



Communication for Development- Role of Folk Performing Arts

KEYWORDS

Oral tradition, rural media, face to face communication media, development communication.

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ABSTRACT *The village people of those days spent their times usefully and purposefully. The laborer in agricultural fields and in rural industries sang songs to overcome the weariness of their work. Folk media is a medium through which the soul of a people expresses itself colorfully. Oral tradition and the Performing arts appear to be the main media of communication. Storytellers, singers, minstrels and other kinds of folk entertainers have acted for centuries as sources for the transmission and dissemination of news and information through face-to-face live communication. The folk arts have been used for moral, religious and socio-political purposes in India right from ancient times. Indeed, there have been schools of learning, courts of justice and discussion fore. It must be noted that folk forms have specific, religious, communal, caste wise and linguistic dialects and bear values and associations that need to be taken into account.*

Introduction

In India, folk traditions are used as a vehicle for mass communication. Traditional media are an effective and important part of the communication system. These are unique in nature, as they resemble the day-to-day life pattern of the rural masses. These media are a source of popular entertainment for the rural audience, in addition to providing instruction and information. In folk media, the components such as power, transmitters, receivers, maintenance and technical problems are not arising and this is a major cost saving factor. The sudden realization that the folk media is the most effective form of communication in developing nations has also dawned upon the governments of other countries.

Communication as a concept derived from a Latin word *communicare* which means make common. The import is to share. Today, the concept has evolved into the sharing of ideas either between oneself or between one person and another person or group of persons. Regardless of the form, communication involves designing and sending message; receiving and interpreting message; and reacting to message received. Message of communication could be verbal, non-verbal or both. It is verbal when words alone are used to make expression or share meaning. On the other hand, communication is non-verbal when we use signs, symbols and gestures to communicate. We can also, communicate with words and signs at the same time to make meaning. In this case, the verbal communication is reinforced with the non-verbal codes to achieve emphasis and effectiveness. The implication is that communication is a combination of verbal and non-verbal means of sharing ideas, feelings, opinions and other vital information between individuals, groups and varied audience members.

The word development ranks among the most loosed terms in social science literature. For this reason, professionals in diverse fields of learning tend to perceive development from their various narrow professional points of views. This unit is therefore aimed at discussing some of the different perspectives of development.

• Growth in Gross National Product (GNP) • equitable distribution of income/increased per capita income • poverty reduction and increased output per man • low rate of un-

employment • increase in industrialization and productivity. • Peaceful process of power succession regardless of the pattern of governance • cultural and ethnic integration • greater political tolerance • greater citizen participation in political process and activities. • Enormous respect for fundamental human rights. • Social mobilization i.e. where the units of the society operate in a social climate that encourages solidarity and the spirit of oneness • cultural secularism i.e. where socio-political actions and activities are based on high level of rationality and empiricism.

Relationship between Communication and Development

We have earlier defined communication as the process of sharing meaning, opinions and ideas. We have also defined development as the continuous process of positive change from one condition to the other. The implication is that both communication and development operate as processes, activities that are on-going. However, communication activity or process will be meaningless if the message of communication is not understood by the targets of communication. For this reason, individuals, governments and organization are always in search of better and effective way of communicating with one another, citizens and organizational publics.

Knowledge of development is therefore needed to improve upon communication strategies and infrastructure to make the process of message sharing effective. On the other hand, every development effort needs effective communication to succeed. Since development agents need to work closely with development targets in order to succeed, it follows that both development agents and development targets must understand each other to be effective. This understanding certainly comes from communication.

Various Folk Art Forms Used for Communication

Folk is an ornament of our cultural heritage. Every region of the country has its own distinctive features. India has a great treasure of folk and traditional art forms right from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and Maharashtra to Northeast. These show its socio-religious and philosophical dimension woven artistically and aesthetically into a life experience, presented in a creative and innovative manner. India is a land of innumerable folk / traditional arts.

Folk Arts on Various Movements

The collective memory of an era, the folk culture adopts a form and action and thus assumes a new meaning. The macro text of the epic is brought down to micro situation when it is made relevant to the contemporary society. Traditional folk arts have been carefully cultivated by various movements. India has numerous slum children who are illiterate and poor. More commendable is the work of Ravi Varma of Vikas Lok Manch who with the help of slum children has been creatively interpreting social realities in a way that makes sense to the children.

In Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP), a voluntary non-governmental organization in Kerala organized Science Jatha (Science Procession) in 1977 to spread the message of people’s involvement in the development process. In 1980 and 1981, the Jathas used the folk arts as a medium for conveying the message of science. The main themes were on education, health, environment and social inequality. The repertoire consisted of songs, street dramas and other several forms of folk arts. Other groups like Chipko and Apiko movements that say Ecology is Wealth and create mass awareness about the fragile ecological balance among the villagers have also been instrumental in creating a quiet revolution through the medium of folk arts. Folk Singers of the region played vital role in arousing awareness among the villagers. They composed songs in folk tunes and sang them in the street. Rajasthan Adult Education Association (RAEA) had conducted an experiment in a village Devakishanapura for bringing about a change by using the text of the epics in the present day situation. Ravi Chaturvedi, an ex-student of the National School of Drama sponsored by RAEA had taken up the challenge of using theatre for change.

Advantages of Folk Media

The appeal of Folk media is quite personal and at an intimate level because it has got direct influence on people. As in the case of colloquial dialects the familiar format and content of mass media gives much clarity in communication. The numerous and different forms of mass media can be exploited to cater to the needs of the people for immediate and direct rapport. The folk media is so flexible that new themes can be accommodated in them.

Indian folk forms are a mixture of dialogue, dance, song, clowning, moralizing and prayer. Though the folk media attracts a small audience, the impact on them is at a much deeper level inviting the audience participation. As the moral instruction campaigned is with entertainment. Being dramatic and lyrical, it satisfies our innate need for self expression. The tradition and culture of ancestors are preserved and disseminated by the folk media in a lively manner. From a century wide perspective the folk and traditional media are still the only mass media in the sense that they have their routes in the tradition and experience of a large majority of the population and also that they have a reach much more extensive than any of the modern technological media.

Advantages of the Folk Media over the Electronic Media

The folk media have certain clear-cut advantages over electronic media. The Familiarity, Personal contact, Common Language, Intelligibility, Credibility and Acceptance make the folk media universally acceptable among rural folks. In the electronic media like radio and television messages come out of an impersonal electronic box but in the folk media there is contact between the sender of the message and the receiver.

Component	Folk media	Electronic media
Investment (Finance)	Negligible	Very high
Power	Not Essential	Essential
Receiver sets	Not required	Essential
Maintenance	None	Essential
Technical problems	None	Often
Interpreter	Not Essential	Preferable
Familiarity	Familiar	Familiar
Personal contact	Always	None
Language problems	None	Possible
Credibility factor	Very high	Lower
Audience participation	Very high	Seldom
Flexibility	Very high	Very high
Adult education	More effective	Less so
Repeatability	Easy	Difficult
Reactions	Can be gauged on the spot	Restricted cannot be
Reach	Very wide	Restricted
Attentiveness	On the theme	Can be clouded by novelty
Intelligibility	Very high	Not comparable
Understanding	Universal	Isolated
Acceptance	Universal	Universal
Overall effectiveness	Very high	Not comparable
Programme designing	Easier	More difficult

Conclusion

Being ancient forms of art, the folk media is very close to the heart of the people. Its appeal is universal and its understanding is direct and at personal level. So the folk media can effectively be used as mass communication among realities and urbanities. The folk media have played a very important role in solving several emotional problems and channelizing the destructive forces into constructive ones. In India folk music, folk dances and folk dramas have always played an important role in combating destructive elements and in harmonizing emotional outbursts relating to caste, creed, religion and language issues. Several folk forms of entertainment prevalent in different parts of India were powerful media of public instruction and unifying force for emotional integrity. Various organizations, movements and government bodies can effectively make use of these folk arts for developmental activities.

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