

TRADITIONAL FOLK MEDIA: EFFECTIVE MEDIA FOR COMMUNICATION IN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract

The role of communication in today's progressive world has become very significant and specialised. Due to India's high illiteracy rate and poverty, mass media alone cannot reach the millions of people in rural areas. Very few people in rural areas have regular access to television, newspaper and the internet; therefore, the modern mass media's reach is limited to urban areas. As a result, education, information and entertainment do not reach the masses in rural and remote areas. The modern mass media is glamorous, impersonal and unbelievable and therefore not suitable for preserving the cultural heritage of India. It is also not suitable for promoting folk performing traditions and arts. On the other hand, the folk media has a remarkable impact on the rural community due to its cultural values, acceptable idioms and functional significance. It can easily overcome the language barriers, difficulties of speech and words. With the help of traditional folk media, social change and nation-building are very much possible. Traditional Folk media can easily carry social issues related to rural development and convey them to the masses. Therefore, it is essential to keep our traditional media alive and cautiously and continuously preserve and safeguard it from the adverse effects of globalisation. This paper aims to analyse the role of folk media as an effective tool of communication in rural areas. It also studies the role of folk media in conservation of cultural heritage and nation building.

Key Words: Folk, Media, Communication, Rural, Traditional, Mass

INTRODUCTION

Life in rural areas is a torment. Rugged terrain and unpleasant weather conditions, long distances, the inadequacy of basic amenities like water, non-availability of infrastructure and resources like roads and rails, electricity, modern gadgets make life an ordeal. Even after so many predicaments, life there does not lose its charm. The villagers live a very colourful, musical and picturesque life. People there are deep-rooted in their cultural traditions and are very close to nature. Despite all electronic, print and digital media, the charm of folk media has not faded. Instead, they have been performing efficiently along with one another and strengthening each other in the process. In rural areas, access to other mass media is limited as the illiteracy rate is very high. Hence, traditional folk media is the most effective form of communication as it is more personal and intimate. It is closer to the hearts and minds of the rural people and appears to be the leading media of communication for rural people.

METHODOLOGY

Study of various data and content available in books, research journals and websites etc, helped to create a theoretical framework for the research paper. Analyses of the various strategies and initiatives by the Government and Non-Governmental organizations also helped me decide the course of my study.

DISCUSSION

TRADITIONAL FOLK MEDIA

70 - 80 per cent of a country's population live in rural areas. Therefore, it is difficult for mass media such as newspapers, television, and the internet to reach the masses effectively. Moreover, as per many research studies, these media have less impact on the rural people in motivating change and development. Also, the low literacy rate impedes the development of almost 80% of India's population in rural areas. However, traditional media and folk art have proved their excellence in creating bonding among the people. In conventional societies, art is an integral part of the process of living. Therefore, folk media plays an essential role in communicating with the people of rural communities and delivering modern messages.

Traditional folk media is a term that denotes people's performances. It represents communication employing verbal, vocal, musical and visual folk-art forms transmitted to a community or group of communities from one generation to another. For millions of people living in rural areas to whom information is to be quickly communicated, mass media channels do hold an attraction, but often enough, they hide the message. Therefore, a premium is now being put on traditional folk performances, which were once considered ancient and outdated. Traditional folk media have been deliberately convinced to flourish to give a personal touch to the otherwise impersonal mass media programmes. It has emerged as an effective mass media in preventing the illiterates and the tribal from continuous exploitation, as they do not understand the language of modern communication.

As traditional folk media is a personal form of entertainment, behavioural changes are quickly brought about by personal interaction. Traditional folk media has played a meaningful role in the development of our country and has constantly proved to be highly influential with the rural masses. Today also folk

media is the leading media of communication for rural people. Various forms of traditional folk media are still alive today. Some of them are discussed below.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF TRADITIONAL FOLK MEDIA

A traditional media form can be anything that does the purpose of communication in a family, amongst friends, and as a whole in society. All the forms may not be popular, but they help to communicate (*Traditional and Modern*)

Folk media can be broadly categorised into the following:

Nagada: This is one of the most popular forms of communication. People announce by beating a NAGADA/Drum with the sticks and communicating messages from one village to another through its beats (Fig 1).



Fig 1: Nagada

Puppetry: Puppetry is a popular form of traditional media that exist in rural areas of India. It is a very ancient art form that originated about 3000 years ago. The most popular forms of puppetry are shadow puppetry and string puppetry. Puppets have been used to animate and communicate the ideas and needs of human societies since the earliest times. They have been employed to teach children physiology, hygiene, civics, history, geography and poetry, claiming that the subjects are remembered more quickly. Puppets are being used in physiotherapy, psychotherapy to educate children, encourage scientific methods of farming, promote fertilisers, and deal with a host of social problems (Mathiyazhagan et al.)To promote various government, semi-government and

private projects, the song and drama division also makes extensive use of puppets in its campaigns (Fig 2).



Fig 2: Puppetry

Patachitra katha: *Patta* means cloth, and *Chitra* means picture. Hence, *Pattachitra* is a picture painted on a piece of cloth and stories were told through this medium. This form of art is closely related to the cult of Shri Jagannath and the temple traditions in Puri(Roshni Subudhi). It is one of the most prominent living art forms, and people in Odisha practice it to this day. It is believed to have originated as early as the 12th century (Fig 3).

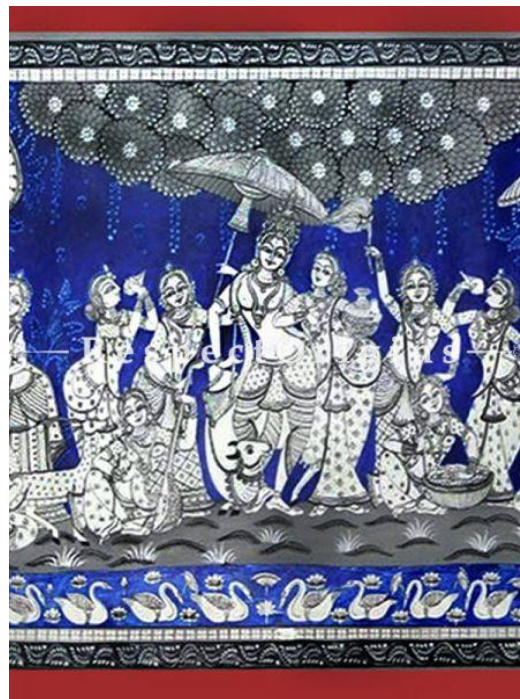


Fig 3: Patachitra Katha

Story telling: Story Telling is another engaging form of traditional media that existed when advanced forms of communication such as the written word did not exist. For example, historical stories of various local heroes who fought battles and participated in the freedom struggle were performed through song and drama. These were not written or documented. Instead, they were orally communicated from one house to another or one village to another. They kept the stories alive. 'Harikatha' and 'Kabigan' are some famous forms of storytelling, which played a vital role in communicating historical and epic stories.

Nautanki: Of all the major folk theatres in India today, Nautanki is one of the most popular folk operatic theatre performance traditions of South Asia, particularly in northern India (Mathiyazhagan et al.). It was the single most Traditional Media of Communication before the advent of Cinema and a popular form of entertainment in the villages and towns of northern India. In the villages People prefer to listen to stories woven around current issues that affect them; for instance, the ill-effects of outdated social traditions like dowry, side effects of agricultural pesticides, unemployment and poverty, and women's empowerment (Mathiyazhagan et al.). In the last few decades, new Nautankis are focused on contemporary social issues such as health, HIV/AIDS, women's empowerment, dowry, immigration, and family planning. They deal with various subjects such as adulterated food, the dowry system, black money, and the challenges faced by the women inside and outside the home. The messages are masked by humour. The programmes that are done in the nautanki style are also broadcasted and presented live (Fig 4).



Fig 4: Nautanki

Fairs and festivals: It includes social, ritual, and ceremonial gatherings. It is a platform created to meet and exchange views among people. Every festival signifies liveliness, colour, high spirit, devotions, and peace, power and humanity messages. Certain fairs and festivals are culture as well as region specific for e.g., Durga Puja (Fig 5), a major festival of West Bengal, Baisakhi in Punjab, Ganesh Chaturthi in Maharashtra, Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Onam in Kerela etc.(Mathiyazhagan et al.). Fairs and Festivals are occasions where the exchange of messages, greetings, sweets, selection of boys and girls for marriages take place, and communication becomes more effective, practical and action-oriented.



Fig 5: Durga Puja

Folk dances: These dances vary from one region to another. For example, there are various tribal dances in the north eastern region, Orissa and Gujarat, and every tribe has a diverse dance form, dress, accessories, symbols and motifs. Folk dances (Fig 5), are form of expression, performed to reflect the happiness, sorrow and different mood of the society and have evolved and become a folk dance over the years, bringing the uniqueness and novelty to the Indian culture(“Careerpower”).



Fig 6: Folk Dance

Traditional paintings, wall paintings, inscriptions, statues and stupas: They have played an important role in delivering ideas and culture from one generation to another.

The above-discussed media are only broad categorizations. There exist many regional variations.

STRENGTH OF FOLK MEDIA

In the past few decades, traditional folk media have come into the limelight in our country. Since these art forms are woven into the social and cultural fabric of the rural society, their role in educating the non-school population is significant. At one level, they act as an effective channel of communication. At another level, they give expression to people's lifestyle and preferences through the spoken word, songs, plays and spontaneous choreography. They have lived and grown with the rural people, and so the rural masses, without any inhibition, get involved in their game and emerge more relaxed and sounder informed (*Traditional and Modern*).

There are many advantages of traditional folk media to inform and educate the rural illiterate, including women. Field experiments have shown that the probability of selected traditional folk media is very high in persuading and even motivating the rural individual. They are readily available and economically viable. As this media is rich in variety, it is relished by men and women of all age groups. They have all the confidence of the rural masses as they are LIVE. They share a familiar world of emotions, ideals and dreams with the rural masses. Above all,

Traditional folk media are in a 'face to face situation' between the communicator and the receiver of the message, which energises discussion that may lead to conviction and motivation (*Traditional and Modern*). If used properly, and wisely, folk media may come to prove to be one of the most relevant, easy, and effective media through which government and private agencies may produce responsible, aware, and advanced citizens in our country which in turn may help in building a strong nation(Kumar).

LIMITATIONS OF MASS MEDIA

Despite meticulous efforts, the print medium has not reached villages to the desired extent due to illiteracy. However, they are capable of conveying the

message through caricatures, cartoons, symbols, photographs and emblems. However not to the extent of the printed words.

On the other hand, radio has made its way into distant rural homes, but perhaps it is more a box of entertainment than information. The radio is a one-way-track to the villager, bringing messages from an unknown and unfamiliar source. To the rural illiterate, "to see is to believe" and so, the sound medium is urbane and impersonal to him (*Traditional and Modern*).

Television has made its presence felt in the country though there is a limitation of coverage. When equipped with imagination, the medium is expected to revolutionise the living style of the rural inhabitants with new and tested inputs of information in agriculture, education and health (*Traditional and Modern*). Television is an audio-visual medium that is way too glamorous to the rural illiterate. The message that is to be conveyed gets overwhelmed by the glamour. While watching the television, the innocent rural viewer finds more entertainment than information. Also, it is far too expensive.

The cinema enjoys tremendous popularity and has been influencing rural communities in changing over to the urban lifestyle. Films are packed with action. Nevertheless, the medium has remained static concerning ever-changing themes like population control (*Traditional and Modern*).

CONCLUSION

The traditional folk media in India is used as a supplement to the mass media rather than the centre of communication to reach most of the country's population who live in the villages. However, when compared to urban-based mass media, the rural-based folk media were found to enjoy greater credibility with rural audiences. They include important messages in their performances in such a way that the people can easily understand and accept them.

Traditional Performing art has a contextual base, is functional and interpersonal, making it easier to carry the message of change, development and growth. Any other medium of mass communication cannot perform or execute in the same way. Even though we have several advanced medium and forms of communications today, yet the importance of traditional folk media must not be neglected.

In India, the traditional folk media has been very effective and powerful in addressing the masses and communicating. They have succeeded in communicating the country's latest development and bringing about the desired changes and awareness among people. These art forms and traditions have a long-lasting impact on the culture and society. Though economic liberalizations, modern faces and globalization has profoundly impacted our cultural heritage, honour and traditions, folk media has still significantly contributed to promoting social integrity of cultural diversity and nation-building.

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