

Research Paper

Social Science



Role of Media in Propagation of Bhakti Cult: A study of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD)

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ABSTRACT

Media production and dissemination of information and entertainment programmes have great impact on society. It influences the social, economic, political and religious norms and values. Media has become so powerful that it tied together whole of the world. Modern world has become a global village not only by fast means of transportation but also due to mass media and communication.

Keywords : Religion, Culture, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, Mass media, Gurukula, Hindu Sanatana Dharma, Dharma Parichaya, and Dharma Praveshika

Introduction

Media and transmission of culture are interrelated factors. In today's world media is considered to be the strong carrier of cultural values, norms, religious thoughts and spiritual ideals. The twentieth century has been described as the age of mass communication revolution. Mass media came up in a big way and its influence on people is very powerful. Media production and dissemination of information and entertainment programmes have great impact on society. It influences the social, economic, political and religious norms and values. Media has become so powerful that it tied together whole of the world. Modern world has become a global village not only by fast means of transportation but also due to mass media and communication.

Throughout the Indian history, religion has been an important part of the country culture. Religious diversity and religious tolerance are both established in the country by the law and custom. A vast majority of Indians (over 93 percent) associate themselves with religion. Religion plays a major role in the Indian way of life. Rituals, worship and other religious activities are prominent in an individual daily life. Religion is also principal organizer of social life.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams also known as TTD is an independent Hindu religious and social Welfare institution acting as the custodian of World renowned temple of Lord Venkateswara. Since its inception in 1933, TTD has been effectively functioning with a primary mission of preserving promoting and propagating Hindu Sanathana Dharma. With this noble mission and vision, TTD is standing tall as a front-runner in the entire country in protecting the rich Hindu culture and heritage by organizing spiritual and religious activities on a large scale across the country. As part of its motto its preserve and protect Hindu Sanatana Dharma training programme in temple rituals also being conducted for people from backward classes, tribals and fishermen community.

Religion, Divine, Nation and society all put together form our culture. Going with country and time ours is the race moving with mission, changing "Kaliyuge Pradhama Pade, Jambhu Dweepe, Bharatha Varshe, Bharath Khade, Gange, Yamune-chiva," but without any coordination and correlation, with this culture, customs and traditions, this contemporary life is going on. Without giving cognizance and without carrying for 'oneness' lying behind, this great culture, the religious activities

are going on. To propagate oneness and to continue the religious thinking through the ages, Media is the only modern method that could be used.

Great institutions belong to the people, belong to history, yet their daily administration is a responsible task. The T.T.Devasthanams Administration, now 50 years old, acknowledged with humility and infinite grace and guidance of Lord Venkateswara, who enabled it to meet its demands credibility and honourably. Today the T.T.D Administration has become the guiding institution for the Hindu temple administration all over the country. On the eve of the first half century of its dedicated service-a period, trivial when compared with the hoary past of the temple, the T.T.Devasthanams rededicate itself to the cause of religion and service to humanity.

The Department of Public Relations

The well-known dictum that man is a social animal implies the main factor of exchange of thoughts for his survival since most of his activities are the results or response he receives in the process of exchange and communication of thoughts. Even institutions undergo the same process. A mechanism to function as the liaison between the society and the institution is essential for the harmonious functioning of the institution. In this respect, the public Relations Organisation of the Devasthanams has its own silent and salient role.

The department of Public Relations in the T.T.Devasthanams came into being in 1976. It has vastly expanded into a full-fledged unit with several wings under its control. Radio broadcasting, photography, publicity wings like 'Saptagiri' and various religious and cultural projects, the scheme of financial aid to authors, documentary films, co-ordination of the activities of Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha, Supervision of the information Centres and many more activities pertaining to the glorification of the Devasthanams come under the sway of the public Relations Officer. The Department functioning as the mouth piece of the T.T.Devasthanams serves with missionary zeal for its glorification on all occasions.

T.T. Devasthanams Press

From time immemorial, many devices have been adopted in the process of communication of thoughts and ideas either from individual to the multitude. These include the ancient Hindu system of Gurukula pattern wherein the preceptor would directly instruct the pupil by oral means. Later on, after

the growth and development of the script, the rock edicts, the copper grants and palm leaf manuscripts came into existence with the sole purpose of communicating thoughts to the multitude. But all these process involve manual labour resulting in strain, with little purpose served. Hence a necessity must have been felt to think of a better system by which the thoughts presented in the manuscripts could be communicated to greater numbers. The printing system has been the fruit of research done in this direction. And today the printing techniques have been vast and varied owing to various obvious factors.

Any religious institutions decided to the propagation of its tenets will inevitably have contacts with press. The T.T. Devasthanams while safeguarding the glory of Hindu sanatana dharma has to publish religious literature. Hence printing and publishing have become the live activity of the Devasthanams. The Press has its own share in enabling the management to cope with the gigantic task of religious mass communication. The history of the T.T. D. Press goes back to 1933 when Mahant Prayadossji took on contract basis a printing press in Madras and named it "Mahant Press".

Soon after, the T.T. Devasthanams Act of 1932 was enacted and the Press was renamed T.T.Devasthanams Press, but it continued to function in Madras. During the Second World War, the Press was shifted to its present premises at Tirupati in 1942, for reason of security.

In the period 1978-83, there was hectic activity in every field of the T.T. Devasthanams, more particularly in printing and publication. When P.V.R.K. Prasad, I.A.S. was the Executive Officer of the Devasthanams, new schemes like Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha, supply of religious publications at subsidized rates, etc. were initiated and vigorously pursued. Consequently, the printing activity increased by leaps and bounds.

During the last three years the Press is able to print about 1200 publications besides the monthly journals, calendars, panchangams, etc. and over 500 manuscripts are ready for printing.

Department of Publication

Propagation of Religious thoughts through literature has been in vogue from time immemorial. The sublime thoughts revealed to the sages had been memorized to the extent possible and passed down from generation by constant recitation, recollection and reinvestiture from preceptor to disciple under Gurukula system. Later on, this message has spread like a wild fire in the forest of ignorance through a congregational discourses but all with the sole aim of spiritual uplift of man in the world and the aspiration to attain a place of no return is called salvation, an effective solution to be free from the giant wheel of birth and death and elders recorded their quintessence of discourses on whatever material they could think it fit for handing down in posterity. Such was the origin and development of script on palm leaves, stones and finally on metals like lead and copper.

With the advent of the printing technology, (by which dissemination of same material from one master work through various copies is possible) it has become easier to compile the thought and transmit through number of copies to every nook and corner of the world. Many an institution has been established to utilize this process for the propagation of their thought.

Sri Venkateswara Central Library and Research Centre

Srimad Bhagavatam is an everlasting fountain of the ancient wisdom crystallized into the Puranic lore of sanatana tradition. The followers of several schools of thoughts such as Advaita, Visishtadvaita, Dvaita, etc., have made invaluable comments on the various aspects of the great classic. In order to codify the different interpretations and popularize the importance of the study of Bhagavatam, the Srimad Bhagavatha Critical Edition Scheme was started in November 1980.

The Vedic literature mirroring the Sanatana Dharma is fast dwindling. Realizing the need to store the classics of Sanskrit literature, the T.T.Devasthanams established a religious library in 1979 which subsequently has been entrusted to the Director of Srimad Bhagavatam Critical Edition Project under a new nomenclature "Sri Venkateswara Central Library and Research Centre", to be the nuclear for the establishment of a Institute of Vedic learning and Research as envisaged by the Devasthanams.

Radio and Broadcasting

Proper communication of any information has some desired effect on the minds of the public. The Devasthanams has its own network of the communication machinery. The department of Radio and Broadcasting of Devasthanams serves the purpose of the dissemination of the Hindu thinking and Hindu culture. Many of the T.T.D. institutions are connected to the department which supplies tape recorders, mike-sets and T.T.D films. Similarly the photography department covers all important T.T.D. functions and festivals and the visits of dignitaries. Photo exhibition forms part of the T.T.D. exhibition. The photo prints of Lord Venkateswara and Goddess Padmavathy are released to the market. Preparation of albums is the specialization of the photography department which helps in its own way to keep up the image of the Devasthanams.

Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha

Hindu religions and philosophic thought has been inspired and shaped, through ages, by various systems and schools of thought. Pithas, Mutts, Ashrams and Religious Organisations following. Yet, the need for a central authority to interpret and project the basic common thread that bind them together has been universally felt. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams had taken upon itself this great task, by constituting the Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha.

In the course of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams' century of administration the creation of Hindu Dharma Pratisthanaitam in 1969, now named, the Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha, is a crowning event of monumental significance in the service to the Lord of Seven Hills and for the promotion and preservation of Sanatana Dharma.

To the Hindus, the Vedas are the Revealed Word, the Holy writ. While the task of preservation of the great heritage of Vedic learning has been assigned to separate bodies created by the T. T. Devasthanams, the Hindu Dharma Pratisthanam and its successor body the Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha have been called upon to devote attention to the following factors

- ❖ promotion and propagation of Hindu Dharma,
- ❖ establishment and maintenance of institutions for imparting instruction in the Hindu Dharma,
- ❖ preparation, publication and dissemination of literature relating to the Hindu Dharma, training of Dharmacharyas and Dharma -pracharaks, and such other personnel as may be required.

HINDU DHARMA PRACHARA PARISHAD (HDDP)

The Hindu Dharma Prachara Parishad (HDDP) originally established in the year 1969 through TTD Act 30 / 1987 as "Hindu Dharma Pratisthanam". The objective and aim of HDDP is to promote and propagate Hindu Dharma all over the country. It is one of the most important child organization of TTD. The following activities are being conducted by Hindu Dharma Prachara Parishad.

PUSTAKA PRASADAM

Hindu Dharma Prachara Parishad introduced distribution of free booklets to devotees. The booklets contain small stories / anecdotes extolling Lord Venkateshwara's munificence, the various legends, rituals and utsavams associated with Tirumala temple. The main intention of this scheme is to render Dharma Pracharam and glorify Lord Venkateswara tattvam in easily digestible format for the laymen, so that more and more

people are drawn to the lotus Feet of the Lord. The HDPP has also been publishing religious books and booklets relating to Hindu festivals and distributing them to the devotees and the public at large in different languages – Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi and English.

EPIC STUDY EXAMINATION

To inculcate love for Vedic and Epic literature among school children, Epic Study Exams are being conducted. About a lakh of pupils take the examinations – Dharma Parichaya for 6th and 7th classes and Dharma Praveshika for 8th, and 9th and 10th classes. It is also learnt that there is a definite qualitative behavioural change towards enrichment among the school children who had taken this examination. Every year nearly 26 thousand students are participating in this examination.

KALYANAMASTHU

In a simple yet solemn ceremony, couples have been united in holy matrimony across 294 constituencies of the state. Each couple has been given 2 mangalasutrams, new set of clothes, toe-rings and the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams also provided the wedding feast for the near and dear of the newlyweds, apart from providing Sree Vari Darshan at Tirumala for the new weds and their families. The TTD is proud of gifting each couple an invaluable hamper of happy memories that would last them a life-time.

SREE SRINIVASA KALYANAM

Kalyanotsavams (Lord's Celestial Weddings) for "Loka kalyanam" The HDPP had also been performing these Srinivasa Kalyanams at various places all over the country and abroad.

LOKA KALYANA RADHA YATRA

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has been playing unparalleled role in extending series of Dharmic reforms to benefit society. In order to preserve inherent essence of a temple as cultural and spiritual prototype of Sanatana Dharma and to restore its rightful dignity at the crux of the Society, various measures have been envisaged and initiated by the TTD. Present concept of "Loka Kalyana Rathams" (Mobile Temple) is another attempt to revitalize the waning social and spiritual values, locating in a key village enabling the age-old, disabled and those devotees not able to travel all along the way to Tirumala to benefit the darshan of lord of seven hills, in their village or near by their village itself.

PROMOTION OF BHAJAN MANDALS

The scheme of Akhanda Harinama Sankeerthana is launched on 7th July, 2007 at Tirumala and has been going on with enthusiasm and dedication by the Bhajan troupes, coming for participation from various parts of the state.

The intention of TTD is to spread this holy culture beyond Tirumala and to revive the culture of daily Bhajana at all villages. This measure is especially targeted at youth and children, who due to lack of proper guidance and outlet to channel their enormous energies and potential of the youth are increasingly drawn to unhealthy habits and unethical activities. Formation of Bhajana Sanghams would encourage positive bonding amongst the village youth and children. It is with the firm faith that the salutary effects of Harinaama Sankeertana would sooner or later lead people onto the right path, the TTDs have initiated this unique movement.

Already Bhajana Mandals are found and promoted on large scale by HDPP, Dasa Sahitya Project and Annamacharya Projects which gave their demonstration on many occasions such as Bhajana Melas, Annamacharya Festivals organised at Tallapaka and Tirupati. Their impact has been formidable during Bhakti Chaitanya Yatra across the state of Andhra Pradesh.

CHATURYUGA BANDHAM – BHAKTI CHAITANYA YATRA

The TTD's epoch-making initiative in Dharma Pracharam during 2007 is Chaturyugabandha Bhakti Chaitanya Yatra (BCY). Its basic purpose is to propagate Bhakti, and bring the glo-

ries of Lord Venkateswara to the doorsteps of villages and to reach out to the common public through Dharma Pracharam. The Bhakti Chaitanya Yatra heralded a new era in the known history of the TTD. It is a massive participatory movement, where the rich and can the poor, young and old men and women can join the BCY willingly and contribute to the can tremendous awakening of the public, irrespective of caste, creed, sex and religion.

HARIKADHA BHAGAVATAR SCHEME

It is a common experience that Harikadhars or Bhagavatars are the prime foundations in inculcating Bhakti by singing alluring songs theming on the stories drawn from Bhagavatham, Ramayanam and Bharatam, so that the public will be emotionally involved in the stories of Lord Vishnu and develop human values and divine worship in course of time.

Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha

The Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha, successor body to the Hindu Dharma Pratisthanam came into being consequent upon the statutory change in terms of Section 24 in the T. T. Devasthanams Act, 1979 (Act of 1979), made there under, having a Governing Body of six members inclusive of three Peethadhipatis and three Ex-officio Members, and an Executive Committee of four members. Organising Purnapravachanam, Harikathas, religious discourses at Tirupati and Tirumala and at T. T. D. Kalyana mandapams is the routine activity of the Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha which also organises yearly epic study examinations to acquaint the school-going children with Hindu culture and heritage. Summer schools are conducted every year for school teachers to provide them refresher course on the basic tenets of Hinduism so that they may rightly mould the budding children. Gita saptahas, Bhagavatha saptahas and Gitajayanthi are organised and prizes awarded to the meritorious.

Another salient programme of the Samstha is the management of a Purana training school at Tirupati to train the worthy and enthusiastic pupils in Purnapravachanam. The trainees who have successfully completed their training of two years, are employed at T. T. D. Kalyanamandapams as Pauranikas.

To arouse the dormant religious enthusiasm at the village level, special bhajana competitions are conducted and prizes also distributed. The Samstha also organises training camps to Bhajan instructors who tour even the interior villages and train bhajana sanghams.

To enlighten the downtrodden Harijan community, Maladasaris are trained in ritualistic practices so that they can help their brethren and slowly equip themselves to join the mainstream of life. Padayatras to Tirumala are organised on auspicious occasions like Ugadi. The scope of the Hindu Dharma Rakshana Samstha is not restricted to any particular area or period of time. The organisation has always been associated with the Devasthanams on the occasion of mass congregations such as Godavari and Krishna Pushkarams. The organisation provides material as well as financial assistance to the local units for conducting their activities. Publication of religious literature, particularly meant for dissemination at congregations is one of the important activities of the Samstha. That the Hindu Dharma Religious Samstha spends more than ten lakhs of rupees every year, evidently marks its significance and popularity.

Magazine of Saphthagiri

The Saphthagiri (a spiritual monthly Magazine) was started as a TTD bulletin in 1949. It is now circulated all over the country as an illustrated religious magazine released monthly in five languages Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi and English. The main objective of the magazine is to propagate religious thoughts, nurture spiritual ideals and develop Bhakti and positive thinking among the people.

Sri Venkateswara Bhakti Channel (SVBC)

S.V. Bhakti channel is playing a key role in the propagation of

Hindu Sanathana Dharma through the live telecast and live relay of various dharmic and spiritual programmes. SVBC brings you live the many splendoured glory of the Lord, the daily sevas, special pujas, processions, the annual brahmotsavams and other events in which devotees from all over the globe participate all round the year. SVBC also brings classical music and dance performances by leading artistes, pravachanams by great spiritual personalities, serials of mythological and religious themes and programmes for children and youth to promote in them our ancient cultural and ethical values.

The main objectives of the Channel are as follows:

- To set up, operate and maintain television channel including other types of electronic media such as radio for promoting Hindu Dharma and related activities for effective dissemination of Hinduism through all types of Electronic media.
- To promote, propagate the activities and schemes of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and other Hindu Endowment Temples across the world through the above channel and to act as agent for Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam on execution of works entrusted to it.
- To maintain and improve works mentioned in sub – clauses (i), (ii), and (iii), above, relating to development of Hinduism, spiritually, Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas & Philosophy of Sastras.

- To recover such sums as may be determined by the channel from any person or authority, local or otherwise and statutory or corporate bodies for the services rendered by the Channel and with any other activity in consonance with the objects of the Channel.
- To produce feature films/documentary films/ serials/ episodes on Hindu Religion and to televise the daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly and annual festivals/activities of Lord Venkateswara and other Deities of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) through electronic media.

Conclusion

Throughout Indian history, religion and bhakti cult has been an important part of the country culture. Religion plays a major role in the Indian way of life bhakti, Rituals worship and other religious activities are prominent in an individual's daily routine life. Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam stands at the top in the entire country in protecting the rich Hindu culture and heritage by organizing spiritual and religious activities on a large scale by adopting various religious schemes, programmes activities, facilities Educational institutions central Library and Research Programmes, S.V. Bhakti Channel, Saptagiri Magazine etc. Print and electronic media and other projects and programmes are playing an important role in propagation of religious thoughts, spiritual ideals and develop Bhakti and purities thinking among people.

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