

GROWING INEFFECTIVENESS OF TRADITIONAL FORMS OF COMMUNICATION (MEDIA) IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SRI LANKA

THE SPREAD OF NEW MEDIA AMONG THE YOUNGER GENERATION

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Abstract: This study examines how rural youth interact with traditional and mainstream media to exchange development messages. Also, it looks at their knowledge of the usage of traditional media. In traditional media, the oral tradition included verbal arts or expressive literature which consisted of forms of utterances spoken, sung and voiced. Some of them include songs, tales, poetry, ballads, anecdotes, rhymes, proverbs and elaborate epics. Furthermore, material culture can be seen in traditional motifs, architectural design, clothes, fashions in various human groups. Also, these forms of traditional media can be seen in social folk customs, followed at birth, marriage, death or annual celebrations, festivals, fairs, ritual and ceremonial gatherings, market occasions and meeting at villages. The performing arts such as traditional music masquerades, dance and drama are functions where these forms can be seen. In this study, the main purpose is to understand how rural youth are connected through these traditional media and how their family members work together with them. The research problem is to find out whether the Sri Lankan traditional media messages contribute to the development of the rural masses and to find the nature of the interaction between the two. To achieve this objective, this study used the new entrants of the faculty of Arts in the University of Colombo as the sample. This research used a random sample method for the selection of the sample that included 200 students in their first year from rural areas, who have come to the university of Colombo from all over the country. For this research, a questionnaire was used to collect data. The experiment was conducted from June 9th until December 31st 2008 covering one entire semester. It was found out that the students were aware of the traditional communication media that had worked as a tool kit to distribute messages. Yet, those forms were used only for entertainment. Most

of the students had seen those forms on television. Soon after entering to the University of Colombo, these students' attitudes changed radically. At the end of first semester, 85% of them used mobile phones. After one year at the university, many of them were used to new media.

Keywords: Bali, gelkavi, kohomba kankariya, nurthi, parukavi, thovil, traditional

I. INTRODUCTION

The term "Development communication" was coined by Nora C. Quebral, a professor at the University of Philippine Los Banos. [7]. Development Communication is very essential for the sustainable development of Sri Lanka. Development communication is characterized by conceptual flexibility and diversity in the application of communication techniques used to address the problems of development. Some approaches in the "tool kit" of the field include information dissemination and education, behavior change, social marketing social mobilization and media advocacy.

Communication is needed for social change and participatory communication. Development communication is therefore for the betterment of the society. Though it is disseminated by a particular group, it affects the masses. This is further proven with the following definition of development communication as: "The process of evolution of a society from the traditional primarily agrarian stage through socio-economic, educational and political advancement to an urban modern age" [12]

The traditional form of communication is the indigenous channels of communication. They are not simply old fashioned forms of entertainment. As media they are alive. The traditional form of communication ex-

presses the folk mass consciousness which is being embedded in the folk society. Communication research has immensely revealed the existing characteristics of folk media which can be effectively used for rural development communication programmes. They are nurtured through oral and functional sources. In short, traditional forms of communication media provide channels for expressing socio-ritual, moral and emotional needs of the language groups to which they belong as long as the contents of traditional media provide entertainment and fulfill communication needs of the groups. They will retain their worthiness as expressive agents. The more the traditional media prove their acceptability to new ideas, the more they will be regarded useful as media of communication. In this process, the contents may change, but without disturbing their structural characteristics. This is what makes them relevant to the society.

In this sense, traditional forms of communication have been used for the development of communication programmes all over the world. In particular, this type of traditional form of communication has widely been applied to communicate messages in the event of disaster, sexuality and STD's, family planning, nutrition, social harmony and empowerment in the development projects.

In this study, the author tried to collect information on how the rural people engage with Sri Lankan traditional form of communication (media) like Sri Lankan traditional dance, drama, ritual, mask dance, drumming, singing and so forth. This was a random sample research. The research was conducted for one semester period from June to December 2008, with the first year students of the University of Colombo. Other than the main objective, it was intended that the research should cover the alternative communication usage in the context of rural development communication.

In the sphere of development communication, traditional forms of communication have been used creatively to disseminate development messages to target groups in the rural development programmes of the countries such as India, South Africa, Latin America and Japan. Nowadays in Sri Lanka the same trend can be seen at some of the major development programmes like Gemidiriya (folk courage) Sarvodaya and other regional and rural community development programmes of Non government organizations. For example street drama is one of the most popular folk forms in Sri Lanka.

A. Rural people and rural development

Rural areas differentiate from the urban areas in terms of their geo physical location and spatial distribution

of households on kinship-family complex lines. In the rural society there are close-knit interaction patterns between individuals and families which are agricultural based. Their informal occupational structure and cliental system are formulated through established traditional institutions. There opinion leaders influence control and authorize patterns and beliefs based on faith conviction in religion and ethics.

Most rural people live in third world countries. They experience poverty, ignorance, exploitation, malnutrition and unhygienic as well as unsanitary living condition. Ignorance and poverty were two stumbling blocks in the way of socio- economic development of these countries. The main objective of the newly independent nation is to be away from them.

B. Political interference

The commitment of the political leaders of these nations was to establish economic prosperity and improve the quality of life of the rural people. The adhocism in the planning of these programmes and half baked implementation strategies have raised the basic issue of what is required to develop these areas. This addresses in the problem of conceptualizing rural development.

Rural development, one of the sustainable development areas, has been defined as a process achieved through collective effort. It attempts to improve the well-being and self-realization of people living outside the urbanized areas. Against this backdrop, the major objections should be to fulfill the following with the traditional media or mainstream media: to provide employment, increase agricultural production, intensify traditional rural industries and trades, fully develop local resources and ensure that weaker sections of the rural society are able to participate in the development process. The traditional media or mainstream media play a vital role in this.

TABLE I

Indicators	1971	1981	85-86
Percentage of rural population	68.5	72.2	72.7
Percentage of rural labor force		78.0	71.7
Percentage of rural agricultural workers	59.7	55.3	52.4

Source: Development of census and statistics, ministry of plan implementation, census of population and housing 1971, 1981 and labour force and socio-economic survey of 1985/86 Sri Lanka.

In order to achieve these objectives a multi-dimensional approach will be adopted to give priority to the media. The people in rural areas in Sri Lanka should be informed of what they achieve as STD. Economic growth, land reformation, building infrastructure,

self-reliance, liberation of women are some of them. Sri Lanka is a predominantly rural society in terms of population distribution by sector and employment structure. This table shows how it was from 1971 to 1986.

According to the above table, more than two-thirds of the population of the country reside in the rural sector and that situation has not changed much in the last one and a half decades.

II. DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION AND USAGE OF TRADITIONAL FORM OF MEDIA

Development communication refers to a spectrum of communication processes, strategies and principles within the field of international development aimed at improving the conditions and quality of life of people straggling with under development and marginalization. Development communication is characterized by conceptual flexibility and diversity in the application of communication. Some approaches in the "tool kit" of the field include; information, dissemination and education behavior change. Development communication is for the betterment of the society though it is raised by a particular group, but it affects the whole mass for the better.

C. Participation of rural masses

During the past three decades, the role of communication has undergone a dramatic change from a one-way, top-down transfer of messages by technicians to farmers to a social process which starts with farmers and brings together both groups in a two way sharing of information among communication equals.

This approach is known as participatory communication. In recognizing that rural people are at the heart of development, traditional media uses the participation of rural people to give a development message. Sri Lanka once experimented this method when introducing new computer technology and teaching to rural youth since 1987, at the community level by various governments. But it was impossible to continue because the traditional society was not ready to grab such types of introduction so soon [6]. The importance of participatory communication in grass root level. "Grass-roots" is a rather symbolic expression referring to people at the lowest strata of society. They are usually poor and unprivileged as distinguished from the centers of political leadership and from the middle class. It explains as follows: "Communication within this society remains particular contrary to others. It should be given much importance in terms of a rural development communication programme. Participation means taking part in certain process of group activities" [10].

D. Traditional forms of communication

Any types of traditional media function are entirely a group activity. This group of people were entertained and educated in various types of traditional forms. It is identified in a syllabus component in the discipline of mass Communication Department of the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, divided in major 4 forms. Those are Oral tradition, Material culture, Social folk customs and Performing arts.

Oral tradition-includes, mostly verbal arts or expressive literature consisting of spoke, sung and voiced forms of traditional utterances like songs, tales, poetry, ballads, anecdotes, thymes, proverbs and elaborate epics.

Material culture is visible aspects of folk behavior such as skills, recipes and formulae as displayed in rural arts and crafts, traditional motifs, architectural design cloths, fashions, farming, fishing and various other types of tools and machinery.

Social folk customs are areas of traditional life, which emphasize the group rather than the individual skills and performances. They include large family and community observances and relate to rites of passages such as birth, initiation, marriage and death or annual celebrations, festivals, fairs, ritual and ceremonial gatherings, market occasions and ritual meets.

Performing arts consist of traditional music, masquerades, dance and drama.

These oral tradition and the performing arts appear to be the main media of communication in Sri Lanka. Storytellers, singers, minstrels and other kinds of folk entertainers have acted for centuries as sources for the transmission and dissemination of news and information through face-to-face live communication.

Families, social groups and community gatherings played the main role of communication and sources for feedback for the folk performances. The values, attitudes, beliefs and culture of the people are propagated reinforced and perpetuated through these folk forms. The issues in a society were depicted in the form of satire by the folk artists for curing social evils.

Communication folk forms also have a long history in Sri Lanka. It can be seen in many areas. These forms are different in terms of their local places and in accordance with regional cultural and geographical aspects. The traditional forms of communication of Sri Lanka can be divided as follows:

Traditional *Bali Yagaya* is the major ritual form. It is the ceremony wherein the presiding deities of the planets (graha) are invoked and praised in order take their evil influence off. The belief in the good and

evil influence of the planets according to the time and place of one's birth is quite widespread in Sri Lanka. Specially, this Bali Yagaya is a kind of beliefs, that the people think a patient gets relief from a kind of ritual which consists of dancing and drumming in front of the Bali figure. The Bali ceremony is a mixture of Buddhism and folk religion. Sometimes the government in Sri Lanka used the Bali ceremony to send messages of development to the people. But now the people are attracted by the main stream media, so Bali has become only a form of art.

The Ritual Theatres of Sri Lanka are among the oldest performances which have gone to extinct. Ritual Theatres have been changing over the years, discarding some elements and absorbing others. This is generally nightlong performances which addressed the numerous deities and demons of the folk religion. The primary purpose of the ritual theaters is to make the demons satisfied so that they will confer their blessings or heal the affected.

One of the major communal theatres, the most famous and most majestic is the *kohomba kankariya*. This ritual dance element takes precedence over all other aspects. It has become one of the most beautiful Sinhala dances. Within this ritualistic entertainment people can get any types of messages.

Another form of theatrical performance is *Thovil*. *Thovil* which is an exceptionally interesting curative and therapeutic performance in which the patient's syndrome is translated into the shape and form of other-worldly creatures. *Thovil* is also used as a relief from diseases. Quite often, the verandah and compound of the patient's house are used as the venue. At a *Thovil* ceremony serving of refreshments is a widely observed custom. But the current interest in the traditional arts has served only to focus attention on their dance and music aspects, not to transform or modify their subject matter. The large number of ritual ceremonies is connected with the goddess Pattini. You can find elements of Buddhism in those rituals and reciting. The goddess Pattini is believed to be of the south Indian origin. And she has become the most popular female deity of the Sinhala Buddhist.

At this ceremony, food prepared firstly from the harvest is used to offer deities. These performances diminish the villages' fear, natural disaster and so on.

Folk-dance and playing drums also are the kinds of traditional communication forms. There are various drums which have been used from the ancient period to send messages to the rural people.

Folk lyrics (poems) such as *Gel kavi*, *Paru kavi*, *Pathal kavi* and *Goyam kavi*, are related to an activity.

Gel kavi were used when the people exchanged goods travelling in a bullock carts from place to place. *Pathal kavi* were sung by mine workers. Each poem has its own style and a message.

Folk drama also is a kind of traditional form of famous communication system. *Sokari*, *Kolam*, and *Nadagam*, are the very famous among them all. *Sokari*, holds a highest place in theatrical performance. *Kolam*, a folk drama, was acted those days. But it remains popular today.

Nurthi, a truly urban *Sinhala* theatre came into existence in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Pasi theatrical company from Bombay arrived in this country, bringing with them a novel kind of drama, quite unlike the performances familiar to local audiences. This Pasi theatre, which soon came to be known as *Nurthi* (new drama in Sinhala) was a singular blend of European and Indian dramatic modes and stage craft.

Despite its great popularity, the *Nurthi* could not survive into the thirties. After the advent of the bioscope (Cinema) it became hard to sustain the stage financially. The decline was rapid. After that the traditional forms of communication emerged as a modern media [6].

The forms of traditional communication worked on a large scale before the 1930's. After 1930, Sri Lankans got the opportunity in education, right of exercising universal franchise, and the new media such as radio, cinema, and newspapers were soon popular. These opportunities created new political leaders as well as educated groups. Those groups took the upper hand to preserve those forms further. Newly emerged trade groups also helped them to continue.

III. CONCLUSION

Use of folk media or traditional forms of communication (traditional media) has been an established phenomenon in the field of development communication. Sri Lanka has also effectively used such forms of communication for the betterment of rural people. Folk media can disseminate development messages of health, STD, sanitation in the regions like Latin America, South Africa, India and South East-Asia.

In 1972, when the UNESCO organized a series of meetings on the integrated use of the traditional and the mass media in family planning communications which got the first significant international recognition. They conducted a number of seminars and workshops around the world. Traditional plays and the folk performing arts also played a vital role for the dissemination of development messages once in Sri Lanka. The performing art of this nature has been

changing its structure continuously over centuries modifying itself to the needs of the changing situation making it functionally relevant to the society.

Tradition is the process of the transmission of age-values and the contextual manifestation and interpretation of the universal acceptance. According to the research findings, the traditional form of media is close to the hearts and minds of people. The young generation has awareness about the folk media which are primarily for entertainment, social communication and persuasive communication. They believe that the folk media and the rural people's interaction with them play a vital role.

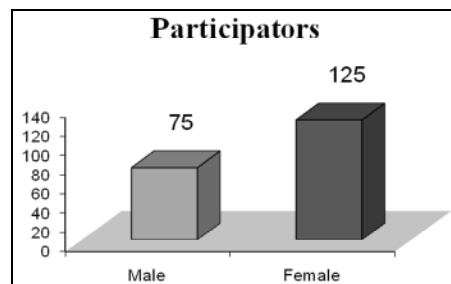
After introducing the modern media such as radio and television, they influenced immensely all the traditional forms of communication. This influence affected the new generation. They interact with the new media. Radio is now not only a listening device, but a talking device too. Listeners started to talk. The mobile phone is not only a telephone. It can provide multifaceted services, such as taking photos, making phone calls, sending SMS messages, and it can be used as a small computer.

In this context, the modern media technology has geared the dynamics of facilities and brought about media to a new stage. The new generation of Sri Lanka is also at this stage. They need not to engage with the traditional forms of communication methods. They participate in them very rarely for entertainment. This research includes some of the points in analyzing the responses and the current situation in Sri Lanka.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

According to the questionnaire, among the respondents there are 127 female students and 73 male students. They belong to 19 districts out of 24 and none of them were from Jaffna, Mulathive, Vavnia districts which were not released from LTTE then. Most of them 35 students are from Kandy while the least, one student from Hambanthota.

FIGURE I



Question 1: Do the people in your area practice traditional forms of communication frequently? 117 students said that the traditional forms of communication are being practiced in their areas. 38 said no as they are from the districts of Colombo and Gampaha.

FIGURE II:

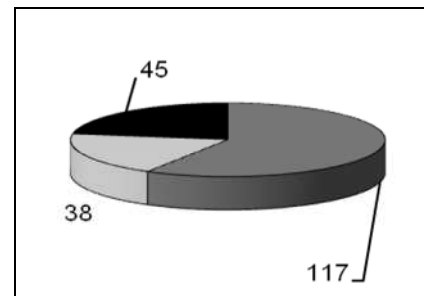


FIGURE III:

HAVE YOU PRACTICED OR TAKE PART IN THE ACTIVITIES ABOVE MENTIONED?

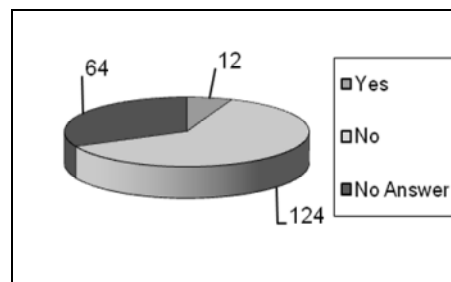


FIGURE IV:

WHAT MESSAGE DOES EACH TRADITIONAL FORM OF MEDIA CONVEY?

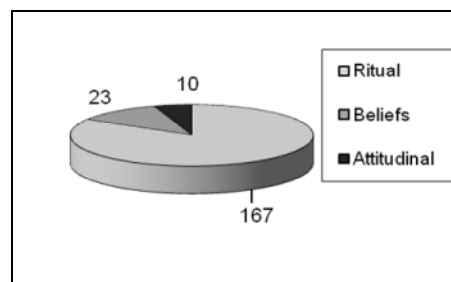


FIGURE V:
DO VILLAGERS TAKE PART IN THE EVENTS ABOVE TRADITIONAL FORMS?

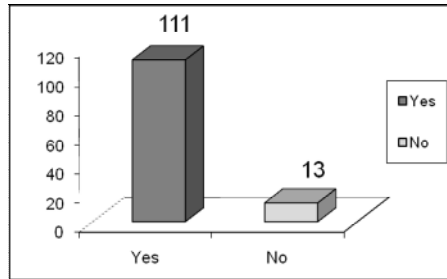


FIGURE VI:
DO YOU THINK THAT THE TRADITIONAL FORMS OF MEDIA CAN GIVE VERY EFFECTIVE MESSAGE TO CHANGE THEIR ATTITUDES?

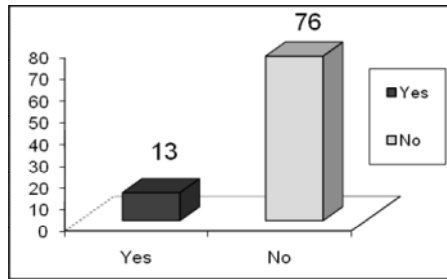


FIGURE VII:
TO WHAT EXTENT DID YOU TAKE PART IN SUCH ACTIVITIES?

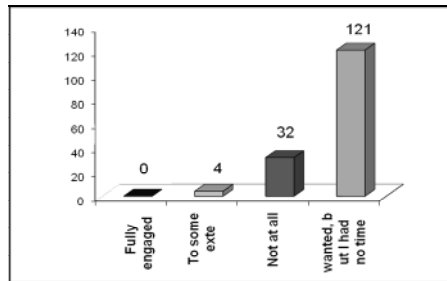


FIGURE VIII:
DO YOU THINK THAT THE MODERN MEDIA SUCH AS RADIO CHANNELS, NEWS PAPERS, AND TV ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE TRADITIONAL MEDIA?

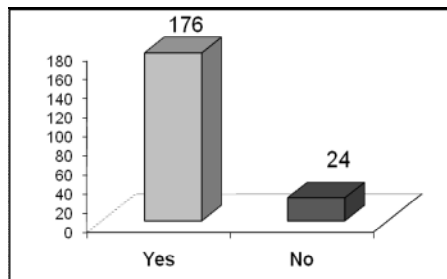


FIGURE IX:
DO YOU USE MOBILE PHONE TO EXCHANGE MESSAGES WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS?

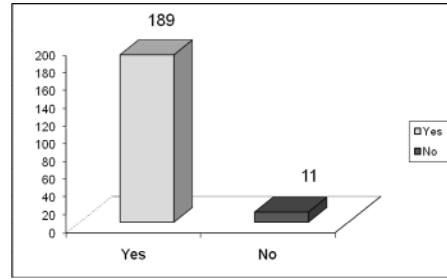


FIGURE X:
DO YOU THINK THAT THE TRADITIONAL (MEDIA) SUCH AS BALI, THOVIL, CEREMONIES ARE USELESS FOR SENDING MESSAGES, AT PRESENT?

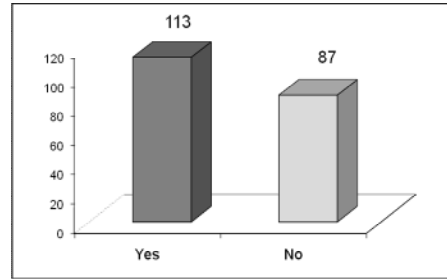
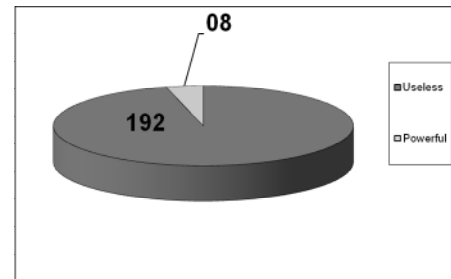


FIGURE XI:
WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION ABOUT THE USAGE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA FOR DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN SRI LANKA?



Among them, 167 students have said those are practiced for ritual purposes. Also 111 students said that villagers participate in those forms, but 76 students responded that those forms cannot give a strong development messages to change their attitudes. Participation of students in this practice is very controversial. 121 students have responded that they do not have time and 32 students did not participate at all.

According to those responses 176 students say that the mainstream media is more powerful than the traditional media.

Most of the students have a little idea or knowledge about the traditional forms of media communication.

They positively responded the question which inquires about the use mobile phones. Those responses are 189 out of 200. Only 11 students did not use mobile phones.

Traditional forms of communication and media functioned lively in ancient Sri Lanka and it had been so up to 1930; that was the bright period. The year 1930 was remarkable, because Sri Lankans got the access to education and exercising of universal franchise.

After British invaders several changes can be seen in the Sri Lankan society. Rural people were given a health or social message through these traditional forms and also they played an entertainment role. The emergence of new media, suppressed traditional patterns of disseminating messages. With the advent of new modern media, the life style of rural people also has been changed.

The newly emerged mobile phone has also changed the entire life style of Sri Lankan youth. They have embraced the new media as a way to jack up their dignity and as well as multifaceted way of communication. This trend influenced the university students also. They were deprived of traditional media. Now, the adults in Sri Lanka attempt to protect these forms for the next generation through modern media.

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