Book Reviews

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Community Radio in South Asia: Reclaiming the Airwaves,

Kanchan K. Malik and Vinod Pavarala (eds) (2020)

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Community Radio in South Asia is an edited collection that offers insight into the state of community radio across different countries in South Asia. Drawing on a mixture of reflections and analysis of policy, socio-economic and historical contexts, contemporary practice and case studies, the volume offers an authoritative overview of community

radio in the region. Edited by Malik and Pavarala, two of the pre-eminent voices in community radio research globally, *Community Radio in South Asia* highlights the complexity, precarity and possibilities of the region's most significant alternative media movement.

Community radio in South Asia has come a long way from the much feted but ultimately unsuccessful Mahaweli Community Radio project. The community radio sectors in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh have each forged their own paths to maturity, with unique research agendas evolving alongside them. While there is a growing field of scholarship on community radio in South Asia, there are relatively few books on a topic that offers such rich, diverse and vibrant possibilities for research. Editors Malik and Pavarala co-authored one of the first books on community radio in the region, with their seminal title *Other Voices* (2007) published shortly after the Government of India's revised guidelines on community radio were released. Given their long-standing engagement with the Indian sector and collaboration across other South Asian countries, Malik and Pavarala have curated a collection of chapters that engage in timely discussion on community radio in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

The book is made up of three sections: the Policy Terrain, Issues in Practice and Case Studies. Each section consists of several chapters by different authors from around South Asia. Alongside Malik and Pavarala, chapter authors include renowned academics, activists and practitioners such as Ram Bhat, Ashish Sen, Priya Kapoor and Pradeep Ninan Thomas who offer their nuanced insight into specific topics and issues. Particularly insightful is the Issues in Practice section, which applies a critical lens to 'the

development trap' (p. 103), technology, gender equality, disaster broadcasting and sustainability.

Each chapter is separated by an excerpt from *CR News*, a publication produced and distributed by the UNESCO Chair on Community Media, based at the University of Hyderabad. The excerpts feature interviews, news articles and practitioner reflections and offer vignettes into the day-to-day issues and discussions that have taken place over the past twenty years of community radio in the region.

While the volume places significant emphasis on reflection and historical contexts, there is also a strong sense of moving forward and setting directions for future scholarship and practice. The authors write of the potential of community radio to contribute to media democracy, peace-building, disaster recovery and improving gender equality. Priya Kapoor's chapter on the use of community radio to preserve Indigenous languages and cultures in Nepal is particularly interesting and highlights an area of significant potential in a region as culturally and linguistically diverse as South Asia. A further contribution of *Community Radio in South Asia* in this sense is the inclusion of emerging voices in the field. Preeti Raghunath's chapter highlights her work on advancing the methodology of critical policy ethnography as well as the subsequent findings detailing the development of community radio policy in the region. Similarly, Madhavi Manchi applies a new lens to the work of Sangam Radio, one of India's first community radio stations, and explores how the station subverts the neo-liberal forces that threaten culture and collective memories. The inclusion of emerging voices alongside sector stalwarts signals the progress of both practice and scholarship in the field of community radio in South Asia.

Community Radio in South Asia has been a long time coming, and represents a significant contribution to the field. This volume would be of great value to both scholars and practitioners in the fields of communication for social change and alternative/community media, whether they are familiar with the region or not. The prose is accessible and the interspersal of *CR News* articles and interviews offers real-world insight into the experiences of activists, practitioners and researchers on the ground over the past twenty years. *Community Radio in South Asia* raises many questions about the future and sustainability of the medium in such a diverse environment, but it also tells stories of how community radio has contributed to empowerment, democracy, cultural preservation, agency and resilience within and across communities.

Reference

Pavarala, Vinod and Malik, Kanchan K. (2007), *Other Voices: The Struggle for Community Radio in India*, Delhi: Sage.