

# Tata Institute of Social Sciences

*Inverting the frame: A Community Video Initiative in India*

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**By**

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## Abstract

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### Exploration

Before proceeding the researcher would like to set a premise for the study. When the initial part of the study began while looking for such initiatives and struggle, the researcher found herself grappling with a situation where not many concentrated efforts have been taken in this particular direction. There were organizations which were making videos on social issues and there were individuals who were taking personal initiatives to bring forth the stories of and from the marginalized world. But somewhere down the line even these did not involve the community and the people concerned directly, or rather they were not community participation-based. The communities were becoming subjects to look at by others. So, the search began for a method which was participatory and which had people as actors and not as subjects. These methods adopted by organizations and individuals hold meaning and importance in their own contexts, but did not fit for the context that the researcher was looking for. The idea was to look at a genre where there was true capacity building of the community, where they were participating for a change which was for them, where they were not only the audience but the directors, where they had a medium, which was controlled by them and they produced their own stories and not have someone else telling their stories, through a medium which was not truly theirs.

The initiative which the study explores came across as one which corresponded with the idea. Also, it was an initiative which was sustained not only in terms of continuing but also in terms of expanding, replicating and improving constantly. The scale at which the Community Video Units have been started is the biggest in India, when it comes to setting up alternative media. With the number of communities it is reaching out to, the number of videos produced and particularly the way of implementation, it not only indicates towards a change through magnitude but also a change through its attributes. So, there is a greater visibility of the alternative medium in terms of expanse that it gains within communities which others have not really been able to achieve and this is the reason why these CVUs were researched.

## **Objectives of the study**

Developing an insight into:

- The process of developing a Community Video Unit: how it has changed with the new shift
- Empowerment processes and how are they attempting to challenge the power equations
- The democratization through community media and opening the public sphere
- The role of a CVU in terms of advocacy, awareness, sense of ownership of media etc.
- Sustainability of the CVU
- The challenges in implementing and working with community video

## **Chapter Plan**

Chapter 1 begins with critically examining the mass media situation in India and sees the connections between media and development. This sets a base for the forthcoming chapters on alternative media, as looking at the dominant is necessary before moving on to the alternative to realize what are the situations which have led to need for working on an alternative.

Chapter 2 explores alternative media and the concept of democratization. One way of democratizing media appears to be the Alternative media. We will also analyze what all alternative media induces when put in a process like opening up of a public sphere, participation etc.

Chapter 3 would delve further into alternative media and the democratization aspect. It would also look at alternative media and social movements. This chapter analyzes the initiative studied and sees at how the beginnings were made and the experience of the

organizations and the communities associated. There were emerging concerns and these would be explored.

Chapter 4 would take on from the chapter 3. The last chapter ends with the earliest initiatives and the learning from it. This chapter would see how the learnings have been incorporated into the current CVU model, the format of the video magazine and the operationalizing structure. This model too has some challenges which would be discussed.

Chapter 5 gets all the ideas together and analyzes the whole process of the CVU. It would look at the concepts which are at the center of the whole process – participation, empowerment and public sphere. The other issues which would be dealt with are sustainability, handling current concerns and looking ahead.

## Acknowledgements

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## A Personal Note

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As I sat in the auditorium watching the film, I realized that what had gone behind the making of the making of the film was phenomenal. It held immense potential to change the rules of the game and turn the tables completely. In the world today the media is controlled by a few elites. The making of the film was an attempt to challenge that. At the same time I wondered if the course that I was doing (Bachelors of Mass Media and Mass Communication) was preparing me for something that would have manufactured me into a product of this neo-imperialist world. I would have possibly become a spokesperson for all the elitists of the world (very unwittingly though) as a part of a Television News Channel or a Television Production House.

In a scenario where there is an absolute burst of Television channels and news media with innumerable broadcasting hours, one sees very limited stories focusing on the marginalized (which, by the way, form the majority of the world). A world is made in which one starts believing that what is being shown on the Television is in fact true and that is the only truth that exists. One is forced to forget about another reality that exists.

I would also have been at this end of the world manufacturing stories that do not make any sense to the other end of the world. But they still see it, since they are in a situation of choicelessness. On one hand this whole question exists of people getting a voice and on the other hand the question is, if others or they themselves are willing to listen to these voices. However, even are choices are highly controlled.

Bernard Cohen (1963)

“News may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”

Alternative media is making an attempt to break through this monopoly. However, it is really tough to make this Fourth Estate of democracy really work like one. The problem begins with the concept of democracy itself. Whether (dominant, mass) media as an institution is democratic is questionable, unlike the other three Estates of The Judiciary, The Legislative and The Executive, where some element of democracy can be traced. Unlike the other three, media is predominantly seen as a business, a profit making enterprise. If one is calling it as much as the Fourth Estate of Democracy then, its being profit oriented demonstrates the flaw it has fundamentally.

There are many such issues which question this whole positioning the media as the Fourth Estate. It is supposed to be a democratic entity and provide the people with the right to communicate. Right to communicate is one of the basic and significant entitlements to human survival. Some governments have included communication right as a basic right for their citizens. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights under Article 19 states: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. As a result the right to information and communication is receiving greater attention in the contemporary affairs. In this context we can see why it becomes imperative to truly make the new media democratic.

The film (Why Are Warangal Farmers Angry with BT Cotton?) was made by some women from the Community Media Trust, Deccan Development Society (See Annexure) where they talked about how the BT cotton had affected their lives. The whole idea struck me as absolutely great where the marginalized people had come up with their own story in their way using the technology.

However, at the same time I must mention that The Community Media Trust is not working in the same capacity as any mass media. It has got a community radio channel which was not allowed to broadcast because of the broadcasting regulations and video making has got severe financial constraints. Another question that I had was that how



many people were in fact seeing these films. Was it also becoming an elite media where only those who would go to film festivals can see the film? How many people facing the same issues were able to see these films? Did everyone in their village get an opportunity to see these films? How 'Community' based are these films actually? And also, if this was a sustainable model and competent enough with the so called mainstream/mass media? Was anything really changing, in whatever small way?

It is some of these questions that I am exploring through my study. When I came across the concept of Community Video Units (CVUs), I thought this as an opportunity to get few of these answers.

There are a lot of civil society organizations world over which are working towards giving a momentum to the alternative media movement. Everyone has come up with their own models of building a system where media is more democratic. This is one of the systems being adopted at a very large scale (in comparison to others, most of which have just remained experiments) in India. This is definitely not the only attempt in India but there are a lot of attributes which give a promise of sustaining it.

The research has thrown open a lot of other things which I had never even imagined about and at the end of it there are a lot of questions I am still grappling with. One also has to keep in mind the limitation of the research. However, on a personal basis this research would always continue as I hope to find out the answers to the emerging questions and am also ready to face further questions. All in the hope, that some day, the definitions of mass media and alternative media would alter. Or at least people would start questioning the mass media and seek a truly 'mass media'.

# Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgement	iv
A Personal Note	vi
List of Plates	vii
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Mass Media	2
1.1.1 Mass Media	2
1.1.2 Representation of Reality?	4
1.1.3 Promoting Homogenous cultures, heterogeneous politics?	5
1.1.4 Importance of the mass media	6
1.1.5 Mass Communication	9
1.1.6 Mass	10
1.1.7 The mass audience	11
1.1.8 Mass media in India	12
1.1.9 News Media/ The Fourth Estate	15
1.1.10 A quick overview of development of TV media in India	17
1.1.11 New technology and changing programming in news channels	18
1.2 Media and Social Change	21
1.2.1 Media as a tool for change	21
1.2.2 Development Communication	24
1.2.3 Access to media as development	25
1.3 Research Brief	
1.3.1 Research Topic	26
1.3.2 Rationale of the study	26
1.3.3 Objective	27
1.3.4 Research Question	27
1.3.5 Methodology	27
1.3.6 Methods	27
1.3.7 Cases studied	28
1.3.8 Data Collection Tools	29
1.3.9 Data Analysis Plan	29
1.3.10 Period of Study	29
1.3.11 Limitations of the study	30
<b>2. Exploring alternative media</b>	<b>31</b>
2.1 Alternative media and democratization of media	31
2.1.1 Alternatives and Resistance	32
2.1.2 Democratization and its challenges	35
2.2 Video	38
2.2.1 Role of video in empowerment	39

2.2.2	Participatory video as alternative media	42
2.3	Civil Society Organizations	43
2.3.1	Concept	44
2.3.2	Civil society organizations and alternatives	45
2.4	Public Sphere	48
2.4.1	The Public	48
2.4.2	Alternative media and Public sphere	49
2.4.3	Threats to public sphere	52
2.5	Participation	53
<b>3.</b>	<b>Questioning the dominant</b>	<b>55</b>
3.1	What is Alternative Media?	55
3.2	Alternative media as more democratic media	57
3.2.1	Five filters	57
3.3	Social Movements – Alternative Media	60
3.3.1	Communication patterns in social movements	60
3.3.2	Alternative media within social movement	61
3.4	The Beginnings of a Struggle: For a Voice	63
3.4.1	The First CVUs	64
3.4.2	The process	65
3.4.3	Experiences with two organizations	66
3.4.4	Identity, Discrimination, Marginalization	70
3.4.5	Video as Technology	73
3.4.6	Initiation of the CVUs	75
3.4.7	Individual Leadership building	80
3.5	Concerns	84
3.5.1	Language Barrier	84
3.5.2	Internal dynamics	86
3.5.3	Reporters as paid employees	88
3.5.4	NGO Media Unit?	89
3.5.5	Training the grassroots people	94
3.5.6	Working in interior areas	96
3.5.7	Film as a part of something larger or a stand alone	97
3.5.8	Public Sphere	98
<b>4.</b>	<b>Shifting alternatives</b>	<b>101</b>
4.1	The New Model: Description	101
4.1.1	Organizational Structure of the CVU	102
4.1.2	Operationalization	103
4.1.3	Format of the video magazine and the underlying ideas	107
4.2	Addressing the Earlier Challenges	115
4.2.1	Community Participation and Ownership	115
4.2.2	Trainers	116
4.2.3	Regular screenings	117
4.2.4	Cost-effectiveness	118
4.2.5	Changed format	118

4.3	Challenges in the Current Model	119
4.3.1	Sustainability	119
4.3.2	Ideological conflicts	121
4.3.3	Identity of the CVU, of all the actors involved	122
4.3.4	Distribution	122
4.3.5	Follow up	123
4.3.6	Urban areas as a phenomenon	124
4.4	CVUs – Empowering People	126
<b>5.</b>	<b>Looking forward</b>	<b>131</b>
5.1	Community Participation and Empowerment	131
5.2	Public Sphere	135
5.3	Power Negotiations	138
5.4	Future Plans	140
5.4.1	Exploring Democratic space within the new technology	140
5.4.2	Linking with local cable channels	141
5.4.3	Space in mass media	142
5.4.4	Looking for a sustainable model	142
5.4.5	Training Grounds	143
5.5	Concluding Remarks	143
5.6	“I would like to believe we are starting a revolution”	145
	Reference	147
	Annexure	155
1.	Pamphlet: The Community Media Trust, Deccan Development Society	
2.	Newspaper Article: Tehelka, “Hello, this is radio free...”	
3.	Poster: Empowering Communities to Voice	
4.	A Brief of Video Volunteers	
5.	Pamphlet: CVU	
6.	Magazine Article: Frontline	
7.	Newspaper Article: Indian Express, “Short film by amateurs shows how BMC works”	

## List of Plates

	<b>Pg.no.</b>
Plate 1: During the shoot of a video magazine of ANANDI (Ajmer, Gujarat)	74
Plate 2: Talking to a woman entrepreneur in a village, whose micro-enterprise was being covered in the upcoming video magazine of Org W (Vachiya, Gujarat)	74
Plate 3: Community people participating actively in the pre-screening announcement, (Baijarpur, Gujarat)	77
Plate 4: A screening in Baijarpur, Gujarat	77
Plate 5: People during a discussion following the screening of the video magazine, interacting with the video reporter of ANANDI (Halol, Gujarat)	79
Plate 6: The trainer - teacher training students at Navsarjan's vocational training center	79
Plate 7: A Video Reporter logging for editing of the video magazine	95
Plate 8: Selection process going on for community producers for Navsarjan	106
Plate 9: A Community member giving his response post – screening of a video magazine of Navsarjan, (Jakhan, Gujarat)	113
Plate 10: People during post-screening discussion, deciding on volunteering for the cleanliness rally to be taken out in the village, (Kataria, Gujarat)	113

# Chapter 1

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## Introduction

“A prerequisite of democracy, therefore, is the democratization of communication, which in turn requires the empowerment of individual.” (Philip Lee, 1995, Cited in [www.indiatogether.org](http://www.indiatogether.org))

The study looks at initiatives in India in the field of alternative media. Hence, the first aspect we need to look into is the need for an alternative. For understanding the alternative and a need for it, we firstly need to look at the dominant media i.e. the mass media. This chapter attempts to provide a background for the understanding of media, mass media and explore why media is considered so important. With the increasing spread of mass media and the importance that it is being given, media ownership has also become a contested issue, which would be discussed too. We would closely look at the news media, as the video magazines have the approach closely associated to news and journalism (than a documentary temper). The importance that media is given also, somewhere demonstrates the capability of media to be a catalyst in social change. We would look at how media came to be recognized as a tool for social change and how the field of development communication has been established.

The dominant definitions of all the terms such as media, mass media, mass, audience would be critically looked at, to have an understanding of the paradigm within which these definitions and meanings work and to set an argument for alternative media that is extensively talked about in the forthcoming chapters.

## **1.1 Mass Media**

The word media is the plural of medium. It is derived from the Latin word *medius*, which means “middle.” Usually when we use the term media we mean mass media. The fact is that mass media is the dominant form of media not just in India, but everywhere in the world, so much so, that we never think of media as anything different from the various kinds of mass media that we are exposed to day in and day out. It is also surprising how media in common parlance has become extremely limited to visual media and more so to Television. The possible reason is that the form of media to which we are exposed the most is Television – including both news and entertainment channels.

### **1.1.1 Mass Media**

Mass media has been very simply defined as “media that reach a relatively large audience of usually anonymous readers” (Croteau and Hoynes, 2004, pg. 4). Few prefer calling the receivers as readers. But the researcher would prefer to use the term receiver only. This is keeping in view the context of the study. It is true that people ‘read’ the messages that are sent to them i.e. they assign their own meanings to it. But in context of participation in mass media, they are always positioned as those receiving the message and not ever as sending it or even having an influence on the message sent. Participatory communication processes wish to alter this positioning.<sup>i</sup>

In the above definition of mass media, the term ‘anonymous readers’ over-simplifies the way mass media approaches its receivers. Though, the masses are treated as an agglomeration of people, but even the characteristics of this mass are very well known to the sender. In fact, most of the mass media messages are also constructed keeping strictly in view the profile of the receivers. In a large audience the specificities are often missed, but this nowhere indicates anonymity.

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<sup>i</sup> In the book “Media Society” by David Croteau and William Hoynes the term reader is used

The Cultivation theory says, “Through its regular and almost ritualistic use by viewers, television plays a homogeneity role for otherwise heterogeneous populations. Influence occurs because of continued and lengthy exposure to television in general, not just exposure to individual programs or genres.” George Gerbner sees these senders as a small group of global conglomerates who are usually concerned with the “product”, which is the mass media. So, they have no message to give, but a product to sell. (George Gerbner et. al., 1994, Cited in Croteau and Hoynes, 2004)

This view can be contested, as when one is selling a product, one is definitely sending a message across. The idea that is being put here is that mass media is being seen as a product to sell, but the global conglomerates are also sending messages constructed with specific purposes through this product. Rather, a plethora of messages are being sent to the receivers for the product to sell and to popularize a certain set of ideas. These conglomerates take over a lot of smaller media groups and though there is an illusion of options increasing within mass media as the number of channels increase, but actually there is convergence, of ideas and of perspectives. This convergence threatens the alternative perspectives to perish.

Mass media tends to promote a comparatively seamless, pervasive and increasingly homogenized cultural environment than what is actually there. This is not within the democratic reach and at places even public television is fighting for its life. An instance in this regard could be Doordarshan. It is often cited that before the coming of satellite television, the channel attempted to cater to a wider variety of audience and it had more social and educational programming. However, its programmes now are strikingly similar to those shown on satellite television’s entertainment channels ([us.indiantelevision.com](http://us.indiantelevision.com)). Though, a lot of voices of dissent to this programming are being put across through mass media itself (newspaper articles, various TV programmes), there have been no visible changes in the cultural environment and a similar kind of programming is still followed. This demonstrates the limited democratic reach, if not a complete absence of reach.



### **1.1.2 Representation of Reality?**

There are few very fundamental questions which emerge from the mass media today. The ownership of the media is one of these. The ownership not only controls representation of reality and the content, but also has a specific agenda setting and hence, it becomes important to consider it. There is an example of the world's so-called first media coup in Venezuela in this regard. The elites in Venezuela were against Hugo Chavez, the democratically elected President. The five private channels in Venezuela were owned by these elite families who had a huge stake in Chavez's defeat (these channels and elites were well supported by the US, who had a great interest in the vast oil and other natural resources in Venezuela). Their television continuously made anti-Chavez statements and build a national sentiment against him. They organized a coup which was actually misinformation send through the media channels owned by them. False information about the shoot-outs was given and it was said that Hugo Chavez has resigned when the shoot-out was organized by the opposition and Chavez had been detained. There was information blockade and the Public Television was forced to shut down. Though, people slowly realized that they had been misinformed, as those killed were mainly Chavez supporters. Few independent media (radio, websites) started reporting that Chavez has been arrested and that he did not resign. This was when the Chavez supporters gathered around the palace and asked that their leader be restored. The 'information-blockage' still continued, with the media refusing to report the truth and anti-coup demonstrations. Probably the worst of all was after restoration of Chavez to power, when the private televisions showed cartoons, cookery programmes and action films all day long rather than broadcast the unpalatable truth (Revolution Will not be Televised, Production: Irish Film Board, 2003). This very clearly explains the operation of underlying agendas through media and control of information and its flow. It also demonstrates the extent to which distortion of truth can take place and how even a nation's government can become powerless. However, this is not to support the control of media by the government either. Government control of media has other fall-outs like strict control of flow of information and restriction of any anti-government point of views. The democratic basis of a country

still stands challenged. So, in the ownership of media by either the government or the corporate, people stand to lose out.

“In case of TV the players are DD and private channels. DD is controlled by government propaganda and Satellite Channel is controlled by money. No one really gives a thought to the people.” (Nimmi Chuahan, Interview, Drishti)

It is well known that the Government of India earlier strictly prohibited the entry of satellite channels in the Indian broadcast scene. This is an obvious indication of the control that the government wants to extend on media. This was more a case of control than regulation. The national channel is strictly government controlled and does not easily allow voices of opposition. Though, with the coming of satellite channels in India, the scenario changed somewhat, but it brought along a different dynamics. The images that came in for the first time during the 1990s have suited themselves to the national flavor now. It is also understood that the Indian audience stifled by the government channel, lapped up the content provided. Commenting on the new phenomenon of the popularity of Western television in India, Edward Gargan of The New York Times (Gargan, Oct. 29, 1991, Cited in [www.razonypalabra.org.mx](http://www.razonypalabra.org.mx)) wrote, "For India, a nation long padlocked to the government's version of reality, the candy-store variety of programming has brought a poorly contained giddiness."

### **1.1.3 Promoting Homogenous cultures, heterogeneous politics?**

The coming of satellite cable television ensured that certain kind of images became more popular and other kind of images got marginalized. It also altered the political process in India to a great extent. Other than the government having a mouthpiece of its own in the form of the national channel, the other parties also found their own propagators. Hence, we see greater complexities involved with the mass media. On one hand the mass media seemed to propagate a homogenous culture and on the other hand it also opened up avenues, to promote diverse perspectives especially political.

All this came along at the same time as liberalization, globalization and privatization of the Indian economy. With the globalization of the markets, globalization of the information also occurred, ensuring creation of and support to the market of the products coming in the country. There is a definite change that the globalization of media brought with it. People constantly talked about ‘Americanization’ of the Indian Culture and the MTV generation. However, currently what one is dealing with now can much rather be termed as localization of globalization (The phenomenon of ‘Think Globally, Act Locally’?). The satellite channels have come up with their own regional channels and are also reaching the local communities in a more directed way. How this affects the society and the local cultures is something that doesn’t fall within the purview of the study, but is a matter to be thought about nonetheless.

#### **1.1.4 Importance of the mass media**

All the issues of ownership, homogenization of culture, representation become important only because media is important enough to be paid considerable attention. It has a lot of influence on people and even social relations. The instance of media coup discussed above shows how it mediates even political processes and relation of the people with these political processes. Media serves as a powerful socializing agent. It also constructs reality and meaning. Though the immediate world around us is based on direct human interactions, understanding of reality which we do not have direct and personal access to comes from the media. It is, in fact, a major source of definitions and images of social reality; thus also the place where the changing culture and the values of societies and groups are constructed, stored and most visibly expressed. For instance, RSS sought to control the identity and truth about Ram, in the name of whom they were trying to attack Islam and the Muslim community. Perhaps the most resonant icon the VHP disseminated was the depiction of baby Ram, the cherubic child held prisoner in a Muslim religious institution at the very site of his birth. They also propagated the image of a young Ram as an aggressive warrior in posters and it served as a militant role model for Hindus taking control of their homeland, the infant Ram called upon maternal devotion from those who would nurture the young reincarnation of Hindu nationhood. (In the Name of God,

Production: Anand Patwardhan, 1991) Identity of a young Ram was controlled and given the form of a warrior and constructed a different meaning for Hindus. The image indicated the need for Hindus to be a warrior to save themselves from the Muslims. In a way, the values of the religion and values related to Ram were given a different form.

Mass media are also bound up with the process of social relations. It literally mediates our relationships with various social institutions. Before one actually starts dealing with any social institution either we have an idea constructed by the media of what that social institution is like, or it is created simultaneously. Or media is the only or the most prominent way in which we are communicating to those social institutions, or if there are other ways in which we communicate with those institutions then media makes sure that it mediates. For example, there is a communication with the political institution through voting. But news media would have pre-polling predictions and thus mediate this relation too.

The above instance also demonstrates that through mass media one can also satisfy a desire to participate in political life, by being in the isolation of home rather than take part in community action. It is where many affairs of public life are played out, both nationally and internationally. Since media takes up the role of communicating the voices of the people, people get a feel that they are participating. Also, by watching all the debates played out on the television screen one feels that one is participating and concerned about the issue and that their opinion is counting too. One interesting example is that many news channels ask their viewers to send in their opinions through SMS and then their messages are shown on the screen during the programme, touted as the 'public opinion'. Firstly, people actually feel that they are participating in an important political debate by sending their opinion. Secondly, the definition of 'public' is questionable here. Only people who have access to a cable network, a mobile phone and an understanding of English do not form the whole public. The use of both the terms 'public' and 'participation' here is questionable. But this argument does not want to discredit this process completely, as recently such processes have been used by the news channels to

influence important judicial decisions (the much famous SMS campaign for Jessica Lal).<sup>ii</sup>

Our arguments make it clear that media is a power resource – a potential means of influence, control and innovation in society; the primary means of transmission and source of information essential to the working of most social institutions. We do not need to elaborate much on this. This is very clear by the fact that news media usually have affiliations with one or the other political parties. Jaya TV in Tamil Nadu is run by Jayalalitha loyalist and is a mouthpiece of her political party (AIADMK). The India Today group, which also owns Aaj Tak, has political affiliations with BJP. An instance is when soon after the Gujarat Riots the India Today Group send a VCD attached with their weekly magazine India Today about how the CM, Mr. Narendra Modi had brought about development in the State and also told the ‘truth’ about the Godhra train carnage and the following riots. The section is called Trial by Fire and the beginning of the video mentions that a mob of over 1000 attacked the train at Godhra and burnt it (2 Minutes to the Truth, Production: Gujarat Government, 2002). However, the Bannerjee Commission came out with its reports and said that the fire started from within the compartment and not outside the train, the same was conferred by an independent investigation by Hazards Center. Though the Bannerjee Commission was stated as illegal by the Gujarat High Court and the investigation are still going on. This clearly states how the Gujarat government propagated statements which are not backed by any factual findings through the use of the media, which it has affiliations with. Like political parties, there are other seats of power too which have a control over the mass media. With its claim that it shows reality and is unbiased and objective, it can form strong opinions. That there is subjectivity in media reportage and representation is undeniable. It is also appreciated that it has the power to form opinions. The concern here becomes not the representation of ‘truth’. The concern here is serious misrepresentation, done knowingly or even non-representation at times. An instance in this regard is a statement made by a politician, Brinda Karat, during the Singur struggle, against the setting up of a car factory of Tata

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<sup>ii</sup> NDTV launched the ‘Fight for Jessica Lal’ SMS campaign, to garner support for a fresh trial in the ‘Jessica Lal murder case’ where all the nine prime accused were “honorably” discharged by a Delhi sessions court

Motors and land acquisition in West Bengal. She mentioned, “If the beating and repression was brutal enough to be compared with Iraq surely there would have been scores of people with fractured limbs, broken heads who would have no doubt been paraded before the media as proof. But there are no such cases.” So, she equated the non-representation before media as a proof of non-existence ([www.hindu.com](http://www.hindu.com)).

The non-representation in media also means that it can very easily evade uncomfortable areas, to help establish an ordered society and take peoples’ minds off. For instance, the North Eastern part of our country does not figure in the news unless there is something very big which can not be ignored. People are not allowed to see how problematic the situation is. They are comfortably ignored in the media thus resulting in no public uproar whenever there is any demand from any of the North-Eastern states supporting them. A problem in the North-East becomes a non-problem for the rest of the country.

There is a key theoretical concept given of ‘hegemony’ (Antonio Gramsci, 1971, Cited in Croteau and Hoynes, 2004) which is relevant to be briefly put here. He argued that ruling groups can maintain their power through force, consent or a combination of the two. Consent is what media creates. Power can be wielded at the level of culture or ideology, not just through the use of force. We have seen in above discussion how media has power to influence and evade reality. In democratic societies use of force is also tough. But democratic societies can not allow threat to the status quo either. So, to suppress the discontent without any force (the use of force can also put the state in a bigger problem) or to create acceptance of their ideology they popularize it through the media. This is exactly what the above discussion point out to, the use of media to create consent amongst people to maintain the power.

#### **1.1.5 Mass Communication**

The mass communication phenomenon persists within the framework of the mass media institution. This refers broadly to the set of media organizations, activities, together with

their own formal or informal rules of operations and sometimes legal and policy requirements set by the society (McQuail, 1994).

Mass communication happens through the mass media. It has been sometimes defined in two ways: communication by the media and communication for the masses. Mass communication, however, does not mean communication for everyone. The media tend to select their audiences (Rivers et. al., 1971, pg. 16). American Studies have been grounded in a transmission or transportation view of communication where communication is basically seen as a process of transmitting messages at a distance for the purpose of control. The archetypal case of communication, then is, persuasion; attitude change; behavior modification; socialization through transmission of information, influence or conditioning or alternatively, as a case of individual choice over what to read or view. It is also related strongly to the nineteenth-century desire to use communication and transportation to extend influence, control, and power over wider distances and greater population (Carey, 1989, pg. 1-44).

In both the earlier sections of mass media and mass communication, a very important point that emerges is the concept of anonymity and masses and the distance between the sender and the receiver. This urges us to look at the term 'mass' very closely to understand the relation between the 'sender' and 'receiver' more. The next section takes a look at it.

#### **1.1.6 Mass**

The concept of a 'mass society' was not fully developed until after the Second World War. Early uses of the term usually carried negative associations. It referred to the multitude or the 'common people' usually seen as ignorant, uneducated, unruly, and irrational and so on. It could be used in positive sense also, when one talks of collective, strength, unity like mass action, mass support and so on But with mass media, as in the definition mentioned, it suggests an amorphous collection of individuals without much

individuality. So, the media audience is large and seemingly undifferentiated for the mass media.

The actual process of communication via the mass media also leads to mass-like relations between the senders and receivers. The masses can never locate where their sender is. They all just get the same message from that sender. There is both a physical distance and a psychological distance between the two. Most mass media messages are not addressed to particular people and there is a physical distance between the sender and the receiver which is almost unbridgeable. This is usually more compounded by a social gap, since the sender usually has more prestige, power, resources, expertise and authority than the receiver. The receiver of mass communication is part of a large aggregate audience. But has little or no contact with fellow audience members and little or direct knowledge or awareness of who they are.

#### **1.1.7 The mass audience**

Another view of theoreticians is that the mass audience is very widely dispersed, and its members are usually not known to each other. It lacked self-awareness and self-identity and was incapable of acting together in an organized way to secure objectives. It did not act for itself, but was rather 'acted upon'. It is heterogeneous, in consisting of large numbers, from all social strata and demographic groups, but also homogenous in its choice of some particular object of interest and according to those who would like to manipulate it (Croteau and Hoynes, 2004, pg. 6 -7).

So, automatically there is a relation that is necessarily one-directional and impersonal, when there is a relation which is one directional the one who is at top controls and decides. This leads to believe that there is no participation and hence no democracy in the system. Ownership becomes significant in such a scenario as the ownership would define who controls. This is explored further below.



### **1.1.8 Mass media in India: Ownership**

There is Concentration of ownership in mass media. This is one clear trend where media is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. For instance, in TV in India there are over 100 odd TV channels and the major broadcasters are just over 6 namely Zee Telefilms, Star India, Prasar Bharati Corporation, SET India, Eanadu and Sun TV.

At another level, there is Conglomeration and integration. Other than concentration, conglomeration has been taking place that is media companies have become a part of much larger corporations that may operate in highly diverse business areas. There is integration - one company having ownership over different kinds of media. For example, the Times network has a TV channel, Zoom; a 24 hour English news channel, Times Now; an English newspaper, Times of India; a Hindi newspaper, Navbharat Times; a Radio Channel, 93.5 FM and music company, Times Music.

As argued in the introduction itself, mass media is for profit. The creation of products will earn financial profits in the capitalist system. Risky programmes which are unlikely to attract advertisers are not taken on. They tend to be politically conservative and hostile to criticism of status quo, in which they are major beneficiaries. There is a general tendency to avoid controversy. With the news media, other than keeping the advertiser happy, in order to keep a control on costs the news channels put on a large no. of video public relations segments, which might have been provided for free by public relation firms. They rely on a small number of elites as regular news sources, focus coverage on a limited no. of institutions in a handful of big cities. So, at times it might not even be intentional to leave out smaller cities and town from the news, but the fact that the cost of production would get extremely high to reach out to these places deter them.

It has been demonstrated how ownership affects content too. Media produces image of the world that give events particular meanings. These media images do not represent reality, but they define reality. Our concern here is that this kind of media is allowed to dominate. In India, the media scene is being overtaken by the global giants. Although one

does not blindly oppose the foreign media or support the national media, the implications of opening up the media to foreign players are far reaching with their vast financial resources and capacity to survive for a long time by understanding and incurring losses, they might succeed in wiping out India's smaller domestic media industry, which will either opt out or be taken over. The bigger media companies in India can be an exception to this. This has been the trend for some time now, where channels have been brought over by the global companies. This concentration of ownership is at a national level too. The big Indian media companies are also taking over vernacular mediums and buying out local newspapers and channels. However, entertainment has a different experience. Bollywood's market has not suffered by the incoming of Hollywood films unlike in many countries and still has a good stronghold. The Hindi film industry however, has managed to push regional films on the fringes and most regional film industries are fighting to survive. So, we see what foreign players do to the domestic (national-level) industry, the domestic industry does to the regional industry.

This question of ownership is closely connected with democratization. There are varied forms of the mass media and all of them instigate a concern for the democratization of media. It has been discussed how the dominant media systems are largely undemocratic. However, the space to explore democratic options is not completely shut and thus we hear different voices too. People have been using the spaces through various means. Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) is an organization which started its community radio called Radio Ujjas. The programme called Kunjal Paanje Kutchji (Kutch's Saras crane) was produced by community people, in the Kutchi language about the issues concerning them the most. However, it could not start its own radio station, as radio waves were completely controlled by the government. So, it managed to buy airtime on AIR in Kutch to put on air their community radio programme. So, though they could not have their own FM channel, they used the existing mass media for exercising their democratic rights. And as we would see in Chapter 5, even CVUs plan to use internet (in

which again the concentration of ownership is increasing)<sup>iii</sup> to establish their Freedom of Speech. But there is an understanding that the dominant media systems are largely undemocratic and this raises uncomfortable questions about a system that is supposed to help maintain democracy and is also seen as a pillar of democracy. This is when the news media comes into picture. The same issues of concentration and ownership have affected the news media too. This concern is shared by the Director of PTI, Ajit Bhattacharjea, he says,

“The overall picture projected by the national press is very ugly. It portrays an acquisitive, conflict ridden, middle class society eager to achieve western standards of affluence, but unconcerned with the condition of human infrastructure at its base And so we find nothing in the papers about panchayats, and empowerment, agriculture and rural economy, literacy, unemployment, social tension. Yet without such courage, the press fails its democratic function of monitoring the condition of society as a whole. It can not claim the status of the Fourth Estate” (Cited in Gupta, 2000).

Here one needs to look at why should there be a concern for democratic news media. The study is also mainly concerned with news media. This is primarily because the video magazines adopt a form of news too. However, a video magazine is not merely reporting, the videos are not only informational but also focus on the efforts that news should take.

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<sup>iii</sup> In terms of the potential for diverse news and information reaching people the Internet is not very diverse, even though it appears to be. Major web portals such as AOL look to “lock in” their audience to their site(s) and products so that they can better sell and target their audience (customers). The “total number of companies that control 60 percent of all minutes spent online in the US dwindled 87 percent, from 110 in March 1999 to 14 in March 2001” due to successes in advertising and marketing as a key to overcome the barrier to online entry. Within the 14 companies, it is heavily skewed towards the top four. <http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Corporations/Owners.asp> (last accessed on 15th Feb, 2007)

### **1.1.9 News Media/ The Fourth Estate**

Firstly, understanding what is news. News is which gives ‘authentic information’ and tells what is happening in the world. It is said to be a ‘real representation’. It is a media which has the power to create emphasis on certain issues. What comes in news is understood to be important enough and worthy. It is a form of media which claims that it wants to make people aware and also promote change in the society based on this information and awareness. Due to these reasons it holds the power to public opinion. There is detailed emphasis on this in the next section.

Slightly touching upon entertainment, it is also a huge influence in building a culture and understanding. But it does not claim to provide authentic information, neither does it claim to bring about a social change. It exists only to entertain people and aims to earn profit through this venture. Commercial values are deeply embedded in commercial entertainment and unlike journalism there is a little tradition of its being a public service area requiring protection from commercial influence. So, one could probably question the effects it has on culture and identity and the politics and economics behind the entertainment industry, but one could definitely not out rightly blame them for producing certain content, as they unabashedly accept what they are producing and always give the profit making nature as the excuse.

But for the kind of understanding and meaning that news media carries, it is essential that it is primarily a public service function. There is an ideal behind news. News is the one which is supposed to maintain some amount of checks and balances. It can hold the powerful responsible, it can force them to work properly. The fact that media can expose the powerful in front of the public meant that the powerful have to concede and be accountable. The process of finding, distilling, and analyzing the information that is the media’s commodity also ensures its political role, the core of its self-definition as the Fourth Estate. It has been recognized earlier that there would always be subjectivity in a news report. However, the subjectivity in a news report should not take form of propaganda. Though it can be argued what can be accepted as subjectivity and what

would be termed as propaganda, but the point here is that media plays a role which ensures accountability of the powerful, rather than becoming a mouthpiece for the select few.

But this ideal has been buried by the business element in it. It is one of the biggest industries in the world. The global news business is expanding to almost everywhere. This is resulting in immense amount of profits. This is also resulting in an increase in the number of people it can have an influence on. In addition to this, with the place that entertainment has acquired in people's lives, even news has started to sell itself as entertainment.

The Fourth Estate has this place today from the time the argument about freedom to expression started in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Once this freedom was won the press began to exercise a role as an independent institution in the political system. It asserted a right to speak with its own voice, not merely echo the voice of the parliament or the government. However, now the commercial success is a more fundamental objective. Of all the checks and balances built into the representative democracies – elections, parliaments, independent judiciary – the press is the only one whose success is measured commercially. The fact that profit has overtaken any other fundamental objective means there is a need to question the stand of the present news media as the fourth estate and at the same time see that how can news media become more democratic and is able to stick to its fundamentals.

In ruminations about the global media industry, the complexity of contemporary political and public life, and the alarming concentration of media ownership, it is easy to lose sight of the reality that the news media is at its most influential when it is local. The global media may swamp us with homogenized stars, heroes, villains, disasters and crises that provide a rapidly changing backdrop for the more prosaic, yet no less urgent, reality of our lives. At the level of the city, state or nation the best of the news media is able to explain us to ourselves, highlight our shortcomings and provide the insights that enable

new solutions to emerge. In fact, the stories to which one can directly relate to make an impact or raise any public consciousness.

#### **1.1.10 A quick overview of development of TV media in India**

When India inherited from British press remained uncontrolled by government and free of official censorship (except during emergency), even though the government retained firm control over broadcasting and censored it as a matter of course. As with many countries emerging from colonial rule, the leaders of the Indian political establishment found it difficult to relinquish political control over broadcasting. They preached freedom of the media but could not bring themselves to practice it for such a convenient inherited instrument of control. In 1955 a Cabinet decision was taken disallowing any foreign investments in print media. Television came in India in 1959 as a test for educational telecasts. There was only one national channel Doordarshan, which was owned by the government. The reach remained limited with under 7 million TV sets sold till the 1980s. Television came in forefront mainly after colored TV was introduced in the 1982. In 1980s it installed transmitters nationwide rapidly for terrestrial broadcasting. In this period no private enterprise was allowed to set up TV stations or to transmit TV signals. During the 1980s Doordarshan allowed advertising sponsors and was integrated into the global marketing system opening up doors for advertisers who were anxious to reach the large Indian middle class of consumers.

Throughout this time programming was highly controlled by the government. Commissions urged that DD, the public broadcaster, be made more independent of government, but even leaders who had campaigned on tickets stressing broadcasting freedom (for example, V.P. Singh in the late 1980s) reneged on this promise after winning office. Government control was rationalized in terms of the need to use broadcasting for development purposes, along with the destabilization threat of an uncontrolled broadcasting system in a society in which ethnic strife and huge inequalities were serious problems.

A major consequence of this politicized system was that the public broadcasting monopoly was over-bureaucratized and its performance was dull, corrupted by censorship and propaganda service, and unsuccessful in service and development purpose. Mainly the programming was directed towards educational and social purposes. Entertainment programming was few and far between and it was mostly religious serials like Mahabharat and Ramayan (Herman and McChesney, 1998).

A huge change came with the Gulf War. People realized they could see the war on their TV sets and TV delivered via cable made an entry in India. The initial success of the channels had a snowball effect: more foreign programmers and Indian entrepreneurs flagged off their own versions. From two channels prior to 1991, Indian viewers were exposed to more than 50 channels by 1996. In the 1990s there was satellite transmission's threat competition to DD and there was a steady integration into the commercial nexus and it weighs ever more heavily on its programming. Thus there was a shift of DD to a competitive and commercially oriented system. With newer channels (Zee TV, initially) entering and offering varied elite perspectives and also views of opposition and not only the government forced DD also to change its programming. Though there are varying view points now available and there is a lot more choice, but these choices are actually to conceal the real choicelessness. And very clearly, programming with very high entertainment content has superseded any other kind of programming in channels excluding the news channels (which also have a high entertainment quotient). The relation with the audience is increasingly imposing.

#### **1.1.11 New technology and changing programming in news channels**

One can see that recently there has been a tremendous change in the programming of news. One can even say that there have been attempts to change this relation between the audience and the producer. News channels constantly ask viewers to present their view and feedback<sup>iv</sup>. This is a result of newer technology like that of SMS which facilitate this

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<sup>iv</sup> Most news channels carry public interest stories and they ask viewers to send in their responses through SMSes. These typed text messages are then displayed in the news bar running below alongside the news

process and make it easier for the people to reach out to the producers and promote more interaction. There are news programmes which call the 'people' for discussion and interactive debating (For instance, 'We - The People', NDTV). There is an emerging concept of 'Citizen Journalism' too (CNN-IBN)<sup>v</sup>.

There has been a supposed emergence of civic activism, which according to a statement made during a News Television Show (India 360, Production: CNN-IBN, Jan 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007) has happened mainly through the use of technology. They had been referring to the online petitions that were filed and SMS campaigns run in the Jessica Lal and Priyadarshini Mattoo case. The point that asks for consideration is that voices of people have been raised through the media other than the traditional forms of protests and activism. People were able to participate in a campaign started by the media, something which could not have been achieved without the technology. The same news show also mentioned that there has been an increase in the number of blogs and amateur videos, which according to them is also a sign of increasing civic activism. However, these technologies of internet and videos have largely been accessible to the upper middle classes and they have utilized these to certain extent and also push their perspectives forward.

There are many more spaces opening up for people with the coming in of new technology. Internet is one of such spaces. Though, now even it is being accused of increasing monopolization, but the fact is that the control and regulation in internet is far more limited than in the traditional media of newspaper, radio, television and films. The regulation is probably more in terms of limited accessibility (only 1% of the world's population and 3.6 % of the India population can access the internet ([www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com))).

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story. There are few programmes which take instant opinion polls through SMSes also like Janata Ki Awaaz on Star News.

<sup>v</sup> This is a concept recently introduced on Indian News Scenario where in the News Channel (CNN-IBN) invites video footage on whatever may become news. The idea of common people getting exciting footage caught fancy especially after the 9/11 attack when the footage of the plane flying into the World Trade Center was shot by a passer-by. There have been few stories based entirely on the video footage given by such citizens who have the affordability of owning a handycam.



However if one looks closely at these, then we realize that it is still not exactly providing a space to the 'public'. The scope of public is limited to the middle and upper classes and lower class is left out completely from these processes, be it through interactive debating or SMS or blogging. Even Citizen Journalism, through its very character, provides space to upper middle class people. The meaning of the term citizen has been made so limited so as to include only a particular section of the society and also gratifying this section by demonstrating that they hold importance. However, what is also true is that all of these are increasing participation and people (even in upper middle classes) who had no access to tell their stories their way have an option to do so.

In the above sections we discussed media as an information provider, the role of the news media, the influential role it has, the control on public opinion and mediating social and political processes. Another aspect that we would look into is of media as a tool of development, which is a statement often made. A lot of times even owning a radio or TV is an indicator for development. There is an assumption that access to media can, in fact, facilitate development. But preoccupation with politics has led the press to neglect development communication, or the task of providing people with information to improve their earning skills or quality of living. Although, it can not be denied that there have been cases where concern for social justice has been invested, they are few and far between. Even if press divorces itself from development communication and only gives information, we have no other mass media today that actually focuses on development aspects, including radio (private radio channels only focus on entertainment, leaving only AIR which is working on development communication). The only other function that media performs, is that of entertainment.

Mass media is very much the popular media or the dominant media. However, what is equally true is that media has always been recognized as a great tool for social change. It has been looked as a tool which could serve many developmental purposes. We firstly have a look at how has media become to be recognized as a tool for change and how alternative media came to be.

## 1.2 Media and Social Change

The reason for media being recognized as a tool for social change lies in the understanding of modernity. One of the legacies of the western world's industrialization experience, along with the spread of the liberal ideas, was the idea of a modern human being. Modernity was understood as primarily a state of mind – expectation of progress, propensity of growth, readiness to change.

### 1.2.1 Media as a tool for change

The move towards modernity was understood to be effected by accelerating the following sequence:

Increasing urbanization → high rates of literacy → mass media dissemination  
→ political participation and economic growth

The broadcast-oriented channels of mass media communication, as opposed to the traditional, interpersonal ones, were seen as those which can help replacing the traditional ways with much needed secular mind – sets (Singh, J. P. in Mody, B (ed.), 2003).

These ideas about mass media and modernization found a lot of acceptance in communication development projects all over the world. These projects were highly centralized. Though, by late 1960s, there were questions about the need for Western-Style urbanization and hence, also on the prevalent paradigm of mass media. There were voices that mass media would be counter productive, if deployed without concern for local conditions. It was noted that mass media were not “miracle drugs”. There was emphasis on interpersonal communication which took stock of the necessity of local communication channels in diffusion of innovations.

“There were times when grandparents used to pass on the history orally. Now that space has ceased to exist. You have to believe the idiot box now.” (Martin Macwan, Interview, Navsarjan)

So, it was understood that media could be used for effecting change, but the need to look for a social change that is in control of the people themselves and not a handful of corporate interests a different media has to be explored. This media should be produced by the people, should not be based on the profit motive and should raise questions, create discomfort, confront authorities, and challenge oppressive social structure and power relations. The answer to a media which would actually bring about a positive change is a more democratic media, a participatory media. The media should be such that it has a content which should be constructive and should contribute positively to the development of the people concerned.

“There is a pyramid where on top is the slot of elitist media watched by a very limited number of people. And the base, where there is maximum number of people, is absolutely empty. So, we are looking to upturn the pyramid, with the base being at the top and producing a large amount of media to be published. 4 billion people in the world are earning less than \$4 per day. These people publish no media. Many are not even recipients of media and even if they are that media is meaningless to their lives.” (Gavin White, Interview, Video Volunteers)

In such a media, there is actually a two pronged approach – on one hand the social change that can be brought about is empowerment of people through democratization of media, as they themselves are handling the technology and producing the content they want to. And on the other hand, this also raises important local social issues through the videos to prompt a way for social change. In this context, discussing development communication becomes extremely relevant, also because this field emerged from the above mentioned situations.

In India, television also started with the objective of development and education, having meaning for places away from urban, affluent areas and to fill the communication gap, to shun the elitist and consumer based approach of television and acquire a character of

national mission. To meet this objective, the SITE experiment in Kheda district of Gujarat was initiated in collaboration with Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) in 1975. It was an experiment to see if 'development' can be reached quickly through television. It was seen as an effort to harness energies to promote social and economic development and spread education as a means to raise the general standards of living. The project started with community based programming, where firstly there was anthropological and social research conducted on Kheda and its people. The programme objectives were to focus on the issues of the people and become a link between them and the administrators. It also catered to the specific information needs of the people like on animal husbandry, agriculture, health, nutrition. The programmes also wanted to deal with education, economic and domestic problems experienced in the village. It had serials where the characters were drawn from the weaker sections of the society, local idioms and popular folk forms were used. There were programmes providing instructional training to set up small infrastructures for home industries. Programmes dealing with Topical agricultural programme were made. The programmes were very popular with the villagers and it proved to be a great success in terms of bringing television directly to 2,330 villages through satellite transmission. The programmers also viewed television as a two way medium and used portable video recorders to get the villagers to see themselves and to get thoroughly familiar with the medium. This was an example of media being used for developmental purposes by keeping in mind the local needs.

There were results which showed teacher-training was a success. There were some positive results in health and nutrition innovation and awareness on animal husbandry. Agricultural programmes were appreciated as they catered to the local needs. Shots of actual field demonstration were used which were seen as very effective. A utilization cell was also set up by ISRO to see that the information disseminated through this medium was actualized in the villages, as it was felt that the information is usually not utilized unless there are special efforts taken. The support was in form of written material, group discussions, clarifications by experts and so on. There were local extension agents for group discussions and meetings for the utilization of information. The findings of this project could not be utilized to influence the policy changes with regard to development

communication, but it did provide an experiment to be looked at the practical application of participatory communication for development. This project was definitely a forerunner in the development communication initiatives and experiments ([unesdoc.unesco.org](http://unesdoc.unesco.org)).

### **1.2.2 Development Communication**

There is a whole field of development communication now which emerged as a field of study Post Second World War when the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America were asserting the right to independence, self-reliance and economic development. This field is quite closely related to media and social change. Mercado defines development communication as an “incremental process which starts with the diffusion of new information and technology which stimulates people to bring about conditions in the environment favorable to maximum productivity and the improvement of the general well-being” (Cited in Mody, B (ed.), 2003). The close relation between development, participation and communication was appropriately conveyed by the UNESCO Director of Communication Division in his Key Note address at the AIMC 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference held at Singapore in June 1996 as under:

“The struggle against poverty, education for all, the preservation of the environment, the fight against AIDS, the promotion of human rights and a culture of peace all these great and noble causes for which the international community is mobilizing its human, intellectual and financial resources, will remain idle words if the people directly concerned in the rural areas and in the suburbs of the megalopolis do not themselves consider these causes as their own. Therefore, they should be given the means and the skills to participate in the communication process, in order to voice their opinions and aspirations through their own media, or at least, through media with which they can identify. There is not development without participation, as there is no participation without communication. Development, participation and communication form a part of the continuum” Cited in Mody, B (ed.), 2003).

This idea of people participating in the communication process, and having their own media to voice their opinions brought out that access to media is also a lead to development. This is also reflected in the SITE experiment. We further explore this idea below.

### **1.2.3 Access to media as development**

As people need food, shelter and health care for their physical survival, they need communication for their social welfare. Moreover, for their human dignity people need factors that are intrinsic to genuine democracy; reason, responsibility, mutual respect, freedom of expression, and freedom of conscience, all of which are mediated by communication. The media facilitate this process of mediating, by providing an arena for public debate and by reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion. It is also necessary to make a public communication an integral part of democracy. People should have free access to the knowledge and information they require, they should be able to discuss matters of public interest with their equals in order to influence actions taken. Otherwise there can be no genuine participation. Genuine participation in communication means that a system is more democratic and also, that this communication would help in further development. The deduction is that if the communication system is more democratic it would lead to development. Hence, it is important for development professionals to see that communication is democratized. When there are attempts to do so, they become alternative. The mass media represents a narrow class interest and we have also seen above that mass media, as it is currently, is not the tool for development.

In this chapter we have critically looked at the mass media and the associated concepts of mass communication, mass, mass audience and ownership, focusing on the news media. We also looked at the incoming of new technology and resultant changing programming of the news channels and also examined emergence of the relationship between media and social change and development and communication. In the next chapter with a built understanding of the above stated concepts we will explore the alternative media, participatory video and the aspects of participation and public sphere.

## **1.3 Research Brief**

### **1.3.1 Research Topic**

Inverting the Frame: A Community Video Initiative in India

### **1.3.2 Rationale of the study**

The study explores alternative media and how and in what way alternative media impacts communities, how it brings about social change or has the potential to bring the change. The realization that mass media is actually elitist and excludes a whole part of the world prompted to look into the matter deeply. Community Video becomes an avenue for the exploration. Understanding video as community media was of prime importance, as the researcher personally felt that it is a very strong medium which is beyond par. Both radio and print have their own limitations which video surpasses. Not to say, but radio and print do have their own strengths and impacts and video has its own limitations. However, video was chosen also due to a personal inclination towards the medium. It was also felt by the researcher that video as a tool has still a lot left to be explored, especially when it comes to videos making impact for a social change or acceleration of social change. It is a medium which can be made accessible to a lot more people with efforts and is probably taking over the society in a way no other medium is.

The premise of the study is democracy and participation of people in media. The whole process of community video has to have democratic values embedded into it. Hence it is not only about giving the tool of media in hands of the people, but also ensuring that democratic values are being preserved while making use of that tool. This is what the study explores when it looks at the process of community video.

Also, media immediately translates into power and when devolution of this power happens there are associated forces in the community which will affect this process. Hence, one is talking about inverting the framework of power.

### **1.3.3 Objective**

Developing an insight into:

- The process of developing a Community Video Unit: how it has changed with the new shift
- Empowerment processes and how are they attempting to challenge the power equations
- The democratization through community media
- The role of a CVU in terms of advocacy, awareness, sense of ownership of media etc.
- Sustainability of the CVU
- The challenges in implementing and working with community video

### **1.3.4 Research Question**

Exploring Community Video Units as a medium for democratization of media and empowerment of communities

### **1.3.5 Methodology**

Qualitative research methodology has been used in the study. For understanding the process and model of community media, its impact on the community, the democratization of media, it was felt that qualitative methodology would fit the purpose. The data was to reflect more on people's understanding and unique experiences. The study is also more exploratory, trying to cover as many varied aspects under each distinct case, keeping in place points of commonality.

### **1.3.6 Methods**

The methods used are:

In-depth interview: these have been held with the community producers and with the heads of organization.



Focus Group Discussions: these have been held with the whole team (all the community producers) of the CVU.

Observation Participant: these have been used to collect data during the screening of the video magazines, where the screening was attended by the researcher. The researcher also attended few days of shoot of a video magazine and has spend few days with the groups while discussing, planning their magazines and future plan of action.

### **1.3.7 Cases studied**

There are three Community Video Units that have been studied. The first case is of an organization based in Gujarat (ANADI) which started with the first model of the CVU. It is a video magazine with a very different way of organization, implementation and functioning. It was one of the initial CVUs and one of the very first implementation of Community Video by Drishti and Video Volunteers. There have been many learnings through this CVU and another version of CVUs evolved out of it. However, ANADI continues to run the CVU the earlier way only. They cater to rural Gujarat. And their experiences with video in rural areas are very distinct.

The second case is of another organization based in Gujarat (Navsarjan), which also got a few of its activists trained in video making. But it used this training very differently. It started its own videography course at its vocational training center. So, they used the video as a livelihood option for Dalits who otherwise had to do traditional jobs which are inhuman a lot of times. Then they started a CVU too. This CVU was based on the 'improved' model. They are also working in rural Gujarat. However, both the CVUs of ANANDI and Navsarjan work very differently as they have different ways of approaching community video.

The third organization based in Mumbai (YUVA) also started with its own CVU. This is also an organization which has its own experience with media. Though its media unit

they primarily made documentaries and they had not worked with this kind of a community media. Another distinction with the above two organizations is that it works in an urban area and has totally different experience with an urban poor community.

So, all three are very distinct cases in themselves and their process of evolving and working with community video has been different from each other too. Thus, the researcher chose these three cases. There would be references in between with experiences (though limited) from other established CVUs too, as and when deemed necessary and when the mentioned cases fail to offer details or when the other CVUs offer a better understanding or when one wants to shed light on their unique experiences.

### **1.3.8 Data Collection Tools**

- A line of enquiry was used for the in – depth interviews
- A Focus Group Discussion Guide was used for Focus Group Discussion
- Screenings of video magazines was attended – participant observation
- Shooting of the video magazine was attended – observation
- Present during the course of conceptualizing the upcoming issue of video magazine - observation

### **1.3.9 Data Analysis Plan**

Data Analysis has been done both manually and by using the software Atlas - ti for coding. Key thematic areas were chosen and data was analyzed according to those. All the data under the thematic areas was coded together using the software and then further analyzed manually.

### **1.3.10 Period of Study**

The Data collection was done in two phases. The first phase was during May-June, 2006. The second phase was during October – December, 2006. During the first phase data on

ANANDI and Videography training, Navsarjan was collected. At the same time data was collected from Drishti, Video Volunteers and Navsarjan on the conceptualization of the new CVUs. In the second phase of data collection, data on and from the CVU of Navsarjan and YUVA was collected. These are the CVUs which have been operationalized in June-July 2006.

#### **1.3.11 Limitations of the study**

The study has been conducted at a time when the new system of CVUs has just been put into place. The processes (of empowerment, democratization, participation) in which the CVU wishes to intervene are ones which take a long time. So, the study has not been able to follow these concepts for a longer time with regard to the new CVUs. It has been able to look at the impacts of the earlier CVUs and at the immediate impact and response of the communities of the new CVUs. The CVUs have been set up in various places and situations and context of each CVU is different. The study looks at only three of the organizations which have their specific contexts. So, experiences from all over have not been drawn in. The study has, however, been able to explore the potentials that this medium has and also look at the beginning of a potential change.

## Chapter 2

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### Exploring Alternative Media

“Now we will not have the interviews of these elite people, we will put the issues and opinions of the people in the slum communities. At least people will be able to say what they want to.” (Vishwajeet, Community Producer, Group Discussion, YUVA)

This chapter attempts to look at the concepts of alternative media and the following democratization of media, the resistance that alternatives face and the challenges in democratizing media especially video. We explore video as a participatory medium of change and its importance. The experiments with alternatives are usually initiated by civil society organizations. Hence, we also briefly take a look at the concept civil society organizations and the way they have explored alternatives. We would then talk about the public sphere, which is discussed in the study often. Participation of people as a means and ends in the process would be discussed, as it defines the approach of the process of empowering people through access to media and which leads to participation in social change.

#### 2.1 Alternative media and democratization of media

The section attempts to look at the alternatives and the resistances they face. There have been earlier sections which discussed how the news media is not democratic, of how it represents the views of a narrow class and is more of a propaganda tool in the hands of the elites and the politicians. Thus, the media stands as undemocratic and unresponsive to the voices of more than half of the population. Leaders of many developing countries have felt they cannot afford the criticism and opposition of a democratic press. Some have muzzled the press by censorship and economic controls; others have taken over the

press. It does not even desire that these voices should be ever heard. With Right to Communication and the Right to be Heard being seen as an essential part of Right to Survival, this equation needs to be changed. However, changing these equations face a lot of resistance and also face a lot of challenges in sustaining and setting up alternatives.

### **2.1.1 Alternatives and Resistance**

These equations are facing opposition and resistance, although, the global media system seems every bit as entrenched, as the global market economy and has no shortage of advocates. It is also understood that it is not really possible to make the present news media more democratic, as there is an increasing trend of globalization and control of ownership making these forces even more indomitable. So, rather than attempting to change them there are alternate ways being found out. It is being hoped that these alternatives would lead the dominant news media to change its approach and perspective too. There have been attempts world over to make people participate in communication processes, to democratize media and these attempts have come to be known as the alternative.

A democratic participant type of media theory was proposed in recognition of new media developments and of increasing criticism of the dominance of the main mass media by private or public monopolies (Enzesberger, 1970, cited in Denis McQuail, 1994). There is also a burgeoning global grassroots resistance of individual, groups and organizations, who perceive their (and society's) interests ignored, damaged or threatened by the globalization and commercialization of the media and communication. From the 1960s onwards voices could be heard for grassroots, alternative media expressing the needs of citizens. Denis McQuail's democratic-participant media theory model is based on a normative set of principles. The democratic-participant media theory suggests that all groups in society ought to have the right to access media, particularly media that serves their needs; that media content should not be controlled by political or state entities; that local organizations and communities should have their own media; and that media ought to encourage active participation, which is better served through the promotion of smaller

scale media forms. Alternative media are reflective of these principles, particularly in being accessible and encouraging learning through interactive participation.

“So, basically people do not have a say in what they are being shown and media is not meaningful for them. Now, these people will themselves make meaningful videos which are interesting, to which people will feel more connected and this would become a competition to the mass media. For instance, if there is a radio channel which talks in the language of people and which is far more interesting than AIR, AIR would have to rework itself and change its programming and content or else it would have to shut down. But for this is necessary that a large network of such Community Media Units is created so that it can challenge the mass media.” (Nimmi Chauhan, Interview, Drishti)

This resistance faces a daunting task, as media corporations have always had the great advantage of controlling the flow of news that would inform people about any challenges to their power. The task of reforming the media becomes more difficult, as they centralize and extend their reach across borders, and as pro-market policies become politically unchallengeable globally.

This alternative media supports the right to relevant local information, the right to answer back and the right to use the new means of communication for interaction and social action in small-scale setting of community, interest group or subculture. Both theory and technology have challenged the necessity for a desirability of uniform, centralized, high-cost, commercialized, professionalized or state controlled media. In their place should be encouraged multiple, local, small-scale, non-institutional committed media which link producers and audiences and also favor horizontal patterns of interaction.

“We are able to talk about what is important to us and discuss it amongst ourselves and then take appropriate action. Also, I am one of these people so it is easy for them to talk to me and approach me. We would know more since we know these people. I know what happened in Hasina Apa’s life. So, of course I

can put that thing in front better.” (Shabana, Video Reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

Concurring to the above sentiment, the digital technology, which is very cheap as compared to the earlier video and film equipments, has ensured that the video-making technology is more easily available. This ensures that smaller communities can have their own media and need not be dependent on any outside source. The stress here is not on high quality which can compete with professional mass media quality, but the importance is given to be able to produce something that is meaningful for the communities.

The practical expressions of the theory are many and varied, including the underground or alternative press, private radio, community cable television, micro-media in rural settings, neighborhood media, wall posters, and media for women and ethnic minorities. The theory rejects the market as a suitable institutional form, as well as all ‘top-down’ professional provision and control. Participation and interaction are key concepts. For instance, the Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Aandolan in Mumbai, a part of the National Alliance of People’s Movements is starting with a community newspaper (a tabloid, in its format). The reporters are people from the community (slum-dwellers) who are running the movement. The concept of an editor was rejected. The editorial board to be constituted includes community people and the editorial board would continuously change its membership. This would ensure that there is no concentration of power with a smaller group. Anyone who can contribute to the newspaper is invited. Even people who can not write would be asked to present their views which can be written down by someone else. This aims at breaking the norm that news articles can only be written by those who can write well. The aim of the newspaper is to establish a strong media which helps in more interaction amongst the people in the movement and which makes sure that the news and information about the movement and the slum communities is circulated well.

### **2.1.2 Democratization and its challenges**

The alternative democratic media seems to be the way out. There have been many attempts and these attempts have also faced many roadblocks. Community radio has often done wonders, and holds some promise for democratization of media, its limits are evident. For instance, there in a small community radio initiative (Namma Dhvani, or Our Voices started by Voices, a non-governmental organization based in Bangalore) in Karnataka. The village was facing drought for 3 years and even the water pipes ran dry. The villagers agitated and complained to the Sarpanch, though there was no action. This was when the community radio reporter recorded people's agitation and aired it on the local community radio, forcing the village Sarpanch to act upon it where he had been inactive for so long. Quality journalism and entertainment require resources, technical facilities, experience and institutional support, without these media tend to stay small, local and marginal, even if useful. However, as argued above the primary focus here is not the professional quality, but the content. Though, some feel that alternative media needs to be attractive too.

“The point is they are facing serious competition from other visuals which are great, attractive. You have to compete with them. People should be able to find it interesting and useful.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

This is particularly true in urban areas, where people are exposed to a lot of media which is mainly entertainment and is of high technical quality. People in urban areas also have their time for television programmes fixed. So, to be able to pull the people from the highly entertaining mass media towards the alternative media would be a challenge.

“During the participatory video exercises we held in the slums we used to target the mass media. We always used to tell the women that you are going to miss your programme on Star Plus. We also asked them that what programmes they watch from 7 pm-10 pm.” (Anil Ingle, Video Trainer, Group Discussion, YUVA)



But the researcher does not believe that communities place such a high value to the mass media, and the communities with which the community video works are marginal. These communities place a value on social change and this ensures that alternative media with a good content would be appreciated and acknowledged by people. However, there is strict competition and this is not denied. In rural areas, though, the situation is different. The fact that a film is being shown on a screen is a crowd puller itself. The pre-screening publicity in villages as done by ANANDI went as, “Come, come, come, watch a film at 9’O clock at (place of screening). Watch the film on the big screen. The film is not about any hero or heroine. It is about your questions and your issues. There is no ticket for the film.” The researcher heard a lot of people asking if they were showing a film on a big screen and there was visible excitement with regard to this. However, the communities in urban areas show nonchalance to this aspect. So, where the medium itself can attract the people in rural areas, there has to be a stronger pull factor in urban areas.

TV has been harder to democratize, because it is expensive to program and gaining access over distribution is difficult and costly. Till recently, production of media content, especially video, was highly expensive. With the rates of camcorders going down, (they are still not as low that a person who is not at least an upper middle class would find it affordable) it is possible to produce at much cheaper rates. It is at least possible for few organizations to afford this technology, which was earlier unthinkable. Still it is quite costly a proposition for grassroots organizations or economically weak communities to produce videos. Also, taking a look at terrestrial broadcasting provides television coverage to over 90% of India's 900 million people ([www.museum.tv](http://www.museum.tv) ). Around 75 million households in India have a television set. And by 2006 there were almost 60 million subscribers for the cable TV ([news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk)). An interesting fact that emerges is that, though there is terrestrial broadcasting covering 90% of India's population, lesser than 40% of the population has access to television sets. However, the access to television and cable is continuously increasing and this can not be ignored, also indicating the need to reach to people through this media.

The proliferation of cable channels would seem to hold forth new democratic possibilities, and the rise of cable may lead to negotiated agreements between cable companies and communities requiring public access. The companies provide facilities, training and sometimes money to keep community groups. In other countries also, there has been a struggle to gain public access to cable channels and as channels multiply with digital compression some of these may become accessible. In many countries 'community cables', TV cooperatives and local TV stations have been organized to supply local needs on a commercial basis. For instance, the Alliance for Community Media (based in USA) provides communities with the necessary assistance to produce their 'Public Access Television.' The local public access centers distribute the television programme made through the cable channel. The funding for the media access comes from the 'franchise fees', which are the payments are compensation for the use of public property from cable television operators and other commercial telecommunications businesses ([www.alliancecm.org](http://www.alliancecm.org)).

Usually, there is a technological block to bring about the kind of social change expected through this process of CVU. The technological block present is that producing media is not a local knowledge. Media right now is produced by professional people. These professional people usually fall into the middle class of the society. The employers of these professional people are the elites. To acquire this technical knowledge requires a certain social and economical standing. This restricts who can acquire this skill. Knowledge, understanding and expertise in communication and profession should not be the exclusive prerogative of the media professional. However, this by default becomes the case.

The most backward regions face another threat to be left out of this process. This threat is no electricity in their area. There isn't a feasibility of a community video if one could not screen a film. There have to be other means of community media to be used which are more traditional and local.

“In villages, who owns the cable network? What do we do where there is no electricity? Even that time (initial setting up of the CVU) I thought it was being very romantic. I still think that reaching out to these people is being very romantic. How do I set up a CVU in Baria (a tribal village in Gujarat)? I would love to. But the voltage fluctuates. It can not run a TV, forget about an editing system. We were given the idea about having an inverter, but the costs are very high. Okay, forget about the costs, but if the computer breaks down where do I get a guy to fix it for me.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

There is a huge challenge from the existing mass media. The entertainment value which mass media offers is hard to negotiate with. As discussed above, it is even tougher in urban areas where the exposure to media is very high. Entertainment has also been given a high place by oft saying that people are already frustrated in their lives and media as entertainment serves as a good break why show people the same problems and issues? So, there is a justification for entertainment and at the same time threatening any other content, saying that it would not be liked or accepted. Thus, to be able to include content which only talks about social issues and problems is a threatening proposition to the producers of that content, although the truth might be far away from this assumption. The mass media limits the space to be explored by alternatives, by placing value on profits and markets.

Now, with a basic premise set up for the alternative media, we would further delve into understanding video as an alternative media and the organizations using the alternative media and the two critical concepts of public sphere and participation.

## **2.2 Video**

A very obvious question could be why such emphasis on only Video and there are even more obvious reasons to it, the most important one being that it does not depend on traditional literacy. P.V. Satheesh notes that, “...there is a generation of women and men...who are not literate. But they have deep reserves of knowledge in farming, forestry,

ecology, natural resource management—areas where survival knowledge...eludes...the literates” (Cited in [www.vrri.org](http://www.vrri.org)).

“The popular format so far has been documents and books. But literacy is a major obstacle. How many people would even have an access to books? The video has an advantage that I can communicate without actually being there in the most remote and the farthest of the areas where people can just take my film and watch it.” (Martin Mcwan, Interview in a Video made by Video Volunteers on the training, Navsarjan)

### **2.2.1 Role of video in empowerment**

There are certain characteristics of video which make it an effective medium and particularly so for development purposes<sup>vi</sup>, one of the most important being the seeming reflection of reality. Video seems to translate exactly what is happening in reality in form of moving images. There is certain kind of credibility that it inspires. Along with credibility there is an impact that video has which other media do not have and it encourages action at many times.

“We have seen the direct action in response to the films. We have seen that the films make an impact. After the film on police atrocities, people asked the commissioner to come down and talk to them. They said that no one would go up to meet him, he has to come down.” (Paresh, Video Reporter, Group Discussion, Janvikas)

The effect of images which provide a testimony almost as good as real is immense. It also communicates easily with people who are not literate unlike the print medium. Although, it can not replace a one-to-one communication, it can still be more personal and clear with lesser efforts than the print or audio medium.

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<sup>vi</sup> The word ‘development’ for the researcher has strong connections with empowerment and equity. Development, for the researcher, is not only accumulation of material, mainly economic resources but it is the power in people to be able to decide and participate in matters concerning their own lives.

“A magazine was printed earlier but illiterate women could not read it and they are the ones we are working with. Now, non-literate people get to know our messages. We need not say the same thing twice.” (Kirti, Video Reporter, Group Discussion, ANANDI)

“It takes a lot of time to convince people at the grassroots. We thought that video would be a good tool to convince people easily.” (Nisha, Teacher Trainer, Videography Course, Interview, Navsarjan)

The reason why many messages fail is, because they fail in proper communication and hence, fail in making any impact. It is believed that visual communication and a more one-to-one communication is effective than print. One-to-one communication requires more time and efforts and it is difficult to reach out to a large no. of people. Radio does not leave the non-literates out, but it does not hold attention as much as video would. Here it is necessary to point that video is also a facilitator of horizontal communication. This is particularly true for participatory video (Bery, R. in White, S.A, (ed.), 2003). A video is able to talk to those who are illiterate and they are able to respond to what is communicated to them, unlike a poster or a written media. A written form automatically prevents people from responding to it. A video can also establish a hierarchy with the communities with the way it approaches them. Though, participatory video as its characteristics asks for lateral communication.

“We want to get away from the top-down and establish an intense process of dialogue. In one of the earlier campaigns we had used video and we saw its effects. This was even when the costs (of producing video) were very high. But the outcomes were very positive.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

Video is also an attractive entertaining medium. There are images that are moving and it manages to hold attention for a longer time than written or heard words and people get involved while watching a video. The stories that are told through the videos are also the

same as theirs. It not only becomes an attractive medium but can easily become a medium which talks with them in their language. It also acts as a facilitator of shared experience and discussion.

“There is also a lot of effect of these films. People feel that questions are the same as ours. So, they get a lot of courage to speak up. It has been very helpful in the field to get new cases.” (Kailash, Video Reporter, Group Discussion, ANANDI)

“....At times the discussions go on for 2 hours and more....” (Kailash, Video Reporter, Group Discussion, ANANDI)

Though, the use of video for development does not end with disseminating messages and discussing about them. It is an initiator of community actualization and as a source of power. People are mobilized and on seeing shared experiences they are motivated to act as a community too on a particular issue.

“In Panchmahal the Sarpanch was present during the screening of the video magazine (video magazine on Right to Food). The ration shop keeper was also present. People took him to task there and then itself. At times the Sarpanch also do not come for screenings. They are afraid that they have to be answerable. Women in the village (Boru) had gone back to the shopkeeper to ask him to open shop for 26 days and not only 3 days. They are dealing with him right now. People are acting together and making these government systems answerable.” (Shabana, Video Reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

Video has been used to reach the policymakers, to empower people behind the camera, to share stories and experiences, to rescue the culture and heritage of poor peasants and indigenous people. As a mediation tool, the power of video was used to help resolve conflicts, achieve consensus and find common ground for collective action. Video has been used for role modeling, as a medium to expose social injustice, to lend a voice to the

voiceless, to challenge public stereotype and for many other development processes involving illiterate communities (White, S.A, (ed.), 2003).

Paresh: “I am very happy about the fact that now I am called the ‘media wallah’. I wish that I take the camera out and create a ‘dhamaal’. I had recently gone and shot during Baroda violence. I managed to get interview of people affected during the violence by various ploys -in toilets, ambulance. The whole thing that I did was very daring for me.”

Alpesh: “On our way back from a shoot few policemen got into our car without even asking. When we questioned the policemen they started abusing. I took out the camera then and started recorded. Seeing this, the policemen then ran away.” (Paresh, Alpesh, video reporters, Group Discussion, Janvikas)

While video as a tool to communicate these conditions cannot eradicate the problems, the problems can certainly be shared, stated and exposed through images. This powerful tool however, must continue to be used by people living in poverty and become their voice.

### **2.2.2 Participatory video as alternative media**

Participatory video is the use of video within groups for change, whether it is individual or societal. Like participatory action research, the degree of involvement that participants have in designing the goals and process varies from project to project. People have used video as a tool to influence government and mobilize communities. Janvikas, based in Ahmedabad makes videos for advocacy on human rights issues. The video reporters worked in the organization as staff members, one was associated with the media section and the other was a driver of their media van. They were trained by Video Volunteers.

Participatory video may also be a powerful tool for people with developmental disabilities. If reading and writing is hard, people may find it easier to send and get messages by video than through the written word.

Participatory video has many strengths, and can make a lasting impact as part of a whole process of community empowerment. For the individual participant, it is an enjoyable way of learning a number of skills; technical, artistic, creative and communicative. It imparts skills that assist employability and build confidence, such as teamwork, using initiative and dealing with people – especially people in authority – outside the participant's own immediate circle. In this way, it is like other arts activities. However, with a video project there is a lasting product at the end, the video itself, which can be shown over and over again, in many different contexts, providing an on-going process of building confidence, and perhaps changing lives. Videos have been used to raise funds, to illustrate to people in power the conditions under which people are living, to highlight abuses of power and of good practice, and to show ways in which communities are fighting back and working to improve their lives. Such videos take their audience into places and allow them to meet people they would not otherwise see or come across.

For communities which lack cohesion, self-esteem and even visibility, the experience of seeing their area and/or issues portrayed constructively and with dignity on screen can bring about a profound change in consciousness and confidence. Watching videos illustrating people with whom they identify suggesting or taking action to improve their lives moves an audience from passive complaint to active engagement and involvement in change ([www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)).

Video clearly gives us the ability to see and hear these voices, thereby allowing our emotions to be touched in ways never imagined before the advent of moving pictures. Yet, video documentation remains expensive, training is often sketchy, and equipment breaks down and cannot be repaired or replaced. Therefore, at this point, video remains out of reach for most poor villages ([www.teichenberg.at](http://www.teichenberg.at)).

## **2.3 Civil Society Organizations**

Alternative media is largely used by civil society organizations and there is an attempt to change the media scene in India by such organizations. So, it is necessary to place the



Civil Society and the civil society organizations in a context. Even the CVU is seen as a Civil Society Institution.

### **2.3.1 Concept**

In the Tocquevillian explanation of the Civil Society (Cited in Mohanty and Tandon (eds.), 2003) people are reeling under insensitive state power, arbitrary bureaucracies, there is a lack of civil and political rights and the rule of law. This led to the creation and consolidation of a sphere for collective action that would be independent of the state. Here, ordinary men and women would be able to express their sentiments in freedom and without fear under the protection of institutionalized civil rights and the rule of law. This sphere of social association, based on solidarity, self-help is the civil society. Despite the inevitable diversity of civil society groups, John Ehrenberg (1999, Cited in Mohanty and Tandon (eds.), 2003) suggests there is a basic agreement throughout history that civil society may be identified as “a democratic sphere of public action that limits the thrust of state power”. Troy Murphy (2004, Cited in Mohanty and Tandon (eds.), 2003) suggests that civil society include “both a site of rhetorical activity and a mediator of public life” that exist separately from government or institutionalized control. The development of this sphere of civil society led to the emerging of civil society organizations. These organizations specifically work on the aspects of social association, protection of civil rights and encouraging collective action. Civil Society organizations create another sphere seemingly independent from the state and the market. Though, there is intervention from both the market and the state and it is not only not-independent, but is strongly associated with both.

Civil Society Organizations are seen as an effective via media to channel aid for development to poor countries, so that the gap opened by the rolling lack of the state is filled through the delivery of development directly to the poor. As recipients of aid, civil society organizations are also under obligation to fulfill their funder’s agenda of furthering neo-liberalism by providing safeguards to people who are adversely affected

by the onslaught of the market. And third, civil society organizations are seen as an effective watch dog that can curb any authoritarian tendencies of the democratic state.

Civil Society Organizations are often accused of forming a buffer system by providing the 'development' directly to people and filling up for the state. So, instead of making the state responsible, the civil society organizations try and take up the responsibility of the state and make it more complacent. However, we are not debating what the Civil Society organizations are doing, but we are trying to understand what falls under the label of civil society organization. So as it appears, the Civil Society organizations align with people and work to make living better. An organization which is independent of state in the context of not being a state agency, which is independent of the market as it does not work in the market framework of profit - orientation and which working towards restoring the rights of people can be called the Civil Society Organization.

In the triangle of The State, The Market and The Civil Society Organization, it can be seen that the media is being controlled by the State and the Market. The Civil Society Organizations have had no part or very little part to play. There is little media which would cater to the needs of the civil society. The Civil society organizations find it extremely difficult to loosen this control over the mass media, as they are owned and run by either the market or the state. The Civil Society organizations by themselves are small to establish their mass media systems, and the media which caters to their needs the best is small and more local media. So, the focus shifted on the alternative media (which is similar to establishing parallel systems to the government and the market). In an era of monopolizing and institutionalizing media, these resistant movements of civil society organizations advocate for democratic voice and participation and alternatives to mass corporations that pose barriers to open dialogue and interactivity.

### **2.3.2 Civil society organizations and alternatives**

Alternative media nowhere has been able to replace the mass media or even become the dominant form of media. Most of these expressions have died as experiments because if

various reasons ranging from financial sustainability to political pressures. But there is an immense scope for alternative media and slowly it is gaining ground. In India, for example, where there are huge number of non-governmental organizations and thousands of schools and colleges looking for alternative video programmes, an alternative video movement has sprung into existence to supply this demand for programmes on ethnic strife and its roots and economic and environmental problems.

For decades, NGOs have been creating visual materials such as poster boards, slide shows and leaflets. They have organized street theater, used video camcorders for education, training, advocacy, conflict resolution, and as a medium of self-expression in community development initiatives. Communication professionals have called for the deliberate inclusion of people's participation – the active involvement of beneficiaries at all levels in the process of such community development initiatives.

Civil society organizations can be an acceptable institution for alternative media, as many segments of civil society are politically-motivated communities promoting numerous causes and holding various versions of democracy. However, there may be questions that why some other alternative can not be used, instead of involving civil society organizations. The reason is that there are no viable alternatives to the developing commercial system – non-market systems, it is agreed, install a layer of bureaucrats between media producers and consumers, and even the best-intentioned bureaucrats over time grow arrogant in their largely unaccountable power. There are very few legitimate concerns over having state run media and communication as an alternative to the market.

Hence, there should be a democratic alternative media that comprise a variety of autonomous and non profit entities. Such a so-called civic society exists and is growing as grassroots movements respond to the centralization-commercialization process. There are threats that some civil society organizations may take over the process of democratization and concentrate power in their hands, than letting it in the hands of the community. This is an equally substantial threat.

“Org... is still seeing it as their media. They are still not ready to believe in people’s capabilities.....there is a strict hierarchy. They are experimenting with it, but are not ready to hand it over to the people. There is a very little input from the community. It is still about the NGO telling the people” (Nimmi Chauhan, Interview, Drishti)

But what is to be considered here is that these organizations are directly accountable to people unlike the bureaucrats. Though, the media does not remain truly democratic, as the power is not devolved to people. The power holders would be different. Instead to the government or the market, it is the civil society organization. This sort of a concern would exist even when the media is controlled by the community itself. Richard A. Shermerhorn (1964) states that, “Supplanting of dominance is best exemplified by a revolutionary group or party whose aim is to seize power and set up a new rule.” So, one group in the community can also supplant dominance. Also, power is countervailing, there is no power if everyone has equal power. A community is not a homogenous group, in a village there are power and powerless, similar is the case in slums too. So, even in the marginalized groups, homogeneity in terms of power is non-existent. There would be a possibility of this media becoming the seat of power in itself. So, the group which is more closely connected to the community media might also try to manipulate it, very much like the state and the market. However, this situation is more acceptable as the negotiation of power is possible, as the physical and social proximity between the producer and the receiver increases.

We are not assuming that power is negative and only suppresses. In fact, the basic behind establishing alternative media is that communities have a power to speak up and act. Probably what one is more concerned with is concentration of power and absence of a space to negotiate with the concentration of power. It is also understood that such a condition would exist, where someone would have the power and the other would be powerless. But the situation has to be flexible and dynamic to allow for negotiation of power. Even in a community such negotiation can be tough, but the aim of the process is to empower people to be able to negotiate, also amongst themselves.

## **2.4 Public Sphere**

The term public is being talked about here, as no term could be more vital to understand than this. When one talks about democratization, one is essentially saying that there has to be a space to debate and express opinions. Many political and social theorists argue that strong democracy requires a public sphere of informal deliberation, enabling the formation of a rational public opinion that can critically guide the political systems (Herman and McChesney, 1998). This conception of a public sphere has been well formulated by Jurgen Habermas (1989). The public sphere that he suggests has certain characteristics. He describes the public sphere as an “intersubjectively shared space”, reproduced through communicative rationality. Such rationality, also referred to as rational-critical discourse or argumentation, is where participation is coordinated through acts of reaching understanding, rather than through ego-centric calculations of success. He identified certain normative conditions of argumentation presupposed by the participants engaged in communicative interaction. These conditions include the thematization and reasoned critique of problematic validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking (combining impartiality and respectful listening), sincerity, formal inclusion, discursive equality and autonomy from state and corporate interests. He does not talk about a homogenous, specific public, but a whole array of complex networks of multiple and overlapping publics constituted through the critical communication of individuals, groups, associations, social movements, journalistic enterprise and other civic institutions. Public sphere is not to be seen in physical terms, but it transcends physical appearances and is an abstract form of dialogue and discussion. These concepts would be dealt with in Chapter 5 as we see how the public sphere created by the CVUs operates.

### **2.4.1 The Public**

The public sphere is composed of the ‘public’. However, the public can be seen in various ways. We describe few ideas below of what public constitutes:

- public is seen as the not-private, that which goes on in the open, observable by and accessible to others

- public as general, pertaining to or emanating from all citizens, as in public interest or public opinion
- public as communal, or governmentally owned or regulated, as in public television or public utilities

Public implies openness, community, citizenship, discussion, debate. The media clearly serve a public function in two ways firstly, as the key instrument in bringing issues out in the open, in front of the public. Secondly, media constitutes a key portion of what we sometimes call the public sphere, the multiple forums in which issues and controversies can be debated, something essential in a democracy, if we mean by democracy the manifestation of the public will. The very idea of a public is intertwined with the idea of a democracy. Since media provides a space for public will to be discussed, it can be safely said that if media is unable to provide space to all of the public, then democracy would not function as a true one. This is particularly the fear about the public sphere today, that it excludes a large group of people and that the public sphere is dominated by few and also controls critical thinking and opinions. We need to see how the alternative media attempts to provide a public sphere which is truly democratic and includes all the public.

#### **2.4.2 Alternative media and Public sphere**

Alternative media, democratization of media all are by default, creating a public sphere for raising important public political issues. The characteristic of this media is such that it confirms to the idea of public sphere, it allows for disagreement and difference. The informal discursive public sphere allows voices and conflict to be expressed in ways which the more inflexible formal institutions of democratic governance do not allow. Historically, a critical feature of movements towards democracy has been the creation of a 'public sphere', meaning all the places and forums where issues of importance to a political community are discussed and debated and where information is presented that is essential to citizen participation in community life. The concept is important because, a democratic society depends on an informed population making political choices. The mass media forms public opinion and it can be said that it is creating a public sphere by

providing a space for critical examination. However, the public opinion needs to be rational and the 'informed' population is usually informed by the mass media keeping in mind the underlying agenda. This is not to say that the public sphere idealization as put by theorists can be fully realized in practice through alternative media or some other means. However, the space for critical examination can be less influenced and political discourse can be more democratic.

The concept of public sphere as suggested by Habermas, is itself criticized. We will discuss this criticism here and also use it further in Chapter 5 to analyze the public sphere. The critics of Habermas (Dahblerg, 2005) suggest that public sphere does not take into account the power relations in communication or that he conceives the operation of power as negative. The public sphere also aims at building a consensus, thus not paying attention to the marginalized voices. But we believe that as a concept the public sphere does not neglect power, but it sees the operation of power as both negative and positive and that it promotes the process through disagreements and argumentation rather than the end-point of reaching a consensus and formation of public opinion. However, it is acceptable that the ideal state of public sphere may not be achieved. Firstly, we take a look at power in public sphere. Though public sphere norm calls for a 'coercion free communication' and not 'power-free communication', power and coercion in practice are not completely divorced. Communicative rationality draws on the force of the 'better argument' to produce more democratic citizens, culture, and societies. Subjects are indeed molded through this constituting power, but their transformation is towards freedom and autonomy, rather than towards subjugation and normalization. The public sphere norm provides for a structure through which critical reflection on constraining or dominating social relations and possibilities of freedom can take place. The form of power that needs to be excluded in public sphere is one which disables democratic participation and leads to communicative inequalities. Secondly, we look at the discourse of public sphere. The discourse in public sphere is known as public opinion, rather than official decision making. Some argue that consensus can be achieved only through suppression, or else there is never a consensus. Though we believe that consensus can be achieved through rational and critical discussion.

The CVU question the existing structures which subjugate and try and exclude the negative form of power – coercion. There is no deliberate suppression to achieve a consensus but there is an open space for argumentation and discussion as personally experienced by the researcher during the discussions held after the screening of the video magazines. However, there are certain inherent structures in a society which overpower, like gender or caste oppression. Through the content of the video magazine and form of discourse in the public sphere, the CVU tries to counter these structural forms of oppression. For instance, there is a video magazine that is made on violence against women by organization W. The content itself tries to counter the gender oppression and when women speak up during discussions it provides an open space for argumentation and challenges power equations.

“There have been consequences for women who have spoken up in our films. You have to see if they will ever challenge power equations. If they do so then you have to be prepared for it. We have brought about a change in the status quo and we can not just show the film and go away.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

The attempts through the CVU evaluate the currently existing public communicative practices and thus think about how they can be made more democratic.

“Earlier men did not use to come to the meetings. They even told their women that they were wasting their time and energy in the meetings. They thought we were corrupting their minds. Now after having watched our films even they have started coming to the meetings. They also participate in discussions that happen after the screenings.” (Kirti, Video reporter, Group Discussion, ANANDI)

In large and complex societies, public participation in political processes is already limited largely to occasional expression of opinion and protests and the periodic selection



of representatives. In the view of Jurgen Habermas and others, the public sphere works must effectively for democracy when it is institutionally independent of the state and society's dominant economic forces. Although such autonomy is difficult to develop and maintain, the point of democratic communication policy making is to strive towards this goal. Although, within this institutional schemata these are many different shapes a public sphere may assume.

### **2.4.3 Threats to public sphere**

The integrity and quality of public sphere may be threatened by government control, the bias and self-censorship of private systems of control or by external intrusions into media systems that shape them in accord with ends sought by powerful foreign interests. There may also be combinations of these forms of threat. These are understood as a threat for the public sphere, where there is interference from the government institutions or the market forces. These two are understood to be working towards fulfilling their own propagandas. In such a case, it is but obvious that power would be negative, i.e. coercive and that the public opinion would be more 'influenced' public opinion. The public sphere constructed by the mass media has to be taken into account here. It becomes more important in the digital age where the concept of public sphere has become more relevant and increasingly complex. Communication is now dominated by mediated discourses, which act towards selling propagandas rather than free flowing information. The liberal public sphere faces threat as it is being dominated by a certain class of the society. This results in media becoming a vehicle in serving the interests of this class rather than allowing for public debate.

New media, like the internet, are also seen as spheres of public debate. However, with the emergence of these new media questions on ownership of technology and the benefit of those for whom it is being developed also emerge. The biggest fear is the commodification of these media, where the media content is to be sold. This also brings us to the aspect of public sphere developing as a board for advertising and public relations by systematically creating and exploiting news events. Publicity has become a more prevalent form of discourse. But public sphere asks for a rational discourse to be a

basis of functioning democracy. Civil society organizations need to recognize that new media technologies are increasingly mediating social networks. A network can both concentrate and disperse power. With this recognition, it is necessary to examine the uses of such networks. These dominating networks and structures need to be worked upon by the civil society organizations. Even within the communities, there is a threat to the public sphere, as discussed above. The threats of a negative power as subjugation are very real as the communities even otherwise have these inherent in their structures of caste and gender and communicative practices controlled by these structures. These would be reinstated and discussed later in Chapter 5.

## **2.5 Participation**

The aim of all of these attempts is to increase the participation of the people. It is necessary that there is participation, because people have a right to voice their opinions, each and every one should have the right to have a say on things that affect their lives. It is believed that this participation would not only be a democratic process itself, but would also ensure that other machineries of democracy function properly. The checks and balances would be effectively managed. Participation would also ensure that matters that are more urgent to the lives of the people are addressed than matters which are actually frivolous for the existence of the people. It is hoped that in the longer run the participatory communication approaches would empower people to be able to decide their own destiny. Ideally, the participation process enables people achieve an identity to chart their life courses, experience freedom in their life space and reach for their human potential with dignity and respect.

Attempts at operationalization of the term “participation” range from those that reflect the dominant paradigm – the participation-as-a-means approach – to those that genuinely represent the case for a context-based paradigm – the participation-as-an-end approach. This process is looking at participation not as only means or as only end. The process is participatory itself and would like to increase the participation and revitalizing the public sphere. This is a two-way, dynamic interaction, between “grass roots” receivers and the information source (which may be both from the grass roots themselves and also from others like government officials), mediated by development communicators (who do the

transfer of technology), which facilitates participation of the target group in the process of decision making, governance, and development .

But there has been a considerable shift from the modernization approach to this one. Much of the inspiration for this shift has come from the work of Paulo Freire (1972). Dialogue was promoted as an ethical communication choice. Being dialogic is not invading, not manipulating, not imposing orders. Being dialogic is pledging oneself to the constant transformation of reality. This pushed scholars to conceptualize the phenomena of their study away from the states (attitudes) and entities (media) toward process. So, there was a shift from vertical to horizontal approach to information. This horizontal approach has the capacity to connect human beings as they experience social change. It is a democratic process, characterized by dialogue, creative and consensual thinking and collective action. The participatory process ensures in a person's active involvement in interaction, dialogue, sharing, consensual decision making and action taking. Participatory communication is the foundation of this process. So, this empowers people to be able to negotiate power relations, to be able to set up a dialogue even with those above them in the hierarchy, and to be able to realize their own potentials. The goal of communication becomes that of conscientization, leading to an anchoring of cultural identities that liberates people from power positions and places them in a position to construct their own future (Huesca, R., Cited in Mody, B., 2003).

With everything sounding so good, it is important to mention the threats too. Participatory Communication that is not guided on a priori structural goals such as building progressive institutions or deconstructing dominating discourses, runs the risk of dissolving into a self-indulgent exercise or being co-opted by an established and elitist organization. Worse yet, participatory communication by itself is capable of reproducing inequalitarian power structures, especially in regard to gender relations. So, the process and the framework of participation have to be built to avoid these from happening.

This chapter gives us ideas about participation, video, conscientization, public sphere and so on, but how these ideas manifest themselves in the CVU would be discussed in the following chapters.

## Chapter 3

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### Questioning the Dominant

This chapter attempts to look at the experiments in participatory video or democratizing media or the establishment of alternative media systems. This is also necessary since what exactly is alternative is tough to define. There is so much of a space to explore that there are varied expressions of attempts of getting away from the mass media. Alongside, it would talk in detail about how alternative media in fact works, how it proposes to bring about social changes, challenge power relations, induce participation and empower people and also see its relation with social movements. We would look into the beginnings of the initiative taken up which this study explores. The processes that were started with the setting up of the alternative media, the experiences with it and the emerging concerns would be explored.

#### 3.1 What is Alternative Media?

Few of the ideas about alternative media have already been discussed in Chapter 2. However, we reiterate them here to connect to the initiatives taken in the direction of establishing alternative media systems. Media, which is connected to the ideas and lives of the communities, has a great potential to instigate changes in them unlike the media which is distanced from them. Umberto Eco (1986, pg. 143) posed some interesting ideas about the chance to radically teach and learn through the use of alternative media. “Semiological Guerilla warfare” and grassroots infiltration of mass media turned passive audiences into activists who were able to “control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation”. The people need to have an understanding what the media images propose to sell; that, rather than merely depicting or entertaining, they are instrumental in designing to gather audiences, designed to motivate certain kinds of behavior. According to him, the reader of a message has the freedom to read messages in different ways, what he calls ‘residual freedom’. To take advantage of that residual freedom available to us, there has to be an awareness of the media environment around us

and then we should interpret and read the messages that the media sends us.<sup>vii</sup> Alain Ambrosi and Sheryl Hamilton (1998, pg, 98) similarly discussed alternative media as a means of “community mobilization...for preserving and reconstructing popular history, for creating sites of access and training...central to the education of media activists”.

“Few students have got certain awareness. They have thought that whatever money they earn they would make films on issues (concerning Dalits) with that money. Some of the students that had come here are financially very backward. They get very happy that now they can handle the camera. They think that only people who can speak hi-fi English can handle the camera. There have been students who do not know how to read or write well. They have an amazing sense of framing and camera. So, knowing how to use a camera has nothing to do with education.” (Nisha, Interview, Navsarjan, on the video training provided to Dalit students)

Participation in alternative media offers both structured and informal learning opportunities through community media curricula or simply through social interaction with others. Many alternative media have a sense of citizen activism and empower people by providing them with a voice for raising their issues and access to the democratic machinery by forming a link ([repositories.cdlib.org](http://repositories.cdlib.org)).

Alternative media is activist as suggested by Umberto Eco. Alternative media also wants to change the way media messages are created, disseminated and understood. The media messages need to be created not for a narrow elite interest, which are disseminated to all. But these messages should be local and be disseminated locally too, so that it has the most relevance. The whole process has to become more democratic and hence, more decentralized.

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<sup>vii</sup> This kind of media activism has another term to it called ‘Culture - Jamming.’

## **3.2 Alternative media as more democratic media**

Repeated ideas discussed in Chapter 2 suggest that alternative is more democratic and participatory. But this needs a further exploration than just suggestion. Michael Albert (2004) attempts a prescriptive definition of alternative media in his manifesto, *What Makes Alternative Media Alternative?* (Cited in [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)) He says,

“An alternative media institution doesn’t try to maximize profits, doesn’t primarily sell audience to advertisers for revenues, is structured to subvert society’s defining hierarchical social relationships, and is structurally profoundly different from and as independent of other major social institutions, particularly corporations, as it can be.”

This definition shows why alternative would be more democratic. The basis on which alternative media is created automatically leads to it being more democratic. Its purpose is not to serve the profit purpose of the elites. It is working against the hierarchy and aims at providing a similar platform to all. It does not have the interest of a narrow group in mind. All this suggests that alternative media would be more democratic, it would be serving everyone equitably, providing everyone a space and finally not working for profit but social benefit.

### **3.2.1 Five filters**

In their propaganda model, Herman and Chomsky (1997, Cited in [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)) present a series of five "filters" to account for why the dominant U.S. media invariably serve as propagandists for the interests of the elite in their ‘propaganda model’. These are 1) size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth and profit orientation of the dominant mass media firms; (2) advertising as the primary source of income; (3) the dependence of the media on information provided by the government, business and ‘experts’ funded by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) the development of right-wing corporate "flak" as a means of disciplining the media to put pressure upon them to follow the corporate agenda. This filter was developed extensively in the 1970s, when major corporations and wealthy right-wingers became increasingly dissatisfied with political

developments in the West and with media coverage; and (5) anti-communism as a national religion and control mechanism. Anticommunism has been ingrained into acceptable Journalistic practices in the United States. The last two filters are largely based on the right ideology and talk about its domination and the anticommunism stance of USA. These ideas are very specific to the US media, though we can see the reflection of the fourth filter in our media too. But for our reference point for discussing alternate media we will keep the first three filters as the benchmarks and we look at how alternative is not propagandist and therefore, has the potential to be more democratic.

The alternate media proposes to provide a voice because it does not have as many filters for content as the mass media. The first filter that influences media content is that ownership of the media, which is highly concentrated among a few dozen of the largest for-profit corporations in the world. Many of these corporations have extensive holdings in other industries and nations. Objectively, their needs for profit severely influence the news operations and overall content of the media.

“It is often experienced that the mainstream media, from audio-visual to print, distances itself from people’s struggles which raise fundamental issues and evoke controversy. A movement, its work and strategies, its perspective and politics against ruling powers and the dominant paradigm, its struggle against the adverse effects of any development project or the repression it faces, have barely been covered in a sustained manner.” (Patkar and Sangvai, 2006 cited in Asharani Mathur (ed.), 2006, pg. 168)

This is not the case with the alternative media. It is very obvious that whosoever owns the media would control the content according to the profit they derive. For any civil society organization, the profit means not the financial benefit for the organization, but the benefit that people get out of the organization’s work. A civil society organization might want to highlight only their work through the media, or even present things the way they see it. At times, they might actually not extend the control on content to the community. They might actually look at media as a tool to spread their work and ideology. (However, the default is always that the organization works for the people and not for itself.) But if

the process adopted in the civil society is highly democratic and participatory then the question of concentrated ownership and self-interest does not arise. There are threats of concentration of ownership with the civil society too. But the civil society is still closer to the people and there is a larger scope to change and become more democratic.

The second filter is that of advertising, which has colonized the mass media and is responsible for most of the media's income. Advertising does not appear in alternative media. But the source of the money provided for the production of alternative media can be the one which controls the content. The funders for the alternative media project might have very specific things in mind. They might also have certain stance which they would not like to be challenged by the alternative media. Even civil society organizations are controlled by a lot of political stances and practical limitations, which again can not be stretched by the alternative media. However, as mentioned in the earlier point, the scope to differ is expected to be much more here than in mass media.

The third filter is that of sourcing, where "the mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest". The media rely heavily upon news provided to them by corporate and government sources, which have themselves developed enormous bureaucracies to provide this material to the media. The source of information here are the people at the grassroots themselves and experts in these social fields. This media also needs to be wary of the possibility of only a group of people amongst these grassroots people becoming the source of information. The group needs to be as varied as possible. Because talking at the level of the alternative media, it is again possible that the elite amongst these people (let's say upper castes) become the only information source.

Edward S. Herman indicates that media activists should concentrate their efforts upon getting broadcast channels, because of their ability to reach large numbers, whose class interest should make them more amenable to critical messages. He is talking in the context of changing the ideological dominance. This is equally necessary, but other than focusing on broadcast, it is necessary to look at local media too. Rather than attempting to get the broadcast channels and the mass media, most alternative media focus on local



for a variety of reason which would become clear as we proceed. Even Herman (1989, cited in [www.chomsky.info](http://www.chomsky.info)) mentions that “access should include ownership, not merely an occasional program or appearance. We have to start from the bottom. Grassroots organizations have to become more media-oriented and more concerned to reach out to similar groups and beyond.”

“In turn people’s movements find it difficult to mobilize or motivate the media to share the shrinking space for the deprived and depressed. For the movements, the dominant market-led media and the alternative media are the two planks for making an impact in a larger society.”(Patkar and Sangvai, 2006 cited in Ashrani Mathur (ed.) 2006, pg. 166)

So, the synthesis that emerges with his two above mentioned ideas is working on a two-pronged approach, where one not only develops media at the grassroots, but also changes the orientation of the mass media channels.

### **3.3 Social Movements – Alternative Media**

There are a number of basic points of intersection between social movement theory and what is commonly understood by the democratization of communication. This asks for further exploration and people’s movements usually have their own alternative media, which are more committed to movements that challenge the system that suggest alternatives and halt oppressive modes and means.

#### **3.3.1 Communication patterns in social movements**

There is a view that social movements, usually, by themselves set up a communication pattern which is very democratic. Also, the society works within a very hierarchical (non-democratic) communication system. The social movements are themselves a communication pattern which are in opposition to such a structure. Social movements also work towards strengthening identity and insist that all the members have a right to obtain and make communicative inputs. Collective decision making and participation is also insisted upon. So, a horizontal pattern of communication is more dominant in a

social movement than vertical pattern of communication. Communication within the movement is dialogical and at the same time the social movements also try to set up a dialogical communication with the authorities ([indiatogether.org](http://indiatogether.org)).

This understanding sets up the base for the possibility of an alternative media (as there is an already existing democratic form of communication) within a social movement. For instance, Narmada Bachao Andolan has its own alternative media, ranging from handbills, wall posters in villages, the Narmada Sanchaar Bulletin, songs, dances, street play group of village youth, puppet shows and jhankis designed by the people in the movement. At the same time one can also deduce that what social movement aims at doing is very similar to what alternative media aims at doing (the points of intersection). Hence, one would not be wrong in assuming that any expression of/in alternative media (howsoever small) is a social movement or has the possibility of becoming one.

### **3.3.2 Alternative media within social movement**

There are arguments on the possibility of an alternative media within a social movement and the need for a social movement for democratization of media. Robert White argues that new social movements are not only the main source of, but also a model for, democratic communication (Cited in [www.indiatogether.org](http://www.indiatogether.org)). He talks about the need within the social movements to practice horizontal, participatory communication and says that full-scale communicative democracy involves not only structural media reform, but also normative change, spreading participatory communication practices throughout society. According to White, movements are the birthplace of such cultural transformation.

Although such a view, perhaps, also romanticizes oppositional social movements. It also conflates democratization through the media (the use of media by groups seeking progressive change in other social spheres), and democratization of the media. These two processes are not identical. They do overlap, however. In engaging in public communication for their primary objectives, progressive movements add to media diversity; conversely, structural media reform would create more public space for critical

movements. But for achieving this, there needs to be a movement for the specific objective, as only social movements adopting a certain form of communication can not affect the larger/ dominant media scene and put media reform on the agenda of governments. This becomes clear in a recent case, where the government has agreed that non-profit organizations can also have their own community radios (government of India gave a formal approval of guidelines on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006), (Tehelka, 2006). This was achieved only after significant lobbying and advocacy for years. Small community radio initiatives were also set up in few places in India. There were engagements with lobby groups all over the world and their experiences and successes were drawn on. There was a Supreme Court declaration in 1995, which declared airwaves as public property which must be utilized for advancing public good. It also declared that broadcasting media should be under public control, as distinct from government control. After this declaration many activist groups began pushing for legislation that would free airwaves which had been under the control of the government, although, it has been a long drawn struggle. Firstly, the FM waves were auctioned in 2001, but only for entertainment and business purpose. News and current affairs could not be included. In 2002, the government had restricted the ownership of 'community radio' to elite educational institutes, for setting up radio stations. Communities could only buy airtime on AIR and run the programmes under government supervision. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting initiated a consultative process in 2004. A consultative parliamentary committee was set up to look at the issue and this committee came up with the changes in policy. It has been seen that only sustained popular pressure can work to make the governments challenge the media conglomerates and make reforms. Coordinated popular action and the naming of a collective project- media democratization- i.e. a definite identifiable lobby is necessary to counter corporate power in this sphere. Such a project will likely be spearheaded by the groups with the most direct stake in media issues (independent journalists, independent filmmakers, development communication practitioners/ researchers, and many others.).

At the same time, one needs to understand that alternative media has many approaches and also, that media democratization is too big a project to be accomplished through any

single strategy, and there are potential synergies between different approaches. There have to be those working directly with the communities, those working at initiating policy level-changes, those challenging existing power structures and so on. There is a belief that presence of many oppositional movements can force dominant power structures (media conglomerates) to bow to opposing viewpoints, while activists who engage with mainstream media can push for practices and policies that offer more opportunities and resources for oppositional cultures to grow and thrive.

As mentioned above, even existing social movements can be a site for such a media and the alternative media movement will need to draw from the energies and frustrations of other social movements prepared to devote at least a small portion of their resources to it.

So, a strategy should include all of the above aspects. It must involve carefully building coalitions, which are broad enough to be politically effective and are also able to take in a wide range of activist media. A movement needs a common and compelling focus, such as the right to communicate, but one which allows different groups to participate in different ways without sacrificing their autonomy. Ideally, communicative democracy campaigns need to connect with deeply felt concerns of broad constituencies, find supporters within political and economic elites, and make possible links between local, national, and international action, as well as between "grassroots" and "tree-tops" (elite, policy-making) levels (Hackett, R.A., 2001, cited in [www.thirdworldtraveler.com](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com)).

With the understanding now developed about the ideas and concepts at the base of the study we now move over to the initiative taken in India in the direction of establishing alternative media.

### **3.4 The Beginnings of a Struggle: For a Voice**

The struggle to find a space for people's voices began with various efforts like establishing community radio in Kutch. Villagers turned radio journalists exposing government officials, talking about issues concerning the people, communicating with people in their language and their songs. This went alongside a consistent fight for

owning the airwaves. Another effort began with community video. The community videos propose to change the relationship people share with media. As we explored in Chapter1, the mass media usually does not cater to people's specific needs instead it serves the means and ends of certain other power agents like the politicians, corporate and so on. The mass media is not even owned by the people but a small group of elites or the political powers. We have also explored how alternative media opens a new democratic sphere and also democratizes media itself. With these ideals for alternatives and challenging the mass media started the quest for community video in various parts of India.

### **3.4.1 The First CVUs**

The concept was started by a New York based organization (Video Volunteers) with a Media and Human Rights organization based in Gujarat (Drishti). The idea germinated after a personal exploration of training poor women in Ahmedabad, who took up self employment. Communication was understood as a vital part in the lives and struggles of these women by the organization working with them. The communication through video to the larger public was understood to make people aware of their struggles and discrimination that they face and a strong medium of getting issues addressed or known.

Organization V started a volunteer matching programme - matching the needs of NGOs with the interests of the film-makers. There were a lot of independent film-makers interested in working on issue based films, who also wanted to explore the culture and issues in another country. The NGOs were also increasingly realizing the need of getting their own media and talking through films and videos to make a larger impact. Video Volunteers believes that media can provide marginalized people with a platform for voice and accelerate social change. In collaboration with Drishti in Ahmedabad, India, Video Volunteers is working to create a global network of 100s of rural or peri-urban Video Producers who produce and share media across the barriers of illiteracy, poverty and media neglect. They had set up 6 CVUs in the first phase and 7 in the second.

Their core activity is establishing sustainable Community Video Units (CVUs) in partnership with leading NGOs. Each Community Video Unit (CVU) comprises up to 10 community members, primarily women, who produce one "Video News Magazine" each month that is shown back to communities using wide-screen projectors or local cable networks. These CVUs will produce one hundred videos in their first year alone, on issues of social justice, development and human rights that will be seen by thousands of people in their communities, providing a local, national and global platform for voice.<sup>viii</sup>

### **3.4.2 The process**

The film makers came to India (they went around the world, including India as one of the countries) to a non-governmental organization. They trained the staff in video making for a period of one month. The goal of the training programme focused on working on individuals and particularly things like self-esteem, decision making, power, through the gained skills. During the training, various techniques of participatory video were implemented. The exercises were usually connected with the lives of the trainees for instance, the photography exercise was looked at as the photographs/ images representing people's life experiences. Things were explained connected to the things they already know or something they are doing. There was a focus on the individual's creativity and it moved beyond just imparting skills, but also understanding and relating to the images they produced. Technical aspects were usually taught through exercises rather than simple explaining. For instance, to explain about the aperture in a camera they showed how the pupil of the eye reacts to light and darkness. The trainers even avoided using the terms and names which were either very new or difficult to pronounce, understanding that it would not be easy for them to get these terms. Usually things happening around them were shot and used for training purposes. The trainees were usually encouraged to figure answers for themselves. The trainings did not happen in a lecture mode and the trainers asked questions rather than providing answers all the time. The camera was introduced not in a very technical way, but in a very participatory hands-on way with everyone knowing the very basic functioning of the camera and becoming a camera

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<sup>viii</sup> This information is from the organization's website

operator and interviewing the rest. The recorded material was then shown back to them. Exercises were done in both controlled environment and out in the streets. The technical things were kept simple for the trainees to understand and grasp better and not get overwhelmed by the complexity. But the way to train changed with the increasing understanding levels of the trainees.

There was a whole media set-up at the end of the training with trained and skilled people and equipment. Along with the training suggestions were also given on taking these films to the community with regular screenings and making it. The trained staff members were called the video reporters. They left them with a film made during the training period and also left the equipment behind for further use in this direction people's media and increasing people's participation by people giving feedback, getting encouraged to be involved in projects and developmental issues.

### **3.4.3 Experiences with two organizations**

Here, we would explore the experiences with two organizations which were a part of the volunteer-matching programme. As mentioned above, in the first phase there were 6 CVUs set up. These are two of those who got their staff trained by the video trainers and set up their own units after the training.

#### **Background information on ANANDI**

ANANDI's primary focus is in achieving its empowerment vision is on gender mainstreaming in the context of the continuing and unacceptable levels of discrimination which women face. The goal of all its interventions is to bring the concerns of this 'critical half of humanity' to the centre of all development policies and interventions.

For the organization, gender mainstreaming means more than gender sensitivity of development agencies. It requires development agencies to actively promote women's empowerment to enable women to participate centrally in all development processes

from community and village level through to state, national and international levels. It also requires specific attention to including the very poorest women within communities and prioritizing their needs at all these levels.

The organization believes that empowering women, and particularly the poorest and most disadvantaged women, will in turn lead to transformation of fundamental inequalities in society and achievement of its universal empowerment vision. Their entry point has been to help women to organize around their immediate perceived needs at local level. In some cases these have been serious cases of violence against women. In others it has been immediate practical needs in the wake of a disaster or longer term practical needs relating to water, sustainable livelihoods or health. Their approach focuses on the particular perspectives and processes which it initiates in order to facilitate women's empowerment. These involve three distinct but interrelated contributions to strengthening women's own initiative and activities, Gender Mainstreaming which is their entry point with partners and with women's organizations; Participatory Action Learning which provides a systematic and equitable process for participatory planning accessible to the poorest women and those who are illiterate; Area Networking for collective action and advocacy.

The organization works primarily with very low income women from tribal and other disadvantaged communities in rural Gujarat. It has so far focused its activities in two main geographical areas which have hitherto been neglected by government; Panchmahals-Dahod where it works with the poorest women of the tribal and other marginalized communities; Saurashtra which does not have high levels of poverty but is very oppressive to women and is vulnerable to natural disasters including droughts, cyclone and earthquake.

### **Background information on Navsarjan**

Navsarjan's primary focus has always been Dalits, which largely includes people previously known as 'untouchables'. It is today an organization that is solidly established in Gujarat and plays an active part in the overall Dalit movement in India and abroad. It works at helping Dalits and other poor communities to overgrow the net of ideological deceptions whereby the system has maintained over years, the status quo. Promoting "self



respect” and “dignity” in all of its activities, it counts 5 major programs all-revolving around caste discrimination relevant themes. As both an organization and a Movement, its Programs can hardly be distinguished from its other daily activities. Many of the programs are carried out since the inception of the organization and are to be pursued for many years to come.

These are: Legal Aid - In view of the continuing and increasing violence that characterizes caste discrimination, the organization quickly established Legal cells within its Taluka offices with the objective to provide legal assistance to Dalit women and men who can hardly find, lest afford a lawyer in normal circumstances. The legal Aid program also aims at promoting awareness in the communities about their lawful rights and their consequent violations; Women’s empowerment - Conscious that Dalit women are positioned at the bottom of India’s caste, class and gender hierarchies, the organization intends to give them a voice and ensure that they are equally and effectively represented in the organization as well as in the movement, at all levels; Training - Training both, members of the Dalit community as well as potential social workers or “Dalit Cadres” constitutes an important part of the organization’s activities. Training programs serve as effective tool to build the ideological base and help cadres articulate their concerns; Education - realizing the correlation between education and Dalit empowerment, the organization engages in educational activities through its Primary Education Program. It has also set up an empowerment center for Vocational Training as well as inputs in Dalit empowerment; Campaigns - As an expression of Dalit mobilization, the organization regularly carries out campaigns in Gujarat on caste discrimination relevant themes.

Their work area is spread in the districts of Rajkot, Amreli, Bhavnagar, Anand, Vadodara, Kheda, Surendranagar, Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Patan and Mehsana in Gujarat.<sup>ix</sup>

Both the organizations are working with groups which have been discriminated and marginalized. They had a very clear ideology before setting up the CVUs. Organization

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<sup>ix</sup> The background information on both the organizations is collated from their websites

V and M wanted to set up CVUs because they wanted to work on two core issues of giving a voice to people and democratization of media, these organizations wanted to focus on empowering people through the use of media. There was a realization that either the stories of these people are not being narrated at all or they are being narrated by someone else.

“It is only in times of disaster and crisis that media can come together to talk about people. But in this case too there is victimization of people. This is the very gaze against which the community media stands.....Then is the angle of independent filmmakers. These filmmakers try to provide a voice to people. But usually they too look at them in times of crisis. And this is not exactly media being in people’s hand. Their story is still being narrated by someone else.” (Nimmi Chauhan, Interview, Drishti)

There is an innate desire in every human being to communicate. And in a world like ours in which there is instant connectivity with the rest of the world (if you have the right means), being connected becomes the proof of your existence.

“If my realities are not visible to the world outside then I cease to exist in their psyche.”(Martin Mcwan, Interview in a Video made by Video Volunteers on the training, Navsarjan)

“Being heard and being seen is psychologically very important. If one person looks at a poor person and simply ignores then they become invisible and they have this kind of a feeling all the time. They feel that they cannot be seen by anybody. And if one sees them then they seem them with a certain gaze in which we victimize them. Poor are only important in disasters. And we become aware of them only in disasters and look with the gaze.” (Gavin White, Interview, Video Volunteers)

It is such a paradox that in a world which is coming closer due to communication technology, absence of the ability or accessibility to communicate might actually mean that you are not being seen by the rest of the world. The World becomes what is seen and heard constantly. The others cease to exist. These ‘others’ are the 4 billion people in the world, who are earning less than \$4 per day. These people publish no media which is accessed by the rest of the world. So, this 4 billion becomes non-existent for the world which is existent through its constant presence in the media.

“There is a pyramid where on top is the slot of elitist media watched by a very limited no. of people. And the base, where there is maximum no. of people, is absolutely empty. So, we are looking to upturn the pyramid, with the base being at the top and producing a large amount of media to be published..... Now the poor will gaze at us. It will be their way of looking” (Gavin White, Interview, Video Volunteers)

There has to be a presence built of these people and the groups ANANDI and Navsarjan worked with formed a part of this seemingly non-existent part of the world. This fight for presence is very closely connected to the issues of identity, discrimination and empowerment which ANANDI and Navsarjan are working for. All these three aspects were getting addressed through the CVUs.

#### **3.4.4 Identity, Discrimination, Marginalization**

One of the key ideas both the organizations are working on is identity. This has been discussed above, about the need for a medium to document the history of the marginalized and express their identity.

“This will be a part of the whole Dalit movement. There is no history of Dalits that has been preserved.....For any movement to be strong it is very important to have an ability to learn from history. There are so many museums on Gandhi on this and that show me one museum on tribal or Dalit or women.

There is no recording. This will become a way for us to record our history.”  
(Martin Mcwan, Interview, Navsarjan)

The identity changes when one is actually handling the camera. In fact, there is an identity attached with the one holding a camera. It becomes a tool for change by its mere presence. One is not trying to look at the pros and cons of it, but here we are expressing the immense effect the presence of a camera has on people. One needs to have a closer look at the background of people who handle a camera.

“Look at the background of people who handle a camera. There are hardly any Dalits, women and people in rural area doing that. It makes a lot of difference if a Dalit woman is handling a camera. One thinks that people who can handle camera are well educated, speak English, are urban.... The confidence level of those who have been given the training in videography has increased immensely.” (Manjula, Interview, Navsarjan)

“We had made a film on manual scavenging. I had always had courage...during a shoot people told me that the Sarpanch is sitting here. I never bothered and continued my shooting...No one lets a girl out in the villages. What they do most is work on the fields...so I mark a change when I am seen with a camera.”  
(Indu, Teacher Trainer, videography course, Interview, Navsarjan)

The access to media gives them an opportunity to work with the factor of identity. Most of the marginalized communities show a very strong desire to express their identity and video becomes an effective medium to do so.

“Police enters the house without any notice. They catch people and put them in jails even now for no reason... I wish to continue making films for this (social) purpose. I want to train others too. If I had known this skill during Godhra riots I could have brought out the truth. I will teach a lot of my community girls.

They need to get this kind of power in their hands. Their condition may improve.” (Shabana, Video Reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

The discrimination and marginalization that happens is to be attacked through this media. The video reporters have personally faced discrimination either on the basis of gender or caste or both. So, they challenge this discrimination by not only holding a camera but also by making films on the issue. They do not want to further isolate the marginalized groups, but want to integrate their identities with the mainstream.

Though both these organizations worked on certain key issue they had a different way of treating the CVU. W wanted to set up an intense process of dialogue and a lateral learning model, where information is exchanged amongst various people. This was along with the belief that there is an increasing importance in making these people heard and in them producing their own media.

“Ultimately it is a tool that has to be used for the benefit of the community.... We are primarily aiming at communities” Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

D used their CVU for generating livelihood opportunities and for making their stories heard. They had never been allowed the access to resources to do so. There was a realization that many Dalits are never allowed to take education so that they can enter any other profession. Also, Dalits are usually not allowed to take up any other profession. Video-making was seen as a means of livelihood for Dalits and the training used for that purpose.

“When Video Volunteers had come to us we had decided that we will use this training to start a videography course.” (Martin Macwan, Interview, Navsarjan)

### 3.4.5 Video as Technology

While above we looked at the issues of identity and marginalization, we realized that identity is also controlled by video and technology. When one is talking about video, there is an obvious reference to technology. Video is not just a medium to communicate, but it is a technology too. One can say that these CVUs have been set up because technology has become more accessible as the cost of owning a video camera has gone down tremendously. However, very ironically, technology has been creating a gap and disallowing certain sections of the society from voicing their concerns. We have earlier discussed the reach of Television and internet in India. 75 million households have TV, which comes to lesser than 40% of the population; lesser than 1% of the population has access to internet, though India has the 5<sup>th</sup> largest user of internet. The technology also establishes two groups – the haves (those who have the access to technology) and the have -nots (those who cannot access technology). This was a resonant feeling in both the organizations.

“People have a tremendous need to express themselves. But only on basis of caste, gender etc, this is being denied. So we are just making the environment conducive-for these marginalized people to express themselves....It is very ironical, but technology has been used to take away people’s expressions. This is becoming more prominent in the context of gender and caste.”(Martin Macwan, Interview, Navsarjan)

“Technology is not neutral and it is certainly not gender neutral.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

The non-access to technology is largely controlled by economic factors. Technology, in fact, widens the gap and reiterates the marginalization. As with most forms of marginalization, those with lesser economic power are powerless, or the instruments of power are made inaccessible. Similarly, with technology, those with lesser economic power are the powerless and this makes sure that they do not access the right to



During the shoot of a video magazine of ANANDI (Ajmer, Gujarat)



Talking to a woman entrepreneur in a village, whose micro-enterprise was being covered in the upcoming video magazine of ANANDI (Vachiya, Gujarat)



communicate, which can facilitate empowerment (if not provide power). So, those who have been traditionally marginalized are marginalized by technology even further. This is prominently so in the context of caste and gender. After all a Dalit, illiterate woman, wearing a torn saree with a ghoonghat, residing in a non-descript village in India is the last image one gets when one says 'film-maker'.

#### **3.4.6 Initiation of the CVUs**

As seen above, there were very specific reasons of the organization for establishing the media. There were very intense views about technology and media which furthered their decision. Both the organizations had used media earlier too. We just take a glance at it and then see exactly how media, specifically CVU, was used.

Navsarjan had a magazine, but it reached only the literate people. It did not reach more than 1000 people. The group they are working with also did not find this medium very accessible, because of the literacy factor. Their experience with video came largely with a film on manual scavenging, which inspired a lot many films on the same issue and helped the Dalit movement a lot. It added to the visibility of the movement and made it stronger and generated a mass support and support from many unexpected quarters.

ANANDI had its magazine too which faced the same problem of reach as its constituency of rural women in Gujarat could not access this media. W realized the need for a strong media after an insightful experience. They had also used video during early nineties when it was a very expensive medium and the need for it was recognized duly. They had held a Sammelan which was for the lateral learning process. There are learning strategies that are shared amongst the women. They were discussing the History and Culture of the place. Here women were invited to tell about their culture. When they discussed it they realized that this information would be used by people outside. Local women had oral testimonies which could be put together by the organization through a media. They recorded the songs used by them. The tool belonged to them and the organization was partnering with them. Earlier the tools did not belong to them. There was very low



participation in any deciding matter. One should always respect the one who should have a control over it. So, though a professional would record these songs, he would go to the tribal areas and see how these people live, what musical instruments they use and learn from them. Eventually, the cassette started moving around and in many other places the songs resonated with women. The language was the local language and their sentiments were understood universally, these cassettes were even played by the truck drivers. The women were getting a way to spread their words in the way they wanted to say it. It marked a definite change for them to record their culture. The women made songs on issues concerning their daily lives and also sang their traditional songs which are closely connected to their lives and livelihoods. In this cassette of songs these people are saying their history in their idioms in the way they understand it, they see it. Here would be interesting to mention that in the pre-screening announcements in the village, the video reporters play these very songs on the amplifier. Thus, the cultural identity was also established and local cultures were being promoted.

They started with their video unit which produced films every 3 months. A large part of this time is dedicated to in-depth research so that the video reporters get a space with the communities and understand the issues closely. The magazines that were made initially were very closely connected to the campaigns initiated by the organization. Even now, they are closely related to the issues the organization is working on, which are also issues of concern of the community. The magazine is shown in the areas of work of the organization. These video magazines are shown in the field area by the video reporters. They usually cover around 22 villages in a month. Till now they do not have a consistent way of disseminating. Usually, when a video reporter goes to a community, she screens all the video magazines at the same time, holding a discussion after each of it. She also tries to see what all issues come up and if any one comes up with their particular cases then take those cases up. Usually, the video magazine is shown by that one who also works as a field worker in that particular community, so that it is easy to take up and follow cases.



Community people participating actively in the pre-screening announcement  
(Baijarpur, Gujarat)



A screening in Baijarpur, Gujarat

“These reporters have to get the space to be with the communities. They have to sit with them talk to them and understand it. They have to have good in depth understanding of the issue. That is why I make sure that the producers of the film are there at the screening. Earlier either of us (Directors of the organization) used to be there, or during the right to food campaign we used to have people from the team working for it. People connected to that issue get together for the screening of the film. Now that does not happen anymore because it becomes very tough to get everyone together for a screening.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

The organizations used the training they received the way they wanted. As mentioned above D saw it as a livelihood option. They have a vocational training center, where Dalit students are given training in a variety of livelihood options. Initially four people (all were staff of the vocational training center) were given training in video-making by the volunteers from organization V. These people then went ahead and set up the videography course for the training center. So, now they are not only transferring the skill, but also providing a good livelihood opportunity for many others. Many students are those whose traditional occupation for manual scavenging. They get back after training and have the opportunity to leave their traditional occupation and open photo/video studios. They also worked on making their course sustainable by making marriage videos. The students also, usually open up photo and video studios and shoot specifically during marriages and also during other occasions. The center has also started making few independent films for other organizations and institutions. This kind of a model was adopted as it was believed that livelihood opportunities are very limited for Dalits.

“It is also in demand as a livelihood option. There is a lot of demand for people who can make (marriage) videos. More and more Dalits are getting linked up with job opportunities. There are only 1% of Dalits who are self employed.” (Manjula, Interview, ANANDI,)





People during a discussion following the screening of the video magazine, interacting with the video reporter of ANANDI (Halol, Gujarat)



The trainer - teacher training students at Navsarjan's vocational training center

This sort of transference of skills, which helped in income generation is not only about income generation. It challenges the long prevalent systems where certain inhuman jobs are traditionally only done by Dalits. It is about challenging the caste system. It is about challenging the power structure. In current situations where Dalit students are forced to clean up toilets in schools, to be able to take up a work (working with a camera) which is considered to be dominated and controlled by elites (read educated, English speaking, empowered, urban, rich people) is a sort of breakthrough on its own. This translates in community media for D as the access to media as a skill was being transferred to community people (students). The video reporters also made few films on Dalit rights.

“We have had a student whose traditional job was manual scavenging, however, after he got trained from here he started his own studio, with the loan he took from here.”(Indu, Teacher Trainer, Videography Course, Interview, Navsarjan)

Both the organizations look at media as something that can build leadership. W started looking at leadership and identity of Muslim Women after the communal carnage in Gujarat. The setting up of the CVU was seen as one intervention in this direction. It would be appropriate to mention here that one of the CVU video reporters is a Muslim woman from Godhra. Where the CVU is seen as a tool for community, it nonetheless, builds individual leaders too.

### **3.4.7 Individual Leadership building**

Here it would be appropriate to look at video reporters as those individual leaders. Though, the focus of the CVU is definitely not on few empowered individuals through skill building, it is aiming at a much larger process. It wants to reach out to the whole community. But in this process it undoubtedly creates strong individuals, who are not only working towards a larger change but are themselves a sign of change.

## **Indu, Navsarjan**

She was associated with Navsarjan first as a student at the vocational training center. The karyakars from the organization go to different villages for taking students for the training course. It started with her doing a course which is largely acceptable for girls: tailoring. It was after a lot of persuasion that her father allowed her and her sisters to come for the training, which is a residential one. She followed this training with other courses too. She was taken on as a staff (first as a librarian and then as an assistant) for the training center by the organization. She was taken on for the video training when Video Volunteers came with their efforts to train people in NGOs. After the completion of this training, for further training, she, along with three two other trainees, went to Mississippi, U.S. It was this exposure that really affected her world view. Their group felt that they were being discriminated by their instructor.

“Our instructor was a white man and he used to leave us and we got a feeling that we were being discriminated against.”

They also saw that the Blacks in the US faced similar kind of discrimination that Dalits face in India. There they made a film looking at both caste and color as forms of discrimination. After coming back from the training she was taken on as the trainer for the newly starting videography course. For a long time her father did not know that she was getting trained into videography. After he got to know he was not appreciative of it. She also faced a lot of problems trying to convince her parents for going to the U.S. for training. She still thinks her father is not happy and not appreciative of what she is doing, but slowly he has also started understanding.

“My father is not happy. Or he does not show it. He was so much against this...”

With her commitment and her exposure and personal experiences she has got a good perspective on the issues. As an individual, she has always been very confident of herself,

but very clearly she got the opportunities from Navsarjan and she used them well too. She herself had experienced gender and caste discrimination in her village, where the girls only worked in fields. She says that even when boys who come for training here see her operating a camera they are astonished, as they have never imagined this. She has very strong views on gender equity and even questions the organization at times.

“There is gender bias in the training center itself...no. of women in the staff, bias towards girls...”

She is also very critical of her current position as a trainer and wants to join the CVU, for her personal growth too. She says,

“You make the same kind of films here (marriage videos). Nothing comes from your mind. In the CVU we will get that opportunity-to think. If I am there, I will make sure that the issues (of gender bias, domestic violence) are covered... One benefit of the CVU would be that I will start thinking from my mind. It will be open to various interesting things.”

Coming from a village in Anand district from a Dalit family who worked on farms, to being a video trainer with the organization and now reaching out to hundreds of people through the CVU, she herself has turned into a confident woman with a critical perspective on marginalized people’s position in the society.

“I have changed the image of my village after I went to Mississippi. My village was infamous for its kind of people. After I went it became known that a girl from this village has gone to US. I was called and honored in the village when I went back.”

The process has helped her in becoming a strong individual who is also being seen as a model for not only the students who come for training but also her village community.

## **Shabana, ANANDI**

In her personal life she is a divorced Muslim woman with a daughter living with her parents, who are not very acceptable of her because of her divorcee status.

“My father does not talk to me. My sisters do not talk to me. Only my mother supports me. She has agreed to take care of my daughter. It is not easy for a divorced Muslim girl to come back home. There is no acceptance.”

On the professional front she introduces herself as a filmmaker and an activist. She explains how she loves what she is doing and though she has to face a lot of flak because of this she is even more determined to keep going forward.

“People in my colony talk when I come home late. One lady would say the next morning while buying vegetables to another one that I had come home at this time and the rest would be done. You know what people talk when a girl comes home late. But I am doing nothing wrong.”

To all this is added another factor of religion. She lives in Godhra and personally faced the communal riots. It was during this time that she started working with women affected during the riots. Then she joined ANANDI as a field worker. ANANDI had also started working on building leadership amongst Muslim women after the communal carnage. She was asked if she would be ready to take the video training and she felt this is an opportunity she can not lose. However, this met with tough resistance at home as she was required to leave her home and her daughter and stay in a different place for a month. However, she went there with the support of her mother and her self-confidence. Things have not been easy for her after this rather they have become more difficult.

“My relatives, my neighbors, no one agrees to what I am doing, they are very critical, they think how can a woman go out and work, and that too something to do with a camera and then I am divorced too.”



“First time when I asked to go for a shoot for a month it was a straight no. Now they understand...At times I also feel angry too. There is so much to sacrifice...and more so when the work is not appreciated by others. But I have to prove myself to others. I have to prove that I am doing nothing wrong. So, whatever it may require I will do all the hard work.”

She has changed from being a complacent housewife who was constantly abused by her husband, to being a woman who sits with other women across villages, working with them, asking about their problems, making video magazines on issues of women, domestic violence, witchcraft, not only trying to change her own life, but also affecting a lot of other women around her, motivating them to speak up against the atrocities and supporting them.

### **3.5 Concerns**

After having looked at the organizations, the training, the models set up and the leadership building process, we take a look at the concerns emanating from the experiences. Firstly, we will look at the training itself that was provided. There were some issues that the trainees had. We will see their responses to the training below.

#### **3.5.1 Language Barrier**

One major issue that the trainees faced was of language and culture barrier. The video trainers communicated in English, came from a different cultural and social background. The trainees came from a totally different background. Most of them did not understand English easily. There were many challenges in trying to translate and even make them understand how a camera works. For people who did not know even Basic English, to be able to edit on computers, where the interface is in English was definitely a tough task on hand.

The language mismatch did not bother as much because it was a well accepted fact by the trainees that there were differences. Though, the organizations did not really take well to those differences, for the very simple reason that it hampered the learning of the trainees.

There were group dynamics too due to this. There were people who could understand English and then there were people who did not. Those who did not, thought they were being discriminated against. So, there was a feeling of deprivation in people in an exercise that was supposed to be capacity building. Not to say that capacity building did not happen but it certainly affected the process. People who could not understand the language actually struggled. This was echoed by video reporters all over and they mentioned that learning editing became a huge task, and to clarify it even further, most of them still had a problem in editing.

“There were cases when people did not translate intentionally so that we can not understand. But I was also keen to learn and from whatever words I could get I used to construct sentences and get it.” (Indu, Teacher Trainer, Videography Course, Interview, Navsarjan)

So, though it was an exciting idea of a volunteer-NGO match, it failed at a level where it was the most necessary to succeed – in training people. This is not to undermine the training that took place, but it points out the inherent problem in this system of training grassroots people by ‘outside’ trainers. Following are some responses:

“During the training there has been a language problem...there were 8 people and just one camera...There was a single editing system. Also, to think similarly is a problem. There were so many people. There was a sense of dissatisfaction. There is a difference in opinion...Drishti should me involved more. They should monitor the trainers because even here we felt the discrimination. There were some people who were paid more attention... They should also see that what part of videography is the student interested and train

him/her more in that.” (Sushma, Teacher Trainer, Videography Course, Interview, Navsarjan)

“Z had an ego problem. There were many problems with him during our first film. He used to keep time for the camera. So every time I took the camera I had to enter it in the register. And I could not touch the computer. He would accuse that we have deleted the files etc...I did not even use the camera that much...there were problems in translation...I have learnt editing only later by myself.” (Indu, Teacher Trainer, Videography Course, Interview, Navsarjan)

“Firstly, I felt that I can not learn this at all. It was so tough. And then there were issues with the language. We could not understand much. But with some help we managed... The trainers did not teach many things. Even earlier with them I felt I could not learn it due to translation problems” (Shabana, Video Reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

“After making our first film we wondered if we can make a second one. The problem came during editing. Most of the editing has been learnt ourselves.” (Kirti, Video Reporter, Group Discussion, ANANDI)

### **3.5.2 Internal dynamics**

The whole process was largely affected by the internal dynamics in an organization. A CVU is composed of various individuals and their relations amongst themselves are capable of affecting the process a lot, even when the CVU model is perfectly fine, conceptually. In the cases studied, it was found that as the reporters got more confident of them and started recognizing their individual capabilities, conflicts in the team of the reporters arose.

“There are four directors that are present here. Problems are bound to come up. Conflict does happen.” (Kirti, Video reporter, Group Discussion, ANANDI)

“I did not use the camera that much. There was a lot of competition. People wanted to prove that they were the best. I also wanted to be the best and I thought that I know more and I need not bother about all this.” (Indu, Teacher Trainer, Videography Course, Interview, Navsarjan)

Not to say, each individual developed his/her own point of view, which they strongly held. Hence, reaching a consensus on various issues became difficult. There was an innate desire in few of the people to lead. So, building leaderships conflicted with each other. Though the fact that these individuals developed their own stands is commendable, it is an illustration of the process working for empowerment of the individuals.

There were also conflicts about who controls the content of the film, the perspective of the film and so on. It was admitted that since there are many individuals, there are bound to be such conflicts. However, these group dynamics took such a shape that they started affecting the process too.

“There were a lot of problems with the three of them. At a time Martin Macwan called them all and said that if they can not work together then this media unit has to be shut. He said that there has been a lot of money spent after them.” (Indu, Teacher Trainer, Videography Course, Interview, Navsarjan)

There was a communication break down between individuals within an organization which was establishing communication systems. This also reflected the inherent power structures even in this kind of a set up which was working on decentralization of power and empowerment. Though, the video reporters had issues with the organization head they could not voice it out to them or they took the researcher as a medium to take the issue forward. There had been many instances when the issue were taken out to people closely connected to the whole set up, but were not told directly to the organization. This reiterates the point further that communication is strongly controlled by power structures.

The way an illiterate person can not sit across the table of a government official and negotiate, similarly these video reporters could not negotiate with the organization and they are always looking for a medium. These are the communication barriers that structures emanate and even the organizations become a victim of it. However, when an organization is working on enabling people to be able to negotiate their terms with authorities, it is disconcerting that it is maintaining the same kind of structures. This probably reveals an important aspect of communication and this process, which is that at times there are links that are needed to establish communication between two parties. The CVU aims at mediating with the community and the authorities in this way and becomes the link.

### **3.5.3 Reporters as paid employees**

This is a huge matter of contention. A non-negotiable aspect of the CVU is that the video reporters have to be paid. But the fact of the matter is that this payment appears very less to the video reporters, compared to the amount of work put in. The CVU becomes cost effective mainly because of the reason that there are people trained by the organization to produce videos. These people are paid minimally and hence, the cost of production automatically comes down.

“Initially the salary was very less. It was only Rs. 1000. Then I talked to Stalin (Drishti) and told him that I want to quit the media unit. The salary was then raised to Rs. 2700. It is still very less. See the kind of work we do. We are working the whole day.” (Kailash, Video reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

“We get only Rs. 2500 per month. It is very less for the kind of time we put in. We fight for appropriate wages of others and here I myself am not getting a proper salary.” (Shabana, Video Reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

However, another view is that the NGO has built the capacities of these people by getting them trained. So, they do owe their capacity to earn more to the NGO only. But this

becomes a rationale to unreasonably use these video reporters too. The NGOs need to appreciate their learned skill and the work put in. But as mentioned there is a constant danger of exploitation of these video reporters (who are now a resource for the NGO), by the NGO itself.

“Their salaries have been raised from 750 to 2700. This is a huge jump. Even people who are leading campaigns have not been getting this much money...I know that there are organizations which want S and K and I would not blame them if they go to them for Rs. 5000. It is tough to resist. I am hoping that they will stick to the organization for at least 2 and half years. They should realize what the organization has taken up for them, there should be a sense of loyalty. Both S and K were not on our payrolls earlier. We had to take them as organization workers because of this. They were getting paid very less in their earlier jobs in whatever they were doing.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

Another observation of the researcher was that the current video trainers who are all professionally educated in video making or those who have come with a lot of experience in the field get a high salary. In fact, during an informal discussion a video reporter mentioned that she should be paid more than the other person (who had just been trained by Video Volunteers) as she has taken education in this particular field and both of them can not be put at par. So, at some level this barrier still exists in the mind of those practicing community video themselves.

#### **3.5.4 NGO Media Unit?**

After having a look at the concerns from the training and internal processes, we will look at the concerns that emerged from the concept and implementation of these CVUs. There were concerns about the truer meaning of the term CVU itself, as had been discussed above. Though the set ups with the two organizations were called CVUs, there was an increasing realization that it was not truly a CVU. The term CVU has three components: Community, Video and Unit. Community in sociological terms in the sense of a type of

collectivity usually refers to a group sharing a defined physical space, a group sharing common traits, a sense of belonging and/ or maintaining social ties and interactions which shape it into a distinctive social entity such as ethnic, religions, academic or professional community (Azarya, V., 1985, Pg. 135-136). Even in the defined physical spaces like villages, hamlets there are many communities and the CVU works particularly with a community, for instance, the Dalit community, but is also relating to the rest of the communities in the whole village too. They are also extending the term community beyond the defined physical or geography and including everyone who has certain basic common conditions of life, like Dalits across villages, and also those who share an understanding of the issues of the marginalized section like the activists. Here it also means that this unit should be owned and controlled by the community. The video unit is working for and with the community. The issue that it will tackle would be directly related to the needs of the communities. It is composed of community members too. Video clearly means that the medium used is Video. We have already discussed why video has been given such an importance given its special characteristic of ignoring the traditional literacy in reaching out to the communities, especially marginalized with which the CVUs want to work on. Unit implies that it should be an independent entity. In these training modules and media/ video units set up, the participation and ownership of the community was very low. These were mainly operated by the trained staff of the organization.

“The main reason was lack of leverage. We were just going and training people. We did not know whether our work was being followed up or not. There were questions like were the movies being screened back to the communities, were they making films anymore etc. The shift was to increase the leverage. The attempt was also to make it more of community media than NGO media.”  
(Jessica Mayberry, Interview, Video Volunteers)

The unit was not an independent entity either. It was more of a NGO component. So, this module was hugely concentrated around particular organizations. All these realizations prompted a shift in the process of setting up a CVU.

ANANDI had a set up which was more closely related to the idea of a NGO media unit. The composition of the unit was of people who had been directly working with the organization. The role of community was, in fact, minimal, other than the fact that the films were screened back to them regularly, regular feedback was taken, and their opinions sought on the issues that should be covered in the coming video magazines.

Navsarjan, in operational terms, did not have a CVU, as the meaning stands right now. However, it did have a video unit which reached out to the community in a unique way. Though, it was challenging the caste system in its own way, the process of doing so was very different than what is now visualized as the process of CVU. There were various learning from the other 4 CVUs too that had been set up. These concerns are drawn below and then it would be seen why a shift in the process and understanding was deemed as the next necessary step.

Firstly, from larger experiences not limited to only these two organizations, it was a capacity building of the NGO and not the community. It was a very long road taken to reach to the community and empowering them. The CVU did not reach the communities directly. It went through the NGOs. Also, many NGOs agreed to set up these CVUs as they saw it as their media unit. So, the media unit was not of the community. It was like a NGO making films for a community. Though a NGO is closer to a community and works with and for the community, it is still not the community itself. However, it becomes easier to work with the NGOs than individually with communities.

“There is a trust of the community placed in the NGO and the NGO understands the local market...they are our link to the communities.” (Rushikesh, Interview, ANANDI)

The NGO staff was being trained for video making, media being recognized by NGOs as an important tool for their work. Community people were not really getting the skills (D being a unique case and though it was imparting skills, it was not going beyond that in helping communities develop their media). NGO saw this as an opportunity to reach out



to more people, to spread their programmes/ projects, to establish themselves. Though there is nothing wrong in using media for these purposes, but the CVU was not meant for these purposes. In the end, the NGO had its media center and the community was still delineated from owning the media. The NGOs used the videos for their own promotion, since they were the owners of that media and people's participation was low. In short, it was not truly people's media.

If the organizations were getting the community people trained (in few cases) it was more for their own promotion. They were 'using' the community people for their own purposes. A film was being made on the work done by the NGO, and the issues the NGO was working on. The community people did not have much of a say in these matters. There was a lot of control by the NGOs on the content and subjects of the video magazines. Where they wanted the issues covered related to the issues they were working on (for the practical reason of being able to work on the issue, once the cases related to the issue started coming), they also controlled how the issue should be projected. Many video reporters felt that their view point was not taken in the video magazines.

"I feel like they are using me. My perspective is not there at all. I feel like I am taking orders all the time. They ask me to do something and I do that...I am not at all satisfied with my last two films. Both of them had a lot of gaps. When I saw the last film I could not believe that I had made it. I felt bad. That's what I felt. My thought was not there in the film." (Shabana, Video reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

The whole process was less decentralized, the power concentrated with the NGO. Though, when one is talking about empowering a community and establishing a democratic media, the power has to be given to people. This was not happening, power was being held back. The NGOs became the power centers. Though these power centers were more accessible and open to negotiations on power. The subject of the upcoming video magazine is always decided on the inputs from the community, field workers and video reporters. During the edit also, there is a form for discussion that how the subject

has to be projected, what all content is to be kept in and so on. Though there is holding back of power, there is also an acceptance that the medium needs to be left to the communities, thus increasing the space.

Once this training was over, there was no consistency in making films. It was not really sustainable. The making of the video magazine did not happen at a regular basis. Once the support and trainers from the Video Volunteers went away the NGO staff failed to carry forward. It was a learned skill which was not being used properly for fruitful purposes. The organization V had suggested that films be made regularly in a video magazine format, after every three months. This was not being followed by many other organizations. The transfer of skills and the media set ups were rendered useless. It was a whole lot investment going waste. It was turning out like a project where huge investments are made and results seen at the beginning, but at a later stage it collapses because of improper monitoring.

There was no proper dissemination system. The films were not being shown around much. Even with ANANDI, which went to the community with the films, there was no regularity. They went to different villages and communities, as found convenient. So, there was no consistency. In a situation where there is high competition from existing media, one needs to establish the media with regular engraining of the ideas. This component was completely missing here and this meant that the effectiveness of the medium was getting low.

The cost-effectiveness of the films was also really low since, the film was reaching less number of people and its cost per person went up. The main basis on which the CVU actually promotes itself is the cost-effectiveness in reaching n number of people. The flaw in a proper distribution also compromised with the cost-effectiveness and not only medium-effectiveness. The cost-effectiveness of a video magazine is calculated according to the total cost of producing the video magazine and the number of people it reaches out to. For instance, if the average cost of producing a video magazine is Rs. 50, 000 and the same video magazine reaches out to 10, 000 people, its cost effectiveness to

reach is Rs. 5 per person. So, when a video magazine is seen by lesser number of people, its cost effectiveness decreases. There was a disconnect between production and distribution. The purpose of the production of the films for the community, but ultimately the film was not being seen by the community or it was being seen by a limited number of people. The films that were made by organization D were not shown to the community, but only became films to be shown to guests.

“We haven’t shown the film around too much. It is shown generally to the guests who come here.” (Nisha, Teacher Trainer, Videography Course, Interview, Navsarjan)

### **3.5.5 Training the grassroots people**

In this process of setting up community video units and training the NGO staff, the obvious concern was that the community people should be trained, though there were certain issues in it. The issues vary from the training style required to train people, who are being exposed to such technology of camera and computers for the first time, to language interface in computers and camera, to then staying on with the CVU. The problem of making trainees understand the functioning of a camera or the concept of a computer was faced during the first rounds of training itself. The trainers had to devise special methods and various metaphors to explain them concepts. A major barrier in their understanding was not only their non-exposure to these technologies, but also language. The language barrier with the trainers had been discussed above. There was another language barrier, that of interface of a computer, which is all in English. The NGOs at times also felt that it would be not fruitful in investing into rural women as there are high chances that they would leave. The NGO wouldn’t be able to retain such people.

“Let’s say you find a girl who has studied till class 12th and you train her then she would probably get married soon and leave. That training would be of no use to either her or to us.” (Kirti, Video reporter, Interview, ANANDI)



A Video Reporter logging for editing of the video magazine.  
She is a tribal girl who had studied only till class 9<sup>th</sup>. Now she handles all the aspects of making a video magazine well.

Though, a video reporter who is a tribal and a young girl negated this.

“Young people can do this. They would not go away. When they find work they do stay back and stick to it. They can learn it.” (Kailash, Video reporter, Group Discussion, ANANDI)

This also demonstrates the inherent barriers that others and even the NGOs have in their mind. Before even reaching out to them, it is decided that they would not be able to take it up. Because of inherent bias people shy away from extending opportunities. This was also faced by Drishti when it tried to convince NGOs to take up trainees from interior areas, non-literates, backward areas and so on. The NGOs refused.

“Where Navsarjan even suggested people from the villages, the NGOs were not ready for it. They felt that it would be like spending more time and energy on them. These people from villages go back to their villages and in such a situation their investment would go waste.” (Nimmi Chauhan, Interview, Drishti)

### **3.5.6 Working in interior areas**

The organization working in interior and tribal areas, found that this medium did not become as effective due to other constraints. Firstly, the reach (physically) is extremely tough to these areas. Secondly, most of these places had a problem of electricity fluctuation, which meant that screening with a projector became tough. They also had to take all their equipments as the villagers did not have TV or VCD players, and there was no other option of screening other than with a projector and screen. The organization tried to get a generator for such area, though this meant that each screening would become more expensive. So, not only setting up a media unit in areas like these is a big challenge it is also a very big issue for the organization. As these maybe the people it wants to reach out to the most. But the nature of the media does not allow (or poses some huge constraints) to this reach.

“For villages with no electricity we are planning to generators. But it is still tough as we have problems of funds.” (Kirti, Video reporter, Group Discussion., ANANDI)

Other than the issue of reaching out, the community’s profile has to be kept in mind too. Most of the people in these areas are earning bare minimum wages to live. The women are already engaged in a lot of activities concerning their livelihood. So, it becomes additional burden on them in the name of capacity building, attending meetings etc, when they are actually fighting for subsistence living.

“We target very poor people. For these tribal and interior areas this is not possible. Where would she spend the time-do capacity building? Attend the meetings? Learn crediting? Or provide for herself, fend herself? Come for the screening? Give 4 hours for the CVU? It is not possible for this to work in remote hamlets.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

### **3.5.7 Film as a part of something larger or a stand alone**

Can the videos be a stand alone? Or they need to be a part of a larger strategy? The instant answer is that the videos have to be a part of a larger strategy. A film alone does not make any sense unless it is connected to the work being done, or a real concern of the community. The video magazines that have been made till now, have come up on varied issue from witchcraft which is still practiced in rural Gujarat to communal harmony in Ahmedabad. The understanding is that though the process of video production and distribution can be very intense, challenging many norms and structures in the society, it would not bring about a change on its own. One needs to work in the field on the issue.

“Professional filmmakers would say all right, this is the issue, I will pay it, I have done my job, finished. A social worker will not be able to say that. For that person, him or her, the commitment doesn’t end with the shooting of the film or

end of the shot. On the contrary it begins from there.” (Martin Macwan, Interview in a film on training, Navsarjan)

This is one major reason why the CVU is not seen separated from the NGOs field work. Media activism hasn’t taken an independent form and currently it is in very early stages where such expectations maybe unreasonable. A CVU is seen as a unit which produces films and the issues that come up are to be tackled by the organization and its field workers. The media is seen as something giving strength and momentum to changes and movements, but not as something that can build a movement on its own or bring about a revolution.

“...this studio should be used to document the social movement. It would be a studio for a social movement. This is a means and not the end itself. This is not a movement it is a means to make the movement stronger. This will add to the visibility of the movement.” (Martin Macwan, Interview, Navsarjan)

### **3.5.7 Public Sphere**

There has been a lot of field work that has come up after the screenings of various video magazines. Organization W, which screened films to the community, got a very positive response in terms of women speaking up on issues like polygamy and witchcraft, which were the subjects of the video magazines. They have been able to initiate discussion in various places.

“These questions do exist here. People believe in witches..... someone needs to talk about these things...” (An audience response after the screening of the video magazine in a village)

Women have related to the stories told in the video magazine and reported their issues to the video reporters present during the screenings or the field workers of the organization. When women discovered that there are women in other villages (and at times in their

villages) who have spoken up on camera on their issues, they got instant courage to speak up too.

“I completely identify with this...this is like my story...my property is being snatched away by my relatives after my husband died.” (An audience response after the screening of the video magazine in a village, her case was then taken up by the field worker.)

These are some issues which are not talked about openly in the villages, or the villagers do not know what has to be done about them. These video magazines and screenings opened up a whole new sphere for discussion and debate with and within the community. There have been instances where discussions have gone on for longer than two hours. We look at a few instances below:

In the Muslim dominated area of Halol, there was a screening held of the video magazine on polygamy. Women participated in the discussions. Many men also pointed out that there were cases of polygamy there too. The women were exposed to the legal angle by a lawyer, which they were completely unaware of. In fact, after the screening many women came up and asked if one can go to the court for a divorce.

People have instantly decided to organize themselves and do something about the issue. There was an instant from a video magazine on Right to Food, where the villagers decided to take stock of the situation and question the ration shop owner who had not been working properly. There have been instances where people have taken action after viewing other video magazines too.

“There has been a huge response to the video magazine in my field area too (Baria). Slowly we are getting the results of the film. People are filing complaints with the police if they get to know of child-marriage happening anywhere. Police has come at times and arrested people too.” (Kailash, Video Reporter, Group Discussion, ANANDI)



Since, W is a Women Rights based organization initially men did not come for the screenings and did not participate. But slowly, the films have been able to bring men to the fore and at the same platform as women where they discuss, question and argue with each other, something which never used to happen before. This sort of a forum was non-existent, where the whole community would get together and talk about issue concerning them, many of which were not discussed at all. So, the organization is able to pull cases and issues out and work further.

The above mentioned concerns of NGO control, training grassroots people, reaching interior areas, overcoming language barriers and so on had to be addressed. Firstly, the Community Video Unit had to truly become 'community' and not NGO media. There was a realization for more sustained and continuing efforts along with connect between production and distribution. Video Volunteers also wanted to increase its leverage in the whole process. They realized that their training was not used properly, so they need to put mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate. The potential of the gained skill needs to be exploited and employed in a better way for the benefit of the community. A CVU had to "Empower Communities to Voice". To stand true to this tagline and addressing the concerns that came up, a strategic shift was made.

This chapter discussed in details the alternative media, the relation between social movements and alternative media. It then entailed a discussion about the initiation of CVUs which included the background on the organization, the training, responses from the trainees about the trainers, the affect on various processes and dynamics in a society, leadership, the concerns from the training, the films as a part of a larger process and the public sphere. With learnings from here and with new ideas about the community media, there was a felt need for a strategic shift. The next chapter would see how that has been adopted.

## Chapter 4

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### Shifting alternatives

The last chapter discussed about the concerns that emerged out of the CVU about its concept and non-negotiables. There were also concerns regarding the operationalization of the CVU and organizational and personal concerns of those involved in the process. Organization V and M also realized that there were certain changes needed in the whole process. There was a felt need for increased leverage of the organizations. There had to be better monitoring and implementation of the whole process. The non-negotiables had to be followed and certain basics in implementation and operationalization strictly monitored. The process of implementation included the composition of the CVU, the training module for the video trainers and the community producers, consistent funding of the CVU, building the CVU as an independent unit eventually, determining the role of Community and the role of the NGO, distribution of the video magazine, consistency in making video magazines and taking up action, ensuring a regular feedback from the communities, having a strong call to action and sustainability of the CVU.

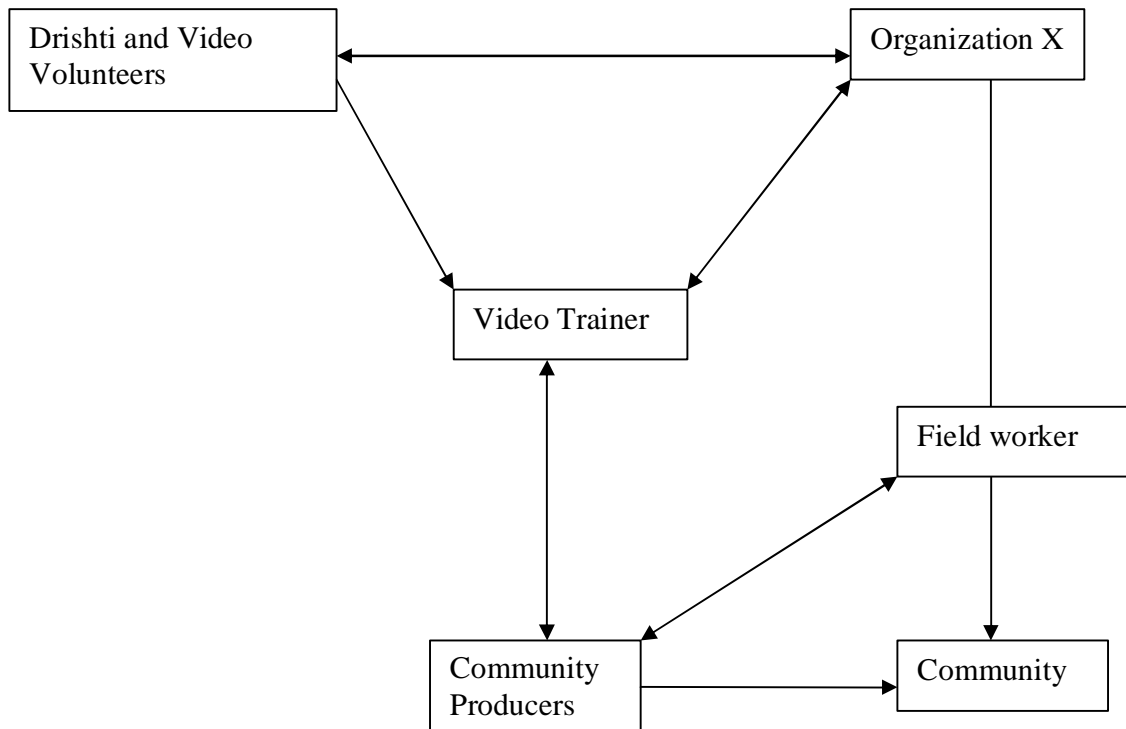
This chapter would discuss on how all these have been taken into consideration while implementing the new CVUs. We would discuss the organizing structure of the CVU and see how the system works now and proposes to be more democratic.

#### 4.1 The New Model: Description

As the needs were recognized, a quest to establish a more sustainable, a more democratic and a complete community media began and the brainstorming lead to the new process. They came up with various ideas. These included setting up the CVUs all by themselves without the video trainers, setting up around 50 CVUs at one go, assigning one trainer to 3 CVUs and so on. However, all of these options were ruled out due to their practical limitations.

#### 4.1.1 Organizational Structure of the CVU

Before moving on to the operationalization of the new CVUs, we would have a look at how it is structured. The arrows depict strictly the work relation and not the communication pattern.



How this structure operates and how these work relations exists would be clear in the next section.

There is an editorial board which consist of representation from all the elements – Video Volunteers and Drishti, the partner Organization, Video trainer, Community Producer and the Community. This editorial board’s function is to overlook at the whole process and its composition ensures an equal representation and it seeks democratic decision making. The editorial board finalizes the issue and its representation for the upcoming video. We had earlier talked about lateral communication. This Board encourages lateral communication and is in fact a structure which brings all the stakeholders at a common platform. As discussed earlier, even NGOs tend to establish vertical communication

(knowingly or unknowingly), even during something like a ‘lateral learning process.’ The possible reason for this is that communication works a lot with social attitudes, community producers are, at many times, not comfortable questioning or confronting the organization heads/ directors. This had been discussed in the earlier chapter, where the researcher experienced that the video reporters of the ANANDI asked the researcher to convey a message to the Director of the organization, or earlier had talked to Drishti about the issue of the salaries. However, it is assumed that physical and structural settings can affect these attitudes also. So, the setting of the editorial board is to at least structurally counter such tendencies and manifestations. The CVU in Bombay also wanted to incorporate a General Body. The General Body would incorporate all the people participating in the process one way or the other. However, there have been practical limitations in putting the General Body into implementation, as a meeting of the General Body required all the community people to come together at one physical space. This is an increasingly tough proposition. There are costs also involved in holding such a meeting as community people would need travel assistance to come to a place. This has been put on hold for the time being.

#### **4.1.2 Operationalization**

Following is an account of how the new CVUs are being operationalized. Firstly, organization V and M approached various organizations with the concept of a Community Video. The NGOs were brought at a similar platform as the Video Volunteers and Drishti. A lot of the NGOs still thought that this unit is going to be a NGO media unit. This was when there were efforts taken to bring all the NGOs at a similar plane through workshops.

“...but now the NGOs are getting at the same platform. All those NGOs who came for the 2 day workshop here are more or less at the same plane now. They were the ones who had agreed to all the things like continuing with the CVU at a long term basis, funding for the CVU, more community control and so on. The concept of community media was explained and a level ground was created where the NGOs came together. They agreed for funding the CVUs, supporting

the CVU on a long term basis and giving more community control in the whole process.” (Stalin K., Interview, Drishti)

There has to be some point of intersection between the various elements if they want to move towards a common goal. In a CVU there are various agencies with their own goals, attitudes and approaches. There are high chances of these differing approaches and attitudes to come into conflict with each other. However, this exercise was to help subside these differences and create a common understanding and approach. We believe, that to undertake any social action or social change one needs to have a similar ideology, a shared view of reality. Till there is no shared view of reality, the organization of people may be formed but it might not be able to sustain itself. In fact, that becomes the most challenging part of organizing people for changes – keeping everyone together.

The process started with selecting NGOs, who were working really closely with the communities with a democratic and rights based approach. After these organizations were chosen, the process of selecting the video trainers started. The video trainers ranged from experienced filmmakers to fresh graduates to news journalists. All of them came with a very different understanding of what the CVU meant.

“But the trainers who are coming now have no clue. They are coming with a very different set of mind. But when they are here then we will make them feel that something is happening. There are people like R who want to stay longer and there might be people who would just leave it in a year. But we want to tell them what we are doing. We will just orient them intellectually over this one month’s time.” (Stalin K., Interview, Drishti)

The varied group not only meant handling different understandings but also meant getting on Board very rich and varied information, as all of them had something different to add to the CVU, instead of getting the same information and viewpoint. There was a training period of one month for all these trainers. The training session was more like a perspective building session and orientation exercise. The trainers are a very important link in the whole process. They are the ones who take the ideology of the CVUs forward

to the NGOs. They are the ones who work with the community on behalf of the organizations. They are also individuals with their own ideologies. This also creates a very dynamic situation as differing ideologies do tend to clash at times, but this aspect would be dealt with in the following chapter, when we analyze the situation. They are actually implementing the whole process in field. More than skill building they are responsible for perspective building. So, their understanding of the ideology makes a huge difference in the process.

“The main point should be the training of trainers... There are many factors which decide the impact. These are also based on a trainer’s personality and his/her ability. A trainer can be a good teacher, he may get his thoughts across well and so on They are an important interface in the whole process.” (Nimmi Chauhan, Interview, Drishti)

The community producers are also selected to build up the CVU team. On an average each CVU has 5-7 community producers. These producers had been selected after a process conducted by the NGOs. At least half of the women are a part of the CVU team. It has been taken care that there are people with absolutely different backgrounds in the CVU as they should add their differing individual experiences to the CVU. In this team, one person is designated as the distributor of the video magazine. It is her/his responsibility to conduct minimum of 25 screenings in a month in 25 communities. This person also holds the discussion at the end of the screening. S/he also collects feedback from the people. It is advised that one field worker from the concerned NGO should be present at the time of the screening and discussion, as there is a necessity to connect the field response to the video magazine to the field action that needs to be taken up by the NGO on the concerned issue.

This team undergoes the training for a month. After the training, the cycle of video magazine begins. The issue that needs to be taken up in the video magazine is selected from a feedback received from the communities with whom the CVU works. The issue is then put up with the editorial board. After the discussion with the board, the CVU team proceeds with the video magazine. The magazine comes up in a period of one month



Selection process going on for community producers for Navsarjan. The *karyakars* of the organization had gone around their field area and announced that those interested should come for the selection process. There were 4 women; out of them three were working in the fields as wage laborers, where they faced continuous harassment from the owner of the fields. Working as a video reporter was an attempt to get away from that situation.



where extensive research is done, discussion is held and opinions are taken from the community. The video magazine tries to take representation from all the 25 communities it is working with in the video magazine. For instance, the Participatory Video exercises with the communities of the CVU team of YUVA, included preparing a list of the issues that were considered important for the communities. The issue of water problems in the slum was listed by the maximum no. of communities and was also the priority issue. So, the first video magazine that came out was on the issue of water. Another issue was sanitation and the next issue of the video magazine was on solid waste management in the slum communities.

After the video magazine is made, the screenings in the community takes place. While the screenings are going on, the production of the next video magazine also continues at parallel. These screenings create the public sphere too, the much necessary space for democratization and people's active participation.

“What is really important is that people discuss these issues and with a consensus come up with a solution by themselves.” (Vishwajeet, Community Producer, Group Discussion, YUVA)

Post screening discussions by YUVA saw people participating and sharing the issue of water in their community. They also mentioned what all initiatives they had earlier taken like taking a morcha to the local corporator. They got a space to rethink their strategies and also look at the situation more rationally.

#### **4.1.3 Format of the video magazine and the underlying ideas**

The first part is the Montage, which introduces the CVU and its context in a visual format i.e. it shows that these are people from community only who are producing this video magazine. The images that are seen at the beginning of the video are of these community reporters getting ready in their houses, which clearly indicate their background. They are shown moving around with the camera and interviewing people in the community. The communities/ city/ village where the CVU is based are also shown in some cases. These are not only images of identity but also of empowerment. They send a very strong



message across, that the community people themselves have the access to the media and that they create their own media now. Here, we also analyze how these images are empowering. The concept of empowerment has components that are political and social. An empowered individual can critically analyze his/her political and situation and this ensures that there is a feeling of control and awareness (Rappaport, 1987). This is also supported in another way by Saul D. Alinsky (1972) where he says that before revolution there has to be reformation where people are made aware of their situation. Only when they have reached a point of disillusionment would they be able to let go of the past for the future. Once this feeling of awareness comes, people are able to participate in a process of social change, which enables them to have greater control over decisions affecting their lives. So, these images shown are of people who are aware of their social, political situation as slum dwellers and their image of going around with a camera also indicates that they are conducting an enquiry into their situations, thus critically analyzing the situations, and this information is being shared with other community people too. Similarly, Paulo Freire (1972) talks about conscientization as the first step in the pedagogy of the oppressed where they realize their oppression and are able to place their situations rationally.

Next, they introduce the purpose of the video magazine: to talk about people's issues by filming them and by presenting people's own issues in front of people. The second section marks the CVU identity through a logo, signature tune and the name of the CVU. There is an anchoring part, which welcomes people to the new issue of the video magazine. The anchor briefly puts the issue of the current magazine forward and mentions what all would be discussed. The next section is the Docu. This part is called so as they document the issue in various communities and the existing situation regarding the issue. This is primarily based on research and data collected from the field. It is the documentation of the community perspective and an analysis of the same.

What follows next is vox-pop. The concept of vox-pop is to gain public opinion through random and many samples. This becomes a very important part of the video magazines as this is where they try and fit in representation from all the 25 or so communities. It has

been seen that people gain a lot of interest in the video magazine as someone from their community has spoken on the camera. There is visible excitement in the particular community during screenings. During all the screenings that the researcher attended, if there was a person from the community, people instantly started saying that this person is from here. It demonstrates that being on camera becomes an important matter for the people (it might also have to do with the novelty of the concept and it might be that they would not be as enthusiastic about coming on a camera after few months). It also shows that they give meaning to someone from their own community expressing his/her views. The view point presented by others in the video magazine might be similar to their view, but it gains further importance and they have a sense of participation in the magazine, if they have a representation in form of their own community member's opinion. It is believed that increased sense of participation would also bring about a sense of ownership later. In fact, the CVUs have also faced problems if a community does not feature at all in the video magazine. People do not show as much enthusiasm or also question why their community has not got representation.

“Drishti says that we have too many vox-pops. But what can we do, there has to be a representation from all the communities. The communities express their dissatisfaction if there is no one from their community in the video magazine. In Jogeshwari-Malad people did question us about it.” (Anil Ingle, Video trainer, informal discussion, YUVA)

The next section is the cultural section. The CVUs on one hand are developing an alternative media for democratization, but as a subtle tone they are also focusing on local cultures and artists. This is the reason for every video magazine to have a song or some other cultural item presented by local people only relating to the issue. This strategy very subtly brings the cultural component in their media. This somewhere also tackles the question of vanishing local cultures or dominance by the ‘global’ culture. So, this becomes not only a media which is a people's media only for information dissemination, news and establishing links and dialogues, but also a media space for their art and culture. This culture is also popular culture, but it is not the global popular but the local

popular. An instance is a video magazine made by a CVU based in Bombay used the tune of a popular Bollywood song and changed the lyrics suiting the issue. The other video magazine in rural areas of Gujarat also had local artists from the community, performing a song composed by them on the issue of the video magazine. The song was in Gujarati language. The other magazines have had popular Gujarati songs with improvised lyrics. Different community artists are invited each time to perform.

The following section is on a true story, which is a success story or an inspirational story. This story also gives people an option about what can be done about the issue. This part clearly takes from the understanding of participatory video that communities who experience their areas/ issues being portrayed constructively through video gives a confidence to them, builds consciousness and watching illustration of people they identify with, suggest and take action, encourages them to act too. On the issue on public health, the success story was from a village where the children of the school carried out a cleanliness rally. During the screenings there was a response from children as well as adults that they would have such a rally in their villages too. So, seeing an action taken by people in some other slum community or some other village to work on the issue suggests that they can do something too.

In this section, the other stakeholders related to the issue are covered. These may include government officials, NGOs any many others. this provides another perspective to the issue and also clarifies their stand on it. This is the section which establishes a link between the government officials and the community. The questions that are asked to the government officials and the NGOs are usually questions of the community. But these questions have not been addressed to these stakeholders because of the inaccessibility to them or because there has been no established link of communication, to appreciate these questions of the community. The water CVU establishes that link as demonstrated in this section. In a magazine on public health, there was an interview with the public health officer of that district. In the interview he instantly denied that there were any major health issues in the area, whereas the video magazine had shown people with severe deformities and problems due to unclean water. The question that people had never been

able to ask him was asked via the video magazine and they also got a response from him, which proved his inefficiency as their public health officer.

The second last section is the 'call to action' section. This is the section which aims at mobilizing and organizing people for the action for change. The video magazine usually suggests a call to action through its success story too. The name 'call to action' itself implies a very active stance to be taken by both the people and the organization. As mentioned in an earlier chapter any participatory process encourages a dialogue and people's active involvement in decision making and action taking. The whole 'call for action' rests on that basis. The earlier sections encourage people's participation, try and create a sense of ownership and after building those lead to action. In the above mentioned example of the issue of public health, the success story was connected to the call to action. The rally was not to be taken out by activists of the organization but had to happen with due participation of the community.

The final section is the section which asks for a feedback and also gives the contact of people/ organizations that can be contacted if the community decides to organize itself and take an action on the issue. The last two sections act as a link between media and field action. It incorporates two dimensions. First, media has a certain effect that it can prompt people to not only react but also act. Second, only media is not enough to incite action. There has to be a follow up in the field to take the sentiment forward. The sentiments and reactions which are generated have to be acted upon to make any change. It is as important to build an atmosphere as it is to take opportunity of that atmosphere then and there. This is the reason why, as soon as the film ends, usually the community producers and the field workers ask the community people to volunteer to take up the call to action. This is also a reflection of the dialogic process that Freire talks about. Rather than being a vertical approach to information, this ensures a horizontal approach. The sender is not invading or manipulating or ordering. Instead, it is asking for a dialogue to take place and it encourages collective action based on consensus. An instance in this regard can be the action taken up with people and the government organization on the issue of public health and safe drinking water. Serious Fluorosis cases from a village were

shown in the video magazine. The village which was covered in the video magazine had a screening of the video magazine, which was attended by around 600 people from the village, the government agency and the organization's activists. The project implemented by the government agency had been shut down due to non participation of communities, which did not pay for the maintenance of the water treatment plans. This screening was followed by a Gram Sabha, where this issue was put up and after due discussion it was decided that the village panchayat will pay for the maintenance from its funds. There was a dialogue amongst the various stakeholders and a consensus was reached ensuring community participation in the following process.

The following discussion physically provides a public sphere, a forum where people discuss issues concerning their lives and take a stand to control the direction of their lives. How this sphere operates has been deeply discussed in the last chapter. However, we have a further analysis of this. This creates a social horizon where people's experiences are given prime importance and what is relevant or seemingly relevant to the people is integrated. It is the opening of a space between the civil society and the state. Habermas had also talked about the institutions that form public opinion like the media, internet, courts, elections and so on. The video magazine is also one such institution. His concern was 'distorted communication'. The public spheres are usually dominated by a certain section of people be it television or internet. This section dominates the society too. This dominance means that the mode of discourse is determined already and it discourages other modes of discourse. They also have a strong agenda – setting capability thus reducing chances for any meaningful debate. Their ability to issue to debate on, manipulate political will and influence the society is expanded through these means of communication and there is no space for a participative discourse of democracy. These institutions also create a public sphere, but to retain the holistic sense of the public sphere these public modes of communication have to be rationally used. So, the space for meaningful, rational public discourse is facing extinction, rather than revival through these modes which are dominated. The video magazine communicates, but prevents distorted communication by having a dialogic process. The whole process of producing a video magazines attempts to be dialogic.





A Community member giving his response post – screening of a video magazine of Navsarjan (Jakhan, Gujarat)



People during post-screening discussion, deciding on volunteering for the cleanliness rally to be taken out in the village (Kataria, Gujarat)

However, in its true sense, public sphere exists only in idealistic situations and the democratic nature of public sphere is contested even in the context of the video magazine. Even in the discussion, there is an obvious case of few people from the community speaking and select few volunteers coming ahead to take up the action. But the whole dialogue takes place in front of the community and a consensus on action is sought. Probably like any other democratic process, it can never reach the ideal state where concerns and views of one and all are taken in consideration, but it continuously moves towards the ideal state. For instance, in the initial meetings held by ANANDI only women used to come and slowly men started coming after attending the screenings. Women who never used to speak in a public forum discussed their issues. At many other times people have also put their opposing views both in the video magazine and during discussions.

Some argue that the public sphere has rather widened than shut down as the events and acts are made public even to those who are far away from the places of their occurrence. There are new platforms being discovered. There is validity in this argument to the extent that people who are physically separated from the event which affects their lives are informed about it. However, our argument is that if the information reaches those who are not connected to the event, it does not make a difference as the concept of public sphere itself says that people participate in issues concerning their lives. But in most cases it fails to be a public sphere, as opportunities for public discussion and consensus are very limited, in fact, consensus is generated and constructed by the media. Here, one can take the instance of the Singur Struggle, which has been mentioned before. The information of 'what is happening' in Singur constantly reached the 'outside world'. However, the people of Singur never found any screen space on any Television channel, there was a consensus generated amongst the masses, largely disconnected to the struggle, that the farmers were happy and it was just a political stunt. The opportunities that were provided to the people of Singur for public discussion and consensus building can only be guessed. The debate was dominated by agenda of the mass media and not the affected people.

## **4.2 Addressing the Earlier Challenges**

There have been many changes integrated not only in the operationalization of the CVU, but also in the format of the video magazine. These changes have been made with an obvious intention of addressing the issues and challenges that emerged out of the earlier CVUs. Following section is an analytical look at these changes.

### **4.2.1 Community Participation and Ownership**

Community participation begins from the composition of the CVU itself. There was a strategic shift with the decision to train community people than the NGO staff. Different CVUs have adopted different ways to increase community participation, most have recognized volunteers from the community, who not only help during the screenings of video magazine, but also maintain a link between the CVU and the community. The video magazine necessarily needs to have a section of call to action. This ensures that there is an action not only by the NGO, but that there is full participation of the community, in form of discussions, consensus building, decision making and action taking.

This also relates to the point put earlier, of NGO control on the content of the media. It was seen that even the NGOs were centralized and were not ready to give away the whole power to either the community or the video reporters.

“The director is overshadowing everybody. Why can you not decentralize it? Something like this has to be decentralized.” (Nimmi Chauhan, Interview, Drishti)

The structural transformations through Editorial Board and General Body have aimed at decentralizing the CVU. The aim is also to make the CVU an independently functioning unit few years later (5 years has been put as the upper limit). The owner of the CVU would be the community and not the NGO. The NGO later on would have no more control than providing assistance. However, what shape the CVU takes then is still to be



seen. Another view is that the NGOs are funding the CVU and there is an obvious conclusion that they would like to have a control over the CVU. NGOs have been brought into the process as they are connected to the communities closely, have worked with them and understand the community better. The NGOs can functionally not be placed out of the CVUs. What is important is that when the NGO has played its defined role of establishing the CVU in the community, it should decentralize the decision making and devolution of power to the communities should happen.

#### **4.2.2 Trainers**

As mentioned in the earlier CVUs the trainers were usually people from other countries. This time all the trainers are Indians and this has helped solve the issue of language barrier that came up. All the issues are not yet solved.

“There can be translating issues, gender issues, cultural issues. With Indian trainers the problem gets lessened by some extent but not completely.” (Nimmi Chauhan, Interview, Drishti)

The ideal would be to have the community people as the trainers. This would be reached after there are few trained people placed in the community. A very good instance here is of the CVU based in Gujarat. The CVU coordinator for the organization is one of their earlier students trained (who later became a staff at the vocational training center). So, once she learned the skill she also helped to build the CVU and train the community producers.

The community producers can later turn into video trainers and train many more people. This would exclude the necessity to call ‘outside’ people as trainers. This way the community would be utilizing its own resources of skilled people for further work. This would also mean a vast expansion of the CVUs. Each CVU trains 5-7 community people. These 7 people could further train other 7 and so on. It is a geometrical progression that is very feasible. There also has been a visible enthusiasm in all the video reporters (from the

earlier CVUs) and the community producers to train more people from their community. So, this not only attends issues like language and culture barriers, but also effectively transfers skills at a faster and probably improved way.

#### **4.2.3 Regular screenings**

A major concern earlier was the screening of the video magazines. Most of the times there was no regularity and many times 2-3 video magazines were shown at a time. This diluted the purpose of the video magazine as with 3 differing issues coming up at a time, the community did not get time to fully indulge in either of the three and this also meant that many a times things stopped at discussions. For the communities, though, the video magazines are usually also informational and for them even that is extremely important. Even recognizing certain issues was felt as important enough, as this (discussing such issues in a public forum) had never happened before.

However, there was not a connection between production and distribution. Disconnected screenings ensure comparatively lower participation and also make the communities more like recipients of the media. At a level video acts as a great tool for mobilizing and the communities should not only be recipient but active participants.

Only regular exposure to media makes an impact and this stands true even for community media. A one-off screening becomes a disconnected experiment. Though people would still hold discussion and probably talk about taking action, but the discontinuity ensures that people would not feel the owners and would not participate as actively. Even watching a media that claims to be theirs has to become a habit. Thus, there was a particular emphasis on each video magazine reaching the same 25 communities each month. People have to feel that we have a voice that would be consistent and one could get back to. The media has to reach out to the people regularly to ensure increasing levels of participation with each proceeding video magazine and each proceeding month.

“One has to distribute it to the same villages. One has to keep going back to those 25 villages only because communication has to have a continuing impact. It has to be like your Outlook or you India Today, which will come in your house every week. It is only then when people will start thinking about it, start taking it seriously.” (Stalin K., Interview, Drishti)

#### **4.2.4 Cost-effectiveness**

The efforts this time was to make the CVUs more cost effective and bring the cost ratio down. This has been achieved by regular screenings as the video magazine manages to reach far more number of people. So, the cost per person to reach is reduced. The NGOs also find it more beneficial as they are reaching a much larger number than they ever would through the field workers and community workers. One screening per community might mean reaching 200 to 400 people. This is definitely a high reach, thus making media a meaningful actor to reach out to people. Different screenings get a different response in terms of numbers. This also depends on the community. At times a village might not even have as many people or in a slum community people are busy with some other things and do not come for the screening. The timing, the placement of the screening, all these aspects affects the audience and the reach. For instance, in a village the screening could only start after 10 p.m. due to technical reasons and this meant that a lot of people did not come. In another village the screening happened near a temple in a Hindu dominated area, so the Muslim community did not have a large number of people coming for the screening. For another screening, most of the women who attended were associated with the Self Help Group of the organization and the rest of the women did not come. But on an average there is an audience of around 200 present for the screening.

#### **4.2.5 Changed format**

The two major changes in the format are the cultural section and the call for action. These have been discussed in detail in the earlier section. The integration of local cultures is in both the models. The earlier CVU used to have the songs composed by local women on

their own culture being played before the screening. There were also attempts to include few songs even in the video magazines. However, in this CVU, every video magazine has a separate section, which serves three purposes of entertaining, providing space to the local popular cultures and community artists. So, the space for cultural expressions has increased and the video magazine is also able to accommodate far more number of community artists (usually different groups participate in different video magazines).

The earlier video magazines also had a call for action and told people on what can be done about the issue. Here the video magazine does give a direction to the people on action but more importantly, it invites people to decide for themselves and provides a space for informed consensus. The role of the NGO is supported by people's initiative and it puts more value on people acting for themselves.

### **4.3 Challenges in the Current Model**

There are inherent challenges in this model too most of which have figured in the research earlier. This section consolidates them and analyses those challenges. It looks at only organizational and operational challenges, but also personal issues that have come up as challenges.

#### **4.3.1 Sustainability**

One major concern for the CVU is self-sustainability. Till now the funding has come from the NGOs. This is also a reason for NGO control. Self-sustenance addresses a lot of issues. Firstly, when CVU finds a financially sustainable model, its dependency on the NGO would reduce in terms of financial resources required. This would also mean that it would not have to go to other funders either and there would be a greater degree of autonomy. If the CVU has to be owned by the community, this self-sustenance has to be achieved. This, indirectly, also means ease in further expansion of the CVUs.

The different CVUs are trying to find their own means for sustainability, though as for now there are only ideas and the implementation of these ideas is still being considered.

We will have a look at the various options for sustainability that have been thought about. They have thought about the CVU making films for other NGOs; video magazines inviting advertising, sponsorship; community producers acting as stringers for local news channels; subscription by other NGOs, individuals, institutions for the video magazine. CVUs also acting as video training centers; CVUs working as video studios for taking on other work/ assignments like covering community functions.

“With the other magazine, the subscription formula has worked. It took around 2 years for subscription to work. But it did finally. But now we are selling a lot of copies (of the video magazine) to organizations, individuals, groups and so on” (Kirti, Video Reporter, Group Discussion, ANANDI)

Another major form of sustainability that they are looking at is communities paying for the video magazine, though they are not very confident if the communities would be willing to pay for the video magazine.

“One would like to state that people all over pay to watch media (entertainment). So it can be assumed that people will pay for this...Another idea suggested by Nimmi was that one asks if the villagers are willing to pay for the films being screened in their villages. They can be asked to pay Rs. 100-200 per year per village. If they decide to do so they will have the film come to their village...But as far as it goes about the viewers paying up nothing can be said with confidence.” (Jessica Mayberry, Interview, Video Volunteers)

However, as mentioned it is still not known if this can work. So, there are a lot many options to make the CVUs sustainable and independent, but the implementation has still not happened, also because this has just begun. However, the CVU initiated by YUVA is looking forward to becoming independent after the completion of one year as the NGO is not supporting it financially after the first year. The CVU is planning to register itself as an independent media organization and get funds on its own and not from the organization.

#### **4.3.2 Ideological conflicts**

There are many stakeholders in this process: Video Volunteers, Drishti, organizations which are setting up the CVUs, the CVU coordinator, the CVU team, the video trainer and the community. All of these stakeholders have their own ideologies and stakes in the process. A conflict is bound to happen.

“Another issue can be that there are half a dozen agencies involved – the NGO coordinator, Navsarjan, Reporter, Drishti, Video Volunteers and the community. At times too many cooks can spoil the broth.” (Martin Macwan, Interview, Navsarjan)

This is still the beginning of the process, so we would like to avoid reaching conclusive statements. At one level these conflicts are also invited as this means that the CVUs are important enough to have a conflict on and that all the stakeholders are willing to work upon it. At another level it might mean the dominance of a certain ideology over others and thus compromising with the democratic fundamentals of the CVU and losing the basics. In fact, what one has seen is that there has been a dominance of the NGOs. The NGOs are very concerned with the way issues are projected. This is so as they have been working on these issues for quite some time and already have certain stands, which they would not like to be challenged by the video magazine. Also, these films are being shown in NGOs field area, so they are definitely concerned about the projection of issues, they have their alliances and differences (also political in nature at times) to be considered.

“Showing anything in Ghatkopar area is not easy for us, the organization has had problems with the local corporator there, he might create problems for us if we screen anything against him, and she (a video reporter) also lives in the same area so it can be problematic for her too.” (Anil Ingle, Video trainer, Informal Discussion, YUVA)

“At times we do not know who exactly are we, the community or the NGO. At times when we go for interview we say we are from the YUVA, knowing that we are from a NGO we are given interview instantly. At other times when we know that the organization doesn’t have a good relation with a particular person and that they would refuse interviews we just tell them we are from the media. This is also strategic. ” (Julekha, Community Producer, Group Discussion, YUVA)

#### **4.3.3 Identity of the CVU, of all the actors involved**

With the ideological conflict also emerges the issue of identity of the CVU. The CVU has been established by the organizations V and M in collaboration with different organizations. It is also supposed to be a community owned entity, with community having the highest stake. The CVU team works with all of the above mentioned actors. So, there is an inherent conflict of identity, which is enhanced by the conflict within all of these actors. The CVU is largely controlled by the NGO and at another level the CVU is working primarily for the community and not the NGO. This is with the assumption that the NGO and the community do not equate and there are conflicts amongst the two though they may be working with each other. Such a situation not only puts a dilemma in front of those in the CVU team, but also controls the content of the video magazine at times. On one hand the CVU is supposed to identify with the community but it ends up being a representation of the NGO at many times.

During an informal discussion with a trainer it came across that people spoke against the NGO on the camera as they had themselves been practicing corruption and had duped people. The NGO was particularly upset about it and did not allow for any of this to be included in the video magazine.

#### **4.3.4 Distribution**

This is one of the major operationalization issues. The initial idea was to have one distributor in the team. However, it turned out that it is practically not feasible to appoint just one person for the distribution. The distribution is not only about taking the video magazine to the community but it also entails the discussion and call to action that takes place. In the initial few months it also becomes very important for a field worker from the organization to be regularly present at the screenings and the discussion as they understand the work with the community better. Also, the community producers, initially, are trained mostly in video skills. They are not trained to be community/ field workers. Their work primarily is to film. However, the nature of the CVU leads to a lot of responses from the community coming to the community reporters. They are seen as social change agents and in such a case one can not define where does the work begin and where it ends. After all a community producer can not, ideally, say that s/he is just supposed to make the video magazine and what happens afterwards is not my prerogative. So, the presence of at least half the team becomes important. This is also important from the point that the community sees the people who have made the film and would feel more comfortable talking to them than to a third person. Similarly a field worker of the organization only can not show the film and follow up on the issues. There has to be an amalgamation of both.

In many cases there are smaller groups of people formed who keep discussing the issue amongst themselves. At such a point for one distributor it is tough to reach out to so many people personally. Presence of more community producers means that they can hold discussions with smaller groups and reach out to larger numbers.

#### **4.3.5 Follow up**

Bringing up a new issue to fore every month entails a lot of work. Many of these are issues on which certain organizations have been working for years. This is to state that every issue needs an in depth treatment if some concrete change is being looked forward



to. The NGOs already have a lot of things that they have been working on. They have not really equipped themselves to work with the issues that come up with each video magazine. This almost comes like an additional responsibility, which becomes tough to handle. As mentioned above, the community producers are also occupied with the production and distribution of the video magazine and they can not be expected to take up the field work too.

“YUVA already has so many cases to handle, and with the video magazine more and more people are contacting them, also we have started screenings in areas where the organization did not have much of a presence. They do appreciate this expansion, but are unable to handle it. Even the community producers can not be asked to follow up cases. After all we already have a lot of work in our hand, making a video magazine every month.” (Anil Ingle, Video Trainer, Group Discussion, YUVA)

#### **4.3.6 Urban areas as a phenomenon**

None of the earlier CVUs were in an urban area. This is the first time that a CVU has been placed in urban areas. The conditions in urban area change completely. There are other political and social dynamics which operate. The CVUs have come across many of these and we discuss some of these related to the urban slum sociology.

The attitude of the people differs in urban area than is rural areas. People in urban areas act more like consumers of services and they also act as recipients of the media and the video magazine also falls into that ambit. A repeatedly heard statement in these communities is that ‘good you have made a film on our issues and it brought the issue in light, but what will happen now, nothing can be done about it’. So, there is a sense of the CVU being an outside agency, which has come to them and also entails their reluctance at some level to act upon the issue. A slum community in Ghatkopar which has a huge water problem said that they have gone time and again to the authorities to get something done but nothing has ever come out of it. This also indicates the hopelessness in the

people and hence the reluctance. So, the CVU needs to be even closer to work with this hopelessness and encourage them further. As Saul Alinsky (1972) mentioned people have to look at the hopelessness of their situations and only then would they be ready for a radical action for a change. That situation of hopelessness is already present however, for a radical action, not only the people need to connect closely with the CVU to have trust in what is done, but the CVU also has to prepare for any such radical action. There is also a huge amount of distrust against any external agency that the slum communities have. They have higher levels of insecurity and mostly believe that there is a personal agenda of the agencies. They are also a more demanding lot. So, till the time the CVU is also not ready for such a commitment to address these things, people would tend to take a position of recipient of the media and 'welfare'. Even otherwise, slum communities are used to taking such positions due to receiving help from innumerable NGOs and they have also seen not a radical change being made in their situations by these NGOs either.

They are being exposed to a lot of media also and the video magazine has to fight with the other media. The video magazine has to be shown at a time when women are not watching the mass media programmes. It takes a lot of effort for any media to replace another media because even media watching is a habit which is hard to change. People would not come for the screenings even if it relates to them if they are not impressed enough with it. There is a competition from the mass media which is attractive, entertaining, hyper-real at times and takes them away from the miseries of their lives. They also have a lot of time occupied with other work and finding a time out of their schedule is almost a fight. A video magazine can not be shown at a time when the water is supplied in the community, as everyone would be busy collecting water.

There are many other actors who enter the scene, which are otherwise not visible in the rural scenario, for instance, the police. Any screening in a public space requires prior police permission. When a lot of these films have anti-state content getting that permission is extremely tough. So, these video magazines are shown without any prior police permission. Any problem that occurs during the screening might eventually land the team in conflict with the police. There is also a lot of presence of political parties in

the slum communities and there are party workers in the community too. So, making an anti-party statement might prove dangerous. Though the CVU might be keen on taking radical stands it can not do so, considering these political dynamics. It did happen post screening in a slum community that a party worker started talking very loudly and started blaming the people when they were complaining against the corporator.

The communities in a spatial expanse are usually not different. Though the urban areas have far more heterogeneous communities than one would find in a single village, these communities are concentrated in certain areas. So, the chances are that when the screening happens in a slum community all the people present are Marathi or all the people present are migrants from other states. The urban slums would also have mostly Dalits and Tribals residing whereas the villages would usually have both the upper and the lower castes. This characteristic matters while organizing people for action as this is also closely related to the socio - political dynamics in that community and can have a huge affect on the processes. Urban social movements are also “organizations with territorial based identity. People strive for emancipation by way of collective action”, (Shuurmann and Naerssen (ed.), 1989). They come together to improve their physical environment. It is important to organize people around these and not ethnic, religion, regional or language based associations unlike many movements based in rural or tribal areas. Though, these associations need to be considered while organizing too. Hence, one would always see that people are more concerned about their physical environment in slums, as has been seen in the response given to YUVA. These become not only the subjects of the video magazines but also become the lines on which to organize.

#### **4.4 CVUs – Empowering People**

The tag line of the CVUs says – ‘Empowering Communities to Voice’ and empowerment to voice also leads to empowerment in general. There has been a basic understanding of what we mean by empowerment in section 4.1.3. However, here we try to closely connect the whole process with the idea of empowerment. Empowerment is related to the idea of self-esteem and self-consciousness which could lead to action taking and social change. The whole process builds on all these three concepts. Being able to produce their own

media, voice their issues and link with the authorities build their self-esteem. The video magazine contributes towards self-consciousness.

“The oppressor, whose task it is to struggle for their liberation together with those who show true solidarity, must acquire a critical awareness of oppression through the praxis of this struggle. One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge consciousness...to no longer be a prey of its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflections and action upon the world to transform it.”(Friere, 1989)

A video magazine on violence on women made in rural Gujarat, had women talking about their own experiences. Not to say, it takes tremendous spirit to talk about such an experience on camera in a place where such things are not talked in public. Many more women also got self-esteem as they saw a woman from amongst them speaking up. This also led to self-consciousness and awareness that these things have to be talked about and brought out in the open. The action in this case was women coming up to the field worker with their experiences and asking how they can help the situation.

A group of people from a village got together to question and roughen up the ration shop owner not opening the shop for weeks at stretch, when they saw that a ration shop has to be open throughout the month and saw the experiences of another village where they had forced the ration shop to be open and function well. Such experiences are many and uphold this link between empowerment and social change.

“...the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality.”(Freire, 1972)

The pedagogy of the oppressed also has two distinct stages. The first stage is conscientization where the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to transformation. In the second stage, the pedagogy ceases to

belong to the oppressed but belongs to all men. In Both the stages, it is always through action id depth that the culture of dominance is culturally confronted. This is what we see happening in the process of the CVU. The process of conscientization occurs with communities producing their own media, viewing that media and critically reflecting upon it. This conscientization leads to empowerment, where the communities are able to understand the oppression better and then organize themselves to act.

Empowerment is also defined as ‘equitable sharing of power’ thereby increasing the political awareness and strength of weaker groups and augmenting their influence over the processes and outcomes of development. Here we could cite the instance of the video magazine in Gujarat where the issue of safe drinking water was put up. The concerned authorities responded immediately after the film was screened in villages. A government body which has the responsibility of providing safe drinking water contacted the CVU and said that they can again start the water treatment plants installed in villages, which had been lying defunct for years. We can not comment on the ‘equitable sharing of power’ here but we can definitely see the influence on the process and outcome of a developmental activity that a story had.

Empowerment has happened at another level of individuals working with the CVU. The community producers are definitely individuals who have self esteem and self consciousness and relating even to the economic perspective on empowerment, they have been able to gain resources and skills to earn a living.

“I am an activist with ANANDI and a filmmaker..... I have started introducing myself as a filmmaker only from the last 2-3 times. Now I am confident about introducing myself like that. Earlier I used to think that people will not believe me. I do not fear that disbelief anymore.” (Shabana, video reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

The CVU team composing of all Dalits was able to enter a village temple, which no Dalit had been able to as they had a camera in their hands. So, they might not have been able to

gain equitable power as the upper castes, but they definitely struck the caste system in some way. Empowerment has a potential to move towards structural changes (Freire and Macedo, 1987) and this might just be one of those steps.

Empowerment should ultimately represent challenges to bureaucracy, to hierarchy of any form and decisions from the top to the down. People should be able to assert their own individual rights to make choices and access resources. These have been attempted through various video magazines where the inactivity of the bureaucracy has been questioned, government officials brought to trial and people demanding the access to resources.

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) has its discourse on empowerment which has a strategy of 'empowerment through organization'. It has identified six pre-requisites for empowerment namely 'resources (finance, knowledge, technology), skills training and leadership on one side and democratic process, dialogue, participation in policy and decision-making, and techniques for conflict resolution on the other' (Grown and Sen, 1987, pp 89). Here we can clearly see the CVU relating to these and incorporating them in its process and end. Empowerment not only ends at community participation but goes further ahead, to address issues of identity, marginalization and hierarchical structures.

“My whole perspective changed after I went to US. Situations were similar even there (for Blacks). There was a fear that how we can go out and make a film on the issue we had chosen (looking at caste and race). But we got the strength. We got our fear out. We faced discrimination even with our instructor. They were discriminating too....but we completed our film and it was highly appreciated.”  
(Nisha, Teacher Trainer, Videography Course, Interview, Navsarjan)

However, community participation is an important aspect of empowerment and empowerment of communities is not possible without it. Community participation and NGO control has already been talked about. So, on one hand what the CVUs have

managed to achieve in these few months is impressive and seems to be making an impact, but without full community participation it might really become another of those instances which attempt to change but could not do so, in making a concrete change in the lives of the people they are working with. Such a process specially loses much meaning till community participation happens in its true sense than like some other participatory exercises where too there is a politics of participation present. It then has the danger of becoming just another development buzzword and a new fangled expression.

So, this chapter tried to analyze the CVU as a structure and as a process and the effect of this structure and process on the community, the role of the community, the positioning of the NGO. It also tried to link up these with the available theories on issues of community participation, empowerment and so on. A comprehensive view on the CVUs has been presented here. In the next chapter we would further analyze the community participation, empowerment and the nature of the public sphere.

## Chapter 5

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### Looking Forward

This chapter tries to address the questions that emerged about participation, empowerment and public sphere in the last chapter. It would analyze how all of these are being affected through the CVU. There were few concerns regarding the sustainability, distribution, follow up and so on. This chapter enfolds these concerns too. It also looks at how the organizations plan to go ahead with the CVU.

#### 5.1 Community Participation and Empowerment

In the last chapter we discussed in detail about community participation and empowerment and how the CVUs are encouraging both. Here we take a more critical look at both these processes. There is a very strong sentiment that there has to be true community participation to facilitate true empowerment of the community. Service provisions to the community can not lead to empowerment unless they involve the communities. The whole process of the CVU is also based on empowering communities; in fact that is the goal. There are two concerns regarding the way CVUs operate. Firstly, the process should not facilitate the empowerment of only few individuals only who are being trained in video making. It has to look at the community which gains empowerment, which can come only through complete participation. Or else, it would be a case as is with many organizations where work is done for the communities and not with them. This has been recognized by organizations too.

“We are not in it for a standard story look at this Muslim girl and this tribal girl, they are making videos. These are wonderful stories. So many people have interviewed them. Of course this is true, but this was not the goal. We do not want to empower individuals only..... It has to reach the community.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)



Secondly, one should go beyond few outcomes in form of success stories through a media like community video. It is a far more potential media, which has the capability to actually encourage people to empower themselves. There have been instances where the work has been done or concerns dealt with by the concerned authorities. In many such success stories authorities have responded only because they were covered in the alternative media. We would want that the power equations change to a level where authorities respond because people are questioning them and not only the media. Media has to become a tool to bring changes in these relations and not overtake the whole process by itself. The CVU should lead to community mobilization and the communities participating actively in the political and democratic processes.

It is probably too early to comment on community participation and mobilization as the CVUs have just started and these are things which take a lot more time than just few months. But the way the CVU functions has to set things right at the beginning itself. People's participation has to be from the very beginning. Though, it is accepted that initially the communities might not participate as much. But the approach has to involve people from the very beginning, which should include people having a say in who all should be their reporters. People would own a media only when they are involved in all the processes of creating and distributing a media than just few aspects of it. Selected or limited participation would mean they are the contributors, but not really the owners. The ownership should not be restricted to the few community producers or the NGO.

“People will be more involved in the action if they are participating in every process. Even now they help us during the research and during shoots. They even give up their time of working in the fields. But they need to be involved more to be able to see it as their media and not only a media for them” (Indu, CVU Coordinator, Navsarjan)

There has to be a strong relation and intensive participation with the media to instill self-consciousness and self-esteem or else passivity would be encouraged in their interaction with the media. Empowerment should also lead to action taking and social change and it

is well understood that people would actually take action (especially radical actions) only when they actually own or identify strongly with the sentiment. Community Participation would encourage this identification and ownership.

“It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis.”(Friere, 1989)

Here we need to look closely at ‘call to action’ and the resultant follow up. The call to action is the one which targets the involvement of people and takes the issues to an action-level. This section has to be based completely on the responses from the people, this is so because people are supposed to take up the action and they should be able to decide what is to be done. There have been instances when the call to action has failed because it did not confirm with the idea of the communities. For instance, a video magazine made in Ahmedabad asked people (residing in slums) to approach a certain government scheme for the sanitation issue. People were already against that particular scheme and did not react positively to the call to action. So, though the video magazine provides food for thought it sometimes may fail to generate any action.

“The response from the community is good, but reaching the community and immediate follow up is not going on with the NGO.... in terms of call to action not all call to actions work. Some are strong some are weak, but it gives people space to think about the issue.” (A video trainer, over e-mail)

However, it is important to go beyond the thinking process. It is also important that the issues raised through the video magazines are properly looked at and worked at as these are important issue for the community and a video magazine on the issues raises hopes for them. If one is looking at concrete changes than just discussion of issues, the process has to be more in-depth and intense.

“When a woman sees a film and connects to it and says that this is my life too, it is great. But it has to go beyond that connectivity. The film has to lead to something. Showing only films does not bring about a revolution. We are doing so many things together like campaigns, protests but it is still an evolution. We hope that it will be a revolution, but that is not the case. So, one has to go beyond that (only showing films).” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

The implications on the communities are very high. It is a very strong medium which is entering to change the status quo and create a certain kind of positive disturbance. This is particularly true for the rural areas. The people in urban areas probably find this disturbance very routine. Still, there are high levels of expectations too. The initiative once taken has to be fulfilled. It is a commitment that needs to be kept and the CVUs also need to keep this factor into account. The communities should not become scapegoats for the organization as they receive a voice one day and the other day it is gone. The attempts at sustaining the CVU are an indication of that commitment too and it is also recognized that there are many practical limitations to sustain a CVU. But a CVU also has to figure how far it can go and what kind of actions and changes it is really ready for. The resounding statement in the researcher’s mind is of a woman in the community in a slum who said, “Good enough the film showed our problems rightly, but nothing would change, this is an unnecessary exercise.” Is the CVU ready to take up the kind of the commitment that such a statement asks for or would it submit itself?

Alinksy (1972) said that ‘Remember we are talking about revolution and not revelation’. And he adds that, “My ‘thing’, if I want to organize, is solid communication with the people in the community. Lacking communication I am in reality silent; throughout history silence has been regarded as assent – in this case assent to the system.” So, not only is communication necessary but a ‘solid’ communication is necessary with the community. Simply communicating and not really relating to the experience of people might mean just revelation, which can never lead to any change by itself.

## 5.2 Public Sphere

The Public sphere is being operated at different levels in the CVU. The first and the most obvious is the space for discussion. Secondly, the content of the video magazine itself is a critical examination of political and social discourse. Thirdly, the linking up with the authorities in question either through the video magazine (in form of interviews) or later through interaction, questioning, discussions is also the operating of a public sphere. In the few essential ideas talked about the public sphere of rational-critical discourse, consensus and operation of power, we analyze how they appear here.

Looking at the space provided for discussion, the first aspect of rational – critical discourse is moderated by the content of the video magazine. Different people come up with their critical views on the issue. People do take subjective stands and push their point of views, they passionately defend their stands and this at times, is considered by critics does not allow for rational discourse. However, we believe that one can be passionate and still be rational and even rationality is subjective. In fact, a critical discourse can happen only when people are passionate and connect strongly to the issues. A non-passionate and separated discussion can not necessarily be rational and critical, rather it would miss out on very important aspects that are only visible to those who are close to it. The discussion space involves such people who are very closely connected to the subject, in fact, the subject is their own issue, and to still provide guidelines for the discourse, we have the content of the video magazine. The space is also used for consensus building. The critics of public sphere say that consensus can be built only by oppression though we would like to disagree with it. It is understood that even in a community which may be homogenous, people will have their own stands. These stands are discussed through the rational-critical discourse. This discourse leads to a consensus, which is not facilitated by suppressing views, but by allowing for differing views to emerge and accommodating all of those. However, it is not denied that many times a minority view may get lost and not paid considerable attention, though not deliberately suppressed. The operation of power in this space happens. Even the construction of such a space is controlled by the power structure in the community, for instance, in many communities, the number of women coming for the discussion is extremely low because

of the gender oppression. Many times not only the construction of the space but the operating of the space is also controlled, as very few women would speak up in the discussion. These are dimensions that are not attributed of the space constructed by the CVU but of the given space in which it operates. So, the CVU tries to counter these and work on negative power that is suppression and coercion and only promote empowerment.

Second level is the content of the video magazine. The content is a rational – critical discourse too, as it is based on information and research from various sources and analyzing them. It not only collects information from the communities, but also the authorities. It gives space for all the stakeholders involved to give their point of views and perspectives namely the community, the concerned authorities and civil society organizations working on the issue. Though the main purpose of the video magazine is to bring out the issue and perspective of the community, but that too is looked at rationally. The view from the authorities is brought along, the issue around which the debate is constructed is not limited to point of view of the communities, but the situation is explores thoroughly. The aspects consensus and operation of power in the content of the magazine figure when the content is edited. The vox-pop tries to reach a consensual statement through the various statements made by people. The selection of the statements chosen to be kept in the video magazine determines that. Operation of power can be seen again during the editing of the content. It is recognized that the control on the presentation of the content happens not only during the various community producers deciding what should be kept but also by the NGO, which regulates how the content has to appear.

“The last film was edited without me and S. The part where the Maulvi speaks was cut down. He clearly said that a woman can go to the court if she wants. For a Muslim woman what the Maulvi says is the final verdict. It would have made such a difference. You remember that women said after the screening that we can not go to the court regarding our divorce. But the rest did not understand the importance of this.” (Shabana, Video Reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

Thirdly, the linking up with the authorities emerges as the opening of the public sphere. On one hand, rational critical discourse happens through the making of the video magazine and then it happens after it through the follow up. This is, in fact, the opening of a space for interactions and negotiations. A video magazine showed that there was high incidence of fluorosis in the villages. When contacted the Public Health Officer refused to recognize that there were any cases. The discourse is also marked by actions taken up by the authorities as a result. The instance mentioned earlier in the research where the concerned government authority responded to the problem of clean water by immediately contacting the CVU team. They later on also held a Gram Sabha in a village and saw how the water treatment plant can start working again with due participation and involvement of the community. As with operation of power, the equation of power is set between the CVU and the authorities. The CVU is in itself an instrument of power and the authorities hold power due to their positions. It manages to question and challenge power equation. Even when a community member speaks up against a government body, s/he is challenging the existing power equations and this aspect of linking with the authorities has led to empowerment.

“There is always a power equation set (with the bureaucrats). If there is a rural woman, non-literate who sits across and makes a deal then these people take it in a negative sense. She sits and talks straight and they think that it is rude. They think that how can this woman sit like this and talk to me face to face. She is challenging every single power.” (Sejal Dand, Interview, ANANDI)

So, these three levels of public sphere operate and we see how the three aspects also function within the public sphere. The most important concern that emerges is the operation of power, especially within the structure of the communities and the CVUs/NGOs as they affect the public sphere. The structure of the CVU is something that has to be determined by the organizations and would not pose many problems if countered effectively. The aspect of structures within the communities, such as of caste and gender, has to be dealt with carefully and can be affected only after serious sustained efforts.

Other aspects of the public sphere seem to be worked upon by the CVUs and there is a need to increase this space to as many people as possible and not move away from rational analysis of situations and issues.

### **5.3 Power Negotiations**

A persistent matter of concern has been who really owns the CVU and who has the authority over it, as it is realized that as with any effective media even the CVU is exposed to becoming an institution of power, which would like to be controlled and limited by the power-holder.

Bierstedt (cited in Shermerhorn, 1964) declares that the source of power in human society is threefold: 1) numbers of people, 2) social organization, 3) resources. Media has the power to influence and intervene with all the above three hence it becomes a force. However, the forces are always moving, the centers of power change and evolve too. The CVU is trying to shift the balance of forces towards people. But as has been seen, the resources (funding, field workers) are with the NGOs currently, the power stays with the NGO and not the community.

“There is no control over the NGOs. The integrity of the NGOs is still questionable. For example in the 10 NGOs right now, one could guess which would actually view it as people’s media and not as their own property. If it is people’s media then the video reporter should be allowed to take the camera back home and shoot what s/he likes. But if it is a NGO property then that wouldn’t be the case.” (Jessica Mayberry, Interview, Video Volunteers)

So, we see that the power shifts towards the NGOs or maybe we can say that by owning media NGOs create themselves as power centers (even by default) in another relation too. Power is not being looked at negatively here. But the power is negative and becomes suppressive, especially, in this case if it is not shared with the community.

“Power has an inherent scarcity value. When one person or group gains more power, someone else has less. There is no power where power is equal. The quest for power is unending in social life and is....a perpetual source of social conflict.” (McIver and Page, 1949)

If we agree to this, NGOs will have less power if they give it to the communities. But after all we are talking about ‘empowering communities.’ What is important to note here is that NGOs and communities are not contesting with each other for more power. There is no ‘quest’ for power, per se, in their relation. Instead they are seen as working together. An NGO is definitely not seen as an opponent instead it is seen as an agency which works with them to displace the opponent. So, this relation between them is not simply the one of a supporter or that of an opponent. It is a complex relation where on one hand the NGO is working with the community to empower it and also ask for equal distribution of power and resources and on the other hand it is becoming a power holder itself and not giving everything to the community due to its own vested interest, which it recognizes can be controlled through this media. However, there is a quest for power between the CVU team and the NGO, in few cases.

“There have been issues with the organization. You get to know when someone doesn’t like it. They ask to shoot certain parts again. Or they answer that it’s ok. They are not satisfied with any of the three films. They had wanted something else and we have not been able to deliver that.....”(Shabana, Video reporter, Interview, ANANDI)

Maybe saying that they are opponents or even equating the two at any level would be too harsh a stand, but they are definitely in certain conflict with each other. To work on the equal distribution of power, one can either pull down the dominant, or add resource to resource unless they have equal power or share power (Shermerhorn, 1964). The third option is the one which needs to be exercised in this case. We realize that there is domination, but not domination by an opponent, there is domination by a collaborator the



same way any relation would have power relations too. There is simply a need to negotiate the power relation for the best possible outcomes for the communities.

## **5.4 Future Plans**

In this section we would look at certain processes that the CVUs wish to begin and act upon. A few of these are already being worked upon. Most of these are actually associated with the distribution of the video magazines and linking up with other media spaces and creating new spaces.

### **5.4.1 Exploring Democratic space within the new technology**

The coming of newer technology everyday is an opportunity to explore more options to democratize media. Probably these are also areas where no monopolization has happened as yet as they have just come into being. In fact, CVU itself is a used opportunity, which came with the digital technology. How this technology is still limited in its reach has been discussed. But that technology can be extended also, has been proved by opening of a CVU in the interior tribal villages of Andhra Pradesh, which are even cut off from the rest of the world during the rains. Though technology is dependent on a lot of other factors like region's accessibility, electricity, literacy levels (this is particularly so in the interface of equipments (especially computer) which are usually in English, though successfully working on video with non-literates has negated this to quite an extent) and livelihood patterns, the options are there to be explored and it is not a dead-end.

There is an existing technology gap. Many new technologies are not used and accessed by the marginalized communities. However, this does not mean that the technology can be ignored instead best use needs to be made. Few of the CVUs are on the way to developing their own websites, which open up a new democratic space. Small clips from the video magazine can be viewed on these websites. Not only that, this also helps in further distribution and networking with other institutions and organizations working with people. Video Volunteers has a plan of having a space in its website in form of channels. This channel would be called Channel 19. This relates to Article 19 of the

Indian Constitution, which talks of ‘protection of certain rights regarding freedom of speech etc.’ and each of the CVUs would have their own channels where their video magazine can be viewed. There is also an option of blogging, which actually allows people to air their views publicly without any restriction. Individual initiatives have been taken with regards to blogs too<sup>x</sup>. The blog reports few stories from the video magazine and also at times what all changes and effects the CVU has been able to bring in particular cases. The coming of Video blogging or Vlogging as it is being called now, probably opens up a whole new space to explore. With technology moving fast and newer media sites being innovated probably the scope is increasing more than ever. Video podcast (sometimes shortened to vidcast or vodcast) can be another viable tool where the videos might be available on demand and uploaded on mobile phones. These are technologies that are still being explored and need to be exploited to claim a space.

#### **5.4.2 Linking with local cable channels**

The CVUs have also thought about finding access to the cable television channel. Firstly, cable television is highly localized. This ensures that a local channel is being used to address the local issue. Secondly, the cable channel has far more reach than the screenings in the community and would probably also reach additional audience of those who would not come for the screenings. There is also a lot of difference between going to the media and the media coming to you. There are many instances where the women remain in their houses due to the purdah system. These women can at least see the video magazine through the cable even if not participate the way one would like them to. One of the CVUs has already linked up with the local cable channel in the form of getting its promotion done on the channel and informing people about what the upcoming issue is about. Though there are a lot of other dynamics involved too. Even cable operators are almost mafia-like in India and are linked strongly with the local politicians. This validates our point of everyone trying to control the media and also that in any existing situation how much ever localized media might be it would be monopolized and become a vehicle for personal and political agendas unless there is no community participation. However, it

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<sup>x</sup> A blog by a video trainer includes stories from the video magazine: [www.shrekzie.blogspot.com](http://www.shrekzie.blogspot.com)

is still a viable option in areas which have the access to cable TV as it is far more localized than any other video form.

### **5.4.3 Space in mass media**

As mentioned earlier, there is a two pronged approach to the alternative media and one approach within those is that alternative media should make the mass media rethink its priorities. On one hand the alternative media systems need to be established for local communication and for transferring of information amongst them. On the other hand they also need to have a voice in the larger world. Alternative media, given all its benefits still remains highly limited in its reach and for increasing that reach one needs to resort to the mass media. This reaching out is as necessary as creating media channels at the local level because there is a need to bring about a change in the world view too. As an attempt to make mass media rethink its position and as an attempt to get a space in the mass media, it would be tried that video magazines are broadcast on the mass media. An option could be the news channels and the national channel, as these two could be interested in accommodating such stories. In another instance the CVU initiative has also been published in a mass media magazine (Frontline). Few reports about the CVUs have come in various newspapers too.<sup>xi</sup> One of the organizations is also proposing to buy space on the national channel to broadcast the stories and experiences of rural women. Thus it demonstrates that one can talk about and propagate alternative options in the mass media.

### **5.4.4 Looking for a sustainable model**

The biggest strength and the biggest weakness of the CVU lie in its sustainability. As it has been recognized that the CVU has to be community owned and controlled by the community itself than any other outside agency even it be the NGO working closely with the community. This independence can be achieved only if the CVU is self-sustaining. Till the time it is dependent on others for its finances (mainly) and other supports (like field work) it would be fighting for its own power let alone truly empowering

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<sup>xi</sup> Indian Express, Mumbai, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2007

communities. The ideas are already there as had been discussed in Chapter 4 and it has to be seen which one is implemented and how to make the CVU sustainable through those means.

#### **5.4.5 Training Grounds**

The sustainability model, if it can be called so, of organization D, of training others in video-making skills is a very interesting one that needs to be looked into deeply. Firstly, training others in the community in the skill not only generates income for the CVU, but also creates livelihood opportunity for the community people who are trained. Probably here one can talk about the opportunities at the Bottom of the Pyramid. There is a huge shortfall in trained and skilled people in many sectors and media also falls into one of those. Media is a continuously growing sector and would keep on offering many job opportunities. Even media does not explore the Bottom of the Pyramid, which is the largest base of human power and resources. This could be one of those initiatives, which actually explore the skills and resources lying at this base. The generation of skilled people can be tremendous. The transfer of skills would keep on progressing and this would also mean that many more and increasing number of people would have the opportunity to produce and create their own media other than working for the existing media. With a multitude of skilled people at the Bottom of the Pyramid, the dynamics of media could change completely (as had already been discussed in Section 5.1.1 ).

### **5.5 Concluding Remarks**

We would like to bring together all the understanding and experiences of the CVUs here, briefly. The CVUs aim at setting at a large network of alternative media, which is local and at the same it also challenges the mass media.

Through its processes it is initiating a step towards a functioning democracy where people actively participate in political and public debates. They are active participants in a change meant for them. They have provided a voice of their own and a space where

they can have a dialogue. People usually lack the means to participate in a democracy and make it function. It is providing them a means and opportunity to act as a citizen.

It is building links with the authorities which was not available to people. Other than holding dialogues amongst themselves, it is necessary to hold the authorities accountable. These authorities have held the power with them, made them inaccessible and contributed to making the democracy a non-functional one. There had been a break of people from the daily functions of citizenship. By providing them a link with the concerned, the structures of democracy are also made accountable.

It has built strong individual leaders as video reporters/ community producers and is attempting to provide space to many more in the community. The reporters are probably the most unassuming media persons. These people themselves come from amongst the masses the CVUs work with. Those who have faced oppression themselves have the media extended to them and they have the power to use that media for empowerment of others too. It is also challenging the existing oppressive structures of caste, gender, religion by working with the marginalized communities and addressing issues of identity and discrimination. The Communities of the CVUs are the marginalized communities.

Technology is also discriminating on the basis of caste, gender, modernization. It is bringing technology to the places and people where it has not been as yet and reducing the technology gap and promoting non-traditional literacy of media over the traditional literacy. A non-literate woman in a rural area is able to operate a camera or tell her story on her condition now, something which the usual mass media and the dominant use of technology fail to provide. It is also promoting local cultures and providing a platform in the community video. The local cultures which are, if not languishing, facing great threats from the mass media promoted culture and modernization. We can see that the CVUs are attempting to bring change at various levels, from individuals to communities, dialogue within self to dialogue with the authorities, extending modern technology to preserving local cultures and working on democratization of existing structures through alternative media and democratizing media itself.

On the other hand there are concerns about NGO control, which may hamper ownership of the media by people. The issue of sustainability of the CVU is also a concern. A lot of issue related to community participation, control and ownership would remain unresolved unless the CVUs become self-sustainable.

## **5.6 “I would like to believe we are starting a revolution”**

This statement comes from the organization which is setting up the CVUs in India. The researcher sincerely hopes that this statement turns true. People themselves have to recognize that they need to have their own media. Either there has to be felt need by the community for the change or that need has to be created. The need has to be created for making them recognize that situations need to change and that these changes can be approached at by having their own media. The CVU has to demonstrate that things are possible to change and with their maximum participation. The commitment not only to the idea of community participation and empowerment, but also to the communities has to be immense. It has to be far more radical, far more involving, a revolution of another kind, questioning the dominant structures not through actions and violence but through voice. The tool of the media is recognized as a great one for mobilizing communities. Though organizing communities require far greater steps than what is currently happening.

“Remember: once you organize people around something as commonly agreed upon as pollution, then an organized people is on the move. From there it’s a short and natural step to political pollution, to Pentagon pollution.” (Alinsky, 1972)

Organizing communities involves a lot more commitment from the organizations as well as the people. The CVUs have to aim at people participating very actively in the democratic processes. The democratization of media would also happen only if few (organizations) are able to sacrifice for the interest of the communities. Any radical action which holds the potential to change comes only by keeping the heat on, by keeping the pressure on.

There is a need for greater community participation, instilling more spirit and activism in people, moving beyond what is obviously achieved through inherent characteristics of media, equating power between the organizations and communities, working on structural changes within the communities and modifying the public sphere. The energies generated in the community through the videos have to be utilized and ensure that one moves beyond the first time impact of video and further into 'citizen' activism. The community media network should be strong to become an initiative to reckon with. The conception and operationalization of the CVUs at such a huge level is commendable. The number of communities it is reaching to directly is high. The number of issues being handled through the video magazines is enormous. But it is equally necessary that all the issues that are being brought up are dealt with a lot of intensity to involve the communities further and emerge with some way ahead, to truly empower. The true potentials of community video have to be realized and invert the frame of the way people look at the world. It should also change the way marginalized are looked at. The marginalized communities have to be kept at the center of it, adopting an uncompromising attitude where the interests of the communities are concerned. Concepts which are being dealt with here like participation, empowerment, democratization and community ownership and community media should become true expressions. The CVUs should open up a space for the citizens to get involved in the action and help communities move towards a more democratic society.

“The greatest enemy of individual freedom is the individual himself. From the beginning the weakness as well as the strength of the democratic ideal has been the people. People can not be free unless they are willing to sacrifice some of their interests to guarantee the freedom of others. The price of democracy is the ongoing pursuit of the common good by all of the people. Tocqueville had warned that unless individual citizens were regularly involved in the action of governing themselves, self-government would pass from the scene. Citizen participation is the animating spirit and force in the society predicated on voluntarism.” (Alinsky, 1972)

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## **Annexure**