

Traditional folk media for rural development in india media essay



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In the introduction to his essay titled “ Traditional Folk Media for Rural Development” D. K. Sujan writes “ Whenever you and I think of India, we visualize a vast land spread from the lofty Himalayas in the north to the green belt of Nilgiri in the south, from the Indian granary of Punjab to the paddy fields of eastern deltas, with rugged mountains and plateaus in between. This land of ours lies in the tropical belt where climatic conditions vary from place to place and time to time. The variety of climate and topographic situations give birth to different cultures, traditions, and philosophies, affecting every mode of life and behaviour of the people”

One of the key challenges in spreading the message of rural development in India is the diversity that is witnessed when one travels the area of the country. Folk forms from different places show striking similarities to each other but they vary depending on region. This variation results in an inconsistency of rules under which these forms are created or presented.

It would be useful to hear to clearly define the terms that are going to be judiciously used within the scope of this paper. The word “ folk” is synonymous with people or society. According to Sujan, “ the word ‘ folk’ itself connotes the harmonious coexistence of man with nature, his rearing of nature and being reared by it” (Sujan, 172). In the words of C. S. Sreekumar, folklore originated when the weary agricultural labourer was in the habit of singing songs to overcome the weariness of work. In his words “ Folklore is a medium through which the soul of a people expresses itself colourfully” (www.sikhspectrum.com). Now when artistically folklore is combined with dance or music or art, resulting in artistic fulfilment and entertainment, the end result is called “ Folk arts”. Unlike its predecessor primitive art, folk art possesses a

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very interesting and different outlook and character. Folk art comes into being after a culture begins to sophisticate, It is languid and very informal and does not require any formal training or license to practice. Another characteristic of it is that folk arts are ingrained into the fabric of the social culture of rural India. It is perhaps the world's most original art form as they were part and parcel of the earliest civilizations themselves. Sujan claims that " all fine arts have their roots in the folk age." Village children pick up the songs and dances when they begin to pick up the language itself (Sreekumar, [www. sikh spectrum. com](http://www.sikhspectrum.com)) folk art often performs a specific function or possesses a specific purpose, the needs and peculiar problems of the village people find expression in folk art. Village life is routinely full of religious customs and ceremonies. Folk arts is very closely associated to religion and myth. Most of the stories are based on an mythological framework and often the specific purpose of the folk form becomes to illustrate the Myths and legends in a manner that is interesting and convincing. Folk media is a term that seems oddly, redundant as one is prompted to ask, but isn't all media folk?

Another characteristic of it is that it is not static. The folk medium of a village is affected by the standard of life and developments in that village. In short, folk arts reflect the changing tastes of the rural population as their encounters with urbanity become more frequent and intense. While satisfying these needs, it also holds the responsibility of attaining a certain aesthetic level, owing to its status as an art form. There is no doubt that Folk art forms possess their own individuality and character. Their existence is

dependent on its intrinsic merit i. e., flight of fancy of the artist, its symmetrical form, its tonal quality etc.

To define the word “ tradition”, they are the outcome of the mode, philosophy, ways, and behavioural pattern of a society. Tradition exists in every span of time. Even today we have traditions. Thus, the challenge is that they are easily replaceable. For example, normative patterns in communication often become traditions.

Regarding the stereotyping that rural folk media is subjected to, especially the masses Sujana has this to say “ Whenever we speak of traditional folk media we aptly visualize a rural open-stage theatre with performance of puppetry in its various forms like kathas, gatha, bhajan mandlies, etc. The man of yesteryears praised gods and goddesses with hymns and bhajans, thus giving birth to the earliest musical expression. Music is the basic fine arts’ element in folk performances. Early man carved his gods out of stone or sculpted him out of mud. This shows that another important element of fine arts was ‘ sculpture’. The caveman painted pictures of his gods and his own deeds in order to communicate his message to future generations, In this way, the third pillar of fine arts, after music an sculpture came to be painting.’ Man performed various rituals before the gods and deities to appease them. This was abhinayam or ‘ acting’, the fourth strong pillar of fine arts. The fifth pillar, of course, is ‘ poetry’, which often enhances other fine arts.

This elucidates how folk arts and folk media came into being. Whenever there is a folk bhajan mandali to communicate pious feelings and sing the

greatness of god, it makes use of music. This music may include both naad and vaad. One can easily see that whenever we refer to folk media such as puppets, nautanki, or gatha, we find that some combinations of the five aspects of fine arts, that is, music, sculpture, painting, acting, and poetry, is present. Incidentally, puppets have the privilege of using all of these five basic elements.

It is the urgent need for development of the country which compels us to find ways and means for better, faster, and clearer communication. There are merits and demerits of folk media in development contexts. It was utilized during the conception and inception of the First Five year Plan, having been considered even earlier by economists, social scientists, and communication experts. Both leaders and researches in social and communications sciences are making ceaseless efforts to find more effective communication media for faster development. Incorporating folk media is an important aspect of these efforts.

Mass Media and Traditonal Folk Media

Let us consider the existing and fast-developing mass media and also the traditional folk media, looking at the advantages and drawbacks of both. This actually means that we should scrutinize the antecedents of both traditional folk media and mass media before merging them together. However, the marriage and amalgamation of these two traditions-modern and historical is a must.

Whenever we say Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, we simply scan the cultural and religious background of the people. While uttering the above

names we clearly visualise various cultural patterns related to these religious orientations. On the other hand, when we say 'Indian' we again visualize a cultural pattern which is Indian. At this juncture the cultural pattern which is related to Hindus, Muslims, etc., disappears.

In the same way, when we talk of puppetry, lila, harikatha, folk songs, nautankis, we clearly visualize the cultural and traditional background of each of the traditional folk media separately. On the other hand, whenever we say 'modern media' we clearly visualize radio, TV, etc. Finally, instead of saying traditional folk media or modern media, we say mass media or mass communication. We naturally visualize all the media together.

There are separate cultures and backgrounds for Hindus, Muslims, tribals and city dwellers, but together they are termed Indian. Puppetry, kawwali, nautanki, television, and radio are separate entities, but all of them when taken together constitute mass media. All have a certain power to communicate development messages. Instead of involving ourselves in research to find out the effectiveness and impact of folk media separately, would it not be better to integrate traditional folk media and modern media.

The writer suggests that the modern media of South India should adopt regional folklore and communicate to the masses through an amalgamated technique including both traditional and modern entities. People like their traditions and their ways of communication. We should not disturb them in this respect and should adopt the traditional ways into electronic waves. For example, a nautanki of Uttar Pradesh can be telecast through regional television centres. In the same way, a string puppet tamasha may be

telecast on TV in Rajasthan. Experimenting with this integration of modern and traditional media will require much study and planning. Putting together such media presentations may be done separately for various traditional folk media with the help of indigenous expertise.

Both traditional folk media and modern media are needed for developmental programs, especially for rural development. In this way, the audience for these media include both the beneficiaries and the functionaries. The functionaries help design the developmental programs and the beneficiaries accept and adopt the outcome of developmental programs. Each media should include some of the basic pillars of fine arts along with the intended message.

Let us examine the comparative strength and effectiveness of traditional folk media and modern media.

Traditional Media Forms

Modern Media Forms

Cannot be universalised

Can be universalised

Express deep cultural roots

Not culturally specific in any expression

Variety of interest patterns

Universal interest

Cultural barriers

Cultural freedom

Mechanization is possible

Mechanization is a must

Training intensive

Training extensive

Limited area covered

Wider area covered

May be converted to electronics

Totally electronic

Direct rapport with the audience

Rapport through field studies only

By examining these comparisons one can discover that both have their merits. No doubt the nature of the development problem, if analyzed, can provide insights as to which forms may best accomplish a specific communication objective. Media choices require careful consideration of specific information needs and of the limitations of available message-delivery and message-development resources.

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To sum up, traditional folk media and modern media should be integrated for use in development contexts. This may help interfusing interest patterns of various regional entities. It may also be regions and places, enhancing the feeling of oneness in the country. It could be a force to generate respect between various cultural groups. Finally, this media combination could facilitate fulfilment of specific development objectives.

Conclusion

It is proposed that instead of being much involved in analysis and counter-analysis of traditional folk media, we should encourage further development of traditional media in itself and then make full use of these media in combination with modern media. We may call it interadaptation of media.

Interadaptation of media, in turn, will help depolarize the interest patterns of a nation. By fusing some aspects of subcultures, different groups will come to know each other, understand each other, and come nearer to each other. For example, if we telecast a Rajasthani story (traditional form of communication) on television network, it will not only help to create an interest in the puppets of Rajasthan but also in the people who create them. Folk media, when broadcast or telecast, could increase an understanding of the life of tribal people as well. It could be used to inculcate a feeling that these far-off tribals are also citizens of India, paving the way for a national feeling and national integration of these groups. Apart from fulfilling the specific objectives of communication, the interfused approach using traditional folk media and modern media will help in creating reciprocal respect for each other. All these prospects make folk media, in combination

with electronic media, a viable communication form to use in making effective messages for development.

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