

Commentary-1

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FOLK MEDIA: AN ACTIVE MEDIA FOR COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS IN DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

In the field of communication various models and theories tell about the process of communication on the basis of various research and elements involved in the process, if we talk about the culture in this regard almost all models and theories somehow explain sender with his/her own background, belief, values, attitude, moods, experiences; which have everything to do with his/her culture. In present time though it is a modern era yet we could not explain communication process without explaining our culture; because two elements of this process, sender and receiver are directly related to their own culture. And only folk media is directly related to our culture; we need to rejuvenate our folk media so as to their preservation long lasting. This article will speak about the folk and traditional media in our country with special reference to Rajasthan state. Rajasthan is a state located in northwest of India and very famous as the 'land of kings' and state of deserts. Number of folk tales, songs, and dances made this state culturally very strong. Folk of Rajasthan is very rich and represents the state itself. Dhola-Maru

is a well-known folk tale and it is still alive in our Indian cinema in the form of Romeo-Juliet in the story. In this article I will explain that how a folk media maintain its presence in today's fast media (digital media) along this I also wish to make people aware about the various folk arts and folk media existing in Rajasthan.

Key words: Communication, Folk Theatre, Folk Media, Folk-Fast Media, Dhola-Maru, Traditional Media

Introduction:

The Heritage of India is itself a classic example of folk communication. Throwing a light on the history of communication shows that India has richest traditional mode of communication among all countries of the world in ancient time. Folk of India is still surviving in the era of cyber communication. For example 'Along with the Government of Rajasthan, FES has been running the *Shamlat Abhiyan*—the Campaign on Commons in Rajasthan—for more than a year now.

'In the campaign, FES has been involved in creating and disseminating material for informing and enabling the stakeholders and has been engaging with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the state for taking the campaign to the entire state. FES has been holding workshops for the government and *panchayat* functionaries at the division, district and block level, as well as the legal and media fraternity and for fellow NGOs across the state. 'A media campaign, for highlighting the importance of commons in rural lives, is also being implemented.

Folk media are being used for disseminating information on the commons, helping to reach more than 20 million people across 9,000 *panchayats* of the state and assisting action on ground.'

No media have the power to replace folk media because folk media is originated in the environment of our culture, belief and values and these are incredible! The oral tradition of peasants in India is rich in its variety and content. It consists of lyrical folk songs of numerous types, Ballads; heroic poems and epic lays; folk opera prose narrative such as marchen, legends and myths; proverbs and mnemonic formulae; riddles; and a variety of magical formulae and incantations. The elements of the oral tradition of folk literature are closely related to specific sections of the structure and to particular aspects of social life. (*Deva Indra, Folk Culture and Peasant Society in India, Page 1-2, Rawat Publication*). There are lots of things to convey, to express and to deliver for which our mass media are not suitable in every aspects. We need some

special kind of channel to communicate some special things having some different impact essence; folk media is a kind of media having an unusual way of conveying messages which affect directly to our heart and senses. Even in today's cyber scenario Government organizes its campaign through traditional or folk media whether in the way of nukkad natak, street plays and sometimes through puppetry shows.

The folk and traditional arts of India have from ancient times been used for moral, religious, and socio-political purposes. Rarely have they been resorted to for pure entertainment alone, though they are often packed with spontaneity, boisterousness and humour. In contrast to the modern mass media, the traditional media are personal, familiar and more credible forms, with the majority of literate and illiterate identifying with their formats, genres and contents. However, these forms need to be used with understanding and sensitivity.

The folk media are close to our heart and mind. It hits directly to our sensitivity and finally we feel the message. This is the reason why folk is still alive it is around two thousand years old. In this digital era people want messages very quickly and immediately and they get also because of the digitalization of the media. But digital age could not able to dominate our culture and that is why organizer, people, media persons are using folk media for communicating messages related to culture and basics of life style.

Science and Health Communication through Folk Media

Heart Care Foundation of India, New Delhi is running a countrywide campaign for science and health communication especially on nutrition under a nationally coordinated project of the Parishad using various folk forms for taking messages of nutrition related issues to the people at large. The campaign includes training and orientation of performing groups in different states, folk performances in various states, and performances at national level in Delhi/ New Delhi. This 10 months' campaign involves street plays, puppetry and folk songs, etc., as tools for communication. The programme was implemented in association with Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of

Folk Media and Indian Culture

Traditional / Folk media are those that were in vogue during the prehistoric and historic times in India. They are still thriving, although they lack the sheen in the wake of the domination of the modern and electronic media of today. Nevertheless they are held valuable, socially relevant, soothing, and superior by the art connoisseurs of today.

PC Joshi avers that India's rich folk arts and cultural forms should be used to regenerate our old culture. There are three features of our folk traditions, opines Joshi. These are as follows:

1. In the folk tradition, the entertainer, entertained, creative artists and community are rolled into one.
2. Art and cultural forms arise as a response to the struggle for social existence against the hostile forces of nature and society.
3. It has constituted the fountainhead of themes, legends, myths, imagery and symbolism that the classical art and culture has drawn upon in abundant measures. The periods of literacy and cultural rebirth have been the periods of cross-fertilization between folk and classical traditions. The periods of literacy and cultural poverty and decay have been the periods of alienation of sophisticated art from folk roots and moorings.

In a folk tradition there is no distinction between classes and masses. This lack of distinction is the source of power in folk arts and cultural forms. The class society creates a cleavage between material and cultural spheres and between the producers material goods and creators of artistic forms and cultural values. These revolutions derived their energy and legitimacy by installing people, the producers of material values, in the centre of the process of cultural values and vice versa. Today, we can again see the conflict between these two tendencies: one of these tends to preserve and heighten the cleavage between classes and masses and other tends to bridge the gap or reduce it. Hence the country like India has the challenge to design the utilization of the communication technology that bridges this apportioned gap and between producers of material values and creator of the cultural values because in these countries folk media is a part of their heritage.

The modern communication technologies are based on electronics engineering, computer operations, satellite operations etc. they can be used with wisdom to:

1. Create diversity and not homogeneity
2. Ensure participation and not exclusion
3. Integrate the masses and not to polarize them
4. Help in dispassion and not in connection

Marshal McLuhan promoted the concept of 'global village'. He also stated that specialist technologies Detribalize and non-specialist electronic technologies retribalize. The electronics technologies would resume person-to-person relations in smallest village scale. The organic would supplant the mechanical. The dialogue would supersede the lecture. Hence, according to the McLuhan, the electronic age is literally one of illumination.

In practical terms, three kinds of activity connected with folk media can be identified in India-

1. The preservation of folk media and the presentation of these forms through mass media agencies.
2. The use of folk media to convey development messages through live performances,
3. The use of folk media to convey development messages through mass media agencies.

The folk or traditional arts of India have from ancient times been used for moral, religious and socio-political purposes. Rarely have they been resorted to for pure entertainment alone, though they are often packed with spontaneity, boisterousness and humour. Indeed, they have been, down the ages, schools of learning, courts of justice, and discussion for a representative of the public sphere. In contrast to the modern mass media, the traditional media are personal, familiar, and more credible forms, with the majority of literate and illiterate identifying with their formats, genres and contents. However, these forms need to be used with understanding and sensitivity.

India may be called as Mecca of folk culture as it has a number of folk media in her heritage. There are number of folk theatre exist in India in different state. These are *Tamasha, Powada or Powala, Keertana, Yakshganga, Dashavatar, Nautanki, Ramlila and Raslila, Jatra,*

Bhavai, Therookuthu, Puppetry, street theatre. Folk media forms Communication in India divided into-

1. Folk theatre
2. Folk songs
3. Predominantly narrative forms, including ballads, folk tales, and other story telling forms
4. Religious discourses
5. Puppet shows

Folk of Rajasthan: Present state of survival

In Rajasthan you will find number of activities related to the folk. In fact organizations of this state prefer, disseminating information through folk media, Puppetry, folk tale, songs, dances are very famous in this regard. Folk media is a kind of media for which we could say that medium for the people and by the people. These short activities relate Rajasthan to its cultural depth. In Rajasthan Folk literature is as much a factual as an emotional mirror of society. Our folk songs and tales can be classified into two categories; one type is that which can be heard in every home and the other being that which is sung and narrated by professional Charans (barbs), Bhats (panegyrist), Poets, Dholis and Dadhis (drummer who sing along while drumming) and other artists. While coming down the ages, these songs and tales went through alterations and modifications according to the particular age they were in. The folk songs and tales were not the creations of single individuals but were collectively created by society. They came down to man as support system – giving validity to his values. What we called refined literature and poetry, art and culture, are basically constituent genres of our folk literatures and folk arts.

Rajasthani language originated from Vedic Sanskrit stream, called *Shaurseni Prakrit*. Script of this language is Devnagiri.

Puppet performing Art:

Puppet performing folk art is very popular in Rajasthan. During the past, its exponents and practitioners are found throughout the India. Puppets are made of many materials and are various types. C S Rayudu has defined some categories, and puppets can be made according to the traditional folk lore of the region, skills of the craftsmen, and the requirements of the rendition.

According to Meher Contractor, ‘Puppets have a subtle impact on simple audiences which no human actor can achieve.’ Meher Contractor has used puppets for over fifteen years to teach children physiology, hygiene, civics, history, geography, and poetry, 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. The Songs and Drama division makes wide use of puppets in its campaigns to promote various government projects. Several other organizations, government, semi-government and private, have also used puppets in support of individual schemes.

In puppetry shows music are played to attract the audience as well as to establish the scene. The puppets are made to dance and act according to the rhythm of this music. The doll is controlled with the help of few stings. The persons, who control the performance of puppets from behind the screen, have to be trained in this art. One person behind speaks the screen and also sings, depending upon the demand of the situation. The dolls are made-up of leather and wood. The head and body strings of the puppets are attached to a cloth covered ring that fits into the puppeteer’s head. The puppets hand and arms are controlled with the help of small rods. It’s feet are attached through other short rods to the puppeteer’s shoes. The body of the puppeteer controls the movements of the puppet. It is quite amazing to watch how the puppeteer controls the puppet and makes it look alive. The themes of puppetry shows change state to state and sometimes community to community or even according to the messages.

Types of Puppetry:

1. **Sutradhari:** the leader of the puppetries is known as the sutradhari (Male) or sutradharika (Female). He assisted by three or four persons to manipulate the puppets. The strings of each puppet are attached to an iron ring on the head of the puppeteer. This allows the sutradhari to operate the puppets with his hands.
2. **Rod Puppet:** it is also called ‘Putul Nauch’. The puppets are generally dresses in jatra style. They are made large in sizes and fixed to heavy bamboo sticks. Such sticks tied to the waist of Sutradhar.
3. **Shadow puppets:** they are known by different names such as chhaya puti in Rajasthan and Tholu Bomalatra in Andhar Pradesh. A cotton screen is used to make shadows of

puppets fall on a transparent cotton screen. Tanned hides are used to prepare shadow puppet figures. In Karnataka, this style is called Togalu Combe Atta. In Kerala it is called it Tholpava Koothu and in Orissa, they call as Ravan Chhaya.

4. **Hand Made Puppets:** they look similar to *kathakali characters* of Kerala. These puppets are more popular. In Orissa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Present Status:

In the present era, puppetry of any genre does not seem to affect the masses on a large scale. The electronic era has forced this art to die, although it is still being practiced in some remote villages of the country. In Udaipur, there is puppet museum. In this museum, visitors witness puppet performances for a period of nearly one hour. The Andhra Pradesh Handicraft Development Corporation has identified leather puppets along with other four crafts namely, Telia Rmal, Scroll Painting, Dokra Castings, Veena/Mridangam making as dying art forms. It has taken up some schemes to uplift the status of this vanishing art.

Ministry of Environment & Forest, Government of India, Jaipur, starts a campaign on National Environmental Awareness Campaign, 2013-14 under the theme 'Biodiversity Conservation' and for the awareness activities the ministry decided to choose folk media along with other media. This shows that the folk media have deeply rooted in our country for conveying the message in this news media age.

Film *Paheli* (2004) directed by Amol Palekar, was based on Rajasthan's culture and if you remember in that film puppet have been used to start and to end the story very beautifully. Director has shown the importance folk media even in this digital era. The whole story of the film was led by the puppets.

Folk Tales of Rajasthan

Before starting different kinds of folk media in Rajasthan, I prefer to tell here an interesting story, a folk tale very famous in this region as Dhola-Maru; which reflects in folk songs also;

Maru thare des mein nipuje teen ratan..

maru thare des mein nipuje teen ratan..

*ek dhola(Dhola Maru love story), duji marwan (priyamaa),
theejo kasoomal rang
padharo mhare des, padharo mhare des ni,
kesariya balam, aawo ni padharo mhare des*

Once upon a time there was a small kingdom called Poogal and the king of the kingdom was Pingal. One day he decided to have his infant daughter Maru married off to Dhola, the son of Nal, the king of Narwar and his good friend. So Dhola and Maru got married at childhood but before they attained adulthood Nal died, and not surprisingly his son Dhola forgot the marriage vows he had exchanged with Maru at birth. So Dhola got married again to Malwani, while Maru pined away for him as her father king Pingal sent umpteen messages to Dhola which he never received as his wife Malwani had all the messengers either arrested or bumped off.

Maru got through to Dhola finally through a group of folk singers, and Dhola on learning about his first wife started off for Poogal immediately. However the cunning Malwani was not going to let the two childhood sweethearts meet if she could help it. As Dhola set off she sent word through a messenger that she had died and Dhola ought to hurry back. Dhola not oblivious of the ways of Malwani saw the lie for what it was and carried on. His journey to Poogal was uneventful apart from an inopportune encounter with Umar Sumar, the leader of a band of robbers who tried to persuade him that his wife Maru had been married off to somebody else. Umar Sumar was himself very keen on Maru, but Dhola was having none of it. He arrived at Poogal to a tumultuous welcome and Dhola and Maru were united at last. However the star-crossed lovers' troubles were not over yet.

On the way back to Narwar, Maru was stung by a desert snake and died. Overwhelmed with grief Dhola decide to become the first 'male sati' in Rajput history by ascending the funeral pyre of his wife; but was saved in the nick of time by a yogi and yogini who claimed that they could bring Maru back to life. They played their musical instruments, and believe it or not these modern day seers actually brought back Maru to life, but the remarkable story doesn't end here. Enter the villain of the piece Umar Sumar once again. He hadn't rid himself of his infatuation for Maru and invited the gullible couple to spend an evening with them. However the couple's fairy godmother was obviously working overtime and again they were warned of the dacoit's evil intentions, this time by some folk singers. Whereupon the couple jumped atop their camel and made off for Malwa in double quick time. And like all Cinderella-endings, the couple along with

Malwani lived happily ever after. (This story is very rare to find in books. So that it has been written as found on internet)

In spite of this famous Dhola-Maru folk tale a number of folk tales are famous in Rajasthan as follows- *Moomal, Bharmali, Jalal Bumna, Sorath, Asa, Kehar, Saini, Ujli Jethwa, Jheema Charani, Jasma Oddhan, Abhalde, Nagji, Ramu Charana*

Folk Songs of Rajasthan

Folk songs of Rajasthan have been delightfully impressive in their simplicity and lucidity. Man has expressed his tender feelings, hopes and heroic sentiments in a very spirited manner through them. Folk songs were the only medium through which a woman could express herself freely.

Folk dances of Rajasthan

It said that Rajasthan's dances touch our emotions. In this state there are very tough and challenging dances we may find; these are Terhatali, Kalbeliya, Ghoomer Dance, MAtaka Bhawai and Chakari dance. These dances are known as the best way to express human emotions, as people said here. I saw almost all dances but found details on a famous website related to Rajasthan, www.lokkala.org.

I want to give here the details of these dances as written in website-

Terhatali: it is a tantalizing dance performed by women while sitting. The women have manjeeras (little brass discs) tied with long strings to their wrists, elbows, waists, arms and a pair in their hands as well

Kalbeliya: It is one of the sensuous dances forms of Rajasthan. Performed by the Kalbeliyas, the snake charmers' community. The kalbelia dancers wear long, black, skirt embroidered with silver ribbons. As they spin in a circle, their body sways acrobatically, so that it is impossible to believe that they are made of anything other than rubber. These dancers use their agile and flexible bodies in such a way that they look like crawling snakes. As the beat increases in tempo, the pace increases in such pitch that it leaves viewer as exhausted as the dancer.

Ghoomer Dance: It is the most famous of the Rajasthan's dances and has been appreciated worldwide. In this many women dance on the music of dhol, thali and manjeera, it depicts the lifestyle of the medieval rajput princes.

Mataka bhawai: It is a popular dance in the villages. The performer often surprises audience as this is a starting combination of concentration and balancing. The dancer balances a number of earthen pots over his head while dancing on nails or broken glass.

Chakari Dance: This dance is performed by the nomadic kanjar tribe of Rajasthan at the time of wedding; with skirts whirling the women give an impression of a spinning top hence the name Chakari dance.

Conclusion

Though it is a digital era but the good part of this era is that it includes all arts of communications in a single medium. These days this media is playing a vital role in the preservation of folk media. No media can replace folk but today, there is a great need to conduct researches and study on our folk songs, folk tales, and folk dances. It is also important that we reflect upon our customs and traditions. If this is so then we need to maintain and develop the status of folk media in our country. Folk literature is a mirror of our society. Ancient history and culture lies veiled in its songs, tales, popular proverbs and idioms. The most important aspect of folk literature is that it delineates, most truly, the essential nature of man and bares the intrinsic reality of society. The virtues and voices, the good feeling and the bad ones, in fact every aspects of man's life is depicted here in its most natural and intrinsic form. In actuality, folk media has a clear – cut advantage over electronic media. The familiarity, personal contact, common language, intelligibility, credibility and acceptance make folk media universally acceptable among rural people. In electronic media such as TV and radio, messages come out of an impersonal electronic box, but in folk media, there is a very close contact between the sender and the receiver. As the contact is direct and personal, the messages in folk media are far more credible and acceptable than if they were transmitted through the electronic media. There is a need to make rural people more aware about the present scenario and reality of the changing life style; if we plan to communicate with rural media we think about the folk media very obviously. In this fast changing time we cannot leave our rural part and for their development communication is the only tool and for communicating to them our folk media is the only and best media.

I found these advantages of folk media in a module while going through the literature review for this paper; these are:

- Most useful in human communication
- No need for special training or technology
- Mostly embedded in one's own culture and tradition.
- Very much a part of our lives
- Feed back is immediate and own
- Flexibility in changing the form and content for the existing context.
- Cost effective
- Very easy to remember and quickly attract the masses.
- Most intimate with the masses in all the religion of the country
- Primary appeal is to the emotions rather than the intellect
- Commands on immense variety of forms and themes to suit the communication requirements to the masses.
- Local and live, and able to establish direct rapport with the audience
- Easily available to their audience
- Flexible to accommodate new themes
- Enjoyed and approved by all the people of different age groups

These are the very positive points of folk media reflecting the importance of this media. These days internet is playing a very important role to disseminate these folk lore in all over world.

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