

Folk and Traditional Media: A Powerful Tool for Rural Development

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ABSTRACT Tradition is the cumulative heritage of society which permeates through all levels of social organization, social structure and the structure of personality. The tradition which is the cumulative social heritage in the form of habit, custom, attitude and the way of life is transmitted from generation to generation either through written words or words of mouth. It was planned to focus the study on stakeholders of rural development and folk media persons, so that their experience, difficulties, suggestion etc. could be collected to make the study realistic and feasible. The study was conducted in the state of Orissa comprising 30 districts out of which 3 coastal districts, namely, Cuttack, Puri and Balasore were selected according to the specific folk media culture namely, 'Jatra', 'Pattachitra', 'Pala', 'Daskathjia' for their cultural aspects and uses. The study reveals that majority of the respondents felt that folk media is used quite significantly in rural development for its cultural aspect but in the era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), it is losing its significance. The study supports the idea that folk media can be used effectively along with the electronic media for the sake of the development of rural society

INTRODUCTION

The complex social system with different castes, classes, creeds and tribes in our country with inadequacy of mass media to reach almost 70% of people who reside in villages, puts over 3.5 millions of people under illiterate category who suspect anything in terms of modernity. Rural development is viewed as overall development of rural areas in social, economic, political and cultural dimensions where agriculture plays the most important role as the livelihood of majorities is dependent on agriculture. Rural development is also considered as national development and it is very much true in case of developing and underdeveloped countries as rural population outnumbers the urban populations. For alleviating poverty in developing and under developed countries, rural development is the only solution having two major components as economic betterment and social change. The basic purpose of rural development is individual and social development, development of indigenous capabilities, improvement of living standards of all categories of people especially rural poor. Any development which does not treat the vast masses cannot be justified and the rural economic growth is in the narrow sense viewed as a balanced social and economic development with emphasis on the equitable distribution as well as creations of benefits. The importance of communication in mobilizing people and seeking

their willing participation in the development of a country is well recognized form of reaching people, communicating with them and equipping them with new skills. It is a verified fact that the development and communication of infrastructure has been enormously expanded and the resultant communication and development process being complementary to each other take the country forward.

On the other hand, the quest for expressing, communicating and sharing something in a beautiful manner has given birth to the performing arts. Tradition always plays an important role in creating artistic process, particularly in the field of folk performing arts. Tradition is the process of transmission of the age old values and the contextual manifestation and interpretation of the universe. The traditional performing arts indicate belongingness and affinity in cultural context and are considered as an integral part of general life of people in traditional societies.

The first significant international recognition of the traditional media in the communication and development strategies of the developing countries came in the year 1972 when the international parenthood federation and UNESCO organized a series of meetings in London relating to integrated use of folk and traditional media in family planning communication programmes. The interest generated by this meeting and the continued efforts to highlight the folk media as effective form to convey developmen-

tal messages resulted in a number of seminars and workshops around the world. The folk media in India seems to be used as supplements to the mass media rather than at the centre of communication efforts to reach 70 percent of India's total population who live in villages. Traditional performing arts being functional, interpersonal and having a contextual base would be able to carry the message of change, development and growth. "*Baul*", "*Kavigan*", "*Chhau*" dance of Bengal, "*Lavani*" of Maharashtra, "*Gee-Gee*" of Karnataka, "*Villupattu*" of Tamil Nadu change their content and focus depending on their contemporary needs and were effective in arousing the conscience of the people against the colonial rule of the British. The traditional media became effective in many political and social campaigns launched by Mahatma Gandhi. Likewise, the eminent Tamil poet Sumbramanium Bharati started using folk music to evoke patriotic feelings. Folk tunes were used to popularize songs and glories of spinning wheels and consequently boycotting British goods. Similarly, in 1940's India People Theatre Association successfully handled some of the popular regional theatre like "*Jatra*" of Bengal, "*Bavai*" of Gujarat, "*Tamsa*" of Maharashtra, "*Burkatha*" of Andhra Pradesh, to increase social awareness and political education.

The outcome of various researchers has established the importance of folk media in development communication. Kamlongera and Van Den Stichele (2000) viewed that dialogue is the essence of any work in communication for development. Folk media has quickly been recognized as one way of ensuring such a dialogue. Zwaal (2000) said that folk media is a communication vehicle for promoting and improving dialogue which the common people or rural farmers employ to deliver their messages. Panford et al. (2001) explained the types of folk media used in the traditional Ghanaian setting and explores their consistency with well known theories. Folk media will be integrated with broadcast radio for interventions under the HIV/AIDS Behaviour Change Communication Project being undertaken as part of the CARE-CDC Health Initiative (CCHI) in 2 districts in Ghana.

Adoyo (2004) reveals that many rural people utilize folk media for communication of cultural messages. In African context, sensitive information is never passed in a straightforward manner but through songs, dances and plays using

proverbs and poems: the mirrors technique. Chiovoloni (2004) stated that folk media or local or traditional communication systems refer to organized processes of production and exchange of information managed by rural communities. These all include traditional theatre or dramas, masks and puppet performances, tales, proverbs, riddles and songs. They are cultural and endogenous responses to different community needs for information, education, social protest and entertainment.

According to Chiovoloni et al. (2004), for sustainable development of agriculture, there is a need for close collaboration between development agents and traditional and new rural communicators to revive or strengthen the traditional communication system for making optimal use of its interactive power to stimulate peoples' participation.

Chauhan (2004) stated that policy makes involved in planning and implementation of research and extension activities of agricultural fields should use the combinations of traditional and electronic extension methods, make available rural agricultural libraries and facility of Internet at village level. Kamla (2004) emphasized that the need for community social workers to understand the rudiments of indigenous communication. Moreover, this becomes realistic when considered that indigenous people are often favourably disposed to development initiatives when the changes advocated have a minimal understanding of their language, music, cultural and religious beliefs. Penelist and Adoyo (2004) defined drama as a traditional means of information which allow different possible endings by encouraging audience participation which is aimed at changing the behavior of participants of such means of communication.

In a developing country like India, an effective communication system of folk media along with mass media is an essential element in modernizing agriculture, in producing healthy, literate and trained workers for industry and for bringing about effective participation in nation building activity. All these together contribute immensely for making rural development a reality.

Thus, it is in this context and background that a study entitled "folk and traditional media as a powerful tool for rural development" was conducted in the coastal areas of Orissa with the following objectives:

1. To enumerate traditional media use in rural areas of Orissa.

2. To study the extent of use of selected traditional media for rural development.
3. To study the attitude of respondents toward traditional media.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the importance, popularity, and use of traditional media, three coastal districts, namely, Cuttack, Puri and Balasore were purposively selected for the purpose of the study. From Cuttack district, Salepur block was randomly selected whereas Pipili block and Jaleswar block were selected at random from Puri and Balasore district respectively. Accordingly, six villages at the rate two from each block were selected by following random sampling technique. Data were collected from farmers during the main cropping season, that is, *Kharif* from 1st June to 30th September and *Rabi* during 15th October to end of February in the year 2009-10. Data were collected with the help of interview schedule mailed questionnaire sent to the developmental functionaries supplemented by focus group discussions. Both parametric and non-parametric statistics like frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used for the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Traditional Media Use in Coastal Areas of Orissa

Orissa is a place of cultural heritage, folk literature, folk song, folk dance, folk art, play, drama. Crafts of Orissa are unique in nature and have a wide sphere for the rural masses as well as for the urban masses. Different types of folk media in the rural areas of Orissa, more particularly coastal Orissa, are enlisted below.

1. Baul Song

The *Baul* music refers to a particular type of folk song. It carries influences of Hindu-Bhakti moments mediated by many thousand miles of cultural intermixing, exemplified by the songs of Kabir. *Baul* uses a number of musical instruments in their compositions, for example, "*Ektara*" is a one string drum instrument used by a *baul* singer. It is carved from the epicarp of a gourd and made up of bamboo and goat skin. Other commonly used musical instruments in-

clude the "*Dotara*" a multi-stringed instrument made up of wood, the "*Dugi*" a small hand earthen drum. *Bauls* are to be found in countries like Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. The *baul* movement was at its peak in 19th and early 20th century but even today we come across the occasional *baul* with one-string musical instrument in the villages of Balsaore district particularly Jaleswar area.

Traveling in passenger trains and attending village fairs are good ways to encounter *bauls*.

2. Jatra

It is a popular folk theatre spread throughout the areas of Indian sub-continent including Bangladesh and in the Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Orissa and Tripura. *Jatras* are unusually four hours long plays preceded by a musical concert, often lasting an hour used to attract audience. The dramatic performance itself is liberally mixed with dramatic monologues, songs and duet dances, routines on the folk tune which often seen as scene transitions. *Jatra* plays are usually performed on the stages that are open on all sides. The *jatra* movement gradually moved to the urban areas and even brought literary works to the rural masses which were predominantly illiterate at that time. After the entry of radio and television and the rise of up market theatre industry, it continues to exist in rural areas. *Jatra* remains a living tradition of musical theatre and has a wide audience base.

3. Pala

Pala is an important cultural performance responsible for popularization of ancient literature. It consists of five or six persons. The drummer plays on the *Mridanga*. Others play cymbals, and help the chief singer. *Gayaka* is to sing and explain the meaning to the audience. After worshipping Lord "Satyanarayan", they generally perform their show explaining an episode, a chapter from the Ramayan, Mahabharata folk tales, and Oriya literature. Depth of knowledge, sharpness of intelligence, oratory and keen memory power are put to severe test when two well-matched groups challenge each other in a *pala* competition.

Nothing but unreserved admiration is due to the singers for their inexhaustible energy to continue the competition every night stretching over

a month. The drummer displays the skill of his fingers and relates humorous stories to please the audience. The dialogue between the singer and one of the attendances breaks the monotony of long speeches and jugglery of words in the song. *Pala* owes its origin to attempt at Hindu-Muslim unity. *Pala* as a traditional media of communication is very much popular in almost all parts of rural Orissa excluding few interior pockets.

4. Daskathia

Daskathia is another popular performance in Orissa. It is said to have been originated in 15th century in village 'pital' of Ganjam district. The word 'daskathia' has been derived from the word 'Dasha' means devotee and 'Kathi' means wooden pieces. The dance brings relief to the master narrator, that is, the *gayak*. The dance continues for three to four hours and within that time the mythological stories is fully narrated by the players.

Both the players dress themselves in a peculiar Odissi *bhesa* (orissan dresses) like those of *Paika*'s (soldiers) with full dresses from head to toe with turban on their heads. At the outset they invoked the blessing of Ganesh (lord of learning) and Saraswati (goddess of learning) for enabling them to do their performance in right manner. This part is called *Mangalacharan*. After the performance gears up, the players play the role of different characters in the story. They play on the small wooden sticks in their hands. The senior player is called "Gayak" and the junior player is called "Palia". *Gayak* literally means singer and *Palia* means repeaters or followers.

Learned Pandits with extensive knowledge in Purana, Shastras and literature perform this dance art by narrating different mythological things with satire and modern taste to entertain the audience. The *Gayak* first tells the story in lyrics and the same is repeated by *Palia* and later creates laughter and humour among the audience.

The *Palia* entertaining the audience by narrating humorous stories and episodes intermittently with the intension of providing vast dramatic action stirs much interest among the audience touching their hearts.

5. Pattachitra

Pattachitra is one of the earliest forms of popular art in Bangladesh. Dating from 12th cen-

tury and existing even today, these *pattas* or scroll paintings narrated stories based on religion or moral themes for the entertainment of the village folk. In earlier times, these reflected various events and themes for their paintings from the "Mahabharat", "Ramayan", and many religious stories. *Pattachitra* like many other popular folk art of Orissa was practiced in the Oriya families of Puri district from generation to generation. The tales of Ramayana and Mahabharata usually being a subject matter of these folk paintings that narrate the stories frame by frame.

However, the selected folk media as stated above were studied with regard to the status of use in the context of developmental messages treated for the benefit of the people of rural area in coastal track of Orissa. The data so obtained is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Extent of use of specific folk media

S. No.	Name of the folk or traditional media	Extent of use					
		Very much in use		Somewhat in use		Not at all in use	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1.	Baul song		25		60		15
2.	Jatra		30		40		30
3.	Pala		50		28		22
4.	Daskathia		45		55		10
5.	Pattachitra		15		20		65

As revealed from Table 1, among the selected folk media, *Pala* is considered as the most popular medium for communicating messages for rural development, followed by *Daskathia* to the tune of 50 percent and 45 percent respectively. At the same time, it is interesting to observe that only 10 percent didn't give any indication of use of *Daskathia* and in the same manner 22 percent, did not indicate anything with regard to the use of *Pala* in the context of rural development. Thus, we may safely conclude that *Pala* and *Daskathia* are much ahead of *Jatra*, *Baul* song and *Pattachitra* with regard to their popularity. The reasons may be attributed to the factor acculturation through which *baul* songs entered Orissa state through Bengal-Orissa border as Bengal is the centre of origin of *Baul* song. Similarly, *Jatra* though equally popular in Orissa as well as its neighboring state Bengal, is more used for entertainment purpose rather than for rural development. For all practical purposes, *Pattachitra* though confined to a particular pocket of Orissa, is mainly used for decoration

purpose without having the solitary purpose of rural development. In a nut shell, it can be concluded that these five media are used in some form or the other with varying degrees with regard to their extent of use in rural development with emphasis upon agricultural messages. This further indicates the use of such media will no doubt bring perfection both with the user as well as with the target audience, that is, the rural man in days to come.

Extent of Use of Selected Traditional Media for Rural Development

Rural development is a broad term and certain aspects like health, education, employment generation, infrastructure, environment protection, sanitation, energy conservation and entertainment can be the determinants of rural development. The point of reference in examining selected traditional media use in general areas of rural development was to find out whether the samples are capable of judging the use of folk media in development.

The analysis made on the basis of data presented in Table 2 reveals that about 85 percent of the respondents could sense the use of traditional and folk media as very much in health sector followed by 70 percent each in education as well as in infrastructure. This type of feeling is also observed with 38 percent in the area of environmental protection, 30 percent in sanitation and finally 15 percent in energy conservation. This may be due to the fact that any message pertaining to health normally draws the attention of its target audience immediately because of a type of realization with regard to the proverb "health is wealth" and education is also assessed with same spirit. In successive five year plans of Government of India, infrastructure enjoys the same status which was considered basic to rural development. Employment generation, environ-

ment protection, sanitation and energy conservation didn't enjoy the same status with that of health, education and infrastructure because of the poor focus of folk media by those functionaries who are in a position to take decision for such media use. It is further interesting to note that about 16 percent of the respondents did not witness any evidence when the use of folk media in employment generation, environment protection are in question and the percentage is just double when sanitation and energy conservation are in question. This may be due to the fact that people in rural Orissa are neither conscious nor considerably aware of the good effects of sanitation and energy conservation and environmental protection.

Efficiency of Selected Media in Disseminating Message

The relative efficiency of media in dissemination of message can be determined by how frequently the media is used for the types of audience and the place at which the media is used. These are the determining factors that speak about the efficiency of media, used in message dissemination. For this investigation all the components under general areas of rural development are taken in to consideration and data collected during investigation is presented in the following table:

It is observed from Table 3 that about 46 percent of the respondents opined that folk media played a significant role when health related messages are delivered on monthly basis followed by 30 percent and 24 percent observed message delivery through these media on half-yearly and yearly basis respectively. Similarly, next important item under rural development activities which brought the attention of folk media is education which is disseminated through folk media to the extent of 30 percent on

Table 2: Extent of use of traditional and folk media (N=100)

S. No.	General areas of rural development	Very much used		Somewhat used		Not at all used	
		f	%	f	%	F	%
1	Health	85	85.0	15	15.0	-	-
2	Education	70	70.0	30	30.0	-	-
3	Employment generation	46	46.0	38	38.0	16	16.0
4	Infrastructures	70	70.0	30	30.0	-	-
5	Protection of environment	38	38.0	46	46.0	16	16.0
6	Sanitation	30	30.0	30	30.0	40	40.0
7	Energy conservation	15	15.0	53	53.0	32	32.0
8	Entertainment	100	100.0	-	-	-	-

Table 3: Opinion of stake holders on frequency of use of folk media for rural development

S. No.	Area in general	Monthly		Half -yearly		Yearly		Not at all	
		f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
1	Health	46	46.0	30	30.0	24	24.0	-	-
2	Education	30	30.0	38	38.0	32	32.0	-	-
3	Employment generation	23	23.0	38	38.0	22	22.0	17	17.0
4	Infrastructure	15	15.0	30	30.0	24	24.0	-	-
5	Environment protection	08	8.0	38	38.0	30	30.0	24	24.0
6	Sanitation	23	23.0	15	15.00	23	23.0	39	39.0
7	Energy conservation	-	-	23	23.0	46	46.0	31	31.0
8	Entertainment	100	100	-	-	-	-	-	-

monthly basis, 38 percent on half-yearly basis and 32 percent on yearly basis. In order of priority, the next item which enjoyed the respondent preference is employment related information and it is communicated through folk media on monthly basis, half-yearly basis and yearly basis as opined by 23 percent, 38 percent and 22 percent of the respondents respectively. This is due to the operation of programme like National Rural Health Mission, Sarva-Siksha Abhiyan. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in massive scale where the use of conventional electronic and printed mass media is not sufficient to cover the message. Due to this reason, whenever and wherever possible the stakeholders of that rural development programme do depend upon the traditional media suitable for the locality.

The other reason which may be attributed to the revealed information is the temperament of both the functionaries of rural development and beneficiaries of rural development who consider the messages of rural development in almost similar manner, that is, on the basis of their need hierarchy, the environment in which they operate and the necessary support they require for using folk media taking benefit out of such use with varying degree. Accordingly the efficiency is gradually lowered when moved from the most prioritised area, that is, health to least prioritised area, that is, energy conservation and sanitation as per their priority list. As evident from the Table 3, entertainment is one of the purposes of communication which is very much fulfilled whether we communicate through folk or traditional media to the tune of cent percent.

Attitude Towards Traditional Media

The most significant development in the context of globalization is information and the com-

munication technology (ICT) influx. It converted the world into global village. In the democratic country like India marked by the diversity of languages and culture greater value is attached to ICT for the development of rural sector. In this context it is felt appropriate to study the attitude of the stakeholders of rural development programmes towards use of folk and traditional media and accordingly efforts were made to collect data to determine the status quo of traditional media in the eyes of stakeholders.

Table 4: Attitude of respondents towards traditional media

S. No.	Attitude category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Highly favorable (more than mean+1S.D)	25	25.0
2	Favourable(Between mean+1SDand mean-1SD)	50	50.0
3	Least favourable (less than mean-1 SD)	25	25.0

Mean-17.5

Standard deviation is 2.

It is revealed from Table 4 that about 25 percent of respondents have highly favourable attitude towards folk and traditional media and same percentage of respondents do have least favourable attitude. But at least 50 percent of the respondents have favourable attitude. The results may be attributed to the fact that through acculturation, rural people gradually diluted their mind in appreciating the core value of traditional media where they get exposed to all modern electronic and printed mass media for getting message related to their welfare. But still some people who are ordinarily traditional minded and attach themselves to their respective culture do value favourably the folk and traditional media. Further, it can also be safely concluded that some flavor of entertainment does lie with the traditional media in itself when compared with non-

traditional media. Moreover, another important factor which contributed to the situation as depicted in Table 4 is lack of discriminating power on the part of respondents both at the level of functionaries and beneficiaries to separate a favorable state of mind from that of highly favorable state of mind as attitude is viewed as a kind of feeling, either positive or negative associated with certain ideals, objects or persons.

CONCLUSION

The indigenous equivalent of exogenous mass media are the folk media which facilitates communication among the rural mass for socio-economic growth and development and on the same token we too observed the powerful performance and wonderful message delivery with utmost accuracy and precision through electronic and printed mass media. Both traditional media as well as electronic and printed mass media are unique in their own way. Though they can do marvelous work independently, together they can make communication more effective and authentic when employed for developmental activities of the society. Thus, the planner and the policy maker and media buyers should not hesitate to make a perfect blend of this two different types of media while addressing the need and interest of lot many people across the country, who by and large are considerably heterogeneous with regard to their taste language, culture and comfort.

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