



## ROLE OF FOLK MEDIA IN NATION BUILDING

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### Abstract

*In today's dynamic world, communication and its role has become very specialized and significant. In India, modern mass media alone cannot reach to the millions of people in rural areas who have no regular access to TV, newspapers, internet etc due to poverty and illiteracy. The modern media's reach is largely restricted to urban areas. Information, education and entertainment do not reach to a large majority of the people in rural and remote areas. The mass media has proved to be glamorous, impersonal and unbelievable. Thus, the modern media is not suitable for preserving cultural heritage and promotion of folk performing traditions and arts. The folk media has remarkable impact on rural society because of the acceptable idioms, functional significance and the cultural values. Folk media can overcome the difficulties of language, speech, words and other barriers of communication like interest, understanding, interpretation, attitude and perception. Folk media is one of the most important vehicles of social change and nation building. While a lot of modification may be needed to convey social messages, folk media will easily carry social issues related to rural development. Therefore, we need to keep our traditional media alive by continuously and cautiously safeguarding and preserving from the adverse effects of globalization. Against this view point, the present paper purports to examine the role of folk media in the nation building and suggesting measures for preserving and transmitting cultural traditions and values to the next generation. It also examines the role of folk media in national integration and conservation of cultural heritage.*

**Key words:** Communication, Folk Media, rural development, cultural, tradition and values

### Introduction

Every human society has developed its indigenous and traditional modes and channels of communication which characterize its existence, organization and development. These communication modes and channels form the basis upon which the communities, especially the rural community, policy makers, planners and administrators, desirous to effect functional economic and social changes, must first identify such community communication modes and channels and utilize them to provide the people with maximum information about such changes.

Communication, the transmission of information from a point called origin or source to another called destination or receiver (or audience), is the blood stream of every society. A society may be explained as a group of people who have lived together long enough to evolve common culture, norms and values. Culture distinguishes one society from another. Culture gives form and meaning to a people's existence. Culture is defined by Oniou and Ogiwo (1981) as the 'the complex whole of man's acquisitions of knowledge, morals, beliefs, arts, customs, technology etc, which are shared and transmitted from generation to generation.

In this definition, culture includes those things which man has invented and produced and which we can see, feel, or hear, as well as those aspects of man's behaviour which we cannot see, namely knowledge, beliefs or morals, language, philosophy, attitude etc. Communication which is an act, a process of interaction, is carried out primarily

through the use of signs (or symbols). Such signs or symbols must arouse the same meaning in other person (individual or group or people) as it does in one's self. Communication is an aspect of culture and the non-material culture. Indigenous and traditional communication modes and channels, therefore, have a sort of cultural diversity. Such modes and channels are identified, assessed and understood in the context of the particular culture and its value system. The communication process is initiated when the source or sender utters symbolic sounds which refer to experiences and rooted in the environment. If the receiver or audience has had similar experiences, rooted in the environment and has been conditioned to associate the given sounds with those experiences and attach a common meaning, we then say that communication has been possible. The communication would be effective if the desired response follows.

### Community Communication Patterns in India

In India, the indigenous and traditional community communication modes and channels tend to have variations from one cultural region or ethnic group to another. The modes and channels reflect the social structure of each community. Such social structure is similarly determined by the totality of the historical and economic experiences of the people. Some of these modes include message relay-running, festivals, drama, music/songs, dance styles and steps, bush or wood fire, smoke ashes, (colour) of clothing, tales and proverbs, gun shots, animals, birds and insects, grass knots, fresh leaves knots, have looks, tribal marks, body language, talking drums,



weather, pottery and wood carvings, legends and myths, and so on. All these are the creations of human interactions, consensus and conflicts. They are made norms, given values and mystified by the indigenous and traditional channels of interpersonal and group communication, mostly based on age, kinship, gender inheritance and marital status and with authority patterns embedded in the social structure and organization of the society. Face-to-face, interpersonal and group communication channels function both vertically and horizontally and are natural, real and inevitable in a community's planned and unplanned advancement.

To be effective, mass communication systems require complex formal organizations which need high skills for their operation. Their technology and messages are urban directed. Because of the heavy capital outlay, international methods of finance are used to finance modern mass media projects, a system which is out of the reach of the rural poor. Inevitably, therefore, the modern mass media and information system tend to stabilize a statusquo which is based on a structural dependency of peripheries on centres. Because of the focus on the individual, and not as a member in a social network, the mass media may not be said to, by themselves, be responsible for the occurrence of mass phenomena, nor can we safely argue that they are sufficient tools for the cause and effect of mass mobilization programmes. Rather, through the existing structure of society and the prevailing expectations, motivations and social institutions, indigenous and traditional community communication channels and the content and symbols which they disseminate may do the trick.

#### **Conceptualization of Folk Media**

There are very few countries in the World which possess the rich treasure of lively folk performances. India is one of them. The traditional heritage of folk performances in India ranges from regional folk songs to street plays. Folk performances, especially folk theatre in India heralds from the early development of the so called "civilized society". There are nothing but, conjectures about the beginning and origin of these folk arts. It may be said that the development of folk arts in India corresponds to the development of human beings. Folk art, of any country, has developed with the society and so they become a part of the culture of that region. They cannot develop in isolation because they are the manifestations of the culture and society itself to which they belong. (Johnson, 2005)

As Raymond Williams (1985) has defined the term folk as '...a general meaning of 'people', in a range from particular social formation, including nations, to people in general'. W. J. Thom has defined folk as the same cultural tendency rather than popular form of culture. Of late, the term has been defined as a 'communal production' of a society of its origin. Folk arts and performances are in a way a reflection of the culture of the society as culture

reflects itself through art, jewellery, folk plays, songs and rituals. Its relation with the society and the community to which it belongs is somewhat different as they are a part of the daily life. Through folk art and performances the society expresses its sorrow, happiness, celebration, achievements etc. A notable American sociologist William Summer (1906) has defined the culture as 'folkways'. His concept of 'folkways' is a more comprehensive term which differs from culture in a distinctive way. Folkways, according to Summer, are products of natural forces which become a part of the unconscious. They are instinctive in nature and travel from generation to generation, as a part of collective behaviour. Later they become the approbated form of behaviour which functions automatically. For Summer, folkways is a matter of action whereas, Lundberg defines it as a part of collective unconscious which a society inherits from generation to generation. To put it differently, folkways are not culture but they are the foundation of culture. It may be said that Culture is formal whereas folkways are informal.

The folk arts are the products of the folkways and culture of the society. They are inseparable as they form a part of the society that they belong to. People live and die with folk arts, hence, they become easy to decode and understand. They are easy to understand by the common masses because of their nature of origin. Folk art is the most effective way of communication. They are a part of the mass media. This phenomenon of mass media is exploited by several government and nongovernment organizations for their individual and common purposes. Traditional folk media includes folk dance, folk drama, folk songs, and puppetry and so on and so forth. Traditional folk media is termed as the performance of the masses. They are in fact the cultural symbol of the community. They are lively in nature and correspond with the changing time pattern. They have been acting as a mass media for a long time. Folk media has a distinctive quality which sets it apart from the rest. It breaks through every barrier and reaches through the audience in the simplest of forms. They are fluid in nature and borrow elements from everywhere without any prejudice. The best part of the folk media is its personal nature of communication. They communicate on the terms and conditions of the community. While communicating folk media develops an interpersonal relationship which is contextual and work according to the needs of the individual. Its interpersonal nature of communication makes it persuasive, and so it gets instant feedback. Shyam Parmar and H.K. Rangnath (1980) have studied the very nature of folk media which gives it an edge over other forms of communication. They are of the view that these folk media forms are local and intimate and hence establish the rapport with the masses easily irrespective of their regional differences. Folk media appeal to the emotion rather than the intellect so they easily



render the encoded message and easily get the desired feedback. The best part of the folk media is that it is not institutionalized and organized and so individual authority controls its quantity and quality. This nature of folk media makes it adaptive to any region in every age. They cater to the individual need but they belong to the community. As far as its themes are concerned, they cover a very wide range from myths to the current issues. Folk media doesn't use any language but it interacts through idioms and symbols of the masses. This phenomenon makes it participatory as people identify with it and it gives an opportunity to everyone to take an active part. No special skill is required in its operation and even an ordinary person can learn and contribute in its functioning. Its participatory nature and spontaneity gives it an edge over rest of the mass media. Apart from audiovisual quality folk media's effectiveness rests heavily on its unique method of communication. They appeal to the collective unconsciousness rather than the individual consciousness.

#### **Folk Media in Nation Building**

Dr. Harish Kumar (2006) has brilliantly demonstrated the role of folk media in rural development. He writes that as most of the population in India still lives in villages, there is no denying of the fact that building a nation spells to be building the rural India. This development should be carried out in the form of the development of the rural people and rural areas along with their total environment through concerted action. The very first change that is visible towards the development of the rural people is the development of modern communication devices and network. In India, this concern above reaching people, communicating with them and equipping them with new skills has been emphasized over and again in successive five year plans which provide the blue print of the country's planned development. As a result, the communication infrastructure has been enormously expended which is taking country forward in turn.

John E Lent (1978) discusses the use of folk media, either in their traditional rural settings or when adapted to mass media, to bring about social awareness of national development plans. It also looks at the role of interpersonal communications networks. The most important question that he considers -can traditional media carry modern messages, and if they can, should they; if they cannot, should they be modified so that they can?-will not be satisfactorily answered until more research is completed on what the rural people themselves think about this. Those who have studied folk potentialities have varying answers.

What needs to be recognized amidst this development is the role of mass media in the holistic development of nation. The first such stem was introduced in 1972 when International Planned Parenthood Federation and

UNESCO organized series of meetings in London. This was done in the light of the importance of folk media in family planning communication programmes. As every village in India has a relevant music, dance or theatre or accustomed to it, they have access to the functional and spontaneous aspect of folk media and how the structure continuously has helped them adapt to the changing situations relevant for them to adjust in the society. Since the traditional media is closer to the hearts and minds of the rural people, its appeal is more personal and intimate. The folk media appears to be the main media of communication for rural people. 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. Families, social groups and community gatherings served as the main flora of communication and sources for feedback for the folk performers. The values, attitudes, beliefs and culture of the people are propagated, reinforced and perpetuated through these folk forms. The issues in a society are depicted in the form of satire by the folk artists for curing societal evils. (Ghosh, 2006)

The folk arts preserve and disseminate in a lively manner, the tradition and culture of our forefathers, since they are deeply rooted in the social mainstream. Folk media comes in different forms and is known by different names in different regions of the country. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh, 'Janapadam' indicates a village and 'Janapadulu' means villagers. The folk art forms of villages, on the whole are known as 'Janapada Kalalu'. Similarly Lok Natya or Lok Geet means 'people's dance' or 'people's song'. There are many other forms of folk arts in other states of India. These are used as 'Jan Madhyamas' i.e. 'people's media'. These forms represent the people concerned by giving a glimpse of their style, speech, music, dance, dress, behaviour, etc.

The relevance of folk media has been well visualized by Balwant Garhgi's. He (1991) said that "Folk media represents the people in their natural habitat, with all their contradictions and multifarious activities. It gives a glimpse of their style of speech, music, dance, dress and wisdom. It contains a rich store of mythological heroes, medieval romances, chivalric tales, social customs, beliefs, and legends. In order to understand the colorful diversity and unity of India, it is important to see the folk theatre in its natural settings." Folk media are relatively inexpensive and easily accessible which adds to the popularity of the folk media in rural areas. Their highly spontaneous, participatory and involving quality makes them the media par excellence for any powerful and effective changed intended.

Durgadas Mukhopadhyay (2007) summaries the relevance of folk media: "Folk performing arts have changed



structure continuously over centuries, modifying to the needs of changing situations, yet continuing to be functionally relevant to society. "Tradition" suggests a process of the transmission of age-old values and the contextual manifestation and interpretation of the universal. Tradition is not only a repetitive behavioural pattern or some persistent symbol or motif in community culture; it is also an assertion of an identity, a revival and regeneration of the life-force of the community. Traditional media rely on this cultural support and context."

In India, mass media has been limited to urban areas largely unable to trespass in the rural areas because of its orientation towards urban population. Traditional media forms being functional in its thought and approach, interpersonal in its attitude would be better to carry out the messages of change, development and growth. But here Durgadas Mukhopadhyay warns that not all folk forms can be used for development of communication purposes; thus, they should be carefully studied from the points of view of content and characterization for their possible adaptation for development purposes. Folk media productions should be consistent with the needs of the social context and related to the customs and beliefs of the local communities. Since folk media have sociological roots, their utilization should be related to local events and their function in the local communication strategy should be properly assigned. We have various folk forms in our country, which are still alive even today. This is quite evident in our cultural heritage. A few categories of folk media are-traditional dance, drama, painting, sculpture, song, music, motifs and symbols. Folk media has greatest appeal to the masses and has qualities of touching the deepest emotions of the illiterate millions. Folk theatre form like Tamasha, Nautanki, Keertana or Harikatha attract the rural audiences most, so people can be educated through the mediums to bring about desirable changes in their behavior. Street play is not like theater but it attracts a large number of people. The villagers have a great fascination for their folk dances and folk songs. Melas or country fairs are synonymous with joy and gaiety and in the rural areas where life follows a hard routine; nothing is more welcome to the people than the prospect of a festival and mela. Story telling has been one of the best and the most commonly used method of instruction in informal education, religious propagation, rural development etc.

#### **Nautanki and Folk Theatre**

The use of folk media as a means of development and awareness is not a recent phenomenon in India. Ever since the end of the 19th century, folk media has been exploited as a method of raising the political and social consciousness of the people. Awareness along with entertainment is the aim of folk media which is based upon ancient Indian perceptions of the role of art in society.

Indian folk theatre is a composite form of containing songs, music, dance, and drama that seeks to fulfill all the intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic needs of its spectators. It is more than entertainment, a complete emotional experience and creates a state of receptivity in which messages can be most effectively transmitted. Folk theatre has functioned as an instrument of social awareness, protest, and change. Regional rural drama performance is known to be dependable and persuasive change agents, acting as a bridge between different rural areas, and between rural and urban areas.

#### **Folk Songs**

A great deal of what has been said of folk theatre is true to folk songs as well. In fact, the folk songs were often composed for some theatrical performances but later they developed an identity of their own. They have been used specifically and effectively by nationalists, communists, political parties and by other government and private agencies to promote their causes. Major folk songs are Alha, Burrakatha, Villupaattu, Puran Bhagat (Punjab), Pandwani (Madhya Pradesh), and Powada (Maharashtra). Among other folk forms in our country, folk songs have played a major role in conveying developmental and socially relevant messages most frequently and most effectively. They also have further potential in communicating the developmental awareness among rural people. If used properly, and wisely, they may come to prove to be one of the most relevant, easy, and effective media through which government and private agencies may produce responsible, aware, and advanced citizens in our country which in turn may help in building a strong nation. In the words of H. K. Ranganath (1980) "they have successfully played decisive roles in attuning the rural mind to the importance of a social or political theme like national unity, social welfare and even family planning. They have thus become the most persuasive communicators on any given theme. In the effort of making them loveable communicators, the original content is squeezed out and a new message is integrated to suit the needs of times and place. This process has given them a sense of contemporarily and functional relevance."

#### **Folk Dances**

India is a land of diverse cultures and traditions. Each region of the country has a unique culture, which is also prominently visible in its various art forms. Almost all the regions of the country have their specific folk music and dance, which proves to be a wonderful way of expression of their community and its traditions. Though these folk dances are not as complex as the classical dance forms, they are very beautiful, because of the essence of rawness in them. The folk dances of any community are performed on almost every special occasion and festival, to express elation and joy. These dances are also considered to be auspicious by many of the tribal communities in the country.





Many folk dances are dedicated to the presiding deity of the specific community. The most interesting part of a folk dance is the attire required for its performance. Every folk dance has its own specific costume and jewellery, which differs from dance to dance. They are, in general, very bright and colourful, with traditional jewelleries that give a folk touch to the performance. These dances are not only the exclusive art of a particular community, but also an asset of India's cultural heritage. During the performances of such folk dances, people come from different sections of society together which may provide a chance to address them collectively using the message through these folk dances to improve their status, for example by getting benefited by the government run schemes of their well-being and development.

#### Traditional Paintings, Wall Paintings, and Inscriptions

Traditional paintings, wall paintings, and inscriptions are an effective and economical medium for advertising. Such practices are not new and innovative as the tradition of paintings on wall for different occasions in rural India is prevalent from the time immemorial. Wall Paintings are an effective and economical medium for advertising in rural areas. They are silent unlike traditional theatre. A speech or film comes to an end, but wall painting stays as long as the weather allows it to. Retailer normally welcomes paintings of their shops, walls, and name boards. Since it makes the shop look cleaner and better. Their shops look alluring and stand out among other outlets. Besides rural households shopkeepers and panchayats do not accept any payment, for their wall to be painted with product messages. To get one's wall painted with the product messages is seemed as a status symbol. The greatest advantage of the medium is the power of the picture completed with its local touch. The images used have a strong emotional association with the surrounding, a step impossible for even a moving visual medium like television, which must use general image to cater to greatest number of viewers. This form for advertising would easily be accepted by the rural people as they are accustomed to such practices.

#### Fairs and Festivals

During these colourful events people of all sects, castes and religions come together and join in the merry-making. Processions are held, prayers are offered, gifts are exchanged and people dance and sing during these multicoloured events. Bringing out the true colours of the rich Indian culture, the fairs and festivals of India play an important role in attracting tourists to the country. These festivals are an integral part of the life of the people of the country. One of the examples is Teej of Rajasthan which marks the onset of the monsoon. On the other hand, Onam in Kerala and Bihu in Assam are celebrated to mark the

harvesting season. Other festivals, like the Konark Dance Festival, promote the culture of India. Religious festivals are innumerable over here. Durga Puja, Ganesh Chaturthi, Janmastami, Christmas, Eid-ul-Fitr, Rath Yatra, Vasant Panchami, Ram Navami and others are some of the popular religious festivals of India. These fairs and festivals can at their best be utilized as folk media spreading awareness among people regarding the developmental process and how to participate in such process along with the new developments in technology in order to make their lives better and the nation strong. The horn bill festival of Nagaland is unique in character as it promotes social integrity, social ethnic values and cultural diversity of whole North-eastern states of India (Das, 1972).

#### Chhath Puja

Chhath puja is deep rooted in folk and culture and it sustains the basic concept of worship with a combination of biodiversity conservation, social integrity and local livelihood development. It has now emerged as a national festival. Though, Chhath is one of the important festivals of Bihar and Jharkhand. It is also observed in some parts of West Bengal, Orissa, Assam, Uttarpradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Nepal. The people of these areas also celebrate the festival with vigour and enthusiasm in states like Maharashtra, Delhi and in several large cities of India. (Jha, 2009)

Chhath needs varieties of grain, fruits, species and many local products. Some of the species are in existence only due to the requirements of chhath puja. Another aspect of biodiversity conservation is related with the water body. Chhath Puja takes place on the edge of different water bodies e.g. river, lake, pond and stream, the local people starts to clean and the water bodies before the puja. The changing and maintenance of the water bodies another embankment are done for celebrations of the puja, these contribute widely in biodiversity conservation, especially for the wet lands (Kesari, 2009).

Chhath puja also promotes social integrity through creating employment opportunities during the celebrations. The lower communities of the society get good income through supplying soil pots, bamboo materials, banana, sugarcane etc. Chhath is celebrated mainly by Hindus; however Muslims also participate in this holy festival in certain places. Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak (2009) is of the view that Chhath is the festival of truth, nonviolence, forgiveness and compassion. Dr. Pathak has been trying for more than four decades to bring scavengers into the mainstream of society and chhath being one of the very important festivals to make scavengers feel accepted. Scavengers are being delighted to be part of the festival. Thus, Chhath Puja has become the national symbol of social integrity, biodiversity conservation, and nation building.



## Conclusion

The folk media in India seems to be used as supplement to the mass media rather than as the centre of communication efforts to reach majority of India's population who live in the villages. In India, mass media continue to be limited largely to the urban population. Traditional arts forms have survived for centuries and they will survive in future for their flexibility. They could be the media for the social change in rural India. Traditional performing art being functional, inter-personal and having a contextual base would be able to carry the message of change, development and growth. Apart from these live programs with face-to-face communication the traditional folk forms have been used in programs over the electronic media. India's role in identifying folk media for communication purposes has been quite positive. Unlike in western theatre, folk performance is a composite art in India. It is a total art with fusion elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic ballad recitation, religion and festival peasantry. It imbibes ceremonials, rituals, belief and social system. It has deep religious and ritualistic overtones and the again, it can surely project social life, secular themes and universal values.

In India, the traditional folk media has been used as addressing the masses and has been very effective and powerful in communicating the latest development of the country along with bringing about the desired changes, protests and awareness among the people. The traditional folk performing arts traditions and customs have long lasting impact on society and culture. Though, globalization, economic liberalizations and modern forces of change have widely impacted folk media and folk performing arts, traditions and cultural heritage, honour, folk media has still contributing significantly in social integrity promotion of cultural diversity and nation building.

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