Role of Folk Media in Rural Development

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Abstract:

Generally folk media represents those arts which is inherited by a homogenous segment of the society through oral transmission. Today the development planners have realised that culture, values and beliefs are not impediments to development. On the contrary they facilitate development. Folk media are cultural institutions transmitting values, thoughts, norms, beliefs and experiences in the society and it has been carrying on this function of transmission for ages with impeccable effect. Today development is more qualitative than quantitative with attention being paid on participatory democracy. It is in this perspective that one cannot ignore folk media which exemplifies participatory approach. An analytical study of the use of the folk media in rural development by the information and Publicity wings of both Central & State Governments in Karnataka makes interesting revelations. Usually the field offices prefer to tread on the beaten path. Shockingly these units spend less than one paisa per person which calls for a reappraisal of the financial aspect of these government agencies if they have to effectively deliver goods. The dismal performance of governmental agencies has prompted NGOs and other voluntary agencies to tap folk media in support of development. Thus folk art has prospered under the patronage of common man rather than rulers. It survives only when it is given freedom to express itself as it is a creative medium.

Introduction:

Over the years the concept of development has undergone transformation. Earlier, to develop was to eradicate poverty. It was in the seventies, that the role of culture in development was
recognised. Today the development planners have realised that culture, values and beliefs are not impediments to development. On the contrary they facilitate development. It was Wang and Dissanayake in 1984 who made a significant revelation that culture was essential not only to provide a context to development and change but also to maintain a certain degree of continuity. Thus experts at the helm of affairs have recognised the fact that culture is more an asset than a liability. It is this new conceptualisation about culture and tradition strengthening the process of Communication which paved the way for the re-emergence of folk media. Generally folk media represents those arts which is inherited by a homogenous segment of the society through oral transmission. Wang and Dissanayke define folk media as ‘a communication system embedded in the culture which existed before the arrival of mass media, and still exists as a vital mode of communication in many parts of the world, presenting, a certain degree of continuity, despite changes’. Folk media are cultural institutions transmitting values, thoughts, norms, beliefs and experiences in the society and it has been carrying on this function of transmission for ages with impeccable effect. Further, being a veritable storehouse of human experiences, folk media portray a realistic depiction of mass culture, therefore forming an integral part of the development process. Today development is more qualitative than quantitative with attention being paid on participatory democracy. It is in this perspective that one cannot ignore folk media which exemplifies
participatory approach. As a result, the flexible, open-ended process of communication in folk media would facilitate empowerment of the people.

In India it’s the governmental agencies, viz., Field Publicity Units and Song and Drama Division of the Central Government and the Information and Publicity Departments of the State Government which are the largest users of folk media in support of development activities in the rural areas. Undeniably, folk media is promoting the message of government in the way it is intended by the government. The system, in fact, has become counterproductive. Folk media has therefore been branded as government media, promoting and protecting the interests of the establishment. As a consequence, its credibility has taken a nosedive. The veracity of the source of these development-oriented messages in folk media is being questioned.

An analytical study of the use of the folk media in rural development by the information and Publicity wings of both Central & State Governments in Karnataka makes interesting revelations.

Usually the field offices prefer to tread on the beaten path. The functional application of folk media as purveyours of news, information, thoughts and knowledge in different parts of the Karnataka State does not commensurate with their extensive availability.

The hanky-panky selection procedure adopted by the units in selecting folk artistes has further deteriorated the organisation of folk media programmes. In fact, it is the song and drama division which is entrusted with the selection of the artistes
rather than the Directorate of Field Publicity. The policy suffers from inherent handicaps as the units are not free to select the artistes and the recommendations of the respective Field Publicity Officers get entangled in the official procedure. The selection procedure is time-consuming and the registration of each artiste is preceded by the meetings held in far-flung places like Delhi, Madras and Bangalore. One can very well anticipate the outcome of subjecting the illiterate, poor folk artistes to the commercial procedure of applying and interviewing. Hence it is not surprising that many folk artistes are totally unaware of the existence of folk media programmes by the Field Publicity Units.

The moot point to be determined is whether these Information and Publicity Units have received necessary stimulus through adequate financial succour from the government in their efforts to reach the densely populated rural and remote areas through folk media. Based on the findings, one certainly fails to appreciate the present financial crisis in these units. Shockingly these units spend less than one paisa per person which calls for a reappraisal of the financial aspect of these government agencies if they have to effectively deliver goods. Surprisingly, in their annual budget allocation there is no specific mention of folk media and the budget allocated to music and drama is spent on folk media.

Under the circumstances, the field personnel need to be educated thoroughly and given an orientation in the use of folk media. A reappraisal of the entire programming process of integrating messages with folk art and even selecting different types of folk arts coupled with better rationale is urgently called for.
the unplanned programmes are resulting in the wasteful expenditure.
Further, the field personnel should also interact with folklorists and the media educators in producing the programmes with artistic discipline and perfection. Provision should be made for interaction between folklorists and folk artists in the integration of the messages to cater to artistic requirements of the media.
The dismal performance of governmental agencies has prompted NGOs and other voluntary agencies to tap folk media in support of development. Fortunately their efforts have produced rich dividends. In Karnataka, folk artistes have innovatively designed folk media programmes to reach more people. The artistes of Yakshaghana, a folk theatrical form have transmuted the folk form into a public forum where information and criticism on political, social and economic issues are expressed unhesitatingly. It is noteworthy that the folk artistes have recognised the need to reflect changes in social environment by donning the role of a critic.
It implies that folk artistes enjoy more freedom and exhibit innovativeness in disseminating information if they are free from the clutches of the government. If the message is thrusted by the government as being done now, it will boomerang, reducing the process of development through folk media into a total farce.
In Karnataka another folk theatrical form called 'Tala Maddale'- an indoor performance requires greater skill to take part in this art as the speech is extempore. This art has matured into a vivid folk media, an example of brilliant incorporation of modern message with the traditional themes drawn from mythology
without distorting either the medium or the message. Moreover this form of folk media is a two-way communication, with the audience responding spontaneously to the verbal match. Ultimately it is the mood and response of the audience that sets the trend of *Tala Maddale*.

Thus, the traditional channels are capable of reaching the target audience with the appropriate message without the necessary assistance from the government.

Historically, folk art is an offshoot of mass culture and is an alternative to the refined art form, the latter being the prerogative of the selected few. Thus folk art has prospered under the patronage of common man rather than rulers. It survives only when it is given freedom to express itself as it is a creative medium.

Based on the experiences of folk media in Karnataka, one can draw the inference that folk media are excelling as tools of development support communication in rural areas instead of acting as the voice of the government.