

CULTURE AND MEDIA: PRESERVE OR PERISH

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Every culture is unique in its nature and features. People believe that there is change in society due to cultural exchange. Though our country Bharat (India) is very rich in its traditional culture but it is seen that the change is coming, intruding and diluting it. This study has tried to find answers to the questions like who/what is responsible for this change, does this change positive or negative, can acculturated media be held responsible for such changes in the society. It focuses on how cultural communication affects the rural life of tribal community in south western regions of the state Odisha. The communication effect is studied through participatory observation, mostly the action, attitude, and behavior of the tribes to understand how enculturation too change and shape the environment. The research reveals that the change is good but it is not always good. The communication prevails in this area is diffused many folds into to accept innovations through traditional and nontraditional media in their various forms. The acceptance of new way of life put the people of tribal village in dilemma: whether to go with the new things or to retain and preserve the old one to maintain the rich cultural value to make everyone feel proud of being traditional Bharatiya (Indian).

Introduction

India is a multicultural country with a varied tradition of every village across the nation. It is very rich in its traditional culture and values mostly untouched by education progress, social upliftment, cultural change, economic growth, and communication development. But the socio-cultural change is seen everywhere. Tribal culture in rural pockets of our country is not an exception. Though it tries to retain its traditional values but the media whether it is modern mainstream media or traditional folk media has transformed village life through its intervention. Every culture around the world gives meaning to the message it creates through its own way of understanding. Culture constitutes the essence of individual's own ways of communication. When we try to understand 'how' culture communicates or what it communicates, it actually allows people to communicate a message to one another the way it was intended, and also helps individuals to find an

identity in and within the differences and commonalities of various cultures; and the 'how' (language) is made up of ideals, values, beliefs, traditions, and behavior¹. There is a relationship between culture and communication and it is a very complex and intimate one². When we look at the intimacy of culture and communication it is seen that the language (written and spoken) is one of the most obvious prominence. And, Edward T. Hall³ (1959), an American anthropologist, traces the importance of acknowledging that communication proceeds in a more significant ways:

It is not just the visible deed of exchanging information or a message from one person to another through words, pictures or the arts. But a less visible yet, the more dominant substance of communication is the unspoken, the "silent language". It is in the non-verbal gestures; the commonalities, within the culture in which they are part, of attitudes towards work, leisure, learning, values, beliefs; it is in the way relationships are handled and in the way 'time' and 'space' is treated.

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It is in the enlightenment of these modes of communication where we can discover culture. p.186

Man communicates in 'the way he works, plays, makes love, and defends himself'. He⁴ (Hall) states that "Culture is communication and communication is culture". Man develops a culture over a period of time, in communication. The communication pattern on any society is a part of its culture. No communication medium can exist in a cultural vacuum. Michael⁵ says, "Culture is a conceptual system whose surface appears in the words of people's language". Language affects the culture as it affects the meaning of content which is the main element of communication process. If one cannot understand the meaning of a particular message due to language barriers, he is not in communication or we can say there is a miscommunication that leads to misunderstanding. Hence, to understand anything one has to know the language of communication⁶. Without communication, there is no culture. And, to establish a culture we need a medium to communicate and over a particular time, we see its development-cultural development.

The media and culture are so much a part of our daily life that sometimes it is difficult to step back and appreciate and apprehend their great impact on our lives. Soon after waking, we have a routine that involves some media. Now for most of us, media are entangled with almost every aspect of life and work. Media influence these aspects of our life as well. McLuhan well understood how media shape culture. Culture can be a vague and empty term. Sometimes culture is defined in a very narrow sense as 'the arts' or some sort of fashionable refinement⁷. Another definition of culture is much more expansive, however. In this broader sense, culture is a particular way of life and how that life is acted out each day in works, practices, and activities⁸. Another communication theorist, James Carey, elegantly captures this expansive view of culture. In 'A Cultural Approach to Communication,' he⁹ wrote:

We create, express, and convey our knowledge of and attitudes toward reality through the construction of a variety of symbol systems: art, science, journalism, religion, common sense, mythology. How do we do this? What are the differences between these forms? What are the historical and comparative variations in them? How do changes in communication technology influence what we can concretely create and apprehend? How do groups in society struggle over the definition of what is real? Media and culture shape each other around the globe, of course. p.7

Through communication we create culture, and when we communicate, we communicate culturally. To critical theorists, communications media can be viewed as industries which commercialize and standardize the production of culture (Kellner, 1989). This definition highlights an important property of the media: a business that produces, distributes and sells marketable products. But the recognition of this property is not to overlook the media's other equally important characteristic: it's being cultural¹⁰. Many communication theorists have critically analyzed the cultural aspects of media and its origin starting from old to new paradigm of media and communication development.

In new paradigm it is discovered that communication theory must return first to the villages, the workshops, the marketplace, and even to the places of worship but this time only to observe, describe, and to try to understand the communication that occur through mass media which act as vehicle of communication, traditional media in particular having roots in native culture, embedded in the local identity and social values besides providing mass entertainment helped Indian society as indigenous tools of interpersonal, inter-group and inter-village communication for ages¹¹. Of all the native culture the culture of tribe is very unique and ethnic.

Tribal Culture

Tribal culture is the way of life of tribe lives and behaves in a closed proximity. According to Vidyarthi¹², "The tribe is a social group with definite territory, common name, common district, common culture, behaviour of an endogamous group, common taboos, and existence of distinctive social and political system, full faith in leaders and self-sufficiency in their distinct economy". In his¹³ (Vidyarthi) book, according to Kroeber:

The conception of a culture and of the tribe as its social correlate coincides very closely with actual anthropological usage as this has developed through general consensus rather than explicit definition. The term culture is used here to denote those traditional beliefs, arts and practices, which an individual acquires as a member of a particular society.p.22

Tribal life is very simple. Simplicity and self-sufficiency are the characteristic of the life of a tribal village. Agriculture and cattle rearing are the main occupation for the tribes in this area of study i.e. Koraput. In general, tribal people supplement their income through wage labour and selling forest product. The most visible

expression of the cultural identity and integrity of tribal community are its distinct language and a unique body of songs, which accompanying dance and drumming in that language. Majumdar¹⁴ defines:

A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of function, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance from other tribes or castes but without any stigma attached in the case of a caste structure following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, liberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources; above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration. p.369

The regions consist of these tribes also have a different look; the environment is very culturally rich. In these regions, the behavior, tradition, culture, communication, action and activities of people are very different and unique. Their behavior changes from person to person in a different surrounding¹⁵.

Tribal people are simple. They are carefree. They are found happy and content with what they are provided with or are given by God. In most of the tribal regions the women are the bread earner and male of the family are taking care of the children. The tribes are fun loving, they are hard working too, but in the free time they drink, sing and dance and making the environment joyous, tension free. The main festivals of tribal people in this region are *Chaitra* and *Pousa*. They enjoy a particular form of dance called “*Dhemsā*”, the local folk dance especially performed by the south-western part of Odisha. Their staple food is rice, finger millet (popularly known as *ragi* and *mandia* in local language). The languages used by these tribal people are *Koraputia*, *Kui* and *Telugu*. The various sub-classes of tribal people of this area are *Damba*, *Dora*, *Godaba*, *Harijan*, *Kandha*, *Paraja*, *Mali*, *Rana*, and *Kirsani*. A tribe is in an ideal state, a self contained unit. It constitutes a society in itself¹⁶.

Enculturation

Dictionary defines enculturation as the gradual process by which an individual learns the traditional content of a culture and assimilates its practices and values¹⁷. It is the culture of their own group by living in it, and being taught things by members of the group. In tribal culture the tribes adhere to their origin. A tribe ordinarily has an ancestor or a patron deity¹⁸. Tribes follow their traditions, customs, and practices very religiously. They are reluctant to avoid social taboos. Their strong

belief creates a typical environment that reflects the ethnic tribal culture. The communication behavior establishes the strongest tool of media that is the word of mouth which carries their culture generation after generation. Their staple food is finger millet and they take it regularly for generation. But when people of these tribal places have continuous interactions with other people to get exposure constantly in a regular interval like meeting people in a village weekly markets or daily in a particular place for a defined reason they are steadily get into the new arena of discussing new things which aspire them to empathize, and that lead them to take a call to accept novelty in their life. The changes in the food habit and dress include ‘chowmein’ to ‘trousers’, ‘shirts’, ‘jeans’ and ‘*salwar*’ (an Indian outfit for ladies) for the young generation only. Therefore, it is said that ‘that medium’ whether it is meeting in a *chowraaha* (crossroad) or market place or in a village centre like under a banyan tree or sometimes it is any traditional or nontraditional media too, are the real causes of accepting new innovation. Culture transfers not only within their own group; it goes beyond that and reaches to people across the boundary. The process is termed as acculturation.

Acculturation

It is a term that describes the cultural modification or exchange that happens when individuals or groups from different cultures come into continuous contact. It can involve adapting to, borrowing, or merging traits from another culture, such as traditions, values, language, food, clothing, or religious belief¹⁹. Acculturation is a process of social, psychological, and cultural change that stems from the balancing of two cultures while adapting to the prevailing culture of the society. It is a process in which an individual adopts, acquires and adjusts to a new cultural environment as a result of being placed into a new culture, or when another culture is brought to someone²⁰. As we discussed above that the tribes are not that flexible in changing their traditional habits unless and until they are exposed repeatedly to a new innovation, they are, in contradiction, accept new things only when they are convinced thoroughly that the latest innovation will benefit them along with seeing someone of their own community have already been experienced the benefit. From observation it is found that they have started accepting new things after getting benefits by applying new technologies in agriculture through new farming process, they started learning innovative ideas to implement in their daily life. Gradually in this rural places the communication facilities improved and tribal people started visiting different other places, particularly market places

which are popularly known as *Haat* in this region. Due to improvements in transportation and communication tribes could move to different places on bikes, auto rickshaws etc. Now they have also access to television, radio to some extent.

They are inspired by the personality they watch on television or by seeing some improvement in their community. They follow their way of living. So, we cannot deny that they are not affected by the media. They are certainly moving towards modernization, knowingly and sometimes unknowingly. Media has played a very significant role in cultural imperialism. Rural mass is too not an exception in this regard, they fall prey to this in a course of time. Rural tribes in this undivided Koraput district of Odisha are changing day by day. If not directly, they are indirectly affected by the action, activities of others through different forms of via media. In some cases the impact is found so deep that they look like very modern in regards to dress, food and artifacts etc. Modernization theory can only be referred to explain the process of modernization within societies

Westernization or Modernization

Modernization refers to a model of a progressive transition from a 'pre-modern or 'traditional' to a 'modern' society. Modernization theory maintains that traditional societies will develop as they adopt more modern practices.

People are seen becoming modern (here it is understood as pro-urban type), in previous findings it is said that they are adopting modern things in regard to culture, technology etc. Modernization is the process by which individuals change from a traditional way of life to a more complex, technologically advanced and rapidly changing style of life²¹. It can be said that there is a paradigm shift from traditional to modern. In modernization the change is always at the individual level, for example a man can adopt a modern dress or technology, which may not necessarily be a change of a society as a whole, the change is in his own personal improvement, not for a society or civilization. To many communication experts 'being modern' is not 'being developed'. However, media's impact has made the rural mass a modern one to which many of us considered as developed. Here in this tribal region we see the shift from traditional to modern, but escaping the transition phase, for example young and old, educated or uneducated are found celebrating birthday in a western style and revealing that they are attracted, learnt it (celebration of birthday in a modern way) from different media, missing the Indian way of celebration; completely ignorant of how a birthday is celebrated in this area or of

its significance. This is something very uncommon transforming feature of this community. From this study we have to accept that media catalyzed modern culture. It has played a very important role in transforming society, so also rural environment.

Role of Media in Modernization: A Tribal Culture Chagement Environment

There was a continuous cultural communication in the villages of Koraput selected for the current study with regard to dressing, clothing, and accessories for dress like ornaments, jewelry, and eatables too. The study has found that during annual festivals and events like *Parab* and many other exhibitions the maximum cultural exchange occur. Groups of people having different culture come in continuous contact with tribes and so the culture of either or both groups are affected, either deeply or with a minimum effect a new culture is formed and found to be a changed one. These annual fairs and festivals are good exposure to tribes to learn new things like a typical recipe of tribal food (explaining while selling their produces) or how to cook a particular dish out of finger millets; a new way of styles in wearing dresses. These are the places where rural people meet relatives and friends besides purchasing their daily needs which are otherwise hardly available in villages throughout the year. Tribal people mostly sell and buy agricultural produce, cattle and harvest with gaining knowledge on new technology of agricultural equipments and machinery. It reveals that they are accepting others' culture. The tribes of Koraput in the process of acculturation accept the dominant culture, the culture of outsider. Dominant culture transforms the society. Hence, the most effective medium of transforming culture is the trade fairs, festivals and exhibitions besides their daily meet. These media of communication has changed the total cultural environment of rural India.

To know their usages of different articles and amenities a survey of 264 respondents are conducted to authenticate the validity of the research findings. The survey has tried to investigate the choice and preference of rural tribes in using their daily need based household items like from toiletry to kitchenware, furniture etc.

A study of the life style of the tribes reveals a significant change. With the passage of time the tribal is also adopting new way of living, the new life style is expressed with the household articles and amenities. The table 1.1 says that out of 264 respondents soap, shampoo, bucket, mug, pot and watch are used by all. Pressure cooker, bathroom, gas stove and toilets are least used

Table-1.1: Household Articles and Amenities of the Tribal People of Koraput

SI No.	Household Articles and Amenities	No. of respondents Use (Total Respondents 264)	Percentage
1	Tooth brush	262	99.2
2	Tooth paste	262	99.2
3	Soap	264	100
4	Shampoo	264	100
5	Beauty cream	288	97.7
6	Bath Room	162	61.4
7	Toilet	178	67.8
8	Bucket	264	100
9	Plastic Mug	264	100
10	Pot	264	100
11	Table	252	95.5
12	Chair	262	99.2
13	Cot	250	94.7
14	Pressure Cooker	160	60.6
15	Gas stove	174	65.9
16	Plate	260	98.5
17	Watch	264	100
18	Almirah	240	90.9

among the population with 60.6%, 61.4%, 65.9% and 67.4% respectively.

The tribal people were self reliant; their needs were mostly met by the nature itself. They were using *Datun* or *Danta Kathi*, an herbal stick for brushing tooth. Now they have started using toothbrush, tooth paste which is chemical based, not natural product. When the so called modern toothpastes are emphasizing ‘natural’ as their ingredient, the people from nature are adopting the chemical toothpastes as they are marketed or communicated well. Similar is the case for ‘shampoo’ and ‘soaps’.

The tribal were fond of using the utensils made of clay or metals. The advent of plastic has also influenced their life. Now days it is not uncommon to find plastic buckets, polythene and other non bio degradable products as a part of their life and lifestyle. They think if they carry a plastic fancy item or polythene bag they are fashionable or smart or we may say modern, forgetting or hesitant to carry a cotton bag instead. Today it is conspicuously visible that how urban life is changing, changing in other way, moving towards opposite direction like adopting rural life style after knowing the importance of natural product.

A huge market has already developed to promote natural produces from herbs to housing, arboriculture, and everything which are in demands in the elite society. The environment is changed from a cool and calm peaceful natural rural village with mud-thatched housing surrounded by greenery, earthen pots to congested concretes, chemical blended products, hustle bustle life.

To Preserve Culture and to Adopt Change

“Native peoples tend to see their cultures as encompassing systems of knowledge and understanding that are fundamental to the continuation of the tribe itself. Any harm to culture is perceived as a direct harm to the ability of the tribe to continue into the future”, said Tsosie²².

The traditional culture prevails in these places when some villagers confessed that they have not changed their clothing since ages, and revelation is “why people are running for so called modern dresses or lifestyle”. This finding discusses the different style of learning; there is a difference in learning in respect to age of tribes, they simply learn out of their own, they are very strong in acquisition of their own culture. Some prefer firewood stove to gas stove while a full-fledged modern kitchen is affordable, saying it is far better and the food cooked in earthen pots on it are much tastier than other, rejecting stainless steel utensils. It is found that enculturation strengthens the values and norms of their own culture. But there is also heavy cultural communication in exchanging their views on topics from food, drinks, and dresses to fun, fair, dance, music, merrymaking in marriages and social functions. People from the city come to villages for many reasons, mostly sell and buy, women from outside Odisha and India too, visit tribal villages to buy tribal ornaments. Young girls were found requesting outsiders to get them the dress and ornaments of their choice from cities and towns. Exhibition of new arrival from dress to technical machinery attracts tribes. Cattle market and barter system are still found in most of the rural places selected for the study, despite industrialization and modernization.

The changing circumstances not only changed their lifestyle but also changed the habit of their dependency on nature and its importance in their life. They are dependent more on factories for their daily consumption, which may lead them to forget their traditional knowledge. The lack of respect and love for nature will lead to believe that the nature is a hindrance for their better life. They are made to belief that the culture outside is better than theirs which may not be always true. Although some adoptions like watch, watching television will definitely make them

more informed and knowledgeable but the overall impact is a matter of concern.

Conclusion: Change is good but not always. Rural villagers are found accepting adoption but some of them are also remembering their past life with regret that they are not following those tradition much. The dilemma for preserving the indigenous culture or adopting modernization has made them confused in taking right decision. We know that change is the only permanent thing in world. But it is a big question to adopt which change, if change is necessary then how to receive the change with preserving the traditional culture. As media is infusing the changes in society media should instill the correct way to accept modernization with traditional values and this can only be possible through developing proper media content to disseminate. The change should be sustainable and as per the requirement of the ecosystem like the need of forest, greenery, jungle and its inhabitants. Human being should be communicating the importance of the ecosystem rather than the changing ecosystem for their achievements or aspiration. Communication should diffuse innovation, but should not ignore preservation. It is the high time to think about how to culture the culture of a good healthy environment. We the citizen of our country, mostly the educated mass should give more emphasis on the building of media culture to create an healthy culture and make rural mass particularly the tribes aware of what to take from media for the betterment of individual and society as a whole; so that they can think and decide in which direction they should go: to preserve and change or change and perish. □

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