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CHAPTER-19

Folk Media in Rural India

**RAGHAVENDRA MISHRA
THOKCHOM ROSHINI DEVI**

Folk media is a channel which creates an ability to bring an attachment to the society through its traditional ways; it helps in expressing the socio-ritual, moral and emotional needs of a society or a community to which it belongs. It is an identity which has been carried by the people of the society through different forms of dance, songs, beliefs, experiences and custom from generation to generation especially in an oral form or by a process of traditional performance and communication.

These forms of media are accepted and have been practised by the society for ages but the journey of these folk media gets blurred in the process of their transmission due to the different phases of the society, however it could be said that folk media have survived against these impact of the modern age by making its own platform, providing an inputs of fresh contents into them and adapting to the trends of the society so long as it satisfies to the psychological and to the social needs of a society.

The Shumang Lila is a particular traditional folk media of Manipur. Shumang Lila is a popular form of traditional theatre of Manipur. It is performed in a courtyard or in an open space of about 18 square feet without any stage or heavy props. It plays an important role in depicting the society by performing play based on culture,

tradition, and history of Manipuri people. The journey of Shumang Lila has made a significant transmission in every phase of its structure and form. Shumang Leela is a very popular folk form and effectively utilized by various groups, agencies, and individuals for social and developmental awareness.

Traditional media have been in existence in India for long and have been used as a medium of communication. Over the years, rural masses have been using the folk media for expressing their social, ritual, moral and emotional needs. These forms represent the people by giving a glimpse of their style, speech, music, dance, dress, behaviour. Traditional tools of communication are developed from the beliefs, customs and ritual practiced by the people. These are very old and deep rooted. It represents a form of communication employing vocal, verbal, musical and visual folk art forms, transmitted to a society or group of societies from one generation to another. Traditional media comes in different forms and is known by different names in different region of the country. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh 'Janapadam' indicates a particular village and 'Janapadulu' means villagers. The folk art form of the village as the whole is known as 'Janapada Kalalu'.

A traditional media can be of anything which does the purpose of communication in the family, friends, and communities also in the society. All forms may not be popular in some case but they help to communicate. Traditional media forms are different according to the different religions and communities. These are shaped by cultural heritage, and by common ties of existence of the people and therefore community or society centric messages in rural India is largely communicated through traditional media.

The traditional media are close to the hearts and minds of the people in a personal and intimate level. It satisfies the innate need for expression, for moral instruction which is a combination of entertainment and for the dramatic and the lyrical. The traditional form is the preservation of the tradition and culture of the forefathers in disseminate ways. Raymond William has defined the term folk as "A general meaning of people in a range from particular social transformation, including nations, to people in general".

W.J. Thom has defined folk as the same cultural tendency rather than popular form of culture. Of late, the term has been defined as a 'communal production' of a society of its origin. Folk art and performances are in a way of reflection of the culture of the society as culture reflects itself through art, jewellery, folk plays, songs and rituals. Its relations with the society and the community to which it belongs is somewhat different as they are a part of the daily life. Through folk art and performances the society expresses its sorrow, happiness celebration achievement etc.

Traditional folk media are indigenous forms of communication which have their roots in the cultural tradition of community. "Traditional folk media are tool of a special nature. Their special nature is attributed to the fact that they have no grammar or literature, yet they are nurtured through oral and functional sources. Traditional or folk media provide channels for expressing socio-ritual, moral, and emotional needs of a society or societies to which they especially belong" stated Shyam Parmar, in his book of Traditional Folk Media in India. An overview study of Traditional Media and Development by G.P. Pandey and K.K. Bhattacharjee observed that traditional media can be used to reach out to the high rate of illiterate people for the change and development of the country. Traditional folk can be effectively utilized for socio-economic development in India.

The Illustrated Cultural History of India by A.L. Basham gives international viewpoints of scholars from across the globe on the rich cultural heritage of India including an array of topics on religion, philosophy, social organization, literature, art, architecture, music and science. The book have presented a comprehensive survey of India's rich cultural heritage making its reader to know the country historic past and its rich cultural heritage in order to preserve it.

Shumang Leela is one of the most popular forms of Manipuri folk theatre in Manipur. As a form of traditional media Shumang Leela has lived its folk life for more than 100 years it has been nurtured by the common people who have a taste for its simple but vibrant performance. Shumang Leela has been described as an important landmark in the development of ideas of nationalism and a keen sense of native sentiment by Arambam Somorendra in his article *Shumang Leela (The courtyard Play) An Introduction*. In his

article he has described Shumang Leela and the artiste as a form of entertainment, informative which reflects the lives of common people, their hopes, aspiration and despair. Moreover it is not bound by any codified rule it is a form of source to reach out the voice of the public. Yet in another article by Y. Sadananda Singh *Thok Leela: Satire, Wit and Comedy* it has been described that Thok Leela is considered to be the beginning of Shumang Leela.

With the raging important of Shumang Leela it gives a remarkable reached out to its audience. It is a form of art which communicates directly with the audience and gives an opportunity to involve the audience to be part of the play. The nature of Shumang Leela audience is lively and innocent. It had been stated that the real power of Shumang Leela lies in its audience by Birjit Ngangomba (Shumang Leela director) in his interview conducted by Biren Das Shrama of STQ. Birjit had further said that Shumang Leela is a form of public gathering and it is regarded as a form of medium which belong to its audience and to the community. In the article of writing for Shumang Leela by Nandakumar Moirangthem he stated that Shumang Leela is the most effective performance of reaching the rural audience rather than the proscenium production and the form should give more wider ways of innovation to the society in terms of spreading education, in creative production which aimed at changing attitudes without losing its entertainment value.

Through the analytic study of Shumang Leela towards Traditional Media and Health Awareness it has been observed that Shumang Leela has played an important role in identifying the culture, tradition and history of Manipur. It has offered a viable ways of spreading awareness to the public in terms of social issues, communal harmony, health and family welfare. Shumang Leela dwells on varied themes like identity crises and its preservation, police-public relations, insurgency and its ramification, corruption and nepotism, social chaos and ailments. "Shumang Leela: Preserving the Best Traditional Media in Manipur" by S. Neken Singh opines that the form of Shumang Leela should be preserved he had suggest ways to preserved the form of Shumang Leela such as inculcating decent lifestyle and costume to the younger generation so that the minds of the youth are aware of the true form of Shumang Leela secondly to expand the show of

Shumang Leela to other district headquarters in order to gain its popularity in every nook and corner of the state. He has also suggested that the State Kala Academy should take up responsibility to promote the tribal dialect plays in the larger interest of preserving this traditional media.

Ritual and performances redefines the concept of theatre and broadens its scope to accommodate ritualistic forms of performances of Manipur which were earlier regarded more as rituals or dances or festivals and not so much as forms of theatre. Beginning with Laiharaoba, the primitive form of ritualistic performance which encapsulated the identity of the Meitei community outside Hindu framework narrative takes the reader to Hindu religious performances like the Nata-Sankirtina, Ras Lila, Gostha Lila, Udukhan Lila, Gour Lila and finally to the rise of the secular form of theater called Shumang Lila.

Dr. Harish Kumar has demonstrated the role of folk media in rural development. He writes that most of the population in India still lives in villages, and there is no denying fact that building a nation spells it has to first build the rural India. This building should be carried out in the form of the development of the rural people and rural areas along with their total environment through the development of modern communication devices and network and it could be achieved through the help of the traditional folk form.

Balwant Garhgi said that "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 colourful diversity and unity of India, it is important to see the folk theatre in its natural settings."

Durgadas Mukhopadhyay stated that "Folk performing art have changed its structure continuously over centuries, modifying to the needs of changing situation yet continuing to be functional relevant to society. "Tradition" suggests a process of the transmission of age-old values and the contextual manifestation and interpretation of the universal. Traditional is not only a repetitive behavioural pattern or some persistent symbol or motif in community culture; it is also an

assertion of an identity, a revival and regeneration of the life-force of the community. Traditional media rely on this cultural support and context.”

According to H.K. Ranganath, folk songs have successfully played a decisive role in attuning the rural mind to the importance of the social or political theme like national unity, social welfare and even in family planning. They have thus become the most persuasive communication on any theme. In the effort of making it a loveable communication, the original content is squeezed out and a new message is integrated to suit the needs of times and place. This process has given the folk songs a sense of contemporarily and functional relevance.

A society may be explained as a group of people who lived together long enough to evolve a common culture, norms and values. Culture distinguished one society from another. Culture gives form and meaning to a people's existence. Culture is defined by Oniou and Ogionwo as the complex whole of man's acquisitions of knowledge, moral, beliefs, arts, customs, technology etc. which are shared and transmitted from generation to generation. Communication is an aspect of culture and non-material culture. The indigenous and traditional 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 the community.

Such social structure is similarly determined by the totality of the historical and economic experiences of the people. Some of these models include message relay-running, festivals, drama, music/songs, dance styles and steps, brush or wood fire, smoke ashes, colour of clothing, tales and proverbs, gun shots, animals, birds and insects, grass knots, fresh leaves knots, tribal marks, body language, 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 traditional 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. Folk art is the products of the folkways and culture of the society. It breaks through every barrier and reaches through the audience in the simplest form.

Traditional Media and Social Communication

Traditional media has played a crucial role in the process of socio-economic development in India. It has helped in convincing and influencing people in a very effective ways. During the freedom struggle, folk media played a great role in spreading the message of patriotism. Jatra a traditional form theatre form in Bengal was used during the freedom struggle. Other than that Paala, a traditional form of ballad singing was used for spreading awareness on various social issues by the Government of Orissa. The Song and Drama Division of the Government of India used various forms of traditional media to spread awareness on a number of social issues like AIDS, Polio Immunization etc.

The Indian society is a complex social system with different caste classes, creeds and tribes. In spite of the national literacy missions and campaigns over 350 millions of people are still illiterate. Mass media is considered as too glamorous, impersonal and unbelievable in context with the villagers where they could not only see and hear but even touch (participate) traditional media. Traditional media can be used to reach these people in the process of change and development of the country.

Shumang Leela is one of the effective traditional media which reflect the image of the society and able to educate the audience at grassroot level. It is an amalgamation of various society aspects which include tradition, culture, custom and current affairs. New stories are developed which described the society issues. Keeping in view of the general mind set of the society as a whole the theme of the play is based on what the audience wants to perceive. The theme of the plays is based on the current trends of the society such as oppressive authority of the government, authentic laws of the government, evil drawbacks of religion and custom. The voice of the common working class people is projected in the play. Impact of the Shumang Leela is mainly on rural area since majority of the audience are from working class people As a matter of fact, Shumang Leela helps in the development of the society such as spreading message which are related to the public sentiment.

In the past few years Shumang Leela performed plays which gives awareness to the audience about the social consequences such

as AIDs, Leprosy, Cancer, Women Empowerment and issues about the arm conflicts which is a burning issue in Manipur. Shumang Leela is an eye opener in Manipur Society, basically it is used to stir the curiosity and gather public interest which also gives awareness on certain topic without suggesting any conclusion. The main aspect of Shumang Leela play is the script which is basically in for and tailor-made for provoking the thoughts of the audience.

Shumang Leela and Entertainment

When it comes to entertainment, Shumang Lila is the best and effective tool with the right component in entertaining the people of Manipur. This traditional media is observed by every individual of the state by every community, the most important ingredient of this traditional media is the involvement of the comic character in the play. The role of the comic character has always being the part of Shumang Lila since its origin and till today it has taken its vital role in the play. Audience loved to watch the comedy part of the play and they roll with a huge laughter when the artiste performed it, moreover the audience always look forward to the comedy part wondering what the character will present at that play. At some instance the comedy gets involved with the audience by facing towards them and delivers dialogue which looks like the character is talking to them. Even the dialogue delivered by the comedian is imitated by children and the audience at their daily life after watching the play. Some of the well known artistes are Oja Hementa known as Tolhan, Oja Gouro, Thekhelamba Chaoba, Mayang Imphal Tombi, Babu .

One of the famous entertainment played of the time was epom, the play consist of two or three character which acts on the daily bases of life but the way the artiste performed makes the audiences laugh. The whole plot of the play is exclusively entertaining, the artiste pick up the contemporary issues and mock on the situation. People in the rural areas are more attached to these traditional play, Shumang Lila are performed during the harvesting season where the audience could enjoyed their leisure time and forget their hardship in the fields.

It is also performed at the spring season (Sajibu and Lamta Tha) to welcome the spring and have a good and prosperous year, today

Shumang Leela is performed in many occasion such as childbirth, inaugurations and also in every locality during the festival seasons. A contest is conducted among the various parties of Shumang Leela in which the best play of the year will be chosen by the jury members of the State Shumang Leela Council. The play will be paid more than the other plays and usually the party are engaged throughout the year.

Shumang Leela and Value Orientation in Rural Areas

Shumang Lila is a unique traditional media that has been the best tool to effectively counter the negative influences of the new media on the youths of Manipur from generations to generations. People of Manipur in rural areas prefer traditional media to other modern channels mainly due to its intelligibility and familiarity of language, gestures, culture and tradition. Messages conveyed by such media are always credible and acceptable to locals. There is 'effective reach' as there is high degree of attentiveness among the audience. Everyone realizes the effectiveness of Shumang Lila in spreading messages to people of all walks and backgrounds.

Having been exposed to these art forms for centuries, they have become a part of their ethos. The languages and dialects are their very own, because of which, intelligibility is very high and has the ability to penetrate deep in the remote rural areas too. The familiarity of language, gestures, music and rhythm is what makes this media universally acceptable among rural folks. Unlike in the case of radio and television, where the message comes out of an impersonal electronic box, in the folk media, there is direct and personal contact between the sender of the message and the receiver. It makes the message far more credible and acceptable. The growing quantum of viewers year by year stands testimony to the fact that Shumang Lila outclasses all other traditional media in the state in terms of popularity, reach and accessibility.

Shumang Leela and Rural Development

Sensitization and mobilization of the uneducated masses for development or awareness program in the rural areas has always been a big challenge for every group or individual, whether it is for an NGO or Government Departments. Today, both the state governments

and NGOs are using the medium of Shumang Lila to convey ideas and its necessities for rural development. Shumang Lila has taken a vital role in highlighting the prospects and consequences for a proposed plan for the development of an area in the field of family welfare, banking, education, health and prohibition etc.

Besides entertaining the audience it makes the people forget their day-to-day tensions and worries, Shumang Lila as a traditional media carries a heavy responsibility in educating people on various issues. It has three important characteristic motives – entertaining, educative and reformative. Various government and non-government agencies are judiciously employing Shumang Lila as effective message carriers to the people. Thus, the role and contribution of Shumang Lila in rural development are quiet massive and can never be denied in any ways.

Shumang Leela and Social Awareness

The various departments of Government of Manipur utilize this medium for spreading awareness and implications on sanitation, polio immunization, adult educations, HIV/AIDS, family planning, child marriage etc. and it found very effective in sensitizing and spreading awareness. There have been many plays based on Animal Husbandry, renewable energy, self employment, organic farming and many other work culture oriented messages which have shown the positive and effective response. Play based on social awareness are also performed which shows the picture of universal brotherhood, human equality, environmental protection and community development. The audience watched it and get involved into the play by showing their emotions, they responses to every moves of the artiste performing on the stage in laughing and crying. The play reflects the society and point out the evilness of the society.

Present day Shumang Lila dwells on varied themes like identity crises and its preservation, police-public relations, insurgency and its ramification, corruption and nepotism, social chaos and ailments, which clearly indicates the magnitude and potential of its adaptability and efficiency to contribute in polishing the social issues as an effective instrument of media. The wider the gap between 'the ideal' and 'the real', the more is 'the Chaos' in the society. Shumang Leela attempts to portray the ideal character in the social set-up. This has facilitated the

viewers to compare between what is ideal and what is real. Moreover, the social actors (people) can surely imitate the ideal character shown on the stage. It is thus an effective tool for social reformation.

Conclusion

Shumang Leela with its most significant feature has made a big contribution to the society of Manipur. It has taken a great role in spreading social awareness to the people both in rural and urban areas. It has become a medium in awakening the public. Government and NGOs have utilized this platform to reach out to their target project by highlighting the pros and cons of it and educating the public about its consequences, it has also helped in promotion the project to the audience. This traditional media has deeply penetrated in the mindset of the public especially in the rural areas where the modern media could not achieve fruitfully. The medium has played a bigger role in reforming the society and audience depend on these medium to get themselves aware of the status of the society. Shumang Leela has maintained its status to the public since its origin, audience never get tired of this medium and would never lose their interest in the future.

The performance of Shumang Leela has made its remarkable development in the passage of time. Today this form of traditional media is popular among the local people and is also known by people across the state. The art of Shumang Leela has been preserved in a very well mannered by the State Kala Academy and the state Shumang Leela Council of Manipur. The performance is institutionalised globally by performing in various part of India such as the play Lidishi Gulap performed by Sanaleipak Nachom Artiste party was shown in Delhi, Mumbai and some metropolitan cities and receiving a positive feedback from the audience. Shumang Leela has paved a gateway to communicate with the rest of the world through its performances. It has creates a platform for the young talented artiste to show their talents and developed their skills and many research scholar have also indulged in studying this unique form of traditional media.

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