

USE OF FOLK AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA IN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION-A CASE STUDY OF THE ARTIST FEDERATION (KALA SANSKRUTI SANGHA) IN ODISHA

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The alternative paradigm of development communication recommends the use of cultural forms of expression in spreading the messages of development in rural, underdeveloped areas. The Artist Federation is an ambitious project of the Government of Odisha which aims to institutionalize the process. The present study is a critical case study of the project in the light of the changing paradigm of development communication.

Introduction

As India gained independence, the question of development of the newly independent country became important for the government. The belief of the then administrative head in socialistic pattern of economy led the government to undertake a barrage of welfare and development measures with the common people in focus. For carrying out the development process a host of economic institutions like the Planning Commission, the Finance Commission, educational institutions like Indian Statistical Institute was formed. The comprehensive development approach was laid out in the first five year plan document and subsequent plans. The international economic scenario was also brimming with exploration of economic policies and developmental approaches for the recently de colonized, third world countries of the world. It was recognized almost in all important forums that a comprehensive communication strategy is an integral part for making a development initiative effective. The most notable among these was the Bretton Woods Conference which launched the notions of this neo-development and laid down the foundations for social scientists like Wilbur Schramm to explore the

paradigms of Development Communication. This was the beginning of a series of experiments in the approaches of communication in third world perspective. The experiment changed paradigms, approaches of using communication as a tool of development and evolved terminologies of various kinds. The medium of communication also came under scanner as Development Communication in its present avatar, Communication for Development (C4D) has advocated the philosophy of narrowcasting than broadcasting keeping in mind the patterns of media literacy in third world countries.

The present paper is a case study on an initiative by the Government of Odisha to facilitate the folk practitioners of Odisha to participate in the developmental campaigns in their own areas in a structured manner. The initiative termed as 'Artist Federation' aims to use the rural folk idioms as tools of communication on developmental projects specially in areas which are challenged in terms of education, awareness, electricity and modern media penetration.

Background of the Study

Odisha is probably a rare state in India which has a range of variety of folk forms. Each state and region of Odisha has its own folk form. The northern Odisha, Mayurbhanj district boasts of the very famous *Chhau* dance while Baleswar-Bhadrak region has the *Mugal*

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Tamsa, a dance drama form. *Gotipua*, *Ravan nacha* and *Ghoda nacha* are other popular folk forms. Coming to coastal Odisha, Ganjam district has the extremely popular *Prahlad Nataka* while the western Odisha, Sambalpur, has *Koshli natak* and *Danda Nata*. Odisha has a sizeable tribal population. Kandhamal is one such state which showcases the *Lanka Podi Jatra*. The southern Odisha, dominated by the KBK region (Koraput-Balangir-Kalahandi) is characterized by a strong presence of tribal population and therefore the existence of a popular indigenous culture being carried over through tradition. Each district has its own signature folk idiom which is theatrical in nature resplendent with elements of dance, music and action. The Koraput, Rayagada, Nabarangpur and Malkangiri districts specialize in tribal theatre form in indigenous language known as *Desia Naat*, tribal agricultural songs called *Geetkudia*, *Dhanyakudia* and a tribal dance form known as *Dhemsas*. Kalahandi and Nuapada has *Ghumra* and *Bajasal* and the Balangir-Sonpur region has *Dhaap* and *Rasarkeli* as major folk forms. The big question is, how to use these forms in Theatre to spread message of development or awareness? This poses a huge aesthetic challenge before the communicators.

In Odisha, the two major phenomenons in this area was the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya whose students trained in Theatre and later took up development drama as a full time work. One such important organization was Natyachetana, theatre of consciousness in the very name of the group, led by Subodh Patnaik, who trained further from Badal Sircar and added an ideological perspective to their developmental drama. In early '90s Unicef began its Tfd operations in Koraput and efforts were made to form theatre groups in various parts of the district. In 2011 when Government of Odisha's Culture Department started a platform for folk artists known as Artist Federation where folk artists were empanelled in Song and Drama Division style and used in promotion of government awareness scheme.

Review of Literature

India has had a rich tradition of folk culture right from the onset of civilization. Each region of India has its own folk form ranging from songs, music, musical instruments, rhymes, poems, stories, narrative styles and theatrical idioms. During the rule of the Hindu Rajas, specially empires like the *Guptas* and the *Nandas*, art, culture and literature practices were patronized and an urban paradigm of culture was created mainly by Sanskrit scholars and a host of talented litterateurs like Kalidas, Vaas et al. The Sanskrit Theatre developed based on the

Natyashastra authored by Bharat Muni, a text much older and capable to Aristotle's Poetics. Thus, there emerged two different streams of cultural practices-one, the folk which is carried over since time immemorial through oral tradition in rural India and two, the urban, elitist culture practiced and enjoyed by educated and modern people of towns and cities. While the first was practiced and enjoyed not as a process but out of natural instinct, as a part of life style, as a self recreation the second became an academic affair, with written grammar manuals and institutional coaching. It also involved a lot of settings, costumes, accompaniments and became a costly affair with a sizeable production cost. In order to recover the production cost the audience were charged and in this way it got alienated from the poor, common masses. However, the indigenous folk culture kept on flowing freely through ages away from limelight of mainstream media. The striking features of these indigeneous media are that they are born out of social contexts and are educative in nature.

"Folk Theatre is the theatre which is transmitted by common people. Its relation with the people is deep and multi layered. It is a kind of entertainment which is not entertainment alone, it carries with it all social and religious institutions. We find reflection of cults, customs, rituals and belief of common people in folk theatre.¹"

As technology developed the newspaper, radio, cinema and television became important influencing factors and the role played by the mass media especially during the second world war led the social scientists take keen interest in media research as they too were convinced of the capacity of information dissemination of mass media which was coined as the Magic Bullet Effect. The Bretton Woods conference advocated pumping of funds to third world countries for economic reconstruction post second world war through agencies like UN, World Bank, IMF etc. A barrage of development projects and schemes were initiated by governments of third world countries like India based on loans, grants-in-aids etc from these agencies. By then scholars like Wilbur Schramm had established the need for a communication strategy integral to these development approaches.

Development Communication Initiatives in India:

The press had played a vital role in the freedom struggle of India. All the important nationalist leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Tilak, Bose, Azad used the pen to great effect as a weapon to propagate their ideas through newspapers. So it was imperative that they were pretty convinced about the influencing capacity of the press. So when the

development road map of independent India was chalked out the press occupied an important role in the strategy. This is very clear from the following lines of the document of the First Five Year Plan:

*“All available methods of communication have to be developed and the people approached through written and spoken word, no less than through radio, film, song and drama. Above all, steps have to be taken to provide literature and information for the people in simple language....”*²

Although the makers of modern India were sensible and visionary enough to mention the traditional forms of communication along with modern mass media in communication strategy, in reality the former was neglected. The Song and Drama Division was set up under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of Government of India to entertain the army located away from family in difficult positions and border areas. But soon its scope and purview was widened and it was assigned the job of conducting awareness campaigns about developmental issues, specially government schemes and projects, through traditional forms of media like song, music, dance and drama. The division never was equipped with either man power or infrastructure to perform its job to fullest. It outsourced its campaigns through a host of empanelled troupes in different parts of the country. These troupes were not always properly trained or lacked skilled artists. The procedure of making message oriented productions were not always very scientific and resulted in mostly lack luster efforts. However, sparingly there were flashes of brilliance with vigilant, dedicated beurocrats and officers and talented artists giving their best in spite of the constraints and came out with wonderful campaigns which led to sustentative behavior change.

In contrast, it is seen that the Government of India was far more serious and liberal in terms of fund allotment, in order to develop the mass media scenario of the country. The Akashvani was revamped as the All India Radio and its stations were distributed all over the country. Two press commissions were set up, setting up of important regulatory bodies like RNI, Press Council of India, Press Information Bureau, training institutions like the Indian Institute of Mass Communication were set up, important legislations like Working Journalists Act, Press Council of India Act etc. were passed. In 1975 television became a nation wide phenomenon through launch of Doordarshan. Added to this were a plethora of committees on periodical basis were set up to look into matters like television software, autonomy of government owned media like the Chanda Committee, Varghese Committee, Nitish Sen Gupta

committee, Ram Bilas Paswan committee and so on. From the very beginning the AIR and Doordarshan were run on the lines of Public Service Broadcasting which was a sister philosophy to that of Development Communication. This gave scope to both DD and AIR to produce and air programmes on a range of developmental issues like health, sanitation, education, agriculture etc. The Directorate of Audio Visual Publicity was also set upto facilitate the advertisements to be aired in DD and AIR. The public service advertisements for the print media gave sustentative revenue to the advertising agencies which were empanelled with the DAVP. It must be mentioned here that the SITE project was launched experimentally in a few rural centres as a pre cursor to Doordarshan. After the launch of Open Market Economy in India in 1991, the electronic media market was flooded by private satellite TV channels and FM Radio stations.

Conceptual Framework

In spite of patronizing the mass media it was not able to play the role as per expectation in the development sector. The top down approach of development which was practiced post second world war tried to impose development schemes and projects from the top by simply throwing funds did not work in third world countries as little progress took place in the Asian, latin American and African nations. The policies and projects were formulated in urban centres by elite administrators without any knowledge of ground reality and therefore were not implemented. Secondly, large scale lack of education and awareness existed in rural societies and the mass media was unable to penetrate those areas due to their remoteness, lack of electricity and telecommunication infra structure. Under this perspective, the scholars were forced to rethink an alternative philosophy of using communication tools to support development strategies. The first significant direction to this thought was given by Everette Rogers³ in his seminal work, The Passing of the Dominant Paradigm where he clearly stressed on the use of human communication forms like traditional, folk and cultural forms of media to support development strategies in the third world countries. Rogers advocated self development of the society rather than a mass media oriented top down approach. An excerpt from the said work goes as:

“So the role of mass communication in self-development is more permissive and supportive than in the usual top-down development approach, where local citizens are told what their problems

are and persuaded to follow certain specific lines of action to solve them, usually involving a good deal of dependence on government.” (Rogers 1976: 29)

The Alternative Paradigm of Development Communication emphasized on drawing communication support for development from the people who are themselves targets of communication thereby advocating an inclusive active involvement of the people in the development process rather than being passive recipients. The focus now shifted back from mass media to human communication-”In many developing nations the mass media in their present form are not suited for the kinds of development tasks they have to perform.....”⁴. The model transformed from being top down to circular and Development Communication (DC) was re coined as Development Support Communication (DSC). The UN agencies like UNESCO, Unicef, WHO etc also took keen interest in development of this process and as a result new processes like Behaviour Change Communication, Community Based Theatre, Theatre for Development emerged. All of these emphasized on inter personal and group communication and gave a facilitation turn over to communication practices. Processes like Theatre for Development became hugely successful and effective in African countries like Ghana and Nigeria. With the alternative paradigm gaining importance in third world countries, the human communication forms specially, folk and traditional media are once again in the centre of application and experiments. But the major question that stands is how the folk media is to be used in dissemination of developmental messages? How will the practitioners of folk media adapt themselves to the communication pedagogies?

The philosophical principles of applied theatre is credited to two pioneers namely Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Freire started in the late 1960s and early 1970s to develop a pedagogy of liberation with peasants in Brazil. Since then, his methodology and techniques of political mobilization have served other purposes for example, in awareness raising on issues concerning the environment, health and family planning. In Freire’s idea, the oppressed illiterates must be offered the opportunity to become conscious of the fact they can change their own situation. Later, influenced by Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogies, Augusto Boal developed a didactics of progressive theatre techniques, experimenting with the use of Theatre as a rehearsal of social interventions. He viewed theatre as a laboratory and platform for Conscientization, awareness

raising and problem solving. In elaborating his seminal work, Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal combined the didactics developed by Freire and the theatre skills and techniques developed by Bertolt Brecht. As a result he developed a wide range of dramatic strategies and games.

Research Questions

Based on the background study, review of literature and conceptual framework, the present study was based on the following research questions:

1. How effective is Folk Media for communicating messages of development in the present era? Can all folk forms be used as ‘media’?
2. How can development messages be designed and incorporated into pre existing forms of folk media? Is there a conflict of aesthetics and communication?
3. Whose role should be more important in the process-the government policy makers and implementing authorities or the artists?

Methodology

The Case Study approach was used for the present study with an exhaustive research into the institution (project/ scheme) with its various structural and functional unit. For primary data, Interview Method was applied for government officials and NGO officials at Bhubaneswar (sample size: 15) and District Culture Officers of the 8 KBK districts-Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Subarnapur and Balangir. Focussed Group Discussion was applied to discuss relevant issues with the members of the 16 folk theatre groups empanelled under the Artist Federation-One from district headquarter and one from block from every district. Purposive Sampling technique was adopted in all these data collections. Instruments like Interview Schedule and FGD Schedule was used to classify and categorize data according to issues and Qualitative Data Analysis was done through Coding Technique to arrive at answers of the Research Questions.

Case Study: The Artist Federation (Kala Sanskruti Sangha)

The Artist Federation scheme was launched in Odisha under the Department of Culture, Government of Odisha from April 2011 with an aim to provide livelihood support, promotion and conservation of the traditional folk art, and dissemination of information of government plans, programmes and schemes through traditional folk artists.

Under the scheme 471 type of folk art, 7482 folk artists group, and about 1 lakh folk artists were enrolled so far. Formation of thirty ZKSS, 314 BKSS-314, 9 NKSS-09 and one RKSS have been completed. The government provides Rs 5 lakhs each to ZKSS, Rs 2 lakhs to BKSS and Rs 3 lakhs to NKSS. So far 1.9 lakh programmes have been organised for the folk forms and folk artists. A corpus fund of Rs 4 crore has been created with provisions in the supplementary budget 2017-18.⁵

Discussion and Analysis

The structural set up of Artist Federation is like this- in every block there will be a BKSS (Block level Kala Sanskruti Sangha) comprising artists of different gram panchayats. Similarly combining artists of every block another repertoire will be formed which will be known as ZKSS (Zilla Kala Sanskruti Sangha). The artists of the Head quarter towns/Municipalities/ Notified Area Councils will come under NKSS (Nagar Kala Sanskruti Sangha). Every KSS will operate in the lines of a registered society and will have members led by a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The publicity budget for government awareness campaigns will be in principle allotted for socio cultural communication which will be implemented by the KSSs. Whichever department wishes to have a campaign viz. Health, Education, DRDA, ITDA etc. will contact the District Council of Culture which is the designated nodal agency in the districts. The District Culture Officer will contact the concerned area's KSS and link them to the departments. The concerned department will brief the artists about the issue, vital points of its campaign and supply them with the ICE (Information, Communication, Education) materials. Based on that the artists will prepare songs, dance items, drama etc which will be performed during a time period in different GPs under a block. After the performances a form is also supplied to audience for feedback and the department officials also submit a report. The remuneration of the KSS is directly credited to its bank account by the government and subsequently disbursed among the artists according to their collective decision.

Apart from the campaigns the Culture Department also organizes district level festivals where these organizations are invited to perform. They are invited in programmes of other departments also. Time to time TOT (Training of trainers) workshops are also organized in districts to train these artists. The state government is also thinking of taking measures for preservation of the folk forms and a few welfare measures for these artists.

Major Findings

From the procedure of operation of the KSS, the underlying principles are as follows:

- a. The underlying philosophy involves democratization of culture. The artists are arranged in the structure of a society thereby imparting them a degree of functional autonomy.
- b. Development approach is in line with community participation which is the very essence of modern communication for development. The process is ensuring participation of those people in development who are themselves the target of development.
- c. As the message dissemination is through local folk forms it easily attracts and communicates to the people. Media messages developed in elite urban set ups and disseminated through mass media often fail to communicate due to media illiteracy issues.
- d. The campaigns are providing funds to the rural artists and in this way the forms are also getting preserved.

However, there are certain problems with the policy and implementation of the project. There are aesthetic considerations and democratic considerations which may be enumerated as under:

1. Not all folk forms are suitable to be used as a awareness tool. There are certain forms which are flexible and developmental messages can be seamlessly incorporated into them like Pala, Desia Naat or Prahlad Natak. But certain forms are rigid like Dhemsas where movements are clearly laid down and any change can damage the purity of the folk form. So, the choice of form is very important. Wrong choice of form will lead to creation of an ineffective campaign. It is an important aspect of communication which demands study and research.
2. How to incorporate the developmental message in folk forms is a matter of deep research, study and can be arrived at through artistic experimentation only.
3. Not all artists are of same calibre and talent, therefore, they need training.
4. Many folk forms have died away or its elements have lost over time due to under usage. Fake lore or adulteration of pure folk is prevalent which needs to be avoided.

5. Although the operational structure is apparently democratic but the ground reality may not be so rosy as there are complaints of post holders snatching away bulk of the money depriving others. Many government officials are also illegally getting a share of the money as bribe or commission in lieu of providing more programmes to the artists.
6. In spite of being apparently democratic the artist federation is often peeved by excessive government control and government policies which are detrimental to artistic freedom. For example, often due to the dominance of message or its representation the art form ceases to be art and becomes only a conversation.
7. The funding provided for the programmes is shoe string and hence many talented artists are not getting involved.
8. The artists often prepare their content arbitrarily sitting in their rehearsal rooms without involving the community thereby violating the principles of democratic community participation. As a result they are missing out on vital real issues of the people.

Conclusion

The Artist Federation is indeed a laudable effort by the Government of Odisha but it should provide functional

autonomy to the KSSs so that they get freedom in preparing their developmental messages in their own way. The government should only provide them with a broad guideline. The budgetary provision for the project should also be enhanced if needed cutting from mass media budget. Steps should also be taken to ensure smooth and honest allocation of money and programmes to them. Also welfare measures like life insurance, special educational and health benefits should be forwarded. The most important thing is that the government must ensure the people's voice should be heard and reflected through these communication channels by means of community participation. The government's role should that be of a facilitator and not controller. □

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