Folk Media and Rural Development

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ABSTRACT

The Indian society is a complex social system with different caste classes' creeds and tribes. The high rate of illiteracy added to the inadequacies of mass media to reach almost 80% of people who resides in village. In spite of the national literacy missions and campaigns, over 350 millions remain illiterate; suspect anything in terms of modernity. To them, mass media prove too glamorous impersonal and unbelievable in context with the villagers' could not only see and here but also even touch. The proposed study is an attempt to ensure the use of Traditional media to reach the common people in the process of change and development of the country.

Rural development means as overall development of rural areas social, economic, political and cultural - so that the people are to lead a pleasant life. Agriculture plays the most important and decisive role in rural development. Infact, nobody can deny this fact that most of the population in India is still living in villages and their livelihood is depending on agriculture. Therefore, we rightly say that India is an agricultural country. Any development, which does not touch the vast masses, cannot be justified. The goals of rural economic growth in the narrow sense but as balanced social and economic development, with emphasis on the equitable distribution as well as creation of benefits. Therefore, the development strategy should be such through which the development of the rural population and rural areas is directed towards a total development of the people and their environment through concerted action. The contribution in development process is well accepted though its precise nature, extent an mechanism still largely elude proper understanding.

The importance of communication in mobilizing people and seeking their willing participation in the development of a country is well

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recognized. In India, this concern above reaching people, communicating with them and equipping them with new skills has been emphasized over and again in successive five year plans which provide the blue print of the country’s planned development. No one would question the fact that India has made substantial progress since independence.

The development and communication infrastructure has been enormously expended. The resultant communication and development processes have been strengthening and supporting each other taking the country forward. At the same time it is also a fact on which not many people would disagree, that both development and communication scholars to study this question in detail and depth and suggest approaches and methods for more equitable and participatory communication and development.

Structural Change in Folk Performing Art:

The first significant international recognition of the traditional media in the communication and the development strategies of developing countries came in 1972 when the International Planned Parenthood Federation and UNESCO organised in London a series of meetings on the integrated use of the folk and the mass media in family planning communication programmers. The interest generated by these meetings and the continued effort to highlight the folk media as effective forms to convey developmental messages resulted in a number of seminars and workshops around the world.

The development of rural India is certainly associated with the dialogue or communication that we are providing them. Tradition plays and important role in a creative artistic process particularly in the field of folk performing arts. Folk art is a functional and spontaneous. Every village has its relevant music, dance or theatre. The folk performing art is changing its structure continuously over centuries modifying itself to the needs of the changing situation making it functionally relevant to the society. Tradition is the process of the transmission of age - values and the contextual manifestation and interpretation of the universal.

As Guru Dev Rabinder Nath Tagore, in his famous “Swadeshi Samaj” speech in july/1904 advocated “all traditional structure of art must have sufficient degree of elasticity to allow it to respond to varied impulses of life, delicate or virile, to grow with its growth, to the traditional performing art is an aesthetic object, the concept of belongingness and affinity in cultural context. The folk art forms satisfy our innate need for self
expression, for moral instruction combined with entertainment, and for the dramatic and the lyrical. The traditional forms preserving and disseminate in lively manners, the tradition and culture of our forefathers.

The Indian society is a complex social system with different caste classes’ creeds and tribes. The high rate of illiteracy added to the inadequacies of mass media to reach almost 80% of people who resides in village. Insipite of the national literacy missions and campaigns, over 350 millions remain illiterate; suspect anything in terms of modernity. To them mass media prove too glamorous impersonal and unbelievable in context with the villagers’ could not only see and here but even touch. Traditional media can be used to reach these people in the process of change and development of the country.

**Traditional folk forms potential as rural media**

Traditional folk forms in India can be effectively utilised for social developmental communication. The communication potential of India traditional performing art has been proved time and again by many instances of national importance. In fact, as Badal Sirckar, the noted Bengali play writer admits rather candidly, He borrows elements from the folk dreams as a matter of “expediency”.

Realizing the importance and powerfulness of this medium, the first five-year plan projected that people in the rural areas should be approached through traditional forms in addition to electronic media for publicity purpose. In later years, the UNESCO picked it up. The traditional forms of communication constitute a potential source for conveying messages for economic and social development. Communities and individuals have utilized a vide range of media local fares, puppet shows, street theatre folk songs and ballads for social purposes and as a support to local development schemes for health and family welfare campaigns, for creating political awareness.

The traditional media are close to the hearts and minds of the people, so there appeal is a personal, intimate level, Further familiar format and content, as also the colloquial dialects used. Make the clarity in communication cross-cultural communication hurdles are not encountered here. The numerous groups and different forms available for specific homogenous groups and for specific purposes can be exploited to cater to people of different region. Rapport is immediate and directs the barriers to communication non-existent.
“AHLA”, the popular ballad of Uttar Pradesh and its counterparts like “LAAVANI” of Maharastra, “GEE-GEE” of Karnataka, “VILLUPAATTU” of Tamil Nadu and “KAVIGAN” of Bengal which changed their content and focus depending on the contemporary needs and were effective in arousing the conscience of the people against the colonial rule of the British. The traditional media became effective in many political and social campaigns launched by Mahatma Gandhi.

Like wise, the eminent Tamil poet “Subramanya Bharti” started using folk music to invoke patriotic feelings. Folk tunes were used to popularise songs on glories of spinning wheels need to boycott British goods. After the independence the union government continued to utilise these traditional performing arts to convey the message and to generate awareness of development in the rural areas.

In 1940’s, IPTA (Indian People Theatre Association), successfully handled some of the popular regional theatre forms like “Jaatra” of Bengal, “Bhavai” of Gujrat, “Tamasha” of Maharashtra and “Burkatha” of Andhra Pradesh to increase social awareness and political education. Mukunde Das and Utpal Dutt used the medium of Jaatra for inculcating the spirit of patriotism and political awareness among the masses of Bengal. Shahir Sable, P.L. Deshpande, Habib Tanveer, Balwant Gargi, Gurusaran Singh, Rattan Thiyam used it as technique of generating national identity and social awareness among the Indian masses.

Careful Investigation of Folk Media

The Folk media in India seems to be used as supplement to the mass media rather than as the centre of communication efforts to reach 80% of India’s total population who live in the villages. In India, mass media continue to be limited largely to the urban population traditional arts forms have survived for centuries and they will survive in future for their flexibility. They could be the media for the social change in rural India. Traditional performing art being functional, Inter-personal and having a contextual base would be able to carry the message of change, development and growth. We have various folk forms in our country, which are very much alive today. We can see it in our cultural heritage. All these need careful investigation, study and documented after serious investigation; their characteristics have to be studied; creative people should be exposed to the structure of the form and the aesthetics of the content they carry; they should also know the techniques of creative communication.

Noted folk media expert Shyam Parmar observes that “The communication needs in India are much greater than the resources we
have to meet them today. While the mass media have been constantly expanding, the traditional media have been playing an important role in this field due to our peculiar needs. Apart from these live programs with face-to-face communication the traditional folk forms have been used in programs over the electronic media. India’s role in identifying folk media for communication purposes has been quite positive. The experience can certainly be of comparative use of both the developing and under developed countries if proper results if these efforts became available through scientific surveys”. Unlike in western theatre, folk performance is a composite art in India. It is a total art with fusion elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic ballad recitation, religion and festival peasantry. It imbibes ceremonials, rituals, belief and social system. It has deep religious and ritualistic overtones and the again, it can surely project social life, secular themes and universal values.

The outcome of various researchers has established the importance of rural media in development communication. Traditional uses of folk media were primarily for entertainment, social communication and persuasive communication. There have been sporadic efforts to involve folk media for conveying development messages through mass-media agencies. International commission for the study of communication problems, the commission, also popularly known Mac Bride Commission, was established by UNESCO to study among issues as increasing importance attached to communication as a social phenomenon and the consequent interest shown in the development communication. One of the important recommendations of the commission regarding the traditional folk forms is:

“Even when modern media have penetrated isolated areas, the older forms maintain their validity, particularly when used to influence attitudes, instigate action and promote change. Extensive experience shown that traditional forms of communication can be effective in dispelling the superstitions, archaic perceptions and unscientific that people have inherited as part of traditions and which are difficult to modify if the benefits of change are hard to demonstrate. Practitioners of the traditional media use a subtle form of persuasion by presenting the required message in locally popular artistic forms. This can not be rivalled by any other means of communication.” (Many voices-one world)

It is true that if we want to penetrate the message of development among the rural masses we would have to opt the folk forms of this country in more planned manner. As veteran folk media scholar Balwant Garhgi rightly said “Folk media represents the people in their natural habitat,
with all their contradictions and multifarious activities. It gives a glimpse of their style of speech, music, dance, dress and wisdom. It contains of reach store of mythological heroes, medieval romances, chivalric tales, social customs, beliefs, and legends. In order to understand the colourful diversity and unity of India, it’s important to see the folk theatre in its natural settings.

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