

Gharelu nuskhe & Muft ki Salah: Chamba, Tehri Garhwal
with Henvalvani Community Radio, (2010)

During my two months in Chamba I was able to collect home remedies, help Henvalvani set up their first web presence and invite and assist Riazat (art director Ogilvy & Mather) conduct a stop- motion animation workshop with the Henvalvani team.

Briefly: -

Home remedies and local medicinal plants

The idea was to work with Henvalvani CR station to produce a radio programme of Gharelu nuskhe & Muft ki salah (home remedies and free advice) from and for the community of listeners that this radio station has cultivated in the Henval valley over the past twelve years. I was able to converse with over sixty people from nine villages in the region of Chamba in Tehri Garhwal over two months and collect home remedies that have been edited into thirty programmes of one minute duration each that will be broadcast in-between the regular radio shows on 90.4 Mhz Henvalvani Samudayak Radio.

The internet interface

I was required to maintain a blog for this residency, this eventually turned out to be an integral part of my project as it unfolded. The team at Henvalvani was eager to put themselves out on the internet and cannot afford a website. They asked me to train them to upload and maintain their own blog and upload their radio programmes. Tired of being written about, the team now speak for themselves on <http://henvalvani.wordpress.com/>.

Script writing workshop lead by Riazat Ullah Khan (art director, Ogilvy & Mather advertising agency)

On my first visit to Chamba last year, Rajendra Negi (Station Manager Radio Henvalvani) in a conversation about sustainability for the radio station mentioned that they make 450-500 rupees if they are able to write a good advertisement for local services/ business. If we wrote better advertisements I am sure we will be able to bring in more projects that pay better. I later invited Riazat to conduct a week long script writing workshop with the Henvalvani team in July.

Details: -

Home remedies and local medicinal plants

While some villages are struggling with an acute water shortage, others are dealing with an onslaught of travelling devotees dirtying their roads and littering their water reservoir on their way to the holy temple at Gangotri. They shat all over the water tank. Its disgusting .. these pilgrims on yatra to the [chota char dham](#) really mess up our villages on their way to find God.. That's why it has not rained. The gods are also repulsed at what humanity has become. .. Janaki Rawat (Srikot). The monsoons have skipped this valley for two consecutive years now. Mostly dependant on natural resources, this agrarian belt has produced very little in the last two years and the farmers have had to shamefully resort to eating the seeds they had put aside for planting. The perennial rivers that feed the villages are getting clogged with plastic and like the Henval river are in danger of drying up completely. Every year a rich businessman

from Delhi host a function at the Surkanda temple and they leave a trail of plastic garbage that is choking the Henval River flowing beneath. Despite the ecological deterioration, this belt of Garhwal Himalayas is still abundant in medicinal plants. There are a number of state supported nurseries for medicinal plants, ayurvedic hospitals as well. A number of plants that repeatedly came up in conversations are commonly found (temru, chulu, kala jeera, bhimal, kala bans, haldi, lasan, akhrot, dhatura, dhaniya). Some ayurvedic plants are endangered, but even the ones in abundance are not used for home remedies anymore. So the question for me along with home remedies became..

Why are you not using these plants? They are known for their medicinal values and they will not damage your kidney.

- If I don't take my daughter-in-law to the doctor every time she has the slightest problem, she complains to my son. We never needed to see a doctor.. we didn't even have a doctor in the region.

What are they using these days.... fair & lovely is it? ... I never needed anything for my skin; we ate pure butter and fresh vegetables. Look at me ..I am eighty and my skin still glows.

- These home remedies take too long. We are becoming an impatient society and need quick solutions and quick remedies.

- Ever since the Television sets invaded our lives in the 90's the middle class aspirations for the shampoo Aishwarya Rai uses and the fairness cream Shah Rukh Khan is selling is way more attractive than grandmothers remedies.

The problem here is larger than just middle class aspirations, youth rebellion, impatience, deforestation and loss of traditional knowledge. It was not within the scope of my project or duration of two months to adequately understand each of these issues in detail.

However, I recorded a large number of uses of local plants, some that are popularly known but rarely used, some that are not used and grow in every backyard as well as fiction about the magical qualities of the surrounding forest. (people claim to have cured cancer and some that have found a cure for AIDS)

Instead of editing this down to a half hour or one hour radio programme of home remedies (as planned), I decided to edit it into smaller clips of one minute duration that can be played in the middle of the regular programming at Henvalvani. This radio campaign is an attempt at popularizing the local knowledge. The audio clip comes with the disclaimer "no form of medication if guaranteed to cure. These home remedies cannot perform miracles, please consult your physician in case of emergency".

The Internet interface

11th to 15th June we were invited to Dharamshal (Himachal Pradesh) for a radio workshop aptly titled "radio-out-of-the-box", organized by a media and arts organization. The range of the tools, applications and technology that the workshop was able to pull together was very impressive. The participants were mainly from community radio stations across India.

Pradeep and Darmiyan from Henvallvani also attended the workshop, while they found some of the technology and software a little hard to comprehend, they were sure of one thing... Henvallvani needed a web presence soon. With open source projects like wordpress one does not need to save up to hire an expensive website designer anymore. With some experience in handling an open source website, I started struggling with my own wordpress blog and learning about widgets and posts on google searches and wordpress help pages. This tutorial was repeated for the Henvallvani team and the queries, bugs and links I could not figure out were researched at night and responded to the following morning. <http://henvallvani.wordpress.com/> We even found free server space on <http://www.archive.org/create/> to upload the radio programmes. Word got around about the new henvallvani blog and within a week Kuldeep from ajeevika <http://www.ajeevika.org.in/>, (a Livelihood Improvement Project for the Himalayas. District Management Unit Chamba,) requested me to conduct a wordpress workshop at Henvallvani. Kuldeep is a natural at designing webpage. <http://uliphtehri.wordpress.com/>

Henvallvani uses narrow-casting and cable casting to disseminate radio content since 2001, have raised and trained over 40 volunteers in the past and continue till date to work with a spirit of volunteerism that is remarkable. what is even more remarkable is that inspite of being one of the oldest grassroots organization they have neither been able to put enough monies together to acquire a broadcasting license nor do they have enough funds to hold on to the now fast dwindling team. Since the Henvallvani office does not have an internet connection, my laptop and tata photon internet connection came in handy to search for funding opportunities for the radio station. Rajendra and I even sent a few proposals and applications seeking a grant for the station. It's great to attend workshops about alternative radio technologies, but the fact remains that in this set up there isn't enough money to pay for the telephone connection, forget about wifi routers and fancy portable recording studios.

Script writing workshop lead by Riazat Ullah Khan (art director, Ogilvy & Mather advertising agency)

Henvallvani has made many impressive public service announcements, as well as advertisements for local services and business. They even have an experience in creating video using still images for cable casting advertisements. Riazat was bowled over by the range of work Henvallvani had already done in this field. However he felt that there was a certain repetition in the scripting language and suggested a hand on workshop in scripting, shooting and editing a stop motion advertisement for a local Hotel. Through this exercise inputs from Riazat pushed the team to think out of the box.

Pradeep wrote the jingle, Ravi composed and sang it, Mamta and Aarti got all the props together, Rajendra composed and clicked the stills. Later Rajendra and Riazat edited the film and Arti uploaded it on youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dritLPR9C5Y>

I attended two goshtis or meetings organized by Henvaivani. One was in the memory of a famous poet/ revolutionary Ghanshyam Shailani. He was a celebrated poet of the Chipko movement in Garhwal. The Chipko andolan began in the early 1970's in this region as a non violent performative tree hugging movement that arose from concerns for the severe deforestation of the valley.

And the other in the memory of a rich businessman from Jardhar village who made his riches in Delhi with his famous cottage cheese store called Garhwal Paneer Bhandar. This rich philanthropist donated money for many social causes in the region including building a school, supporting and sponsoring young athletes and sportsmen ect... He was also instrumental in raising a private army that enforced the sharaab bandi andolan (ban liquor movement) by beating up drunks of the village if caught in the act.

These meetings are attended by local politicians, teachers, activists, journalists, musicians, poets, college students. The discussions are mostly around issues of local problems of urban migrations, forest fires, drying rivers. The discussions come alive with poetry reading and fiery debates. I was glad to see for myself that the meetings are followed up with action that everyone contributes to.

After working in an urban context with a colony of migrants for almost six years, this experience of being part of a collective identity and action in Chamba was extremely refreshing for me.

Before I left Chamba, I was invited to be on the board of the radio station, which I am honoured to accept. The team at Henvaivani welcomed me into their houses and lives and made this residency successful in more ways than one for me.

To me, to be loved, trusted and accepted is the real payback of my art practice.. and I feel richer by a million.

Aastha Chauhan
May-June 2010

<http://radiokhirkee.wordpress.com/>