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Air Cover and Ground Mobilization: Integrating Entertainment-Education Broadcasts With Community Listening and Service Delivery in India¹

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"We listen to each episode of Taru. We then discuss the episode's content in our listeners' club. Through the medium of Taru, we are learning lots of new things, and I am trying to incorporate many of them in my life to make it better. After listening to this radio serial, we have taken decisions to wipe

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out the caste discrimination in our village, teach dalit (lower caste) children, and to pursue higher education."

—Vandana Kumari, a 17-year-old member of Village Kamtaul's *Taru* listeners club, Bihar State, India, in a personal interview, September 2, 2002.

The young woman quoted above listens regularly to the radio serial, *Taru*, broadcast by All India Radio (AIR), the Indian national radio network. Her father, Shailendra Singh, is a rural health practitioner (RHP) in Kamtaul Village in Bihar State, and a respected public figure (in summer 2002 he was elected a Ward Commissioner). Singh's health clinic is called a *Tithy* (Butterfly²) Center, and is part of a network of 20,000 rural health practitioners, organized by Janani, a nongovernmental organization that promotes reproductive health care services in the poor Indian States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. These four States have a population of 190 million people; the highest fertility, infant mortality, and maternal death rates in India; and the lowest literacy and contraceptive prevalence rates.³

In 1999 Shailendra Singh and his wife, Sumita, underwent a three-day course in reproductive health care, first-aid, maternal and child health, and diagnosis and treatment of STIs/RTIs (sexually transmitted infections and reproductive tract infections) at a Janani training facility in Patna. Janani purposely invited both Singh and his wife for training as most rural Indian women are embarrassed to seek reproductive health services from a male RHP. Now, with a trained woman health practitioner Sumita (referred by village women as *Didi* or "sister"), female villagers could discuss sex, seek prenatal and antenatal care, and access contraceptives. After registering in Janani's rural health network, Singh's clinic in Kamtaul Village began to stock Janani's branded *Mithun* ("Bull") condoms, *Apsara* ("Angel") oral contraceptive pills, and pregnancy dipsticks.

In February 2002 Singh and Sumita's health practice in Kamtaul Village became the center of a novel experiment in entertainment-education radio broadcasting, when All India Radio, in cooperation with Population Communications International (PCI), New York, broadcast an entertainment-education radio soap opera *Taru* (the name of the program's female protagonist) in four Hindi-speaking states: Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh.⁴ All

¹University. A version of the present paper was presented to the International Communication Association, San Diego, 2005.

²Rural health practitioners often call on patients in their homes, like a butterfly that goes from flower to flower. Hence, the label *Tithy* (Butterfly) Center.

³Together the States of Bihar and Jharkhand have a population of 102 million, an annual per capita income of \$101 (the lowest of any State in India), a total fertility rate (TFR) of 5.5, a contraceptive prevalence rate of 2%, and only 52% literacy.

⁴From May 2002 onwards, *Taru* began its year-long broadcasts in the other Hindi-speaking States of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, and Haryana.

India Radio and PCI's ground-based partner in these four Indian states was Janani. Preprogram publicity for *Taru* was conducted on-the-air by All India Radio and, on-the-ground, *Taru* was publicized by Janani's 20,000 strong network of RIIPs (like Singh and Sumita), *Taru* posters (Photo 19.1), and over 700 strategically placed wall paintings at major highway intersections (Photo 19.2) (Singhal & Rogers, 2003).

In four villages in Bihar State, selected carefully to fulfill certain criteria (detailed later), folk performances dramatizing the *Taru* storyline were carried out (led by one of the present authors, Sharma) a week prior to the radio serial's broadcasts to prime the message reception environment. Shailendra Singh's Kamtaul Village was one such site for the folk performances. Singh and his wife Sumita spread word-of-mouth messages about the folk performance, encouraging hundreds of people to attend, and awarded transistors (with a sticker of *Taru*'s logo) to groups who correctly answered questions based on the folk performance. These groups were then formalized as *Taru* radio listening clubs. Each group received an attractive notebook (with a *Taru* logo), and were encouraged and urged to discuss the social themes addressed in *Taru*, relate them to their personal circumstances, and record any decisions, or actions, they took as a result of being exposed to *Taru*.

RHP Shailendra Singh's daughter, Vandana, her younger sister, a cousin, and two friends formed the young women's listening club in Kamtaul Village. A *Taru* fever has since raged in the Singh household. Discussions of *Taru* inspired the Singh family to undertake several new initiatives: They stopped a child marriage in Kamtaul Village, launched an adult literacy program for *dalit* (low-caste) village women, and have facilitated the participation of dalits in community events. Further, since *Taru* began broadcasting, Singh's monthly sales of Mithun condoms and Apsara pills have jumped 400%.⁵

What explains such ground-breaking social changes as are occurring in Kamtaul Village? The present chapter argues that synergistic possibilities for social action can emerge when entertainment-education radio broadcasts are strategically integrated with community-based group listening and locally available health care services. Social transformation was catalyzed when (1) All India Radio provided the entertainment-education "air cover" in the form of *Taru*, (2) *Taru* listening groups acted as informal organizing units for social deliberation and local action, and (3) Janani's rural health network provided the ground-based service delivery. Each component complemented the contributions of the other.

In the present chapter we provide a historical background on the *Taru* Project, a description of its on-the-air and on-the-ground components, and the radio serial's storyline. Our methodology for assessing the impacts of

⁵In the month of February 2002, when *Taru* began broadcasting, Singh sold 22 pieces of Mithun condoms, seven cycles of Apsara pills, and no pregnancy dipsticks. In August, 2002, Singh sold 90 pieces of Mithun condoms, 30 cycles of Apsara pills, and five pregnancy dipsticks.



PHOTO 19.1 Shailendra, the rural medical practitioner in Village Kamtaul, standing next to a *Taru* poster. Shailendra is an avid listener to *Taru*. He intervened in a child marriage in the village, and works tirelessly to remove caste-based inequities in his village. (Source: Personal file of the authors. Photograph by Arvind Singhal.)



PHOTO 19.2. A 15 feet by 8 feet wall-painting on the Patna-Muzzafarpur Highway, promoting the broadcasts of *Taru*, and the rural medical practitioner network of Janani. This painting contains the logo for *Taru*, an announcement about the time and day of broadcast of *Taru*, and the name of the sponsor, Janani's Tidy Center. Some 700 such wall paintings were placed in strategic locations in Bihar State prior to broadcasting *Taru*. (Source: Personal file of authors. Photograph by Arvind Singhal.)

Taru is described, including the use of video testimony and participatory photography. We then present the results from our community-based study in certain select villages of Bihar State, explaining the process through which community members enact system-level changes as a result of exposure to *Taru*. We investigate the power dynamics, the resistances, and the audience members' struggles in the process of media-stimulated change, a process involving parasocial interaction, peer communication, and collective efficacy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: FROM TINKA TO TARU

The inspiration for the *Taru* Project came from a previous community-based investigation of the impacts of *Tinka Tinka Sukh* (Happiness Lies in Small Pleasures), a radio soap opera, in Lutsaan Village of North India. In January 1997, 184 villagers in Lutsaan signed a pledge not to give, or accept, dowry (an illegal but widespread social practice in India). These villagers also pledged to

not allow child marriages (also an illegal but common practice), and pledged to educate daughters equally with their sons (Papa, Singhal, Law, Pant, Sood, Rogers, and Sheffer-Rogers, 2000). The petition, in the form of a colorful 20 by 24 inch poster-letter, was mailed by Lutsaan villagers to All India Radio, which was broadcasting *Tinka Tinka Sabh*. In the radio program, a young woman, Poonam, is abused by her husband and his parents for bringing an inadequate dowry, until she commits suicide.

The poster-letter stated: "Listeners of our village [to *Tinka Tinka Sabh*] now actively oppose the practice of dowry—they neither give nor receive dowry." A young tailor in the village was especially influenced by the radio program episodes about dowry and initiated the process of writing the poster-letter among the people in his tailor shop. As a result of the forces set in motion by the tailor, the villagers formed radio listening clubs, planted trees for reforestation, and built pit latrines for improving village sanitation. Girls' enrollment in the village's schools increased from 10% at the time of the radio broadcasts to 38% two years later. Fewer dowry marriages and child marriages occurred in Lutsaan, although these practices did not disappear completely in the village (Papa et al., 2000).

Authors Singhal and Papa (with editor Everett M. Rogers) conducted an in depth case study of the empowerment process in Lutsaan over several years (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Papa et al., 2000). The Lutsaan case study suggested entertainment-education interventions have their strongest effects on audience behavior change when messages stimulate reflection, debate, and interpersonal communication about the educational topic among audience members (Papa et al., 2000), and when services can be delivered locally. These insights from Lutsaan were applied in formulating the *Taru* Project, which included a partnership with a ground-based service delivery organization, Janani; preprogram publicity of *Taru* through Janani's extensive RHP network; and the establishment of listeners' groups to encourage peer-based conversations.

Radio Listening Clubs

The idea of broadcasting to listening groups is not new. In 1956 India was the site of the famous Pune Radio Farm Forum Project, which was a field experiment to evaluate the effects of radio farm forums, each consisting of several dozen villagers who gathered weekly to listen to a half-hour radio program (broadcast by All India Radio), and then to discuss its contents (Kivlin, Roy, Fliegel, & Sen, 1968). The theme of the radio forums was "Listen, Discuss, Act!" One of the radio broadcasts might deal with rodents as a problem. Following discussion of this topic in a radio forum, villagers would mount a rat-control campaign in their community.

The research evaluation showed that the Pune radio farm forums helped to "unify villagers around common decisions and common actions," widening

"the influence of the *gram panchayat* [village government] and broadening the scope of its action" (Mathur & Neurath, 1959, p. 101). The farm forums spurred discussions among villagers, leading to decisions about digging wells, adopting purebred bulls and Leghorn chickens, and establishing *batuadis* (children's enrichment centers) (Singhal & Rogers, 2001). At the village level, the radio forums acted like voluntary organizations "whose members were neither appointed by authority nor elected to represent specific group interests," signifying an important experiment in village democracy (Mathur & Neurath, 1959, p. 101). Members voluntarily engaged in village clean-up drives, planting papaya trees, and building pit latrines.

THE TARU PROJECT

Taru was a 52-episode entertainment-education radio soap opera, broadcast in India from February 2002 to February 2003. Its purpose was to promote gender equality, small family size, reproductive health, caste and communal harmony, and community development. *Taru* began broadcasting in Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chattisgarh States in India on February 22, 2002 (and later in the entire Hindi-speaking belt of North India from May 2002). One episode was broadcast each week on Friday at 8:00 p.m., with a repeat broadcast each Sunday at 3:40 p.m. Each episode of *Taru* began with a theme song and a brief summary of the previous episode. Each episode ended with an epilogue that posed a question to the listeners, inviting them to write in their responses to AIR. Half way through the *Taru* broadcasts (in October 2002), Kiran Bedi, a well-known woman police officer in India and a social activist, hosted two interaction programs with *Taru*'s listeners, answering questions on the air.

The idea of integrating on-air entertainment-education broadcasts with ground-based listening and service delivery was floated in September 2000, in a New York-based meeting between David Andrews and Kate Randolph of Population Communications International; Gopi Gopalakrishnan, Arisingh Dutt, and Shejo Bose of Janani; and author Singhal of Ohio University.⁶ As a first step, PCI hired MODE, an India-based research organization, to conduct a literature review and site-based formative research (in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh States) to distill the educational issues to be addressed in *Taru*. In the next 17 months the *Taru* Project progressed rapidly as roles and responsibilities of the partners were defined.

PCI looked after the overall management of the *Taru* Project. It provided the technical assistance for creating the radio serial, sponsored a visit for half-a-dozen members of All India Radio's creative team to Bihar State to gain

⁶PCI President David Andrews and Janani's President Gopi Gopalakrishnan had met a year or two prior to this 2000 meeting, and had discussed possibilities of working together.

familiarity with Janani's program, and hosted a workshop with the AIR creative team to design a blueprint for the radio serial. Ohio University (1) designed the Project's theoretical framework for integrating *Taru's* on-the-air and on-the-ground activities, (2) carried out a pretest of *Taru's* pilot episodes in collaboration with the Centre for Media Studies (CMS), New Delhi, and (3) implemented the summative research evaluation plan (detailed later) for the present project in collaboration with CMS. Janani sponsored the broadcasts of *Taru* in the four states, worked with Ogilvy Outreach, a Bombay-based advertising and PR agency, to develop a logo for *Taru* as well as the preprogram publicity materials (posters, stickers, flyers, and wall paintings), distributed these materials to RHPs, and provided logistical support to (a) Brij Lok Madhuri to conduct the *Taru* folk performances, and (b) to Ohio University and the Centre for Media Studies to conduct the field-based research in Bihar State. All India Radio was responsible for producing the radio serial, broadcasting it, and for inviting and collecting listeners' feedback.

Orchestrating Audiences Through Folk Performances

The ground-based prepublicity for *Taru* included the performance of a folk play, patterned after the storyline of *Taru*. The purpose of these folk performances was to generate buzz about *Taru* prior to its broadcasts, to distribute publicity material, and to establish listening groups. Usually mass media programs face an audience lag, the time needed to build a sizeable and dedicated audience (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Preprogram publicity and the ground-based orchestration through folk performances helped shorten this audience lag for *Taru*.

Folk performances were conducted in four villages—Kamtaul, Madhopur, Chandrahatti, and Abirpur—each drawing an audience of 600 to 800 people (Photo 19.3). Devendra Sharma⁷ (one of the present authors) scripted the *Taru* folk performance in the *nautanki*⁸ genre, using a *nat* and *nati* (male and female narrators) to engage the audiences. A song in the *Alha* folk format introduced the themes and characters of *Taru*. The folk performance was customized to the local Bihar milieu (including use of local colloquial expressions, costumes, and props) in a two-day workshop with members of Rangkarm, a local theater group in Patna. Rangkarm, which included a dozen actors, actresses, and instrumentalists, collaborated with author Sharma, Janani of- ficials, and RHPs to organize and stage the folk performance in the four lo- cations. Audience members were goaded to listen to *Taru* themselves and

⁷ Sharma is also Creative Director of Brij Lok Madhuri, an organization dedicated to using Indian folk forms for social change.

⁸ A popular folk theater form of North India.

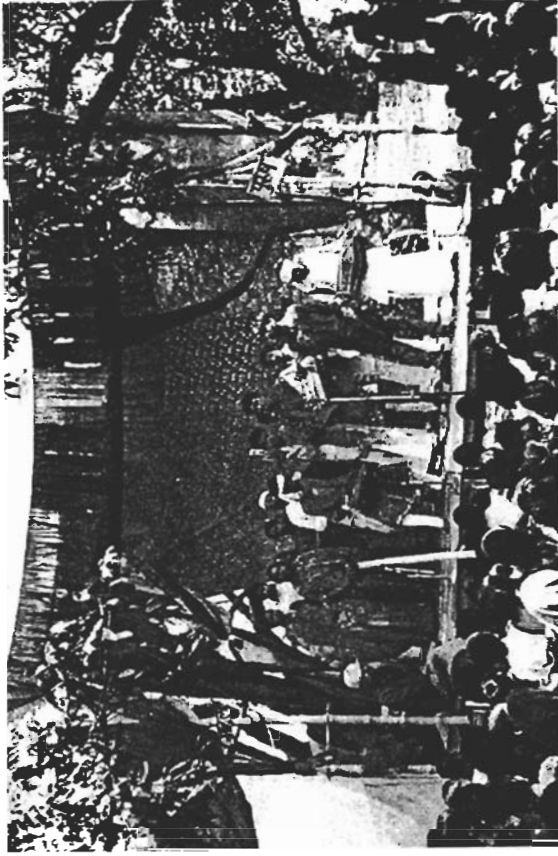


PHOTO 19.3. Some 800 people from eight neighboring villages gathered near Abirpur Village to watch a folk performance about *Taru*, prior to the broadcast of the radio soap opera. The purpose of the folk performance was to stimulate interest in listening to *Taru*, to form listening clubs, hand out listeners' diaries to members of the listening clubs, and to distribute *Taru* posters, stickers, and pamphlets to prime message reception. (Source: Personal files of authors. Photograph by Devendra Sharma.)

to encourage others to tune in, and the dates and times of broadcasts were repeated several times.

After the performances, four listening groups were formed in each of the four villages, including (1) a young female listener group (Photo 19.4), (2) a young male listener group, (3) an adult female listener group, and (4) a family listener group. Each listening group had six to eight members. Each group received an attractive diary to record their impressions of the radio serial and summarize their conversations, decisions, and actions.

Taru's Story

The story of the radio serial revolves around *Taru*, a young, educated woman who works in Subhagpur village's Sheetal Center (patterned after Janani's Tidy center), an organization that provides reproductive health care services and carries out village self-help activities. *Taru* is idealistic, intelligent, and polite, and works to empower rural women. *Taru* is a close friend of Shashikant, who like *Taru*, is educated, intelligent, and involved in social work at the Sheetal Center. He belongs to a lower caste and is subject to discrimination by the high

caste people in the village. Taru likes him for his sincerity, and he, in turn, is supportive of Taru's ameliorative efforts. While there is an undercurrent of romance between the two, they have not yet explicitly expressed it, given that Shashikant is mindful of his lower caste status (Taru belongs to an upper caste family).

Taru's mother, Yasboda, is highly supportive of her daughter, whom she sees as an embodiment of her own unaccomplished dreams. On the other hand, Mangla, Taru's rogue brother, derides Taru's social work, and ridicules her friendship with the lower-caste Shashikant. With the help of Aloni Baba (a village saint) and Guruji (a teacher), Taru and Shashikant fight multiple social evils in a series of intersecting storylines, including preventing a child marriage and encouraging girls to be treated on par with boys.

A subplot involves Naresh, his wife Nirmala, his sister Ranjana, his mother Ramdulari, and his four daughters. Ramdulari insists on a fifth child, arguing for the importance of having a grandson. Nirmala uses contraception to avoid an unwanted pregnancy, and as the story evolves, Ramdulari undergoes a change of heart and starts valuing her granddaughters.

Another subplot involves Neha, a close friend of Taru, who is newly married to Kapileshwar, the son of the local *zamindar* (landlord). Kapileshwar starts out as a controlling husband, restricting Neha's mobility outside of the home. But Neha wants to lead a meaningful life and begins a school for dalit (lower-caste) children. Kapileshwar undergoes a change of heart, and becomes highly supportive of Neha's activities, despite criticism from his parents (Table 19.1).



PHOTO 19.4. (Left to right) Usha Kumari, Sumita Kumari, and Kumari Neha, members of the Aburpur young women's listening club, who regularly listen to *Taru* on the transistor radio that they won in the quiz competition following the *Taru* folk performance in their village. (Source: Personal files of the authors. Photograph by Arvind Singhal.)

TABLE 19.1
The Main Characters of *Taru*

Name	Characterization
Taru	The lovable young woman protagonist who works at the Sheetal Center, an NGO promoting reproductive health services and self-help activities in the village. While she belongs to an upper caste, she is a very close friend of Shashikant, her colleague, who is of a lower caste. She is a positive role model for gender and caste equality.
Shashikant	The young, dignified, educated male protagonist who works with Taru at the Sheetal Center. Though of a lower caste, he is a staunch supporter of women's rights, and an organizer (with Taru) of village self-help activities.
Neha	Taru's friend and supporter. An educated woman who is married to Kapileshwar. Neha faces resistance from her husband and in-laws for her village-based initiatives, including teaching underprivileged low-caste village children. But she persists and inspires others.
Kapileshwar	Neha's husband. Initially, he played the role of a male chauvinist and a traditional upper-caste individual who looked down upon lower-caste people. With time, he begins to support his wife and her initiatives.
Aloni Baba	A respected religious person in the village. He speaks out against social ills, including giving and taking dowry, early marriage of girls, and discrimination between girl and boy children. He supports Taru and Shashikant in their endeavors against child marriage, promotion of small family size norm, and the education of girls.
Guruji	A friend and follower of Aloni Baba. A light-hearted, humorous person who uses the local Bihari dialect to reinforce Aloni Baba's message.
Mangla	Taru's brother, a loud mouth, and a negative role model. He does not like Taru's involvement at the Sheetal Center nor her friendship with the low-caste Shashikant. He is always looking for ways to foment trouble.
Ramdulari	An old traditional village woman, who is Naresh's mother and Nirmala's mother-in-law. She has four granddaughters and initially longs for a grandson. As the story develops, Ramdulari's behavior toward her granddaughters becomes more compassionate and she no longer desires a grandson.
Nirmala	Ramdulari's daughter-in-law, Naresh's wife, and mother of four daughters. She loves her daughters and believes that they are as precious as are boys. She uses contraceptives to avoid becoming pregnant, even though her mother-in-law wants her to have at least one boy.
Phirki Chachi	The middle-aged village gossip and busybody, who incites and creates trouble.
Ranjana	Naresh's sister and Nirmala's sister-in-law. Taru and Shashikant help her to stand on her own feet through self-employment.

RESEARCHING TARU

Our research on *Taru* is guided by methodological triangulation, the use of multiple research methods (both quantitative and qualitative) to measure the same phenomenon. While the present chapter relies primarily on data collected from a community case study of Village Abirpur in Vaishali District of Bihar State, and from our observations of Village Kamtaul, Madhopur, and Chandrahatti (where a high degree of field orchestration, including folk performances, was conducted) in Bihar's Muzaffarpur District, other forms of data were collected to deepen our understanding of how *Taru* influenced its audience: (1) personal interviews with key officials involved in the production of *Taru*, including its executive producer, director, and writers; (2) a pre-post random sample survey of 1,500 respondents each, including both listeners and nonlisteners, in a sentinel research site in Begusarai District, Bihar State, India; (3) a pre-during-post, four-group, panel design quasi-experiment study to gauge the additive effects of the influence of (a) field orchestration activities such as folk performances, establishment of listening groups, and diary recordings; (b) preprogram publicity of *Taru* through posters, stickers, and flyers by the RHIPs, and (c) reproductive health service delivery through the presence of a Tity Center RHIP and his spouse; (4) a content analysis of a sample of listeners' letters in response to *Taru*; (5) a content analysis of the educational themes and character portrayals in the 52 episodes of *Taru*; (6) monthly collection of point-of-referral data on the sales of condoms, pills, and pregnancy dipsticks from Tity Centers in our research sites; and (7) a longitudinal design of five rapid surveys to assess the degree of audience exposure to *Taru*, conducted at two-month intervals during the broadcasts of *Taru*.

Taru's Listenership

Our five rounds of rapid exposure assessment surveys conducted in 2002 suggest that *Taru* is regularly listened to in 10 to 15% of all households in Begusarai District, our sentinel research site in Bihar (Table 19.2). While realizing the problems associated with estimating state-level population estimates from district-level sentinel site sample surveys, an extrapolation of these numbers suggests that *Taru* may have a listenership of between 20 to 25 million people in the four Indian States of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chattisgarh, whose combined population is about 190 million people. If these listenership numbers for *Taru* hold in other Indian States (where *Taru* began broadcasting in May 2002), the listenership of *Taru* in the entire Hindi-speaking region of North India, which has a total population of 625 million people, may range from 60 to 75 million people.

TABLE 19.2

Longitudinal Assessment Through Four Rapid Random Surveys in Begusarai District of Bihar State to Gauge (1) Listenership to *Taru*, (2) Listeners' Perceptions of Similarity of *Taru*'s Characters to Them, and (3) Listeners' Intentions to Change Their Behaviors as a Result of Listening to *Taru*

Assessment Dimension	Rapid Survey 1* April, 2002 (N = 369)	Rapid Survey 2 June, 2002 (N = 457)	Rapid Survey 3 September, 2002 (N = 521)	Rapid Survey 4 November, 2002 (N = 371)
Percent of <i>Taru</i> listeners in households surveyed	15%	10%	12%	13%
Listeners' perceptions of how similar <i>Taru</i> 's characters are to them	30%	48%	37%	45%
Listeners' intentions to change their behaviors as a result of listening to <i>Taru</i>	61%	80%	50%	83%

*Note. Broadcasts of *Taru* began in late-February 2002 and ended in February 2003. The rapid surveys were conducted regularly at two-month intervals.

Community Case-Study and Field Observations

In Village Abirpur, CMS researchers and the present authors made eight rounds of visits in 2002, spending about 40 person days. Another round of visits, of roughly 20 person days, occurred in early March 2003, soon after *Taru*'s final broadcast. In September 2002, accompanied by author Singhal, CMS researchers conducted 16 in-depth interviews and three focus group interviews (with 28 respondents) with *Taru* listeners in Abirpur, and five in-depth interviews in Village Kamtaul, including RHP Shailendra, his wife Sunita, and their daughter Vandana. These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed from Hindi into English. Our team members also investigated examples of individual and social change reported by villagers in Kamtaul, Madhopur, and Chandrahatti, spending a total of 10 person days in these sites in 2002. Various techniques of data collection were employed including participant-observation, note-taking, and photo and video documentation.

Methodological Innovations in *Taru* Project

The *Taru* Project employed various methodological innovations in the conduct of entertainment-education research.

Video Testimony

We conducted video documentation of the *Taru* project, a new methodological approach in entertainment-education. Audiotaped testimonies privilege the spoken and written word but fail to capture the affective, nonverbal, and spatial domains of listeners' responses. For instance, audiotapes, or their transcribed text, cannot capture the emotions of poor *dalit* village women, who, for the first time in their life, are learning to read and write. Nor can textual descriptions fully capture the open-air atmosphere of a village school, or the enthusiasm of the young men and women who established it.

In conceptualizing the *Taru* Project, we envisaged our role (and responsibility) as being more than simply summarizing and interpreting the views of the "others." We provided our respondents a means to speak for themselves, in their own space, accompanied by such emotions as joy, anger, frustration, and resolve. Under the guidance of one of the present authors (Singhal), and the field-based leadership of coauthor (Sharma), 21 oral testimonies of *Taru* listeners were videotaped in Abirpur, Kamtaul, Madhopur, and Chandrabhatti villages in December 2002. Some 14 hours of video were recorded, including shots of listeners' group discussions after listening to a *Taru* episode, and activities undertaken (such as the adult literacy program in Kamtaul Village). Careful about not just privileging the voice of men or the social elite, which can happen in E-E program evaluations, our video testimonies consciously focused on the voices of poor women, the most "muted" social group in Bihar.

A paragraph from author Sharma's field notes (of December 15, 2002) during the video documentation process is illustrative: "During our video shoot in Abirpur, Soni, a young girl of 15 years and a member of a *Taru* listener's group invited me hesitantly to her house for a meal. As I went inside, I saw that her mother was cooking on a *chulha* (mud stove). Her house—made of mud, reed, and husk—was in a dilapidated condition. With great courage and resolve, Soni told me (on film) that her father was unemployed and that they could hardly make ends meet. . . . What struck me most was that even with a large family to look after [Soni has four brothers and sisters], and difficult financial circumstances, Soni and her mother were fiercely proud and dignified. I remember the poignancy of the moment when I shot the interview of Soni's mother in their *aanqan* [an open space in the house usually surrounded by rooms], with the burning *chulha* serving as the only source of light, while Soni served dinner to me and her siblings. Soni and her mother said on tape: "When Taru and her mother Yashoda can fight harsh circumstances in the radio serial, why can't we?"

Participatory Photography

To gauge the influence of *Taru* on audience members, we employed participatory photography, drawing inspiration from the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and Augusto Boal (1979), who argued for handing over the means of production to the people. As opposed to asking people questions, and thereby constraining the nature and scope of their word responses, we handed out eight disposable cameras to *Taru* listeners in Abirpur, Kamtaul, Madhopur, and Chandrabhatti, and asked them to capture *Taru*'s influence on them (or their community) through the language of images.

Our participatory photography method was inspired by a Freirean literacy project in Lima, Peru, which in 1973, asked poor people certain questions in the Spanish language, but requested them to answer them by using pictures. When the question "What is exploitation?" was asked, some people took photos of a landlord, grocer, or a policeman (Boal, 1979, p. 123). One child took a picture of a nail on a wall. It made no sense to adults, but other children were in strong agreement. The ensuing discussions showed that many young boys of that neighborhood worked in the shoe-shine business. Their clients were mainly in the city, not in the barrio where they lived. As their shoe-shine boxes were too heavy for them to carry, these boys rented a nail on a wall (usually in a shop) where they could hang their boxes for the night. To them, that nail on the wall represented "exploitation."

When we asked our *Taru* listeners to "shoot back" (in images) the influence of the radio serial in their lives, we ended up with over 200 photographs.⁹ Here we describe a photo from Vandana's camera, the young listener quoted on top of the chapter. The photo shows Vandana (she asked her cousin to take this picture) standing next to a young man of her age (about 17-years-old). When we asked her what the picture signified, she said: "This is my boyfriend, a boy who is a friend. He studies in my high school and we attend the same coaching class. I feel comfortable talking to him and sharing my thoughts with him. I am not shy and timid like other girls of Village Kamtaul, who feel nervous talking to boys. If Taru and Shashikant can be good friends, why can't we?" In the picture, Vandana is donning jeans, an outfit that conservative villagers regard as inappropriate. Also, perhaps for the first time in the history of Kamtaul Village, a young woman invited a young man to stand beside her and pose for a photograph. Vandana gives credit for this confidence to *Taru*.

IMPACT OF TARU

Our study of *Tinka Tinka Sukh* in Lutsaan Village (discussed previously) suggested that an entertainment-education program can spark the process of social change by drawing listeners' attention to socially desirable behaviors

⁹ Author Singhal and Sharma are carrying out an in-depth study of these participatory visual responses.

(Papa et al., 2000). When listeners develop parasocial relationships with the characters of an E-E program, they may be motivated to consider changes in their own behavior. E-E programs can stimulate peer conversations among listeners, which can create opportunities for collective efficacy to emerge as people consider new patterns of thought and behavior. However, existing power structures resist the process of social change, and people's own thinking is fraught with paradoxes and contradictions as they "negotiate" their actions with their intentions. Was there evidence for these processes in the villages of Bihar, where our present investigation of *Taru* was based?

Parasocial Interaction With *Taru*

Parasocial relationships are the seemingly face-to-face interpersonal relationships which can develop between a viewer and a mass media personality (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The media consumer forms a relationship with a performer that is analogous to the real interpersonal relationships that people have in a primary face-to-face group (Papa et al., 2000; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Sood & Rogers, 2000). Horton and Wohl (1956) argued that when a parasocial relationship is established, the media consumer appreciates the values and motives of the media character, often viewing him or her as a counselor, comforter, and model. Rubin and Perse (1987) argued that parasocial interaction consists of three audience dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral.

Cognitively oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which audience members pay careful attention to the characters in a media message and think about its educational content after their exposure (Papa et al., 2000; Sood & Rogers, 2000). Such reflection on the educational themes can help media consumers recognize that they could make different behavioral choices in their personal lives. Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) is linked to behavior change that a person considers and/or enacts. *Self-efficacy* is an individual's perceptions of his/her capacity to deal effectively with a situation, and to control this situation (Bandura, 1995). For example, after receiving messages from an entertainment-education program, is a person persuaded that they have the ability to change their behavior in a socially desirable way?

In Village Kamtaul, RHP Shailendra Singh noted how listening to *Taru* motivated him to intervene in a delicate situation: "We have applied the learnings of *Taru* in real life. Just as Taru and Shashikant prevent a girl child marriage in the radio serial, we also stopped a child marriage from occurring in Kamtaul. We politely said that this was wrong, and concerned people came around and changed their decision" (personal interview, August 19, 2002).

Sunita, Singh's wife, greatly admired Neha, a friend of Taru in the radio serial, who establishes a school to educate dalit (low-caste) children. Sunita



PHOTO 19.5. Sunita (standing right), the wife of RHP Shailendra Singh, who was inspired by Neha (a friend of Taru) in the radio serial, to begin an adult literacy class for lower-caste women in Kamtaul Village. (Source: Personal files of the authors. Photograph by Devendra Sharma.)

launched adult literacy classes for 20 lower caste women in Kamtaul's Harijan Tola (the lower-caste settlement) (Photo 19.5). It is highly uncommon in an Indian rural setting for a high-caste woman to interact with women of lower castes. "If Neha could do it, so could I," Sunita noted.

Ratneshwar, the younger brother of the RHP in Village Madhopur, also wished to start a school but did not feel efficacious to do so. After listening to *Taru* and particularly being influenced by characters like Shashikant, Taru, and Neha, he was able to realize his dreams: "I really enjoy teaching children. After listening to *Taru*, I turned this dream into reality." Ratneshwar's School, which meets in front of the Tilly Center, is attended by 25 to 30 children aged 10 to 12 years. Ratneshwar charges a minimum admission fee.

Affectively oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which an audience member identifies with a particular media character, and believes that his/her interests are joined (Burke, 1945). The stronger the identification, the more likely that character's behavior will affect the audience member. Soni in Village Abirpur exemplified this identification: "I love Taru. She is so nice. I also like Shashikant. When Taru is sad, Shashikant makes her laugh. When

Taru is sad. I am sad. When Mangla asks her to not see Shashikant, and Taru feels bad, I feel bad." Audience members view their favorite characters as close personal friends, and become emotionally upset when certain characters face difficult personal situations.

The affective identification may be so strong that audience members adjust their daily schedules to listen to the radio program to maintain an ongoing relationship with their favorite characters. As Dhurandhar Maharaj, a male listener in Abirpur Village, noted: "Every Friday at 8 p.m. I have to be close to my radio. It's like meeting friends." For some audience members, the identification with a character may be so high that they cannot distinguish the fictional character from the actor. For instance, Kumari Neha, a member of the young women's listener group in Abirpur said: "I wish Taru could come to our village. She is so sweet and polite. If I learn so much from hearing her voice, what will she do to me when I see her in person." Neha identifies so strongly with Taru that she cannot make the distinction between the "real" Taru and the real Taru.

Behaviorally oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which individuals overtly react to media characters, for instance, by "talking" to these characters, or by conversing with other audience members about them. Such conversations may influence audience members' thinking about an educational issue and motivate them to change their behavior in a specific way. The centrality of interpersonal or group interaction to behavior change has been documented by various researchers (Auwal & Singhal, 1992; Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1995, 1997; Rogers & Kincaid, 1981). The present study, however, draws attention to a specific type of interpersonal communication that creates opportunities for collective efficacy (discussed later in the present chapter).

Katz, Liebes, and Berko (1992) argued that parasocial interaction can prompt referential involvement on the part of audience members. Referential involvement is the degree to which an individual relates a media message to his/her personal experiences (Papa et al., 2000; Sood & Rogers, 2000). Before audience members consider behavior change as a result of observing or listening to a media character, they must be able to relate the experiences of the character to their own personal lives. If a connection cannot be made between the lives of a character and the experiences of an audience member, behavior change would certainly seem less likely for that individual.

Usha Kumari, a college girl in Abirpur, is indebted to *Taru* for making her strong and inspiring her to implement her dreams: "There are many moments when I feel that Taru is directly talking to me. Usually at night. She is telling me 'Usha you can follow your dreams.' I feel she [Taru] is like my elder sister . . . and giving me encouragement. I thank her for being with me" (personal conversation, September 4, 2002). Usha's uncle, Manoj Maharaj, is Abirpur's village RHP and treats villagers for minor ailments. Usha was fascinated by the sight of her uncle giving injections and dreamed that one day she would be

able to serve her people's health needs. However, it was difficult to implement as the movement of young, unmarried women is considered inappropriate in her village. Impressed with the boldness of Taru to fight social obstacles, Usha went through an important change in her personal life: "Previously I lacked in self-confidence, but I have slowly gotten out of my shell. I am learning how to administer medication, including injections and saline drips, from my uncle" (personal communication, September 4, 2002). Usha estimated that between June to August, 2002 (a three-month time-period), she administered over 200 injections.

Many young women listeners of *Taru* say they are "transformed." Meenakshi, a 16-year-old listeners' group member in Madhopur, talked "on camera" in front of her parents about the importance of using a condom to protect oneself from HIV infection. She also mentioned that she would encourage her partner to use condoms when appropriate. Meenakshi noted: "I learned this information about HIV/AIDS from the episodes of *Taru*. After listening to these episodes, I took a decision that I will discuss how to protect oneself from AIDS with my friends and family members." Meenakshi's desire to openly discuss information on sex-related topics in Madhopur Village is remarkable, given that such topics are taboo.

In sum, exposure to *Taru* led to parasocial interaction between certain audience members and characters in the soap opera. How did these parasocial relationships prompt peer conversations among listeners?

Social Learning Through Peer Conversations

Our data provide numerous examples of how *Taru* stimulated conversations among listeners, creating a social learning environment for social change. Social learning is particularly important in entertainment-education because the intention of E-E message designers is to change audience members' perceptions and behaviors by providing audience members with examples of behaviors that are socially desirable or undesirable (Bandura, 1977, 1997). The characters are designed to be appealing or unappealing to audience members. Involvement with these characters often prompts discussions among audience members concerning the socially desirable behaviors promoted by an entertainment-education program.

Soni Kumari, a member of the young women's listening club in Kamtaul Village, noted: "Almost 50% of the girls in our High School [out of a total of 300] listen to *Taru*. In fact, we have even painted a wall in our school to promote the listening to *Taru*. Every Monday in School, during the break, we meet to discuss the previously broadcast episode." Vandana Kumari, another listening group member, pointed to a specific result that came out of these discussions: "We discussed in school what to do for our friend . . . She was only 16 when her parents got her married. She stopped coming to school.

We knew she was staying at home. One day, when we saw her father coming to our school, we spoke to our teacher and asked him to convince her father to not keep his daughter at home. Now she has resumed her classes. . . . She will continue to study until she goes to her husband's home in a year or two."

Kumari Ncha, a listening group member in Abirpur Village, noted: "Our discussions of *Taru* have given us strength and confidence. Now I am not shy of speaking in front of my parents. *Taru* taught us that one should always speak sweetly and politely. When you mean well, who can oppose you? Even the devil will melt. We have all told our parents that we will like to go to college, and we will not marry in a household which demands dowry" (personal communication, September 5, 2002).

In Kamitaul Village, family-based conversations between RJP Shailendra Singh, his wife-Sunita, and their two younger daughters and niece (the latter three are members of the young women's listening club) have led to a debunking of several traditional practices that humiliated lower-caste villagers. For instance, when Vandana's elder sister got married in June 2002 (four months after *Taru* had begun its broadcast), Singh purposely invited the village's "untouchables" to attend the wedding. Some of the lower-caste people helped with the wedding arrangements and some even served drinks to the guests. Singh noted: "Several people refused¹⁹ the drink, but most people accepted. I made sure that the servers were properly groomed and wore clean clothes. For those who confronted me later, I told them that I am a doctor, and my profession does not allow me to discriminate" (personal conversation, September 2, 2002).

Audience members can share their similar and different perceptions of the information presented in the media program. They can talk about considering or adopting the socially desirable behaviors that are highlighted in the media program. These interpersonal discussions create a social learning environment in which people learn from one another. Collective efficacy emerges when people share ideas about the social problems facing their system, and discuss ways of confronting resistance to their plans for social change.

Collective Efficacy Stimulated by *Taru*

Our data provided numerous examples of how *Taru* inspired collective efficacy and community action to solve social problems. In Abirpur Village, young female and male members of *Taru* listeners' groups, after seven months of discussion and deliberation, started a school for underprivileged children, inspired by the character of Ncha in the radio serial. Some 50 children attend

¹⁹In India, many continue to believe that the touch of an "untouchable" is impure and inauspicious.

this school regularly, which meets six days a week, from 4 to 6 p.m. in the open air, under a tree near the Titly Center. Young women of 15 to 20 years of age teach these children. Young men helped convince the parents to send their children to school and help with the operational logistics. Establishing the school was a collective act of both young men and women in Abirpur. Such mixed-sex collaboration is highly uncommon in Indian villages. As Sunita Kumari noted: "Before listening to *Taru*, we were shy and uncomfortable in talking to boys. Now that we are in a group, we feel comfortable to talk to them, and we do so on an equal footing."

The rise in collective efficacy among young women listeners of *Taru* is reflected by an incident from author Sharma's video documentation visit to Bihar in December 2002. It is not common for young women to interrupt conversations among men, let alone challenge their veracity. During a male group interview, some young men claimed that, inspired by a *Taru* episode which portrayed the ills of substance abuse, they quit the habit of eating *gutkha* (chewing tobacco). But the young women, who overheard their conversation, aggressively challenged their claim: "These boys are lying. A few may have left the habit, but most of them are just saying this in order to gain fame on the video." The act of challenging the boys openly reflects the collective efficacy gained by the young women's listeners' group in Abirpur Village.

Another example from Abirpur Village demonstrates how an individual's rise in self-efficacy can subsequently spur collective action. After listening to *Taru*, Dhurandhar Maharaj, a 17-years-old Hindu male listener, questioned the caste and religion-based discrimination that was prevalent in Abirpur and decided to do something about it: "When I heard Mangla [Taru's rogue brother] insult Shashikant for his low-caste, I was furious. Then I realized I myself did not mix with the Muslim students in my class. It took me two to three days to muster enough courage to sit next to Shakeel Anwar, who is Muslim. Now Shakeel is my best friend, and all his friends are my friends" (personal conversation, September 3, 2002). Dhurandhar soon realized that Shakeel's younger sister stopped going to school after the eighth grade. Her parents were reluctant to send her to the neighboring town's school without an escort. Dhurandhar, Shakeel, and their half dozen closest friends discussed this problem, and decided to take turns escorting Shakeel's sister. Once this plan was implemented, six other friends of Shakeel's sister, who also had stopped going to school for a similar reason, resumed their schooling. Dhurandhar noted: "Now they go in a group and it does not even matter if we can't escort them on certain days."

The evidence presented here shows that exposure to *Taru* stimulated interpersonal discussions about educational issues and motivated some listeners to engage in collective action to solve community problems. However, our data suggests, consistent with our previous findings of the effects of *Tinka*

Tinka Sarkh in Village Lutsaan, that social change seldom flows directly and immediately from exposure to an entertainment-education media program that prompts parasocial interaction. Instead, audience individuals who are exposed to the program may create a social learning environment in which new behavior options are considered but they discover that change often proceeds in a circuitous manner. What works for a media character may not work so easily in real-life situations in which there is community resistance to new behaviors. Certain community members may develop a sense of collective efficacy in solving a social problem, but the solution they devise may not be effective. Although a person may say that they believe in performing a certain action, these beliefs may not reflect his/her actions.

Nonlinearity of Social Change: Power, Resistance, and Paradoxical Behaviors

Our data provided numerous examples of how existing power structures in the villages can serve as a barrier to social change. Individuals or groups, who wish to undertake a certain ameliorative action, often face resistance from social structures. For instance, in India, caste, gender, and class mediate the extent to which people can overcome restrictions and barriers to progress. Mumbly (1997) situated such "power" as neither simply prohibitive nor productive, but recognizes it as simultaneously "enabling and constraining human thought and action" (pp. 357-358). Indeed, a number of scholars have encouraged examining discursive practices of social system members as they resist and subvert the dominant social order (Burrell, 1993; Gramsci, 1971; Mumby, 1997; Papa et al., 2000).

Both in Abirpur and Kamtaul villages, members of the young women's listeners' club criticized the caste bias of their elders, which prevented them from listening to *Taru* with other friends who belonged to another caste. Initially the young girls felt powerless to oppose these parochial traditions, however, soon they devised ways to subvert them. In Kamtaul, the young women agreed to individually hear the *Taru* episodes at home, and then later discuss them during school break. By August 2002, six months after *Taru's* broadcasts began, they felt efficacious enough to openly gather at the local Tuly Center, or at someone's home, to listen collectively.

Paradox and contradiction are also an integral part of the process of social change (Papa et al., 2000). Since established patterns of thought and behavior are difficult to change, people often engage in an adjustment process until the new behavior patterns are fully internalized. For instance, Manoj Maharaj, RHP of Abirpur Village, talked at great length about how caste-based discrimination was on the ebb in Abirpur. However, in a casual conversation, Maharaj strongly supported other kinds of discrimination. When author Singhal asked him if

Abirpur Village had any people living with AIDS, he said: "There are two AIDS patients in the neighboring village. And he [despite being the sole health provider in the area], will not touch them."

Gender equality was a prominent theme throughout the episodes of *Taru*. One of the most vocal proponents of this theme in Kamtaul Village was Vandana Kumari, the young women quoted at the beginning of this chapter. When author Sharma met with her in December 2002 and asked her if she would spend her future life tending to the *chulha* (mud stove) (implying she would be a home-maker), she said: "I will not tend to the *chulha*. I will use a gas burner." Although Vandana had internalized perceptions about the importance of women to go to college and forge a career, she did not recognize that her views on using the gas burner versus the *chulha* contradicted this professed support for women as being more than homemakers.¹¹

So power, resistance, and paradoxical thinking were apparent in our *Taru* research sites as people struggled with social change. *Taru* played an important role in stimulating these effects. Conversations that support behavior change are important, even if that talk is not always supported by subsequent action. As Rushton (1975, 1976) observed, words alone can exert influence on the behavior of others. Thus, a mother who talks to her daughter about gender equality may influence her daughter to further her formal education, even though the mother still acts under patriarchal dominance. For instance, Neeraj Kumari, a family listeners' group member in Abirpur Village, who plays the role of a traditional *bahui* (daughter-in-law), tending to the needs of her in-laws, husband, and two young children, noted: "My life is the way it is. But my children will marry whom they want... we will not give or take dowry." Gudiya, a young listener in Madhopur, said: "I don't know how life will turn out for me, but I will definitely make my daughter like *Taru*."

CONCLUSIONS

The *Taru* Project is intended to improve access to health services provided by rural medical practitioners in remote areas of Bihar State and to empower radio listeners in small listening groups. Our results suggest that when people organize themselves around a common purpose (in this instance, listening to a radio soap opera), the interactions help stimulate reflection, debate, and action, which may not occur for an individual listener. When individuals organize in small groups to take charge of their lives, they shift community norms, which may make the social change more sustainable.

¹¹Weick (1979) argued that this type of paradox emerges when a person does not recognize that her ideas within one system (for example, homemaking) contradict his/her ideas within another system, such as gender equality.

In this study, we learned that F-E programs can spark processes of individual and social change through the formation of parasocial relationships between audience members and media characters. Audience members consider changes in their own behavior based on what has worked or not worked for media characters. F-E programs can also initiate a process of social learning as audience members talk among themselves and consider behavior change at the individual and collective level. Some of this social learning may inspire collective action as audience members work together to improve community life (as illustrated by the newly established open-air school in Village Abirpur).

However, individual and social change is rarely a simple, linear process. Audience members may encounter powerful forces of resistance as they attempt to change power dynamics in a community. In addition, attempts to change behavior are often fraught with paradoxes and contradictions that point to the difficulty of altering entrenched actions within complex communities. Despite these difficulties, our findings suggests that synergistic possibilities for social action emerge when entertainment-education broadcasts are integrated with community-based group listening and locally available health care services.

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