



# MY VOTE MATTERS

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA



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NO PLACE TOO REMOTE,  
NO DUTY TOO TOUGH.

**EVERY VOTE MATTERS  
AND WE WILL MAKE IT  
COUNT.”**

# Boosting Awareness through Community Radio

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For the first time ever, the 15-year old community radio sector in India has participated in a campaign on voter education and electoral literacy during the ensuing general elections for the Lok Sabha in April and May 2019.

In a unique, 'out of the box' approach, the Election Commission of India (ECI), through its flagship programme, Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP), entered into a partnership with the UNESCO

Chair on Community Media at University of Hyderabad to leverage the potential of community radio to promote voter awareness and informed participation in the electoral process. With the broad objective of building inclusive,

informed, and ethical voters' participation in the ongoing parliamentary elections, the project adopted a decentralised and bottom-up communication approach through community-generated audio content.

Through this partnership, 25 community radio stations from

16 states of India were brought together to produce, in a short span of two months, over 100 hours of radio programmes in 11 major languages – Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Odia, Assamese – and other minor languages and dialects such

as Bundeli, Marwari, Haryanvi, Desia, and Santhali.

The project kicked off with a three-day national workshop conducted by the UNESCO Chair on Community Media on the University of Hyderabad campus in February 22-24, 2019. At that workshop, about 50 community radio broadcasters from 25 stations across the country brainstormed on the proposed Festival of Democracy (FOD) project and designed a detailed road-map for the campaign. During the workshop, Padma Angmo, Director, SVEEP urged the CR stations to unlock the potential of the medium to promote electoral literacy and voter education and, thus, participate in what she termed the maha tyohar (great festival) of country-wide general elections. With the express intention of 'leaving no one behind,' the assembled station representatives agreed that they would focus on groups at different socio-economic levels, in local languages, and in ways that are meaningful to specific local contexts.

Since the workshop, all the participating stations in the Festival of Democracy project have got down in right earnest to produce radio programmes that synchronized with different stages of the electoral process – initially, on the idea of democracy and different levels of governance in India, moving on to voter registration, and, as the political campaign picked up, on informed and ethical voting, and, finally, on the voting procedures and the technology used. On the cusp of polling day in phase 3 of an unprecedented 7-phase elections in the country,



Mann Deshi Tarang Vahini doing a rally with school children



Ashwini of Yeralavani interviewing an elderly voter

Children of Radio Madhuban performing an informative skit for service voters





Fakat Hussain of Alfaz-e-Mewat interviewing an official



Staff of Rudi no Radio reviewing content with the UNESCO Chair



Radio Charminar conducting a panel discussion on voter registration

with a mammoth electorate of 900 million, about 10 community radio stations in the project have already broadcast their 12 planned episodes on different aspects of elections.

During the last 50 days or so of the Festival of Democracy radio campaign, the community radio stations have stretched their imaginations as well as resources to undertake a range of activities, both on-air and off-air. They produced pithy promos and jingles, mobilized folk music, composed rap songs to reach out to first-time voters, scripted short skits and audio plays on voting, interviewed political science teachers in local colleges as well as local administrators and election officials, and reached out directly to different groups of voters by recording vox pop on the streets and through community-level events. Many stations have also roped in school and college-going students, other NGOs, and frontline workers such as Anganwadi functionaries

as the ambassadors to take voter awareness messages to the nooks and corners of rural villages and urban neighbourhoods.

Radio Mattoli in Wayanad, Kerala broadcast a quiz on elections in which listeners could participate via phone-in; similarly, Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu aired a phone-in programme where they encouraged listeners to share their experiences as voters. Alfaz-e-Mewat in Ghagas village in Haryana reported receiving about 10-15 calls for every episode they broadcast, including a few from Rajasthan. Radio Bulbul in Bhadrakh, Odisha managed to record an interview with the Governor of the State, Prof. Ganeshi Lal, who spoke about democracy and appealed to voters to exercise their right. Bulbul also broadcast an extended interview with Ratna Boli Roy, an activist for the voting rights of mentally challenged people. Radio Nazariya in

Ahmedabad showcased their election broadcasts under the label 'Votetanta' and ran an informative social media campaign called "Do you know?" Gurgaon ki Awaaz in Haryana did a live show on democracy in collaboration with a group called We the People. An excellent example of using folk culture for voter education was a performance of Daskathia (a popular ballad form of Odisha) that was broadcast by Radio Namaskar in Konark. Radio Dhimsa in the tribal district of Koraput partnered with its parent organisation, SOVA (South Orissa Voluntary Association) to enact a play on elections that was based entirely on the tribal context of the region. In addition, some stations such as SEWA's Rudi no Radio in Sanand taluka of Gujarat and Radio Dhimsa also took the programmes to the people through narrowcasting sessions in the villages.

However, most stations went beyond broadcasting

content and either organised or participated in community outreach activities related to voter education. Radio Mattoli, Mann Deshi Tarang Vahini in Mhaswad, Maharashtra organised voter awareness camps for first-time voters, while Nityananda Janavani in the tribal region of Purulia, West Bengal organised a "Festival of Democracy Fair" where the Santhali community actively participated and presented a number of Baha songs (A Santhali dialect spoken in and around Purulia district) on the importance of elections and voting procedures. Radio Bundelkhand in Orchha, Madhya Pradesh, Radio Nazariya in Ahmedabad, Radio Namaskar in Konark, Karshakavani in Punganur, Andhra Pradesh, Radio Guru and Radio Charminar in Telangana undertook some good outreach programmes to reach the marginalised sections, including nomadic tribes, locationally disadvantaged communities, and people with disabilities (PWDs).

Rudi No Radio in Gujarat and Radio Bulbul in Odisha were among the stations that participated in camps organised by ECI to demonstrate the functioning of the EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) and VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) equipment. Yeralavani in Sangli, Maharashtra even went around the constituency in a van called the Festival of Democracy (FOD) Express to reach out to the communities in a more conspicuous and engaging manner. Radio Madhuban in Abu Road, Rajasthan participated in an all-women bike rally organised by SVEEP, and did the only outreach activity in the project directed towards service voters by putting together an event at the local CRPF Academy that included screening of informative videos, a skit by children, and a short quiz.

Radio Active in Bangalore, where the election has already been conducted, made creative use of social media platforms not only

to draw attention to their Festival of Democracy broadcasts, but also to encourage voters to share their voting experiences and photographs with their inked fingers through hashtags like #GotInked and #MyVoteMyRight.

While all participating community radio stations have expressed their satisfaction at being an integral part of the Festival of Democracy initiative, the project itself may be seen in the long-term as one of capacity-building and empowerment of grassroots broadcasters. For instance, the young women at Rudi no Radio, all of whom are in the age group of 16-18 years, said that participation in the election programme was a huge educational experience for them, contributed to their self-confidence, and their family members took pride in their taking part in voter education.

