

## Traditional Media of Communication

**T. Mathiyazhagan<sup>1</sup>, Jagjyot Kaur<sup>2</sup>, M. Ravindhar<sup>3</sup> and G.P. Devrani<sup>4</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Worked at the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare, Munirka,  
New Delhi-110067, India.*

*<sup>2</sup>International Institute of Health Management Research, New Delhi-110075, India.*

*<sup>3</sup>Jaipur National University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.*

*<sup>4</sup>National Institute of Health and Family Welfare, Munirka, New Delhi -110067, India.*

*Corresponding author: mathi\_53@yahoo.co.in*

Traditional media have been in existence in India for long and have been used as a medium of communication, particularly in remote parts of the country where the modern media of communication has either less penetration or no penetration at all. Despite the revolution of modern media including; new media such as kiosks, internet, social networking such as facebook, twitter, MySpace etc., the traditional media yet occupy some space in the delivery of messages to a large number of people in the country. The traditional media are defined as ‘those media which attempt to communicate a message to a particular group of target audiences in a given time in local dialect with entertainment’. Centre for communication program, John Hopkins University, Baltimore (USA) advocates ‘Enter-Educate’ approach for making the communication more effective. Traditional media, hence, become personal forms of communication and can be considered to be ‘matchless persuasive means of communication for policy makers and administrators’ and an inexhaustible treasure of colorful forms and meaningful themes for mass media personnel<sup>[1]</sup>.

In a developing country like ours, traditional folk media have been reckoned as successful mass-motivators. During the years preceding the advent of electronic media, the traditional folk media not only reflected the joys and sorrows of people, but also inspired the masses. Mass media have extended the area of coverage of a folk performance, while traditional folk media, with their inspiring colour and costumes, dance and music; have enriched the content of the mass media channels. In addition, utilization of traditional media for communication revives culture. Systematic organization of people’s performances makes the motivational work more community based with the objectives of social and economic betterment and cultural revival<sup>[1]</sup>.

The authors in this article lay emphasis on the traditional modes of communication as 90 per cent of the world’s population lives in developing countries and 70 per cent

of them lives in rural areas. Mass media such as newspapers, television, radio and the internet do not effectively reach these people. The high rates of illiteracy adds to the inadequate reach of mass media as vast majority of India's population who resides in the rural areas are illiterate. Folk arts and traditional media are the aesthetic components of the concepts of belonging and affinity in a cultural context. In traditional societies, art is an integral part of the process of living in the community. Traditional media are classified as audio-visual media because one hears and sees the artistes and their messages. It has double impact of both seeing and listening. It tries to engage the audience face to face and brings them closer to the media. One gets quick and instant feedback in the traditional media. Traditional media are still the only means of entertainment for some regions in rural India. These media are still alive in villages and continue to provide both information and entertainment to the people in remote areas who are not exposed to the modern media of communication. Thus, traditional media are very useful in a country like ours to inform, educate and entertain the poorer and illiterate sections of the society. Every region has its own folk art form that is immensely popular in that area<sup>[2]</sup>. The major limitation of traditional media is that they cannot reach the mass audiences. They cannot create greater awareness, however, this problem can be overtaken by binding traditional media with modern media, such as Television, Radio and film.

In 1972 a series of meetings on the Integrated Use of Folk Media and Mass Media in Family Planning Communication Programmes were organized in London by the International Planned Parenthood Federation and UNESCO which represented the importance of folk media in communication and development strategies of the developing countries. The meeting identified folk media as a vehicle for the expression of development messages. India's interest in the potential of folk media as a communication device pre-dates the 1972 meeting. The need to use folk media for this purpose was anticipated during India's First Five-Year Plan. The Song and Drama Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was created in 1954 to meet this need and the Division is still active<sup>[3]</sup>. It makes the use of "live entertainment media to make the masses aware of the various national programmes and objectives" and has 12 regional centers, 1000 empanelled artists of its own and some 700 private troupes registered with it. The media it uses include puppetry, plays, dances, ballets and 'harikathas'. The ministry of health gives to the division funds from its own budget for publicity through the folk media. The programmes are designed at the division's headquarters and centers. The mobile units of the Directorate of Field Publicity and the troupes, both official and private, of the song and drama division come in direct contact with people in villages. The communication channel they provide is more intimate and vibrant and can be extremely useful from the point

of view of family planning. But their limitations are severe. As mentioned earlier, the total number of people they reach in a whole year is less than what the cinema in the city does in less than a week<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **Features of Traditional Media**

The prominent features of traditional media include: (i) Traditional media are non-technological in nature but flexible and culturally rigid; (ii) Traditional media have limited reach; (iii) Traditional media have tremendous impact on the audiences as the messages are presented live before them; (iv) Traditional media have more appealing effect to the target audience as it has been designed in communication cum entertainment mode so as to make the messages more appropriate, understandable and convincing; (v) Traditional media have proved effective in communication because of its cultural compatibility; (vi) Traditional media have the advantage of in-built instant feedback because of face to face interaction; (vii) Traditional media operate with the motto of minimum input and maximum output - Bringing about changes in the behaviour of the target audience; (viii) Traditional media have the privileges of attracting the people easily; and (ix) As the performers of all the traditional folk media are almost from the local community, they are more acceptable to the society and their ideas can be easily adopted for behavior change<sup>[5]</sup>.

### **Forms of Traditional Media**

Traditional media are of various kinds and vary from place to place, culture to culture and region to region, but in all these forms the purpose remains the same, that is to inform, educate and entertain the audiences for generating awareness among them about various development issues, including health and family welfare, rural development, agriculture, social aspects etc. Different methods of traditional media are predominantly used in different parts of the country according to the pulse of the audiences. However, the authors make an attempt to list out a few of the common methods which have been found in the literature as well as by their own observation. Each of the methods is described in the subsequent paragraphs.

#### **Nautanki**

Folk forms which have traditionally been used in India as a means of disseminating information, are diverse in nature and include different combinations of drama, dance, song, story-telling and puppetry, storytelling, nautanki, sculptures etc. Of all the major folk theatres which exist in India today, Nautanki is one of the most popular folk operatic theater performance traditions of South Asia, particularly in northern India. Before the advent of Bollywood (Hindi film industry), Nautanki was the single most

popular form of entertainment in the villages and towns of northern India. The pleasure of Nautanki lies in the intense melodic exchanges between two or three performers; a chorus is also used sometimes. The performance is often punctuated with individual songs, dances, and skits, which serve as breaks and comic relief for audiences<sup>[6]</sup>. Audiences today want to watch Nautankis that mirror and discuss their own realities, rather than those which depict narratives from a remote past. People prefer to listen to stories woven around current issues that affect them; for instance, the ill-effects of outdated social traditions like dowry, side effects of agricultural pesticides, unemployment and poverty, and women's empowerment. In essence, they want to make sense. In the last four decades, new Nautankis are centered on contemporary social messages such as health, HIV/AIDS, women's empowerment, dowry, immigration, and family planning. They deal with a variety of subjects such as black money, adulterated food, the dowry system and the problems concerning the changing status of women both in and outside the home and also the messages are masked by humor.<sup>[2]</sup> The programmes done in the Nautanki style have been broadcast and also presented live.

### **Puppets**

Another form of folk media i.e., the Puppets, have been used since early days. Puppetry is a popular form of traditional media which exist in rural areas of India. Shadow puppetry and string puppetry are popular forms. Puppetry is a very ancient art form, thought to have originated about 3000 years ago. Puppets have been used since the earliest times to animate and communicate the ideas and needs of human societies<sup>[7]</sup>. They have been employed to teach children physiology, hygiene, civics, history, geography and poetry. Thus, claiming that the subjects are conveyed to the children more vividly and are remembered more easily through the use of puppets than through conventional means. Puppets especially glove puppets have come to be increasingly used in the field of communication and development in recent years. Puppets are being used in physiotherapy, psychotherapy, to educate children, to encourage scientific methods of farming, to promote the use of fertilizers and to deal with a host of social problems. The song and drama division makes wide use of puppets in its campaigns to promote various government, semi government and private projects<sup>[8]</sup>.

### **Harikatha**

The media habits of a particular community also get established through research. For instance, the research team noted the existence of Kathakars, who sit in the village square and narrate stories, are very popular among the masses. Harikatha is

a well known traditional media form of the southern region in India. It is very popular in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Its basic characteristic is that it narrates varied themes. The Harikatha is known in other regions of the country with different names such as Katha, Kathakalakshepam, Kathagunam, Keertana, Sankeertana, Kathakeerthan and also Sivakatha. The narrator is also called by different names like Haridas and Keerthanakar. He is accompanied by other musicians on Violin, Mridangam, Tabla and Harmonium. Harikathas are normally performed by men, but nowadays we can see women performers too. It is difficult to describe the characteristics of Harikatha. It is a concentrated drama, a monodrama with only one actor i.e., the Keerthankar; he himself enacts a series of characters, moods, emotions, feelings and manners. Harikatha is a composite art form that includes, narrations, histrionics, thematic stories, music and dance in addition to moral and philosophical advices. The performer acts, sings, narrates and dances often. His performance is laced with humour to hold the attention of the audience. The origin of Harikatha can be traced to the emergence of the Bhakti movement. This was also responsible for the evolution of 'bhajans' and 'puranapravachanam'. The bhaktas conveyed their knowledge and experience to the people through songs. Saints like Kabir and Tukaram used Keerthanas for social reforms. In Maharashtra, three types of Haikathas exist. They are known as Naradiya Harikatha, Warkari Harikatha and Nationalist Harikatha. The nationalist Harikatha is employed by the agencies of state and central governments for the propagation and education of masses on family planning, health, sanitation, national integration and grassroot level empowerment, especially the Panchayati raj system. Thus Harikatha can be in the form of worship, social and moral education besides wholesome entertainment. In Gujarat, a temple tradition of Keerthana sangeet is popular. It is used for both moral education and entertainment<sup>[9]</sup>.

## Comedy

Comedy has been derived from the Greek word *kômôidia*, as a popular meaning, is any humorous discourse or work generally intended to amuse by creating laughter, especially in television, film, and stand-up comedy. This has been defined as a dramatic composition, or representation of a bright and amusing character, based upon the foibles of individuals, the manners of society, or the ludicrous events or accidents of life; a play in which mirth predominates and the termination of the plot is happy; -opposed to tragedy. The popular comedians at international level include Charlie Chaplin, Rowan Atkinson (Mr. Bean), Jim Carrey, Jackie Chan, Barry Humphries and Johnny Walker, Johnny Lever, Mahmood and Paresh Rawal are known in Hindi films and Vadivelu and Brahmanndan are best comedians at regional films

in India. Basically, they are very good communicators and they know how to put the things in an understandable manner by a layman with the dialogue enriched by entertainment. Because of their qualities of jovial in nature, they enjoy reputation in the society and find welcome place wherever they go. The known comedians in Tamil films do communicate many things to the audience to quit smoking, chewing tobacco, alcohol and encourage use of contraceptive device like condom.

### **Jatra**

It is a popular folk-theatre form of Bengali theatre, including Bangladesh and 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 is liberally mixed with dramatic monologues, songs and duet dances on the folk tune. *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 unknown. *Jatra* remains a living tradition of musical theatre and has a wide audience base.<sup>[10]</sup>

### **Pala**

This is a popular cultural institution responsible for the popularisation of ancient Oriya literature. Pala is directly concerned with the life of a common man. Being crowned with the indigenous and special traits of Oriya life, it not only entertains the common man but also inspires him to religious, moral, truthful and spiritual way of life. It is an excellent common art with high intellectual and literary values. Pala has attained a special position as an indigenous art. It possesses two merits — both entertainment and religious upliftment. It has achieved immense popularity for bringing progress to Orissa in fields like religion, culture, literature and social values. It's role in inculcating idealism in human character can never be denied. It is needless to say that Pala, which has so widely influenced the social life of Orissa, is a tool for spiritual and cultural awakening.<sup>[11]</sup>

### **Daskathia**

Again an art form that's exclusive to Orissa, Daskathia is performed usually by two men, the singer and his assistant and is simpler than a Pala. The performers - the Gayak (singer) and his accomplice (Palia) generally narrate a poem of mythological or religious intent. Apt to its name, the performance is a form of worship and offering on behalf of the Das — the devotee. A unique and indigenous musical instrument called Kathi is used in this form of performance. The singers hold these instruments

in their left hand placed in between the index finger lying one over the other. As he hits one end of the stick to the other, rhythmic sound is produced.

Like the Pala Singer, the singer begins with an introduction in which he seeks the blessings of a deity. The entire narrative is interspersed with lines dedicated to the deity. The Daskathia performance is of a shorter duration than the Pala. The attire is chosen with a view to create impact in the minds of the audience. The long silken coat and the turban form the attire of the dancers and create a gorgeous spectacle for the viewers. Themes are usually drawn from the Purans, Ramayan and the Mahabharat.<sup>[12]</sup>

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.<sup>[13]</sup>

## **Fairs and Festivals**

India is known for its unity in diversity, also known for its fair and festivals, rituals, traditions, history etc. Every festival denotes vivacity, colour, high spirit, dedications, and peace, power and humanity messages. Certain fairs and festivals are culture as well as region specific for e.g., Durga Puja, a major festival of West Bengal, Baisakhi in Punjab, Ganesh Chaturthi in Maharashtra, Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Onam in Kerela etc. These are a few occasions where exchange of greetings, sweets, messages, selection of boys and girls for marriages take place and communication becomes stronger, effective and action oriented. The fairs and festivals are considered as traditional forms of communication in India.<sup>[14]</sup>

## **MTNL Perfect Health Mela 2011**

This Fair was first launched in 1993, this mega community service is a time tested mass health awareness element which attracts approx. 3-7 lakh visitors every year. This is a right mix of tradition and modern exhibits, creating awareness about all aspects of health for people of all ages, from all walks of life, covering all under one roof using infotainment as the medium. It is a unique mega community service event, a perfect example of multiple community service event about all aspects of health, for people from all walks of life, under one roof in an atmosphere of fun,

frolic and recreation. The concept for the first time was conceptualized and designed by the Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) in 1993. The foundation coordinates the event like a mother NGO. It's a perfect example of health bhagidari between the Delhi Government and Heart Care Foundation of India.

It's a perfect health picnic spot for the children, ideal consumer health bazaar for shopping freaks, the right place for health awareness checkups (free or subsidized) and a right atmosphere for entertainment. It is an annual event organized between Dussehra and Deepawali in one of the locations in Delhi for 10 days.<sup>[15]</sup>

### **Traditional Media in Different Parts of the Country**

'Bhand Pather' of Kashmir, 'Kariyala' of Himachal Pradesh and 'Veedh-Natakam' of Andhra Pradesh lay emphasis on communications of social messages. So does the 'Naqal' of Punjab, 'Villupattu' of Tamil Nadu, 'Powada' of Maharashtra and 'Baul' of Bengal. E.g., one of the earliest plays 'Neel Darpana', a Jatra play, was first staged in 1861. It dealt with Bengali indigo cultivators, portraying the health concern and social awakening. *Pala*, a traditional form of ballad singing is used for spreading awareness on various social issues by the government of Orissa. The song and drama division of the Government of India uses various forms of traditional media to spread awareness on a number of social issues like AIDS, polio immunization etc<sup>[5]</sup>.

The use of folk media as a means of education, publicity and propaganda is by means a recent phenomenon in India. Since the end of 19th century, folk media have been exploited as a method of raising the political and social consciousness of the people and also educating the audience. Thus, the role of folk media in publicizing the social projects such as family planning, five year plans, national integration, modern methods of agriculture, matters of hygiene and nutrition and defence policy has come into the forefront since independence. Private agencies like Darpana have produced several plays on social themes either with or without official backing and support. The government sponsored play 'Aram-Rajya', relates to family planning, health and nutrition. Aram Rajya became popular and ran 250 shows between 1965 and 1966, with five to ten thousand attending each show. Individuals who have used folk forms as an expression of their own creative impulses have been able to embody their social concerns in forms which communicate effectively<sup>[3]</sup>.

Native leaders of any country are often used to spread information informally. E.g., midwives (in India and in several other countries) disseminate family planning information; religious leaders promote the 'bimas' (the mass guidance in rice

cultivation program in West Sumatra) and 'jamu' (herbal medicine) salesmen spread ideas. The authors do feel that the most effective way of convincing rural audience could be by involving a prominent village personality (village pradhan, school teachers, opinion leaders, influentials) for communication of messages to villagers. In Kalimantan in Indonesia, a village headman is involved in reminding people to practice birth control. He has a bell outside his house which is used to call meetings and give warnings and is rung every evening to tell villagers that it is time to take the pill<sup>[8]</sup>.

### **Combination of Traditional Media and Electronic Media**

Policy makers involved in planning and implementation of research and extension activities should use the combinations of traditional and electronic extension methods, make available digital libraries and facilitate internet connections in villages. In a developing country like India, an effective communication system of folk media along with mass media is an essential element in modernizing agriculture, 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.

The most significant contribution comes from the various experiments conducted during the Satellite Instruction Television Experiment (SITE), conducted in India between August 1975 and July 1976. An ATS-6 satellite loaned by NASA enabled the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and Doordarshan to directly beam programmes to 2,330 villages for about three hours a day. The villages formed six clusters spanning seven states, and four languages: Oriya, Hindi, Telugu and Kannada.

Television sets were set up in the villages. Morning sessions of the Site were meant for school children and included science education, biographies of great Indians, health education, current affairs and entertainment. Evening transmissions contained news, entertainment programmes, many of which served to underline the unity underlying India's cultural diversity, instructional programmes on Agricultural improvement, animal husbandry, health, hygiene, nutrition and family planning. Half an hour national segments in Hindi were broadcast for all six clusters and included a news bulletin<sup>[3]</sup>.

According to Chiovoloni *et al.* (2004), for sustainable development of villages, there is a need for close collaboration between development agents, traditional and new rural communicators to revive or strengthen the traditional communication system for making optimal use of its interactive power to stimulate people's participation<sup>[16]</sup>.

### **Traditional Folk Form Broadcast and Telecast by Radio and Television**

Akashvani has in the past done some work in the use of folk songs to convey social messages. For example, 'Songs of the nation's builders' titled programme was broadcast on radio in which folk singers were invited to present songs in their traditional folk styles depicting the progress made in their respective regions.

'Nai Naveli Nautankee' - is a series of programme written in hindi and produced by Urmil kumar from Akashvani, Lucknow, UP. These programmes were made in Nautankee style and are broadcast by All India Radio, Lucknow. Also these programmes were presented live in Delhi on several occasions.

'Bhukhand Tap Raha Hai' - a 45 minute radio play broadcast in August 1981 was adapted from a long poem of the same title by Chandra Kant Deotale. It conveyed the message that man is responsible for his own fate. It used folk songs. Doordarshan did its share of such programmes. Puppets were used as a medium and most of the development-oriented programmes on television which use folk media utilized puppets.

'Basanter Tika Nin' (1977) used glove puppets to allay the fears of children regarding small pox vaccinations. The programme was mainly designed for rural children within the reach of the Calcutta television centre.

Similarly the leather shadow puppets in Orissa were devoted to the theme of family planning. This film was later also shown in the different parts of the country.

### **Conclusion**

Folk media as a vehicle of the expression of development messages; including health and family welfare have been fully recognized. As emphasized by the National Population Policy (2000), the communication of messages by the folk media has been very clear, focused and coupled with local dialect and entertainment. Communication of message has been practical in approach and goes to the heart and head of the people. So many traditional media are used for propagation of messages on health and family welfare in different parts of the country. Nautanki, Puppets, Hari Katha, Comedy, Bhand Pather, Kariyala, Veedh-Natakam, Naqal, Villupattu, Powada and Baul, are some of the popular forms of traditional media found in India for communication of messages on social issues as well as on health. Traditional media primarily target the rural people as 70 per cent of them lives in remote rural parts of the country who have either limited access or no access to the channels of mass communication. Moreover, traditional media are non-technological in nature but they are flexible and culturally rigid. However, rural people have great confidence in them because the traditional folk artists are mostly either from their

own community or from the local areas and they are more acceptable to them. The question of credibility of the artists as well as the messages given by them does not arise. Though advances have been made in electronic media and their reach is quite high, yet people use them only for getting information but for putting the information into action, they need channels like inter-personal communication or the media which can help them remove their queries where the traditional media come into effect. Therefore, the authors conclude that though traditional media have some limitation, the impact of these media cannot be underestimated.

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