



FOLK MEDIA IN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

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INTRODUCTION

The human urge to express, communicate, and share something beautiful gave birth to performing arts such as folk and traditional media. Folk performing arts have changed structure continuously over centuries according to the needs of changing situations but without losing their functional relevance to society.

IMPORTANCE OF FOLK MEDIA IN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

Ninety percent of the world's population lives in developing countries and 70% of them live in rural areas. Mass media such as newspapers, television, and the internet still do not effectively reach these people. Moreover, many research studies show that these media do not have the required impact in terms of motivating change and development. In addition, high rate of illiteracy impedes the development of almost 80% of India's population who reside in the rural areas. However, folk arts and traditional media have proved their excellence in bonding and creating affinity in the community as demonstrated by community festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi in Maharashtra and Lohri in Punjab. In traditional societies, art is an integral part of the process of living in the community.

Thus, Folk media can play a vital role in communicating to and with the people, particularly, in rural areas, including the modern messages. They can be effective mass media for preventing the tribals and the illiterates from continuous exploitation, as they do not understand, the language of modern communication. In India folk forms have special significance as mass media. People in remote rural and tribal areas do not have an access to the modern media and it does not reach these target groups. Here, folk forms of communication can help immensely in dissemination of the messages emitted by the electronic media.

For social change and development, a change in the beliefs and the value systems of individuals is required to make them more adaptive and responsive to any change, be it a technological change or societal change. The role of a development communicator is to find communicative ways to influence these beliefs and value systems. The communication potential of Indian traditional performing arts has been proven throughout history: Alha, the popular ballad of Uttar Pradesh in battles, and its counterparts like Laavani of Maharashtra, Gee-gee of Karnataka, Villupaattu of Tamil Nadu, and Kabigan of Bengal were effective in arousing the conscience of the people against the colonial rule of the British. Traditional media became effective in the many political and social campaigns launched by Mahatma Gandhi. After independence, the



Union government continued to utilise these traditional performing arts to convey messages and generate awareness of development programmes in the rural areas.

The 1974 New Delhi seminar of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) focused specifically on the potential of the various forms of traditional media and the technique of their production as well as their integration with mass media for motivational purposes. This seminar generated a number of guiding principles on how to use traditional or folk media for motivational purposes and for promoting development programmes.

The significance of folk arts in social and political communication was felt and recognised by Jawaharlal Nehru who once said, "I am greatly interested in the development of a people's theatre in India. I think there is a great room for it, provided it is based on the people and their traditions. Otherwise it is likely to function in the air. It is a people's approach. Nevertheless, I think an effort should be made in the direction." (IPTA Bulletin, 1943)

Folk media should be an integral part of any communication programme for rural development. Wherever possible, these should be integrated with mass media but in all cases, integration with ongoing extension work is vital.

VARIOUS FORMS OF FOLK MEDIA

Folk performance in India is based on ceremonial rituals, beliefs of the society, religious and social values. Moreover, instead of one single art it is a combination of multiple things like music, dance, events or epics in poetic form. It is very common in festivals like Dussehra and Durga puja. One type of folk art, puppetry owes its origin to India and has been very effectively used for conveying relevant messages of social awareness, historical and traditional identity, and moral value systems to the masses. Puppet theatre is fully integrated in the rituals and the social background of the rural people in India. Puppet theatre has also shown remarkable staying power as societies have changed with time.

POPULAR USES OF FOLK MEDIA IN INDIA

The Ramalila of Ramnagar near Varanasi is one such example of folk art which currently provides an opportunity for the young and old, rich and poor to come together for 16 to 20 days preceding the Dussehra. Each section of the city constructs raised platforms or transforms streets, terraces, or gardens into palaces, woods, and streams. The whole city is the stage, the arena, of the performance. The play moves sequentially day after day and the audience moves with it from locale to locale.

Puppets are increasingly being used as a strategy for addressing varied development issues such as educating children, encouraging scientific methods of farming, promoting the use of fertilizers, etc. The Song and Drama Division of the Government of India makes wide use of puppets in its campaigns to promote various government projects, and Life Insurance Corporation of India used puppets to educate the rural masses about life insurance.



During the general elections, members of the various political parties used folk songs for campaigning and presented humorous skits to ridicule the opposition's candidates and win support for their own candidates. Swang and Ragini in Haryana and Tamasha and Lavani in Maharashtra have been extensively used by the political parties.

The folk media in communication programmes can be used not only for political and socio-economic development but also for cultural development. However, folklore must retain social authenticity. The folk forms have evolved gradually, and their flexibility has helped them to retain their appeal to the rural people. Since folk media have sociological roots, their utilisation should be related to local events.

Local cultural programmes, such as folk-songs & dramas, are used as an effective medium of communicating the message of development programmes. Dramatization of a theme or story creates a lively interest among the audience. Folk-songs & dances related to the subjects of local interest & importance, when acted on the stage, bring them home more forcefully. Traditional media, like theatre command immense credibility and impact. They are the most appropriate channels for changing the traditional Indian mind towards modernization.

PREREQUISITES TO THE USE OF FOLK MEDIA

- An understanding of the rural audience
- Careful consideration of its content
- Characterisation for their possible adaptation for development purposes
- Consistency with the needs of the social context
- Integration with the customs and beliefs of the local communities
- Provide rural people with entertainment in order to attract their attention and to ensure their participation in developmental activities
- Efforts should be made to preserve the originality of each folk form, adaptation need not alter nor destroy the form
- For effective community-level communication strategies, the integrated and planned use of both folk and mass media is necessary
- Collaboration between the folk artistes and the media producers is absolutely essential

Peasants, agricultural labourers, bonded labourers, women, tribal, and other oppressed groups are rediscovering the potential of folk and traditional performing arts as a weapon in their struggle for land, better health status, better working and living conditions; and human rights. Many development planners in the Third World are beginning to appreciate the use of folk media as a mode of communication to explain development programmes. Government agencies, international organisations, and donor agencies should progressively use this important and powerful communication tool as a means for mobilising people for economic and social development. They inform, educate and entertain the masses. Folk media, in fact can be used to convey the very ideas of the new communication systems and prepare the masses whole-



heartedly to accept the electronic media when they are ready to go full stream.

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