

# Traditional Media in Fisheries Communication

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**I**nformation is the key resource in rural development and the communication of information is a major function of extension education. The interest in the use of traditional/folk media for developmental purpose is increasing in many less industrialised countries like India. The use of traditional media involves an act of communication by employing vocal, verbal, musical and visual act forms transmitted within a society from one generation to another (Paramar, 1975). These media include theater plays, songs, puppet shows, story telling and other forms of entertainments.

Ban and Hawkins (1988) is of opinion that interest in folk media has increased because mass media has been less successful in promoting rural development than what was expected 25 years ago. Alternative means of communicating with rural people are therefore sought. Another strategic issue is that there has been a decreased emphasis on top down communication employed by the conventional mass media in favour of participatory approaches. Use of folk media involves substantial participation of the audience.

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Besides the aforesaid strategic issues there are some socio-economic reasons on why folk media are preferred over conventional mass media in developing countries. In India about 76% population live in rural areas. Most of these rural areas is geographically remote and that mass media have got a limited reach. Besides, poverty and illiteracy of the rural masses are limiting factors in the popular use of print media and costly media such as radio and TV. Further there is a high degree of linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity among the rural population. For instance there are 15 recognised languages in India with more than 720 dialects.

Evaluative research and impressions on the effect of folk media have proved that these media have obvious advantages over conventional mass media.

Conventional media are only helpful in creating an awareness and often changing loosely held attitudes of its audience. The traditional media appeal to the emotions of the audience, who identify themselves with the performers. It is easier for them to identify with the folk media because these fit closely with local cultural patterns (Hancock, A. 1977). Because of this reason folk media are effective in inducing a strong motivation to change rather than simply creating awareness. Further these arts have better credibility by virtue of their strong cultural roots. Communication takes place in the dialect of the receivers, in a way they are accustomed to. In other words use of such media help to create direct rapport with the audience.

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The Socio-Economic Evaluation and Technology Transfer Division of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute has initiated efforts to popularise the use of folk arts for promoting participatory approach in the technology transfer efforts. As a first step towards this a programme was implemented as a part of the extension activities of the Institute. For this purpose the traditional folk art 'Ottanthullal' was selected to communicate scientific ideas to the fisherfolk. Ottanthullal is a popular folk dance of central Kerala which combines music, dance and entertainment, toned in satire, based on stories from epics. The script for the Ottanthullal was prepared by the Scientists of the Institute. The message content was such that it effectively combined entertainment with useful advice on problems, prospects and issues in marine fisheries. The composition highlighted the importance of conservation of marine fisheries resources and the related environment and the role of fishermen in it.

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human activities and warn the fisherfolk about the consequences. The main purpose of the programme is to reiterate his role in the protection and conservation of resources for sustained development through judicious exploitation using right type of equipment. The need for conservation of endangered marine organisms through creation of marine parks, protection of coral reefs for the upgradation of ornamental fish resources, development of mangrove vegetation for soil conservation and prevention of erosion and minimisation of pollution of productive waters avoiding waste disposal. The attention of the fisherfolk is also drawn towards deep-sea fishing and technologies for production of marine organisms in near-shore and brackishwater areas. Recognising the socio-economic backwardness in which the fishing community is placed, measures for economising the fishing operations, the importance of practicing thrift and alternatives for women displaced from the industry as a result of modernisation are also suggested through the verses. The composition concludes with an appeal to the fisherfolk to eschew inter-sectoral conflicts through accommodation, co-operation and self-regulation thus avoiding

enforcement of legislation for controlling fishing activity.

The preview of the Ottanthullal was made at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute. The scientists and other staff members numbering more than 100 participated in the evaluation. The content, treatment and presentation received high ratings. The 'Ottanthullal' modified based on the suggestions was performed in the fishing village Chellanam in Cochin as a part of an environment awareness campaign and the response was encouraging. People, particularly women and youth turned out in large numbers to attend the programme. The message was well received and the programme could achieve its objective of education through entertainment by communicating the findings of the research agency in a simple and palatable form. An important lesson learnt through this effort was that folk media have a distinct place in development communication and can complement the modern media in putting across the message. A professional artist was engaged to perform the programme. In order to minimise the cost on repeated live presentation in different villages a video cassette on the programme has been prepared.

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