

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AND TRADITIONAL FOLK MEDIA OF THE ZEME NAGA SOCIETY

by

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Abstract

Tribal communities in the Northeast India rarely find their approaches, concerns, and issues properly addressed by the mainstream mass media. Traditional folk media in that vacuum till now mirrors familiar details of their everyday culture, validate rituals and institutions, educate non-literate groups, and maintains conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour. Thus, traditional folk media is the indigenous equivalent of exogenous mass media and facilitates change and progress in tribal societies by communicating socio-economic change. Traditional media is found in the expression of their daily social life of the people. Since ancient time, the people engage themselves in folk songs and dances, arts and crafts, rituals and festivals etc. that are part of their daily life. Traditional folk media are indigenous channels of communication having in built character of entertainment, which was made for expressing socio-ritual, moral and emotional need of the folk such as folk songs, folk arts, folklore, etc. Folk media is a genuine means of communication and a true carrier of culture amongst various people. It inspires people to perceive the message or information more effectively. Folk media serves as a means of achieving the ultimate reality. Present article is an attempt to understand the traditional folk media in tribal communities with the help of empirical evidences from Zeme Naga society of North East India.

Keywords- Traditional folk media, ZemeNagas, Social Communication

Introduction

Traditional folk media has a role in preserving traditional values and teaching it to next generations. Apart from, often it plays a crucial role in the communication of new ideas and new social and political order. Most of tribal communities in the Northeast India rarely find their approaches, concerns, and issues properly addressed by the mainstream mass media. Here, traditional folk media mirror familiar details of everyday culture, validate rituals and institutions, educate non-literate groups, and maintains conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour. (Bascom, 1965)

Traditional folk media is the indigenous equivalent of exogenous mass media and facilitates change and progress in tribal societies by communicating socio-economic change. Tribal community members, irrespective of their education and religious adaptations, turn to traditional folk media for consolidation and integrity. Traditional folk media leads to enculturation and adopts, and increase acceptance of new messages and incorporate outside symbols in its forms and presentations.

Tradition is handing down of beliefs, experiences, and customs from generation to generation especially in oral form or by a process of traditional performance and communication. Traditional media i.e. the traditional means of communication and expression exist before the advent of modern mass media. Traditional media is found expression in the daily social life of the people. Since ancient time, the people engage themselves in folk songs and dances, arts and crafts, rituals and festivals etc. that are part of their daily life. Traditional media are indigenous channels of communication having in built character of entertainment, which was made for expressing socio-ritual, moral and emotional need of the folk such as folk songs, folk arts, folklore, etc. Folk media is a genuine means of communication and a true carrier of culture amongst various people. It inspires people to perceive the message or information more effectively. Folk media serves as a means of achieving the ultimate reality. "Folk media represents the people in their natural habitat, with all their contradictions and multifarious activities. It gives a glimpse of their style of speech, music, dance, dress and wisdom. It contains a rich store of mythological heroes, medieval romances, chivalric, social customs, beliefs and

legends. In order to understand the colorful diversity and unity of India, it is important to see the folk theater in its natural settings.” (Gargi, 1964)

Types of Traditional folk media

Traditional media is a very useful form of communication. And it exists in numerous forms and practiced in different parts of the country. Every community has its own traditional means of communication. Although some of the traditional media maintain its originality, many of it may not be in its original forms or contents. Traditional media forms were re-invented to use in modern society. Folk theatre, Street theatre, Puppetry, Fairs and festivals, Folk dance, Storytelling, Folk music and song, Paintings, Traditional motifs, designs and Symbols, Proverbs, Sound signals, Traditional youth clubs or dormitory, Traditional games are some of the popular traditional folk media forms practices by different communities across the country.

Traditional media have been in existence in India for long and have been used as a medium of communication in rural areas. Over the years, rural masses have been using the folk media for expressing their social, ritual, moral and emotional needs. During the freedom struggle, folk media played a great role in spreading the message of patriotism.

Although highly organized medium of mass communication like print, audio and audio-visual medium, Internet etc. are used in excessive manner in today’s parlance, traditional folk media is still popular among the rural masses. Traditional media depict the stories of most common rural dwellers and cultivate the rural lifestyle. Traditional folk media cannot present in glamorous and colourful manner equally, as compared to other organized sector of mass medium. But it can reach to all sections of people including illiterate and backward class. Traditional folk media can command a very strong position in the rural people’s mind, as it weaves its messages in their own style, taste and dialect to serve their various needs and purposes as well as entertain people.

Traditional folk media in the Northeast India

Surrounded by beautiful terrains and lush green environment Northeast India is land of cultural and tribal heritage. Traditional folk media in this part is associated with the identity of social or ethnic groups, hence able to vibrate and unite members of the community. Popular folk forms

like Bihu, Hornbill festival, ShumangLeela extend the message of alliance and community belongingness. Traditional folk media plays crucial role in formation of community identity and has socio-political significance in the Northeast.

Objectives

The paper is aimed to analyze the effectiveness of traditional folk media in changing tribal societies. Paper highlights changing Zeme Naga society inhabited in DimaHasao district of Assam and their affection, consolidation, and relationship with the traditional folk media forms.

Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature and conducted in the select areas of the DimaHasaodistrict of Assam. The data were collected with the help of questionnaire. Simple random sampling was used to select samples from two development blocks namely Harangajao I.T.D.P. block and Jatinga block. Taking ten from each block we chose total 250 samples from twenty villages by taking ten from each block as a sample. Besides, participant observation method was also applied to understand the traditional folk media dynamics.

ZemeNagas of DimaHasao

The ZemeNagas are an indigenous group belonging to Mongoloid race and are one of the sub-groups of the greater Naga community. The Zemes are the second largest community in the DimaHasao district. In last two hundred years many changes took place in the Zeme Naga society. Coming of Christianity, adopting modern agricultural practices, migration to urban places and other parts of world can be mentioned as some of the factors that have changed the social dynamics, community organization and cultural practices of the community.

Spread of education also brought notable changes in the Zeme Naga society. The old tradition like making big animal sacrifices, paying expensive bride prices, killing of illegal child etc. are reformed and made the tradition much lighter which can be easily followed or maintained by both the rich and poor families.

Traditional folk media of the ZemeNagas

Hangseuki and Leuseuki(Morung)- The Morung or youth dormitory Hangseuki(for boys) and Leuseuki(for girls) are important social institution, which sustains the Zeme society, religion and culture. The Morung is the best school to teach practical life to the Zeme youths. It makes them self-reliant, disciplined and helps them to understand their mutual rights, social duties and responsibilities.

Dekuakuibe: -Dekuakuibe means digging a well. It was done by a family or clan when any one dies an unnatural death like falling from trees, attacked by wild animals, from fire etc. The ZemeNagas believed that such type of person died thirsty and so their soul long for water. So, a well is dug and named after them.

Hejuadekung: -Hejuadekung is a tilted erected stone, which can be called as the foundation stone of the village. After the selection of the site of the village, a foundation stone has to be erected before an entry with some rituals. It is also the ritual centre of the village and the sport ground of the ritualized long jump.

Hekuakuabe:-Hekuakuabe means putting of stones slates together one after another. Hekuakuabe is made by the family in memory of the loved ones. It was also done to mark the heroic deeds of a person while they are still alive. Hekuakuabe is still practice by the ZemeNagas till today.

Heramleusumbe:-Heramleusumbe is another kind of stone erecting to remember a person. This can be erected when the person is alive or after death by their family. These types of stones are erected when an individual is associated sexually with a number of women during their youth life. The number of stones put up in a line was the number of women he had associated. This tradition is not followed anymore by the ZemeNagas but the erected stones are still found in some of the villages in DimaHasao district.

Festivals: The Zeme Naga celebrates various festivals. The festivals of the Zeme Naga are based on different stages of agricultural operations. It marked with the ritual or prayer to supreme God 'Tingwang' for blessing, for protection of the crops, thanksgiving etc. Some of the

important festivals are Hangleutewbe or Matuibe, Helei 'Nna or Helei Bam, Hega-'Ngi(the year ending festival), Puakpat 'Ngi, 'Nsim 'Ngi, 'Nkam 'Ngi etc.

Helim (Folk dance):- The ZemeNagas are endowed with rich cultural dances which are handed down from their ancestors. Dance is performed with the combination of song and drum beats and cymbals. It is said that the ZemeNagas learnt the art of dancing from the animals, birds, insects etc. There are different types of dance like Hereilim (war dance), Herepiebelim (hornbill dance), Kechinglim (cricket dance), Nruirekansaubelim (cock dance), Hekalim (fish dance), Timphiangbelim (butterfly dance) etc.

Herasam(Folk Tales): Folk tales have been handed down from one generation to another generation through oral tradition. They have been communicated either by their parents or grandparents or any elders in family gathering sitting around the hearth. Folk tales has been imparting informal education and invoking respect for social and ethical values in the community.

Heleu(Folk Songs): Folk songs play a very significant role in the socio-cultural life of the zemeNagas. They communicated more through songs than any other means. It is the source of pleasure and happiness and also the way to express sorrow and love. These are transmitted from one generation to another orally. There are different kinds of songs like, songs connected with agricultural activities, festivals, romance, rites and rituals, conflictingsongs, emotional songs, work songs, marriage songs, children songs, lullaby etc.

Proverbs and Proverbial sayings of the ZemeNagas

A proverb contains wisdom, moral and traditional views which are in a fixed and memorisable form and are handed down from generation to generation. The Zeme Nagas have rich proverbs and proverbial sayings which are passed down from their forefather and is used very much by the community till today in a very effective way.

Dresses and Ornaments:-The ZemeNagas have their own traditional attire, which is woven by the women folk. They spin the yarn and dyed the yarn with required colour produced by them from herbs available in their forest. The Zeme Naga dresses are very beautiful and artistically

designed with orchids, cowries, seashell etc. Men wear a necklace made of seashells and beads called ‘Tebateu’ and ‘Teluiteu’. Women wear ‘Telatau’ made of seashells, beads, cowry etc.

Traditional Folk Media Practices of ZemeNagas

S. No.	Form	Nature of the Form
1	Hangseuki	Youth dormitory
2	Heramleusumbe	Stone erecting in remembrance of a person
3	Hekoakunabe	Multi-stone structure to mark heroic deeds of alive persons
4	Dekuakuibe	Digging a well after unnatural death of a person
5	Hejuadekung	Foundation stone of the village, rituals performed here
6	Pitrerang	Symbols used to declare individual authority on land/trees
7	Hereilim	War dance
8	Geching Lim	Cricket dance
9	Herelim	Folk dance
10	Hekalim	Fish dance
11	Kereh	Village fence
12	Heraasam	Folk tales
13	Samrekum	Proverb
14	Samrang	An adage that is passed down from forefathers
15	Hepietu	War time watching point
16	Hepua-heni, Heteuheta	Dresses and ornaments
17	Nsum	Drum like musical instrument
18	Ntoi	Cymbal used along with drum during festivals
19	Nrabung	Guitar like musical instrument
20	Metiam	Zeme Naga flute
21	Tesasaabe	Announcement by priest before religious observing by individual
22	Hekialeu	Romantic folk song to propose to a girl
23	Keloaletdeibeleu	Long folk song to teach fellowmen to live a peaceful life
24	Leusangleu	Song telling life and heroic deeds of a person
25	Helimleu	Dance song
26	Keloapetbeleu	Song to express sorrow after not getting lady love, also used during departure of girl after marriage to her in-laws home
27	HegaNgi	Festival celebrated after harvesting is over
28	NsimNgi	Festival observed before the year ending festival
29	Puakpet	Day of observation before cultivation starts
30	HeleiNgi	Festival to mark the preparedness for cultivation
31	Nchang	Festival of giving thanks to god for completion of seed sowing
32	Ntuare	Place where a grain is sowed, girl (in pre-menstrual age) of the farmer sow the seeds.

Musical Instruments: - *The ZemeNagas have various types of innovative musical instruments that produces beautiful melodies. Important musical instruments of the ZemeNagas are***Nsum or drum**, mouth organ called ‘**Ntuk**’, **Nrabung**(single string violin),**Metiam** (flute), trumpets called **Kebuikie**(made of buffalo or mithun horn), cymbals called ‘**Ntoi**’ and **Hemeu (gong)**

Kere: The villages of the ZemeNagas are located in hilltops and hill slopes as it provided a better advantage for defense during the past tribal raids. In olden days, the Zeme people built a strong defensive stonewall or strong timber fence as barricades around the village with one main gate (Kere). A good and strong kere signifies the strength and unity of the village.

The ZemeNagas observe various rites and rituals, which are more or less associated with myths and legends. The folk tales, folk songs, folk dances are important part of their life. Till today folk tales are told or narrated to the children with the moral where the children get to learn the difference between good and bad. The stories are so effective that the children make the protagonist their idol and try to be like them. There are also many folk songs, which teach the people many lessons like to get up early, to be hard working, to respect elders, humble etc. It gives moral advice combined with entertainment.

Traditional media and social communication: Major Findings

A field survey was conducted to know the recognition, acceptance, popularity and effectiveness of traditional media forms among ZemeNagas of DimaHasao district. The following results were obtained-

Demographic profile of the respondents

The data reveals that more than half of the respondents’ i.e. 58.87 % are male and 41.13 are female. The study represents that the male are more open than female. It also shows the male dominance over female in Zeme Naga community in DimaHasao District, Assam.

1. Majority of respondents fall in the age group of 21-30 years with 33.52 percent followed by 31-40 years of 28.17 percent. Lowest percent of 6.48 falls under the age group less than 20 years.

2. The data shows that majority of the respondents are married of both sex with 64.51 percent while the remaining 35.49 percent are unmarried.
3. The data shows that majority of the respondents' attained education from HLSC with 39.15 percent followed by illiterate people with 20 percent. Respondents who have the higher qualification of PG and more got the lowest percentage of 2.54. The data also represents that among the Zeme Naga community of Dima Hasao District, the literacy rate; in term of higher education is very low.
4. The data reveals that the majority 59.44 percent of the respondents both male and female category belongs to the religion of Christianity followed by Heraka with 32.39 percent. The representation of Paupaise i.e. forefather religion is comparatively very low with single percentage of 8.17. It reveals that the Zeme Naga community of Dima Hasao District adopted Christianity more than Heraka.
5. The data shows that most of the respondents (61.69 percent) live in nuclear families while 38.31 percent live in joint families.
6. The data shows that majority of the respondents are dependent on the agriculture with 37.75 percent followed by the service holder with 21.97 percent. The table also represents that the respondents are also taking small self business for their living with 17.18 percent. Student percentage comes next to it with 15.49 percent.
7. The data indicates that 52.68 percent of the respondents annual income falls in between 2.1-5 lakhs and 37.74 percent of the respondents annual income falls on >2 lakhs.

Mass Media Consumption

8. The data indicates that the reading habit of Newspaper is very low with 16.06.
9. The data shows that the number of people who listen to radio is very low with 28.73 percent.
10. The data shows that majority of the respondents (72.11 percent) did not watch television while only 27.89 percent of respondents watch.
11. Data reveals that despite the poor network more than half of the total respondents use mobile phone with 57.46 percent. 42.54 did not use it. It is seen that even illiterate people are using it. It has become an important means of communication among the rural folks.

Traditional Folk Media

12. The data indicates that 85 percent of respondents agree that traditional media is very important in the tribal society. Thus it can be said that the acceptance of the traditional folk media is still very high in tribal societies.
13. The data represents that majority of respondents with 73.8 percent agree that traditional media are more effective than Print or Electronic Media. The negative response is only 7 percent and 19.2 percent are neutral to it. It reveals that Traditional media although an old means of communication, its effectiveness is more among the Zeme Nagas in comparison to Print and Electronic media.
14. The data indicates that 74.6 percent of respondents believe that if traditional media is blended with modern media, it will be more effective than using it in the pure form. This also shows that people like the emergence of traditional media forms on modern mass media platform.
15. With the march of time every element, process or form is changed because change is a natural and progressive process. According to table most of the people realized that traditional media forms of Zeme Nagas have been changed with time with 87.4 percent favour. Only 4.8 percent people said no and 7.8 percent were neutral. Thus we can say that Zeme Nagas traditional forms are also changing and it is recognised by the people. Here, a significant impact of modern mass media is observed on the form and structure of traditional folk media.
16. Majority of the respondents said that Traditional media forms are easily understandable by the people with 90.4 percent while 9.6 percent disagree with it. Thus we may conclude that despite the emergence of many new media the understandability level of Traditional media is still high among the people.
17. Data reveals that 64.2 percent of the respondents welcomed the changes taken place or modifications in the traditional media forms. Only 13 percent expressed negative opinion. 22.8 percent are neutral. Thus we can say that traditional media practices are adopting modification to increase their suitability and these changes are welcomed by majority of the people.

18. Majority of the people with 81.2 percent believe that advent of Christianity, Heraka and modern education system have an impact on the Traditional media practices. Respondents with negative opinion are 18.8 percent. Thus, it indicates that coming of Christianity, reformation of Heraka religion and introduction of modern education have an impact on Traditional media practices among the tribal community particularly the Zeme Nagas.
19. The data represents that 86.4 percent of the respondents strongly believed that traditional media practices if utilized for disseminating development messages among the Zeme Nagas can surely be able to bring positive changes among the community in a short period of time while 13.6 percent did not agree to it. Thus it can be said that a 'catalyst of social change' role of traditional media is recognized by the people.
20. According to the study, 82.6 percent of respondents said that modern youth of the Zeme Nagas are giving less importance to the traditional media practices. This reveals that with the advent of new media the youth interest in the traditional media is losing among them which is not a good impact.
21. The data represents that 87.6 percent of respondents agree that introduction of modern education have an impact in dormitory activities and functioning while 12.4 percent have negative response. Thus, we can conclude that dormitory existence and its functioning have been impacted by modern education.
22. The data reveals that 95 percent of respondents like folk songs being broadcast in the Radio or Television. Only single percentage i.e. 5 percent did not like it. The data indicates that blending Traditional media with broadcast media will be very effective.
23. The data represents that 86.2 percent of the respondents have been personally participated in the folk dance. 13.8 percent of them have never taken part in it. Thus, the study shows that the participatory nature of traditional folk media is very important factor behind its popularity.
24. The data indicates that 85 percent of respondents agree that they have seen changes in the dance form. 15 percent of the respondents gave negative response. Thus, we can conclude that changes have taken place in folk dance with the change of time.

25. The data represents that majority of respondents with 97.4 percent enjoy the traditional festivals. Thus, the table indicates that enjoyment is a part of every traditional festival which everyone expects during the festival time.

Discussion

Traditional folk media and social Change

Change is the universal thing in human society. Every society has experienced change internally or externally. Social change is any change that had taken place in a society. According to New World Encyclopedia “Social change is a general term which refers to change in the nature, the social institutions, the social behaviour or the social relations of a society, community of people, or other social structures; any event or action that affects a group of individuals that have shared values or characteristics; acts of advocacy for the cause of changing society in a normative way”. Thus, social change is an ever- present phenomenon in every society.

Social change in tribal societies can evolve from a number of different sources, including contact with other societies, changes in the ecosystem, technological change, and population growth and other demographic variables. Social change may include changes in nature, social institutions, social behaviours, or social relations. Social change is used to indicate the changes that take place in human interactions and interrelations.

The present research reveals that with the change in the society traditional folk media also witnesses changes in the form, structure, and presentations. Interestingly this study finds great affection and acceptance for traditional folk media among the youths of Zeme Naga community. Study also finds value of traditional media for development communication.

Social Change among the ZemeNagas

The Zeme Naga society had undergone many changes in its journey to modern society. In the present days, the ZemeNagas who had embraced Christianity have given up all animistic rites and rituals. But the beautiful folk dances, folk tales, folk songs, dresses; ornaments etc. are still practice by them. The traditional forefather religion ‘Paupaise’ follower still follows the rites

and ritual but not very strictly as observed in the olden days. With the advent of Christianity and western education, the status of women is said to have improved in the Naga society.

Study establishes that traditional means of communication is very significant in the life of ZemeNagas. It cannot part away from them as long as they are Zeme. Traditional folk media carries significant meanings of yearly important events. Every tribal traditional folk media depicts the different important occasions of the year. In everything that they do has a particular time, which is communicated through songs, flute, nra (violin) ntuk (toto), nsum (drum) etc.

Transformation in Traditional folk Media practices

With the march of time and incorporation of new socio-cultural elements traditional folk media forms have also been changed. For instance, sometimes-proverbial Zeme songs speak louder and truer than the speech one can express. An old man may chant his song to express of some of genuine fact about one's background and status instead of narrating in his speech.

In the present times, changes in traditional folk media are brought in assimilation with modern media instead of remaining in using traditional media. The advent of Christianity has an impact on traditional folk media. Some of traditional folk media are too primitive to watch with modern ones. When Christianity and education came some of the elements of traditional media have deserted. The Zeme had a practice of communicating through chanting song among boys and girls on important occasion, which they called it "Hekialeu", or "Kahekiabe". The uses of Hekialeu or Kahekiabe have no more among youth today. When this tradition had been in practice, young boys and girls can chant Hekialeu from dawn to dusk without communicating in conversation.

Impact of Modern Media

Modern media have also an impact on traditional media. Print media like signboard, billboard etc. are popularly used today even in rural areas. In traditional media system communication are done mainly through human means to spread some events and news. Mobile communication, Internet and social media also utilized by people to communicate message. Modern public address system is rapidly replacing traditional means for announcement. Instead of erecting plain

stone to commemorate some important event of an old people, now-a-days inscription are used in memorial stone. Blowing of horn is very rare which was very important to announce or proclaim autumn seasons. However, the tradition remains the same even though its practice is not very regular.

Modern mass media has influences traditional folk media practices of ZemeNagas in so many ways. Though some of the traditional folk media practices have been blurred or discontinued after coming of modern mass media, the present study finds favour from the audience for blending of traditional folk media with modern mass media. Use of modern mass media Platforms can be very effective in preservation, spread and popularity of traditional folk media.

CONCLUSION

The traditional folk media is so closely connected with ethnic and tribal societies and it reflects mythological, philosophic and mystical systems and beliefs. This association gives them unparalleled connectivity and acceptance in such societies and even in the age of digital and speedy communication makes them primary and dominant media. Like any other society tribal societies are also going through the socio-economic changes and it is marked by adaptation of new religion, educational system, settlement system, economic activities and migration tendencies. Social change has brought openness and acceptance for changes in the form, structure and revival in the traditional folk media that helped in regaining its importance in the social communication.

All over the world traditional folk media is facing threat of death in the ever-changing and globalizing environment. Socio-economic modernisation and facilitation of modern information and transportation facilities bring internationalised popular culture that is replacing various folk forms and presentation from the social communication. Traditional folk media has been the part of local societies and cultures. Earlier it was safeguarded in the memories of the members of the society. Now it is responsibility of all to preserve these beautiful, natural mode of communicating prosperity, identity and culture.

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