



COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE OF FOLK FORMATS IN INDIA

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Abstract

India has a great treasure of folk and traditional art forms right from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and Maharashtra to North-East. The traditional forms of communication constitute a potential source for conveying messages for economic and social developments. Communities and individuals have a wide range of media-folk music, folk dance folk theatre etc. for social purposes as a support to local development schemes for health and family welfare campaigns, for creating political awareness. The functional role of folk format has analyzed the reaction or amusement, education, socialization and transmission of new ideas, knowledge and values. Another specific area is the contribution of the women folk performers as change agents in the process of development. In the village, the women have served as change agents in the rural communities through a system of powerful interpersonal and immediate communication. Many national and international seminars held on the role of folk formats and development suggested the integration of folk format with mass media for quicker transmission of information as it was motivating the rural audience. The stream of folk culture in India still has enough vitality to absorb and integrate new elements and the women continue to remain active bearers of the folk tradition in India.

Introduction

The term folk includes all those persons, living within a given area, who are conscious of a common cultural heritage, and have some constant traits for example occupation, language and religion. The behavioral knowledge is based on oral tradition and not on written scriptures. The group should have a sense of identity and belongingness regardless of its numerical strength. The way of life of the group of people is more traditional, more natural, less systematic and less specialized in comparison to the so called civilized people.

Communication is the transmission of facts or information is carried in such a manner that the meaning intended and the use of message is understood by the communication, so that it becomes a two way process. It is assumed that transmission of new ideas through face to face communication and through the mass media can prepare a climate that is propitious for the acceleration of change in the desired direction. The case for developmental uses of communication helps to enlarge mental horizons second, it can be used to raise level of aspiration. Third through communication, attention can be focused on problems having a bearing on the contemporary developmental context. Fourth, it can be effectively employed to build consensus on the new economic and cultural goals and on the instruments with which to achieve them. Fifth, through imaginative communication, experimentation can be encouraged and knowledge relating to their success and failure can be widely diffused. Sixth, it can also be utilized to teach specific skills and techniques. To sum up, communication can play a powerful role in nation building and development and can contribute significantly to bring about social change in the desired direction.

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 North east. These show its socio-religious and philosophical dimension women artistically and aesthetically in to life experience, presented in a creative and innovative manner. India is a land of innumerable folk/traditional arts.

The traditional forms of communication constitute a potential source for conveying messages for economic and social development. Communities and individuals have utilized a wide range of media-folk music, folk dance, folk theatre etc. for social purposes as a support to local development schemes for health and family welfare campaigns, for creating political awareness. Ranganath (1980) described folk media as living expressions of lifestyle and culture of people evolved through the years. Wang and Dissanayake (1984) defined it is a communication system embedded in a culture which existed much before the arrival of mass media, and which still exists as a vital mode of communication in many parts of the world presenting a certain degree of continuity, despite changes.

Review of Literature

Durga Das Mukhopadhyay (1994) defined the traditional performing art is an aesthetic component of the constant concept of belongingness and affinity in a cultural context. The communication potential of Indian traditional performing art has been proved time and again by many instances of national importance. The contextual approach to folklore, in which its communicative attributes are primary, not only does it make good sense to base the meaning of the text upon both the intent of the speaker and the attitude of the listener, but also to consider the meaning of messages as interdependent upon their



actual communicative events. Puppetry is a natural development of story-telling and religious and social preaching prevalent in India.

Yathish. L. Kodavath (2015) described oral tradition and the performing arts appear to be the main media of communication. Story teller, 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. He 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.

Das Sheelita (2013) defined folk theatre having roots in native culture is embedded in local identity and social values. Besides providing mass entertainment, it helps Indian society as indigenous tools of interpersonal, intergroup and inter-village communication for ages.

Objectives

1. To study the folk art functions of recreation or amusement, education, socialization, transmission of new ideas, knowledge and values.
2. To assess the contribution of women folk performers as change agents in the process of development.

Methodology:The study is based on secondary data which is collected from the books and journals dealing with the subject.

Functional role of folk format

Recreation and amusement

Folk art forms are used in ritual functions and in various rites of rural society. No social ritual relating to birth, marriage and death is complete without folk performing art. Songs are sung when a child is born. In the marriage ceremony, women sing songs. The girls ask the bride groom some riddles which he is expected to answer. When the daughter leaves her home after marriage, there are songs of farewell. In Madhubani district, women paint the walls with beautiful designs and sing songs relating to these paintings and enact sequences which help to bring good fortune to the married couple. Folk songs in praise of the river Ganges are sung while fulfilling the funeral rites. In fact almost all the folk art forms have ritual or religious connections.

In India, since time immemorial, there has been an interaction between the folk and elite tradition and this process is still going on. Robert Redfield pointed out, "it is India that the great tradition is in constant, variable and conspicuous interaction with the life of local communication. The elite tradition might borrow some elements from the folk and integrate them in their own system, after necessary refinement. Milton Singer says, "Fragments of little tradition have been absorbed into the great tradition of the culture of the villages and tribes and in the long run also have been responsive to the authoritative teachings of the literate".

Various oral traditions like folk song, ballad, epiclay, folk tales, myths, proverbs, riddles etc. provide good recreation and amusement to the people in their work and leisure. The folk songs through their enchanting tune and interesting themes convert dull work into play while providing an avenue to forget the fatigue and the hazards of work. Women in the village sing songs while transplanting the seeds, weeding the field and drawing water from the well. Puppetry is another form of traditional folk theatre in India. Since time immemorial, it has been a popular and appreciated form of entertainment in rural India.

Educational function

Folk tradition plays a vital role in educating the people, especially the younger generation. The simple tune of the song enlightens the tender minds of the children with the useful knowledge of geography, history, politics and simple arithmetic and so on. Proverbs riddles and folk tales also educate people in an interesting and informal manner. Proverbs often impart technical knowledge regarding ploughing, sowing, irrigation and harvesting etc. to the farmers. Riddles help sharpen wits. They also make children grasp mathematical problems easily.

Socialization and folk form

It also helps in socialization and modifying their behavior according to the need of the community. Grandmothers tell stories of the ideal type of hero to the grand children and in the process impart some knowledge, value system and belongingness to the society. Folk songs help to inculcate good behavior and adjustment to the social structure. Narrative and elegies relate people with their ancestors. Their lives and philosophic and their achievements which generate pride among number of society, help in the process of socialization. Myths, legends and ballads are effective devices of social control. Myths and legends while narrating the life history of the mythical heroes describe the consequences of simple acts done even



by mighty persons. Proverbs are very effective in exercising social control in the villages and powerful in modifying behavior pattern.

Transmission of knowledge and ideas and values

Folk art serves as a communication channel for transmission of knowledge and beliefs. The folk songs depicting new rules regarding land revenue and other social legislations provide some knowledge to the people. Folk arts provide moral philosophical and historical knowledge to the people. They help to increase the knowledge about culture and civilization, values and beliefs, norms and behavior, prevalent in a social structure in the past. The stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata, related through countless number of folk art forms is a complete source of social, moral and historical knowledge with maximum information, proper education and excellent entertainment. The stories about historical heroes emphasize the qualities of a good person and outline the behavior pattern which helps to improve coherence and equilibrium in society.

In Kerala Sastra Sahitya 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 expert in a village Devakishanpura for bring 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. Nautanki of Northern India originated from religious and social preaching and mythological Bhakti plays. The socially-conscious form of theatre of North India is being reshaped for western system of communication, adult education and family planning. Social themes, value systems are exhibited through this form.

Women Specific Folk Format

In India folk artist is not apart from the mainstream of life. Leisure and recreation have not yet been commercialized. There exists no schism between utility and beauty, between functionality and creativity. For the folk artists, work is not alienated from life and his creation has both utilitarian and aesthetic dimension. Almost everyone can dance and sing and artistic expressions like singing and dancing are not put on a separate niche. Every activity in the village has its relevant music, dance or theatre. Women in traditional societies are the carries of messages and harbingers of social and social cultural transformation in this process of development and growth. They are the potent medium in the process of development communication in traditional societies like India.

On a close look at the change agents, employed for work in the field for interpersonal action/reaction with the target group, it was found that drastic alterations were urgently warranted in order to draw the desired results. The change agent was often found to be unfit for or inadequate to the task set before him/her. The folk songs depicting new rules regarding land revenue system and social legislations provide some knowledge to the villagers. Folk tales transmit political, historical, moral, ethical religious and philosophical knowledge to the villagers. They also impart worldly wisdom and practical knowledge about the conduct of everyday life.

In the joint family system prevailing in India, older people are respected for their knowledge and experience. Grandmothers would tell stories and sing folk songs to their grand children in the evening. These stories and songs are modified and improvised according to the listener's mood, occasion and the special need of the society. In the village, the women had served as change agents in the rural communities through a system of powerful interpersonal and immediate communication. The mass media channels hardly reached the villages and even if they reached them, they lacked credibility with the rural masses. The old medicine women, the story telling grandmother or the midwife, who commanded the respect and the confidence of villagers, possessed great agent potential as change agents at the village level. The message of family planning has been carried over by these change agents in the villages.

No celebration of a child birth or marriage is conceivable without the singing of a folk song and presentation of folk ritual performance appropriate to that particular ceremony. Madhubani of Bihar and Pad of Rajasthan are complete audiovisual communication structure, perpetuated by women in the rural areas of India.

Traditional midwives deliver two-thirds of the babies in the world and are credible source for communication about contraception, baby care and sexual behaviors. They are generally female, low-incomed status, past middle age, and illiterate



and they have been taught midwifery by their grandmothers, or other relatives. In India and Pakistan and certain neighboring countries the daises have low social prestige. But elsewhere in Asia and Africa and Latin America, the traditional midwife is accorded a very high prestige in her village. Tamasha in Maharastra originated from satirical verses, long winding storytelling and parody based on interacting dialogue. This is the rare folk theatre form of India in which the feminine roles are played by the women. Lavni a kind of semi-erotic song along with the wag is the basis of Tamasha. Various Tamasha plays were produced in the 1920s during the non-operation movement in India. Tamasha with its variation has become an important tool for spreading ideologies, government propaganda and presenting the inner void of urban intellectual.

Conclusion

Loomis and Beegle defined communication as “the process by which information, decisions and directions pass through a social system and the ways in which knowledge, opinions and attitudes are formed or modified. In essence it is a process of social interaction that is in a communication situation two or more individuals interact. Leagan emphasizes on audience response and considers it vital to the process especially when it is meant to bring about change in people. As source encoders, we have to decide how we will channelize the message so that our receiver can decode them. Thus the communicator and receiver are the important persons in the process of communication. Organized face to face communication, such as in involved in rural extension and community development work, is also included in the definition of communication. The framework of communication for health and awareness should be a fusion of various techniques of personalized communication styles at different levels. A proper coherence has to be established between urban and rural people, so that masses in the villages can involve themselves in health care programme. The traditional media with its effective reach, powerful input and personalized communications will help in realizing the goal of health of all.

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 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 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.

Many national and international seminars held on the role of folk formats and development suggested the integration of folk format with mass media for quicker transmission of information as it was motivating the rural audience. Folk artists and crafts men should be given recognition in the form of award, resources should be provided to setup national level organization of folk media in communication programmes. Special assistance programmes should be produced for involving youth, women’s organizations rural co-operatives and other village level organizations.

In rural India, whatever they can understand, whatever affects their life styles, whatever they find essential in their daily life, they acknowledge and incorporate in their folk songs and folk tales, however modern it may be. The stream of folk culture and oral tradition in India still has enough vitality to absorb and integrate new element and the women continue to remain active bearers of the folk tradition in India.

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