

Mass Communication and Social Change in Rural Areas



Social Science

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ABSTRACT

Traditional media would serve as a great driver to generate awareness among rural citizens. Skits, magic shows and educational drives by NGOs are among the preferred traditional media that developmental agencies can use to good effect. 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 for development in rural areas. Though the folk media attracts a small audience, the impact on them is at a much deeper level inviting the audience participation. There are many organizations all over the country which perform folk arts on topics relevant to the society with the purpose of generating awareness for change.

Introduction

"No man is an island," said the sixteenth century poet, John Donne. By their very essence, human persons have been created as social creatures. Hence, as social beings, persons cannot exist without communicating with one another. Communication is the fabric of life. If you were to ask yourself how you have become what you are, mentally, psychologically, socially, culturally, emotionally and spiritually, you will realise it is only through communication with other human beings. You have developed and will in future continue to develop till you reach the fullness of your personality only through learning from others. This learning will come through communication with them. Hence, communication is a fundamental fact of human existence. It is anthropological reality, essential both for human living as well as for human growth and development.

Mass Communication

Mass communication is communication which uses technical media and is oriented to a vast number of persons, who are not contacted personally. As individuals they are considered only statistically. The individual's identity is lost and communication is considered to be an interaction of groups or large bodies of persons or even one person with large bodies of persons. This mass human communication is effected through mass media. The word "medium" can have different meanings. It can mean the spoken, written, audio-visual, non-verbal language. It can also signify a text or message, formulated in a medium, like a story in a book, a song on the radio, a film in the cinema or a soap opera on TV. The word is also used to express a channel of transport for messages, like a radio broadcast or a television production. Finally, it can also mean a media organisation, producing and sending programmes like a broadcasting station, a newspaper office or a film producing company.

Advertisement

Advertisement is the major source of revenue of many media. In the United States the entire T.V. and radio services are free because of the financial strength provided by rich advertisers. Certain companies finance expensive television shows involving millions of dollars. They recover their expense through getting advertisement during those particular shows. In India, advertisers determine the type of program that is shown on Doordarshan. Some years ago, a newspaper report stated that there were hundreds of good educational programmes collecting dust in Mandi House because there was no advertise ready to sponsor them. Sitcoms and light entertainment programmes were their choice for sponsorship. Newspapers and magazines earn 3/4 of their revenues through advertisements.

The commercial psychology works on the innate instincts of man, first making the consumer feel inadequate, without making it obvious. Then slowly it begins to manipulate some secret anxiety, fear or obsession in him. Confronted with the same advertisement repeatedly in various media finally he is persuaded that buying the product would reduce the sense of inadequacy and tension created in him. The secret of advertisement is based on Geobbel's doctrine that "a lie repeated often enough becomes truth!"

Media and Social Change

If we were asked to describe our country in terms of the economic situation of its people, we could say that India is a rich country full of poor people, for more than half the population of India is living in sub-human conditions, without even satisfying their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. This situation cannot and should not be allowed to last. Change is absolutely necessary in our country. If the country should change, it is important that there be a change in the attitude to life, to persons and to things, to situations and to people, not only among the poor, but more important, among the rich minority. This indeed is a gigantic job. How do we reach people spread over an area of 1,178,995 sq. miles and a population of over one billion? 82% of these live in the 6,38,365 villages of India. They speak 22 different languages and more than 200 different dialects and belong to several religious castes and tribes.

It is obvious that the only means of reaching all these masses of people is through the mass media. However, that simple word "masses" is saturated with multitudinous differences both stark differences, and differences of the lightest shades. For each individual and each community in this country have their own culture, customs, beliefs, value system. All of these are expressed in the attitudes of the members of the different communities and groupings in our country. These attitudes have been formed mainly by the rich elite of our country. This small but powerful minority has established a number of myths, namely, false assumptions which have been internalised by the poor and oppressed majority and have been to a great extent responsible for keeping them submissive and resigned to their lot of poverty and misery.

The rich also have control over all the means of communication, education and value formation. They can assert their clout in all institutions in the country that provide these services, namely, the press, radio, TV, films, schools, colleges, religious institutions etc. Through this control they are able to maintain the attitudes of submission, patience, and acceptance of their lot on the poor and underdeveloped multitudes. Since the mass media for mass communication in India are in the hands of the rich powerful elite, these will not want to use them to bring about real attitudinal change in the ordinary people. But these rich owners realise that if the media were totally passive to the situation of the poor majority, there would be a possibility of a revolt among them. Hence, they use the institutions in their command, whether legal, governmental, religious or educational, as well as the media to anaesthetise the masses by giving them long range promises and short term benefits which will not change the system that caters to the vested interests of the minority.

Basically, the media do not belong to the people but to the few who dominate and benefit most in society. What is urgently called for, therefore, is an alternative form of communication. In this alternative communication, the people will achieve greater control over their communication, which will give them the opportunity to express their own concerns, voice their own thinking and enable them to control their own learning process. The way to this alternative communication is already being used in

several parts of the country. This is through the folk forms of communication which are fortunately being given greater scope today by groups of social activists wanting to build awareness among the rural people. The salient feature of these folk forms is the participation of the audience in it. Virtually everybody can take part in it.

Social Change in Rural Areas

In the village of India, folk art has never been dead and people do still continue to have community theatres in spite of the onslaught of the cinema. There has been a folk renewal in the Indian theatre, in painting, dance, sculpture music and consequently in cinema. A very effective form of people's communication is the street theatre. It is being used extensively to deepen the awareness of the people with regard to the issues that confront them in their villages and slums. As the result of the caste massacres in the seventies, two street plays, 'Pathre Sangappa' and 'Belchi' were performed more than a thousand times in the streets of our country. These street plays have drawn the audience closer to the performers and have been able to rivet their sympathy for the cause they espoused. The street play can reach out to the people and enable them really to identify their problems. If there is a consistent attempt at presenting the social evil throughout this medium and others that are similarly people oriented, there is no doubt that there will be a change in the attitude of the poor, and a step towards a change in the unjust society that is prevalent in India.

In New Delhi the women's movements are using street theatre in order to drive home feminist ideologies. Soon after the well-known Mathura rape case, the street plays 'Om Swaha' and 'Aurat' created a strong reaction not only among women's organisation, but also among the ordinary women who witnessed them. It was significant that as these plays came to a close, the actors requested the audience to participate in discussions on dowry, caste system, etc. Witnessing these street plays and several others of the same striking quality, we have no doubt that

the people can be well prepared to accept that there is a need of social change, and that they are to be the prime agents in the movement for this change. Badal Sarcar's avant grade plays have become immensely popular with the new trendsetters. His 'Procession' has been very successful in Tamil Nadu and the Tamil version 'Thendungal' is still being performed. Komal Swaminathan's 'Thanneer Thanneer' has been a smashing success on the stage and later on became a controversial movie which has caused several of its viewers to reflect deeply on the present situation of exploitation in our country.

Wall posters are an important medium in many state election campaigns now. To the general public who does not have an access to the newspapers, these wall posters, especially if they carry cartoons, humorous yet pointed, would be an ideal medium of communication which informs them as well as teaches them to criticise. It must be borne in mind however, that social activist groups will have a hard task ahead of them in the education and awareness building of the masses.

Conclusion

We already know that the recent elections in Gujarat have ventured very far with the electronic media. Its communication experts have studios with the latest equipment and boasts of more than a hundred TV mobile vans. The influence of the media can be both mesmerising and consciousness rising. In the village of India, folk art has never been dead and people do still continue to have community theatres in spite of the onslaught of the cinema. There has been a folk renewal in the Indian theatre, in painting, dance, sculpture music and consequently in cinema. A very effective form of people's communication is the street theatre. But with all this, we must realise that there is a tendency to give absolute power to the media. We must note that there is a critical element in the human being that enables him to react. It is on this element that we find our hope and on which we must concentrate.

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