

Folk songs and drama- an important tool of communication

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ABSTRACT

A National Committee in its report on communication media in India said, "From the point of view of its easiest appeal to the masses and its quality of touching the deepest emotions of the illiterate millions the medium of songs and drama is matchless." For developing societies like ours, with extremely low levels of literacy, the significance and relevance of folksongs can hardly be over emphasized. It provides aid in educating the young, promotes group solidarity, serves as an outlet to suppressed emotions and provides a means of escape from disappointments and frustration. The secret of its effectiveness lies in the fact that the "folk" are not aware of its subtle ways of functioning. The folk and traditional arts of India have from ancient times been used for moral, religious, and socio-political purposes. Rarely have they been resorted to for pure entertainment alone, though they are often packed with spontaneity, boisterousness and humor. In contrast to the modern mass media, the traditional media are personal, familiar and more credible forms, with the majority of literate and illiterate identifying with their formats, genres and contents. However, these forms need to be used with understanding and sensitivity. Rural India is endowed with rich, popular means of communication, including traditional or folk songs, proverbs, storytelling, dancing, drama, poetry recital, arts and crafts. These popular media are used for such purposes as recreation, entertainment, ritual, ceremonies, communication (information), and religion. Furthermore, we believe that traditional media can be accommodated by contemporary theories of communication, education, and behavior change.

Key Words : Rural India, Tradition of folk songs, Information, Communication

INTRODUCTION

The folk performing art is changing its structure continuously over centuries modifying it to the needs of the changing situations. It is making itself functionally relevant to the society. In traditional societies art is an integral part of the life of the people. Folk media will therefore refer to the vehicle the common people or rural folk employ for the delivery of their messages. Folk dance, folk music, folklore, should therefore of necessity be immense value as communication tools, collectively called folk media, to anyone involved in the dissemination of information to the rural community.

Songs as forms of communication :

What can the songs tells us about caste, gender and class that cannot be learned in other

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ways? What do the songs convey that might otherwise be obscured by merely observing social interaction in the field or by deploying more conventional anthropological tools such as participant observation? These insights and intuitions are of singular value because they characteristically deal with and involve the emotions, the cultural experience as felt in addition to as understood – that is, in psychological terms, the phenomena of intention, identification, motivation and affect that are often neglected in cultural analysis, including much of the recent research that combines an ideology of emotionality with practices that feature analytical instrument and objectified data.

Significantly, like good poems, folksongs exist in the memories and voices of living individuals. They are primarily a means of social communication among those who share common bodies of knowledge, value systems and ideologies. Constituting people's oral traditions, the remembrance and recollection of song in particular contexts also invoke a variety of interconnections with other contexts. They are therefore loaded with meaning precisely because of the interplay of interplay of inter textual resonances wherein each seemingly isolated song may in fact be related to others, which often represent competing view points and voices within the given folksong tradition. These strong inter textual connections and interactive relationships between the songs of a region are what make them so effective as forms of social communication. The fact that folksongs are sung again and again and passed down through generations also indicates the high degree of acceptability of the ideas, moods and messages they contain.

According to Kidd and Byram, "In many developing countries of the world, various folk media like puppetry, dramas, folk songs and dance have been used to engage the interest of the large numbers of the masses with the motto of community education and development. These folk media in collaboration with mass media such as radio and television used to diffuse health messages widely and effectively".

In India, Folk songs have played a very important role in the Chipko movement (Hug the trees movement) for saving the environment. The use of traditional folk songs for creating awareness in India and as a means of development is not a recent phenomena. In the Indian history, it's been reported that folk songs were harnessed for inculcating the political and social consciousness among the masses by improvising its content. Folk ballad forms like Alha of Uttar Pradesh, Laavani of Maharashtra, Gee-gee of Karnataka, Villupattu of Tamil Nadu and Kavigan of Bengal played an effective role in arousing the conscience of the people against the British rule. So did Mahatma Gandhi by using folk media with the launch of many political and social campaigns and which eventually proved to be effective. In the history of Indian theatre, there are reports of using it as an instrument of social awareness as well as political change.

Folk drama has certain advantages over other forms of folklore. Because of its audio-visual character, folk drama has great appeal to both the literate and non-literate, Men and Women, young and old, workers and farmers, all are drawn to dramatic forms, and like the Nigerian proverbs, folk drama combines more than one objective. Different forms of folklore serve different purpose, but folk drama in particular performs several functions at the same time. It is not only of great appeal, but is also closer to the psychology of the people.

As an instrument of mass media, folk drama is more effective in such societies because it easily combines entertainment with instruction. It easily reflects events of past history of a particular region, and at the same time its performance is economical. It costs almost nothing to visit a folk theatre in Indian villages and its staging does not require great expenditure. This is the reason why hundreds of men, women and children assemble to participate in folk performances whether it is the Jatra of Uttar Pradesh, the Khayal of Rajasthan, the swang and Maharashtra, the Bhawai of

Gujarat, the Yakshagana of Karnataka. These folk performances last throughout the night and the spectators do not show signs of fatigue even after a whole night performance. This also explains how close such forms of folklore are to the minds of the folk.

Indian folk dramas, according to their subject matter, can be classified into three broad categories:

- 1) The religious type of dramas. These are a sacred means of communication.
- 2) The socio-religious type of dramas. These are semi-sacred means of communication.
- 3) The social type of dramas. These are secular means of communication.

The popularity of this drama form increased and professional performers and singers began performing regular shows. Gradually the historical, semi-historical and secular themes were also included in its repertoire along with the old mythical themes and thus the new jatra began to highlight the contemporary social and political problems as well.

This belief survey of Indian folk songs and drama demonstrates that the dance-drama the musical drama and the mime-drama like the tamasha or the swang, alongwith puppet theatre, combine most of the qualities of a good mass media. These performances are artistic creations guided by the folk mind and are directly related to mass psychology. Hence they enjoy wide circulation and popularity among the masses. Prof. Huber C. Heffner while commenting on the theatre and drama in liberal education has rightly observed that the drama is an art which depicts the relation of human character to human destiny. In fact, it reflects the “whole varied pattern of human nature in all of its multifarious changes from the Greeks to the present age” (1966). Heffner’s observations are quite appropriate in the contexts of Indian folk drama.

Conclusion :

The development workers can use this idea for sending their messages to the desired receivers for developmental activities. The folk songs possess wider flexibility that determines the viability of this medium for rural communication. For effective community level communication strategies, the cooperation and planned use of both folk media and mass media are necessary for achieving optimum impact and for obtaining desired feedback. Collaboration between the folk artists and the mass media organizers is absolutely essential for development purposes. As have wider flexibility, the folk medium, can include any facts or event for delivering the same through their presentation, to the audiences immediately. The other medium of mass communication, have no such opportunity or way to execute the same. Beside this, a very quick or instant interaction between the audiences and the communicator is possible satisfactorily in an easy environment.

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