



GAON CONNECTION: THE RURAL MOUTHPIECE

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Abstract: We live in an age where there information is available at just a click. But things are not same in rural areas. There are places in India where people are still unknown about the basic information. Media has also ignored the rural population. Regional and national newspapers carry news items that have relevance in urban India.

But now it's time for a change; change for the betterment of rural India. Now, the rural people no longer have to be isolated from the outer world, a world full of technology. Instead, people would be able to have an access to information. In a nutshell, they would have access to the possibility of aimproved life. And this would be achieved by a new initiative- Gaon Connection, initiative taken by Neelesh Mishra, Founder & Editorial Director of the newspaper.

Gaon Connection – India's first and biggest rural newspaper which fills the gap between the unemployed and the jobs, between the poor & outdated farming conditions and new farming practices, between the needy and the opportunities, between social backwardness and social reforms. Miracles can happen, once both the poles are bridged. And Gaon Connection intends to do the same task of bridging. Gaon Connection was started in Dec 2012 is a 12 page all color broadcast newspaper priced at Rs 5, printed on imported newsprint, and brings together reportage, beneficial information, rural culture, rural problems, interviews, sports, government schemes, agricultural reporting, rural food, information from make-up advices for women and men, to the precautions needed while buying insurance, and how to use new mobile applications. It is now available in the form of print media, digital media, social media and mass media. The Gaon Connection newspaper, currently, has a presence in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand and is planning to expand its content footprints to all Hindi-speaking states soon. The paper is self-financed, and not for profit, although it does not strictly follow the NGO model. India lives in its villages. Gaon Connection attempts to empower rural people by making them up-to-date and give a voice to their concerns.

Keywords: Gaon Connection, Rural communication and Media, Rural Newspaper.

Introduction: Media plays a key role in anything from the beginning of wars to the way people live their day-to-day life. Media have a significant impact on what is considered important in a society, by focusing on certain events and persons and avoiding other ones. Media, now a day, is playing an excellent role in making and shaping of public beliefs and strengthening of society. Media, which is also known as the sword-arm of democracy, commands awe and respect of country as well as people. It is the most effectual instrument which has the potential to bring the downfall of the despotic rulers of the world. It is the most influential investigative system that exposes the injustice, inequality, partiality, oppression, and misdeeds of society. But, media is focused to urban areas and paid news, ignoring the problems of rural parts of the country.

Neelesh Mishra, founder of Gaon Connection, started a newspaper specially for rural people. The daily fills the gap between the unemployed and the jobs, between the poor & outdated farming conditions and new farming techniques, between social backwardness and social reforms; basically between the needy people and the opportunities. Wonders can happen, once the two ends are bridged. And Gaon Connection intends to accomplish the same task of bridging.

Literature Review: Jain and Singh (2013) The Study proposed that the newspapers being a part of a common man's life have a vital role to play in creating awareness about the knowledge society. Based on the present study, it can be said that at present their contribution may not be in very important quantum, but the newspapers are not completely shrugging their responsibility to create awareness about the concepts regarding the knowledge society. They lack in providing

technical information and frequently using terms like knowledge society, knowledge economy and knowledge management. The bulk of the populace still depends upon newspapers for the internet media can serve only those who know how to use it. For such people who have the quest to know, the newspapers can be a great support.

Sharma (2013) in his article pointed out that modern society shows deep dependence on mass media and is dominated by media in all aspects of life. It is a well-known fact that media has a massive power to shape the attitudes of people in rebuilding of reality. People develop shared construction of reality through mass media. The media-provided interpretations of certain issues have a deep and far reaching impact on the masses. The media has the power to push various problems into the public domain. It is the need of the hour that sustainable development is given priority by the media. Further, the author proposed that mass media has significant role to play since along with legislation, formation of attitude towards sustainable development is required on a large scale which can only be accomplished through media. The media has a social responsibility and active involvement of mass media is important for promoting sustainable development and motivating.

Jain (2003) In his study found that mass media too has not played any important role in information dissemination this can be attribute to the fact that the reach of mass media is more in urban areas. Only the commercial programs are common. The media was largely confined to classes, urban sector and some restricted social groups. But the situation is far different today when media and masses are expected to become intimately knives together thereby demanding media's inherent closes proximity with rural masses and the problem of rural society at a large. With the increasing rural awareness, the media has to establish it credibility, interest and involvement in mobilizing, articulating and exposing the problems of rural people. Media

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programme have to focus rural realities and approach them constructively by motivating all media and other related agencies simplicity involved in the growth and attainment.

There was barely any coverage of rural India, though 70 percent of the population lived there. The infrequent coverage of rural India was restricted to reports on farm suicides and working of panchayats. There was a little coverage of problems faced by people in rural areas about the plurality and diversity that were covered only throughout natural disasters. The fact that climate change was going to affect the present and the future should necessitate it getting continuous and top coverage in newspaper and television channels. Issues such as poverty, child labor, rural education, sanitation, malnutrition, rural-urban divide also needed more attention.

Methodology and Objectives: The study is based on the secondary data which is collected from websites, magazines, newspapers etc. The study is based on following objectives:

1. To study a start-up which has a social impact on rural India.
2. To study a media company that address rural problems.
3. To study the reasons for starting up Gaon Connection.
4. To study the influence of Gaon Connection.

About Gaon Connection: Gaon Connection, started on December 2, 2012 started by Neelesh Mishra and Karan Dalal, is India's first and biggest rural newspaper. It is an effort to give voice to rural India. In an era where Indian media industry focuses on the urban concerns and attempts to give rural people their own voice.

It is a two-way street that provides information to knowledge starved rural people and brings information from there about everything from every day public issues to the role models and from media-dark areas to the urban India. Gaon Connection has various verticals: print, digital, audio and video content. The Gaon Connection team currently operates across Uttar Pradesh,

Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and it's soon expanding its footprints to all Hindi-speaking states. It provides all the useful information related to agriculture, politics, government schemes, technology, rural culture, rural problems, interviews, agricultural reporting, rural food, and information from make-up advices for women and men, to the precautions required while buying insurance, and how to use new mobile applications.

Gaon connection is a bootstrapped venture and has convinced journalists from news channels like NDTV and IBN7 to contribute to the newspaper. Gaon Connection depends upon advertising for its revenues. Initially, Gaon Connection was a weekly newspaper, but later it became a daily newspaper. It covers news and developments in 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh and plans to document happenings in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand in the near future. Besides the rural population, the venture plans to tap rural immigrant in cities like Mumbai and Delhi. This will help them stay connected to their roots and might help in bringing the talent back to village when they spot opportunities in their villages.

They are also planning to translate the newspaper in English. Also, on cards is an audio newspaper, which will be a big step for Gaon Connection to proliferate and broaden its reach. It will be a subscription based model available on mobile phones that will mostly current headlines from rural India. An edition in English every week will help people from across the world tune into news from rural India, says Neelesh of his ambition for the venture.

Gaon Connection has a financial support of THE INDEPENDENT AND PUBLIC SPIRITED MEDIA FOUNDATION (IPSMF), backed by Mr Azim Premji and other notable philanthropists. IPSMF encourages excellence in independent, public-spirited and socially impactful journalism and has been supporting Gaon Connection Private Limited for the purpose of reporting and publishing stories of public interest.

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The Swayam Project: The Swayam Project is Gaon Connection's outreach programme to generate thousands of young rural leaders at the grassroots level to become community journalists, entrepreneurs, and change makers. Their vision is to build the Swayam Project over a period of time into a global case study. Swayam Festival targets higher secondary female and male students, college students, women from Self Help Groups, Asha health workers, farmers, A&Ms, etc. The events are held in schools and colleges, in community centers, at hospital compounds, etc. They have a vast range – from martial arts classes for girls to soil testing for farmers to test drives of motor cycles and tractors sessions with legal experts on dealing with domestic violence to sampling GEC TV shows and news channel contents.

Gaon Connection is actively engaged in and runs ground activation through a big community outreach programme ("Swayam Project") which generates community journalists. It works with farmers club, schools, self-help groups and other community bodies in remote, media-dark areas across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand to help rural people become powerful voices for their communities as community journalists. The venture aims to build the Swayam Project into a global case study – the largest communication programme of its kind in the world, across states and multiple languages which has demonstrated practicable solution, resolving issues and bridging the gap of knowledge which is presently a visible issue faced by rural India.

Awards Won by Gaon Connection: Gaon Connection won major journalism awards and earned acclaim for their work.

1. Neelesh Mishra, Founder, and Manish Mishra, Associate Editor, won India's biggest journalism honour, the Ramnath

Goenka Award for 2012 in the category "Uncovering Invisible India".

2. Dr. S B Misra, Editor-in-Chief, won the UNFPA-backed Laadli Award in "Best Editorial" category for North India.
3. Anu Singh Choudhary, Roving Writer, won the Ramnath Goenka Award for her work in the category of Sports Journalism in 2013.
4. Britain's Thomson Foundation selected Gaon Connection Principal Correspondent among 12 journalists from developing countries for high quality journalism.
5. In April 2015, Germany's radio broadcaster Deutsche Welle selected the Gaon Connection website among 14 worldwide websites hailed for "Best Online Activism" in the "Social Change" category.
6. Laadli award for writing on gender (five times in all) won, apart from the editor in chief, by Anu Singh Choudhary, Shrinkhala Pandey and Devanshu Mani Tripathi.

Conclusion: Gaon Connection seems to be one of the only start-up which provides all kinds' information to the grass root of India whether its agriculture or health or technology or solutions to the rural problems or government schemes or social issues, etc. And Gaon Connection is truly a media company which focuses on rural problems which is ignored by any other media company of the country.

Reference:

1. Gaon Connection's website.
2. Your Story website: Gaon Connection: Giving a voice to rural India
3. First Post website: Gaon Connection: A paper dedicated to India's villages
4. The Quint website: Gaon Connection completes five years of rural journalism
5. Live mint website: Neelesh Mishra- How I spend my year