

COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATIVE CULTURE: A STUDY ON TEA GARDEN COMMUNITY OF BARAK VALLEY IN SOUTHERN ASSAM

Dr. Partha Sarkar*

ABSTRACT

With the development of science and technology, the forms and way of communication have become more specialized. In a country like India, so vast and varied, modern mass media alone does not constitute the sum total of communication channels. The participative culture as a distinct culture is aimed at motivating people through the effective and efficient communication to think positively for the economic and social development of the community. Today, the tea industry in Barak valley is passing through a crisis period. The importance of improving the productivity through participatory communication has become more crucial for the industry to survive. The introduction of modern methods for improving workers productivity will not be successful unless it is implemented through this participative culture since the tea industry is considered as a Participatory industry. The paper analyses the importance of participative culture as a communication tool on the occupational mobility of tea garden community. The data are collected through first-hand primary research in a tea garden of Barak Valley in Southern Assam through the participant observation as well as interview schedule. The respondent in the study were union leaders, executives and workers, selected randomly and personally met on first-met-first response basis. The main purpose of this paper is mainly to assist the tea garden community of the Barak Valley of Assam as well as to improve their productivity and the standard of living through the concept of participative culture from a communication perspective.

Keywords: *Participative Culture, Communication, Productivity, Tea Garden.*

Introduction

The importance of communication in mobilizing people and seeking their willing participation in the development of a country is well recognized. In India, this concern about reaching people, communicating with them and equipping them with new skills has been emphasized over and over again in successive five year plans, which provide the blue print of the country's planned development. The resultant communication and development processes have been strengthening and supporting each other taking the country forward.

Participative culture is a distinct culture aimed at motivating people, through effective and efficient communication, to think positively for the economic and social development of their society. Called by different names, participative culture has been recognized as an important vehicle for bringing about economic prosperity of a society.

In India, the indigenous and participatory community, communication modes and channels tend to have variations from one cultural region or ethnic group to another. The modes and channels reflect the social structure of each community. Such social structure is similarly determined by the totality of the historical and economic experiences of the people. Some of these modes include message relay-running, festivals, drama, music/ songs, dance styles and steps, bush or wood fire, smoke ashes, (colour) of clothing, tales and proverbs, gun shots, animals, birds and insects, grass knots, fresh leaves

* Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Assam University, Silchar, India.

knots, have looks, tribal marks, body language, talking drums, weather, pottery and wood carvings, legends and myths, and so on. All these are the creations of human interactions, consensus and conflicts. They are made norms, given values and mystified by the indigenous and Participatory channels of interpersonal and group communication, mostly based on age, kinship, gender inheritance and marital status and with authority patterns embedded in the social structure and organization of the society. Face to- face, interpersonal and group communication channels function both vertically and horizontally and are natural, real and inevitable in a community's planned and unplanned advancement.

Participatory communication means, the connection between life and survival is given once again here, as well as the active participation and involvement of all groups in the task of solving problems. Communication is no longer a one-way-Street ruled by a dominant society. It would be desirable if this type of media work could find its rightful place in society. Participatory communication conveys a view of life, depicting the position of human being. On this basis, values and standard are shared and rules laid down concerning behavior towards nature and relationships between men.

Today the tea industry in Barak Valley is passing through a crisis period and the importance of improving the workers' productivity, through this culture is critical for the industry to survive. This industry being a traditional industry, introducing modern methods of improving the workers' productivity will not be successful, unless it is implemented through this culture. Participative culture in itself does not motivate anyone. All it does is that it creates an environment wherein whatever innate motivation exists within an individual, can be expressed in the form of effective work. We may call this culture as a positive environment creator.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the present study were to:

- Find out the different types and forms of Participatory media prevalent in the tea gardens of Barak Valley;
- Examine the impact of various campaign of development that employs Participatory media of communication

Methodology

The primary data was collected through the participant observation cum interview method from the three tea estates: Dewan Tea Estate, Isabil Tea Estate and Anaikhal Tea Estate which come under three districts i.e. Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandiof Barak Valley. Our sample respondents included union leaders, executives and workers, selected randomly and personally met on first-met-first-response basis.

Findings

- **Participatory Cultural Performances in the Tea Gardens**
 - *Jhumur dance* among the sample respondents from the three tea gardens shows that more than 90% of the respondents recognized Jhumur dance as a part of their cultural performances in tea gardens. On the whole it can be inferred that the extent of likeness towards the Jhumar dance as a part of their cultural performance is substantiate very high in selected tea gardens under the study.
 - *Dhamail Dance* among the sample respondents from the three tea gardens shows that more than 85% of the respondents likes Dhamail Dance as a part of their cultural performances in tea gardens as it has great involvement in the socio cultural gathering
 - The sample respondents from the three tea gardens shows that *Monosha Puja* plays a great role in their cultural performances in tea gardens. On the whole it can be inferred that the extent of likeness and their devotion towards the Monosha Puja as a part of their cultural performances is substantially very high in selected tea gardens under the study.
 - *Karam puja* among the sample respondents from the three tea gardens shows that 40% of the respondents were neutral regarding the likeness of Karam puja as a part of their cultural performances in tea gardens. On the whole it can be inferred that the extent of likeness towards the Karam puja as a part of their cultural performances in selected tea gardens were 60% but the remaining 40% were neutral with their response.
 - *Tusu puja* among the sample respondents from the three tea gardens shows that 40% of the respondents were neutral regarding the likeness of *Tusu puja* as a part of their cultural performances in tea gardens. On the whole it can be inferred that the extent of likeness towards the *Tusu puja* as a part of their cultural performances in selected tea gardens were 60% but the remaining 40% were neutral with their response.

- *Bhadu puja* among the sample respondents from the three tea gardens shows that more than 70% of the respondents recognized Bhadu puja as a part of their cultural performances in tea gardens. On the whole it can be inferred that the extent of likeness towards the Bhadu puja as a part of their cultural performances is substantially very high in selected tea gardens under the study.
 - While comparing the extent of likeness of *Jitiya* among the sample respondents from the three tea gardens, Aienakhal tea garden shows that more than 90% of the respondents recognized *Jitiya* as a part of their cultural performances in tea gardens and other two tea gardens shows 70% likeness towards *Jitiya* as a part of their cultural performances. On the whole it can be inferred that the average extent of likeness towards the *Jitiya* as a part of their cultural performances shows a difference between the selected three tea gardens for the study.
 - *Chat puja* among the sample respondents from the three tea gardens shows that around 80% of the respondents recognized Chat puja as a part of their cultural performances in tea gardens and 20% of the respondents are neutral regarding the likeness towards *Chat Puja*. On the whole it can be inferred that the extent of likeness towards the *Chat puja* as a part of their cultural performances were substantially very high in selected tea gardens under the study.
- **Participatory Folk Media**
 - 78% of the respondents considers tea garden dance and 69% of the sampled respondents considered folk songs as the most popular medium for communicating messages for rural development. Thus, it may be concluded that tea garden dance and folk song were much ahead of puppetry show and street theatre with regard to their popularity.
 - About 62 %of the respondents could sense the use of Participatory and folk media as very much in health sector followed by 57% and 44% each in education as well as in infrastructure respectively. This type of feeling is also observed with 38 percent in the area of environmental protection, 33 percent in sanitation and finally 27.66 percent in energy conservation. This may be due to the fact that any message pertaining to health normally draws the attention of its target audience immediately because of a type of realization with regard to the proverb "health is wealth" and education is also assessed with same spirit.
 - Employment generation, environment protection, sanitation and energy conservation didn't enjoy the same status with that of health, education and infrastructure because of the poor focus of folk media by those functionaries who are in a position to take decision for such media use. It is further interesting to note that about 30 percent of the respondents did not witness any evidence when the use of folk media in employment generation, environment protection are in question and the percentage is just double when sanitation and energy conservation are in question. This may be due to the fact that people in rural Assam are neither conscious nor considerably aware of the good effects of sanitation and energy conservation and environmental protection.
 - 58.51 % of the respondents opined that folk media played a significant role when health related messages are delivered on monthly basis followed by 20% and 21% observed message delivery through these media on half yearly and yearly basis respectively.
 - Entertainment is one of the purposes of communication which is very much fulfilled whether we communicate through folk or participatory media to the tune of cent percent.
 - While comparing the frequency of non governmental agency in organizing participatory media in their location among the sample respondents from the first two tea gardens shows that there are more than 75% of the respondents were said that nongovernmental agency were not organizing Participatory media in their location and but Isabhal tea estate around 55% respondents said that nongovernmental agency were organizing participatory media in their location.
 - While comparing the status of government agencies in organizing participatory media in their location among the sample respondents from the three tea gardens it shows that there are around 55% of the respondents who said that government agencies were organizing participatory media in their location.
 - 60% of the respondents said that culture and tradition, problems in society, awareness about health and hygiene related message were received through the developmental

programmes by the government agencies and 40% of the respondents said that awareness about education, rights and duties, scientific knowledge, "No to Child Labour related message were received through the developmental programs by the government agencies.

- About 26 %of respondents have highly favorable attitude towards Participatory media and same percentage of respondents do have least favorable attitude. But 53% of the respondents have favorable attitude. The results may be attributed to the fact that through acculturation, rural people gradually diluted their mind in appreciating the core value of participatory media where they get exposed to all modern electronic and printed mass media for receiving message related to their welfare. But still some people who are ordinarily participatory minded and attach themselves to their respective culture do value favorably the folk and participatory media. Further, it can also be safely concluded that some flavor of entertainment does lie with the participatory media in itself when compared with non-Participatory media.

Conclusion

The Participatory communication is very 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. 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. All over the world participatory communication is facing threat of death in the ever-changing and globalizing environment. Socio-economic modernization and facilitation of modern information and transportation facilities bring internationalized popular culture that is replacing various folk forms and presentation from the social communication. Participatory communication 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 the responsibility of all to preserve these beautiful, natural mode of communicating prosperity, identity and culture.

Lastly, to sum up, it is essential to consider some points which reveal Participatory culture as a communication tool, viz., selection of the folk media on the basis of popularity with concerned folk artists who were well acquainted with local language, dialects, culture and traditions, organizing campaign at village places with the help of interested village people systematically by following all the steps and theme related to social development, patriotic as well as recreational and entertainment suitable to the media should be included . Thus, utilization of locally available resources such as talent of the folk artists, popularity of the media, acceptable idioms, and riddles through participatory media that will find very interesting and effective as communication tool for rural development and natural recourse technology. It is, therefore, concluded that the potential of the participatory culture can be utilized wisely and systematically for agricultural as well as development purposes too. They can serve the society as indigenous tool of inter-personal, inter-group and inter-village communication for ages.

Recommendations

The following are important recommendations of the study. They are:

- Strategic interventions should be engineered to ensure commercial viability of folk art and culture. This is one of the instrumental ways to empower the tribal/folk performers from the socio-economic perspective.
- All possible efforts should be made to sustain the innate beauty, inherent quality and core ideology of tribal art & cultural forms. This is essential to ensure their exclusive identity.
- Common public of the broader society should be informed regarding the values, styles, forms of different folk performing arts. Effective campaign and publicity of these elements are going to crystallize favorable public attitude and opinion towards folk art and culture;
- Need for bringing about more direct involvement of the workers than at present, not only for solving their own social problems but also to solve their work related problems in the *Bichars*
- To develop a more effective participative communication channels in the tea estates Barak Valley so that its scope can be extended to implement through the forums like the *Bichars*, modern management concepts like 'Quality Circles' Total Quality Management,' Workers' Participation, in Management and such other.
- Special allowance may be arranged as a scheme under rural development planning for economically weaker section of folk performers and artisans.

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