

Review Article

Community Journalism as a Catalyst for Grassroots Development in Viksit Bharat@2047

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Abstract

This paper explores the transformative role of community journalism in advancing the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047, a national goal that envisions India as a developed, inclusive, and equitable society by 2047. Community journalism defined by localized storytelling, participatory media practices, and grassroots engagement serves as a bridge between policy makers and the people, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Through platforms such as community radio, hyperlocal newspapers, and mobile-based reporting tools like *CGNet Swara*, *Khabar Lahariya*, and *Azad Hind Radio*, citizens are not only informed but empowered to voice concerns, demand accountability, and influence governance. This paper presents case studies, literature review insights, and government policy analysis to examine how community media aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), bridges the urban-rural communication divide, and addresses challenges like digital illiteracy and media exclusion. It also recommends policy interventions, training, and digital innovations to strengthen community journalism. As India progresses toward Viksit Bharat, community journalism emerges as a strategic tool for inclusive communication, participatory democracy, and sustainable development.

Keywords: Viksit Bharat@2047, Community Journalism, Grassroots Development, Community Radio, Azad Hind Radio, SDGs, and Digital India

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Introduction

The vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 represents India's long-term national goal to transform itself into a developed nation by the year 2047, marking 100 years of India's independence. It is not merely an economic or political ambition but a holistic developmental blueprint that emphasizes inclusive growth, technological advancement, social equity, sustainable development, and citizen empowerment.

Under this vision, the Government of India outlines a future where every citizen regardless of caste, class, gender, or geography can participate meaningfully in the country's progress. Key focus areas included poverty eradication and social justice, universal access to quality education and healthcare, empowered rural communities and self-reliant villages, digital India and technological innovation, green and sustainable development and participatory governance and democratic engagement.

To achieve these objectives, media participation become vital components. This is where community journalism plays a pivotal role, acting as a bridge between government policies and public participation. In a vast and diverse country like India, mainstream media often overlooks rural voices and marginalized communities. Community journalism, especially through mediums like community radio, hyperlocal news platforms, and grassroots digital collectives, provides a platform for such voices to be heard, their

issues to be highlighted, and their solutions to be documented.

As India moves toward 2047, empowering local communities through participatory media becomes essential to ensure that development is not just top-down but also bottom-up. By enabling informed citizenship, local accountability, and cultural expression, community journalism aligns directly with the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

Grassroots development is a bottom-up approach that involves active participation from local communities in identifying their needs, planning, and implementing development initiatives. In Viksit Bharat@2047, grassroots development is essential for rural India's upliftment, poverty reduction, gender equity, clean environment, education, and employment. Community journalism, community radio, hyperlocal newspapers, and digital storytelling platforms help mobilize communities, monitor policy implementation, and encourage local innovation, making grassroots development a catalyst for achieving inclusive and sustainable goals.

Community journalism refers to a form of journalism that is produced by, for, and about local communities, especially those that are geographically confined, culturally distinct, or socially marginalized. Unlike mainstream or corporate media, which often focus on national or global issues, community journalism centers on local stories, local voices, and local impact.

It is typically characterized by:

- Hyperlocal content focusing on the immediate needs and concerns of a specific community
- Active involvement of community members as contributors, reporters, and even decision-makers
- Use of accessible media platforms, such as community radio, neighborhood newspapers, local newsletters, WhatsApp bulletins, and digital portals in regional languages A participatory approach to news production and dissemination

Community journalism emphasizes the democratization of media where media is not just a tool of information, but a platform for empowerment, dialogue, and development. It plays a critical role in civic engagement, making local populations aware of their rights, entitlements, and opportunities.

In the context of Viksit Bharat@2047, community journalism becomes a transformational medium that can bridge the information gap between government policies and grassroots realities. By amplifying underreported issues such as lack of access to healthcare, rural infrastructure, education, women's empowerment, or environmental degradation community journalism supports inclusive development. In this sense, community journalism is both a mirror and a messenger reflecting the community's needs while enabling progress from within.

India's Viksit Bharat@2047 vision focuses on inclusive and participatory development, requiring grassroots involvement in rural and semi-urban areas. Traditional media often overlooks rural issues and

marginalized voices. Community journalism, acting as a bridge between policy and people, is emerging as a powerful tool for social transformation. Platforms like community radio, local newspapers, and digital citizen journalism are empowering rural voices and promoting accountability. However, scholarly attention on community journalism's role in Viksit Bharat@2047 remains limited.

Therefore, this research seeks to:

- Explore the impact and potential of community journalism in facilitating grassroots development
- Understand how it can amplify marginalized voices and local governance mechanisms
- Examine its contribution to media literacy, civic engagement, and participatory communication

By doing so, this study aims to highlight the strategic relevance of community journalism as a transformative force in achieving an inclusive and empowered Viksit Bharat.

Literature Review

- These works encompass citizen journalism platforms, community radio, ICT tools, and social impact studies in India:

While existing literature robustly documents the effectiveness of community journalism in empowerment, problem resolution, and civic engagement, there is limited work connecting these media practices directly with the unified national vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 and its broader developmental targets (e.g., SDGs, rural equity, digital inclusion). Community journalism as an essential strategy within India's 2047 vision

| No. | Paper & Year | Focus / Findings |
|-----|---|--|
| 1 | Mudliar, Donner & Thies (2012) – <i>Emergent Practices Around CGNet Swara</i> | Explores CGNet Swara's voice forum: over 70k calls, 1,100 messages, highlighting inclusive rural participation and citizen autonomy. |
| 2 | Pain (2017) – <i>Framing Citizen Activism: CGNet Swara vs Mobile Voices</i> | Comparative study showing citizen journalism as both activism and journalism, mobilizing communities across cultural contexts. |
| 3 | Moitra, Kumar & Seth (2021) – <i>Impact Pathways of Mobile-based Community Media</i> | Case study of Mobile Vaani: maps Theory of Change, evidences empowerment of marginalized groups via voice platforms. |
| 4 | Mehta (2020) – <i>Impact-driven Journalism during Pandemic</i> | Documents CGNet Swara's crisis reporting during COVID-19: ~90 stories, ~60% resolved, showcases high-impact outcomes. |
| 5 | Biswal (2020) – <i>Exploring Role of Citizen Journalism in Rural India</i> | Demonstrates digital participatory culture and critical consciousness within CGNet Swara via Arnstein's participation ladder. |
| 6 | Goswamy & Kashyap (2018) – <i>Community Radio for Agriculture Extension</i> | Identifies community radio as a vital participatory tool for disseminating agricultural innovation among rural farmers. |
| 7 | Sharma (2023) – <i>Community Radio for Rural Entrepreneurship</i> | Shows community radio's role in sustaining local industries by showcasing indigenous artisans and entrepreneurs. |
| 8 | Khobar Lahariya (2009–) – Recognized by UNESCO & The Hindu | Highlights an all-women rural newspaper that fosters local accountability and amplifies marginalized voices. |
| 9 | Chalchitra Abhiyaan (2016–) – collective using film/journalism in West UP | Documents grassroots media as cultural intervention, enabling storytelling and critical dialogue in riot-affected regions. |
| 10 | Bultoo Radio / CGNet Swara Bluetooth (2015) | Innovative 'Bultoo Radio' via Bluetooth: 528 stories in months, ~21,000 transfers, reaching media-dark tribal zones. |

framework, advocating for integrated policies and scalable media models.

Community Journalism in India: An Overview

Community journalism in India has evolved from pre-independence India, where local newsletters and handbills played a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion and promoting social reform. Post-independence, journalism became institutionalized and centralized, with urban elites dominating the media landscape. The emergence of community radio in the 1990s and 2000s, along with the digital era and hyperlocal journalism, has further boosted community journalism. Notable platforms include Khabar Lahariya, CGNet Swara, and Mobile Vaani and Video Volunteers. Community media in India is increasingly recognized for its role in development planning, participatory governance, and digital inclusion, with government schemes like BharatNet and Digital India indirectly supporting community media ecosystems.

Platforms and formats

Community journalism in India uses various platforms and formats to address local populations' information needs. Print media, community radio, digital platforms, and hyperlocal news platforms are essential tools for low-literacy regions. Digital platforms like CGNet Swara, Mobile Vaani, and Video Volunteers empower non-literate communities to contribute actively to the public sphere. Hyperlocal news platforms focus on neighborhood-specific content, creating media ecosystems close to the people they serve. These platforms embody participatory communication and contribute to an inclusive and developed India.

Government Schemes and Support for Community Journalism

The Indian government has implemented various policies and schemes to strengthen community journalism, particularly through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB). These include the Community Radio Policy, which allows educational institutions to run community radio stations, and the Media Infrastructure Development Scheme (MIDS), which provides grants-in-aid to new and existing stations, content generation support, and capacity-building workshops. The BharatNet project aims to provide high-speed internet to 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats, supporting digital community journalism platforms like CGNet Swara, Mobile Vaani, and Video Volunteers. The Digital India campaign promotes digital literacy, e-Governance access in rural areas, and vernacular content creation by local communities. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) supports Common Services Centres and Information Kiosks at the panchayat level, indirectly helping in community reporting and digital storytelling. State-level initiatives, such as Bultoo Radio and Khabar Lahariya, have also supported community journalism through funding, policy facilitation, and recognition of local media organizations. Strengthening these policies will be essential for leveraging community media as a

strategic tool in achieving the participatory development goals of Viksit Bharat@2047.

Role of Community Journalism in Grassroots Development

Community journalism is crucial for grassroots development by amplifying local voices, highlighting region-specific issues, promoting local governance, enhancing media literacy, and encouraging civic engagement. It bridges the urban-rural communication divide, empowers women, youth, and marginalized communities, and contributes to the inclusive vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

Case Study 1: Khabar Lahariya – Rural Women-Led Media Initiative

Khabar Lahariya is a groundbreaking rural media organization led by Dalit and marginalized women in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Launched in 2002, it began as a local-language newspaper and later evolved into a digital-first platform producing hard-hitting investigative journalism. Reporters cover gender-based violence, corruption, and local governance in areas often ignored by mainstream media. Their work has led to action on numerous issues, including road repairs and police accountability. The initiative not only amplifies unheard voices but also empowers rural women through media training, employment, and visibility, making it a model of inclusive journalism aligned with grassroots development goals.

Case Study 2: CGNet Swara – Mobile-Based Journalism in Tribal Areas

CGNet Swara is a mobile-based citizen journalism platform launched in 2010 to serve tribal populations in Chhattisgarh and neighboring states. It allows users in remote areas to report news and grievances via a simple voice call, which are then moderated by journalists and shared online. The platform addresses issues such as health, education, forest rights, and infrastructure. CGNet Swara has successfully resolved thousands of complaints, including teacher absenteeism and delayed wages. By using basic mobile technology, it bridges digital divides and ensures tribal communities have a voice in public discourse, directly contributing to grassroots empowerment and participatory governance.

Case Study 3: Azad Hind Radio 90.0 FM – Regional Community Radio Station

Azad Hind Radio 90.0 FM, based in Meerut, is a regional community radio station established to foster localized communication and development. The station broadcasts content on health, education, women empowerment, and local governance in Hindi and regional dialects, targeting rural and semi-urban listeners. It promotes government schemes, records community feedback, and creates platforms for villagers to share success stories and grievances. By engaging local volunteers Azad Hind Radio enhances civic participation and grassroots awareness. Its programming reflects real community concerns, thereby contributing to the broader goals of inclusivity and development under the Viksit Bharat@2047 vision.

Challenges and Limitations

Community journalism faces financial sustainability challenges, political and institutional barriers, lack of adequate training and infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, outdated equipment, and studio facilities. These issues hinder its full impact on grassroots development. Community journalists often come from marginalized backgrounds, affecting content quality and consistency. The rise of misinformation and fake news complicates the situation, necessitating robust fact-checking systems and media literacy programs to maintain trust and credibility.

Community Journalism in the Vision of Viksit Bharat@2047

Community journalism aligns with India's Sustainable Development Goals by promoting quality education, gender equality, and strong institutions. It plays a strategic role in Digital Bharat by enabling local storytelling and awareness campaigns. Policy recommendations for empowering community journalists include simplified licensing processes, funding schemes, regional training centers, and legal protections. Future innovations may include AI-powered local language reporting, immersive digital storytelling, and mobile-first journalism tools, boosting inclusivity and equipping rural reporters for Viksit Bharat@2047.

Conclusion

Community journalism is a crucial grassroots movement for inclusive development and participatory democracy. It amplifies local voices, promotes transparency, and empowers marginalized groups. Initiatives like Khabar Lahariya, CGNet Swara, and Azad Hind Radio demonstrate its transformative power. However, challenges like financial constraints, political pressure, limited training, and misinformation risks need policy-level support. Initiatives like Digital India and BharatNet align community media with India's Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring no voice is left unheard.

Source of Support: Nil

Conflict of interest: Nil

Acknowledgement: None

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How to cite this article: Singh P. Community Journalism as a Catalyst for Grassroots Development in Viksit Bharat@2047. Subharti J of Interdisciplinary Research, Aug. 2025; Vol. 7: Issue 2, 36 - 9