

Relevance of Traditional Folk Media among Youth in the Twenty First Century - A Study on the Appeal and Popularity of Folk Forms among College Students in Jaipur, Rajasthan

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Abstract

From Pigeons to mouse clicks, hand written letters to electronic mails, communication modes have traversed a long way. In the present Millennium, technologies have converged and so have modes and forms of communication, which are instantaneous, varied, and interactive like never before. Therefore, keeping such advancements in mind, this research paper strives to explore the relevance of Traditional Folk mediums in the twenty-first century, when better and faster communication choices are available. Besides, due to lack of patrons or economic hardships of artists or availability of other entertainment and communication choices before masses, several folk forms are almost on the brink of extinction. The paper highlights the efforts of various institutions and folk artists towards reviving folk forms of India. The study through a sample survey of under and post graduate students in Jaipur, endeavors to find the popularity and appeal of Folk forms amongst youth.

Keywords: Popularity, Relevance, Revival, Traditional Folk Media, Youth

Introduction

Few centuries ago, when printing machine had not been invented and books were the prized possession of the privileged few in society, when trains weren't in our lives and Television was beyond ones' imagination in India, the world was not a 'global village'-as connected as it is today. Since people had limited means to commute, they stayed confined to their respective horizons and had indigenous forms and modes of communication and entertainment, akin to their culture. They carved blocks, designed motifs, drew and painted over walls and floors, danced, sang, made colorful little puppets and manipulated them to spin out a tale; played instruments to express their emotions and feelings, enacted stories of beloved-based balladry which passed on orally from one generation to another. Be it Ghoomar or Jhumar performed during Holi, Diwali and Gangaur, Kalbelia, Chirmi, Kachchhighori, Chari, Chakri, Gair, Gawari or Teratali dances, Maand and Panihari songs or the songs of the Manganiyar and Langa community, or Mandana and Sanjhi motifs or Bagru and Sangneri block wooden printing or

the *Katputli naach*, or the *phad vaachan* by the Bhopa-Bhopin couple. Every such form has had its own significance.

As time passed by, novel modes of mass communication were invented. The advent of printing machine in the fifteenth century, led to genesis of newspapers, newsletters, books, and magazines etc, which have today evolved into gigantic print media business ventures all around the world. Cinema was the next mode of mass communication that was born as an answer to the leisurely time in the lives of people, brought about by machines, after industrial revolution. Radio and Television altered films from an evening out; shared public; experience to a private one, indeed turning many individuals into couch potatoes. From terrestrial to cable to satellite to DTH, today we have compact and flat LED, LCD, Plasma and Smart TV sets, on which programmes can be recorded and repeatedly viewed. CDs, DVDs, and I-Pods have today replaced gramophones, jukeboxes, etc.

The cyber media has revolutionized information flow, making it more instantaneous, interactive, participatory and democratic. The availability of high speed internet on mobile phone has turned people into android robots who are dancing to the tunes of technology. So while on the one hand we have reached a point of time, when and where a wide range of entertainment and communication channels are available just one click away, the efforts of various governmental and nongovernmental organizations towards revival of Folk content and forms in India shook the spirit of enquiry of the researcher in me. The research paper strives to bring out the relevance of Traditional folk media in the present epoch and study the appeal and popularity of folk forms of the state of Rajasthan, among the youth of Jaipur. Besides, the paper also highlights the efforts of various institutions in revitalizing Folk forms in India.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the relevance of Traditional folk media in the twenty first century, when other advanced mediums of mass communications exist.
- To study the appeal and popularity of various folk forms of Rajasthan among students.
- To study the efforts of promotion and revival of Folk forms of Rajasthan by various institutions and Folk artists.

Research Questions

- Are traditional folk mediums relevant in the twenty first century when other mass mediums like Newspapers, TV, Radio, Internet etc are easily accessible to masses?
- How appealing and popular are the traditional folk forms amidst the youth of Jaipur?

- What are the various government and non government organizations and research institutions doing to preserve and promote Traditional Folk Media of the state of Rajasthan?

Method of Study

- The present research paper is based on a descriptive survey, documenting current attitude of the youth of Jaipur towards traditional folk media of Rajasthan. The survey through a set of questions tries to find the appeal and popularity of the folk forms amidst college students of the city.

Sampling Details

A sample of 100 respondents was selected, by purposive sampling technique from the city of Jaipur. Proper care was taken to include male and female in equal proportion (50 male and 50 female), to prevent disparity regarding representation/sex of respondents.

Sampling universe- Undergraduate and Post graduate students of Jaipur

The demographic profile of the respondents of the study is as follows: - undergraduate and post graduate students of arts, science or commerce stream, Age (18-25) years, from lower, lower middle, middle, upper middle and high income groups. Questionnaire comprising of close ended questions were distributed among students from four different universities in the city. The data was collected by the researcher herself in person.

The reasons behind selecting Jaipur were manifold. First, the demographic profile of the city is diverse i.e. people of varied educational, cultural and economic backdrop reside here. Second, being the capital it ensures availability of all mediums of mass communication to the masses-viz. newspapers, TV, FM radio, multiplex cinema halls, 24 hour electricity and good network for internet access and hence preferences for traditional folk mediums vis a vis other mass mediums can be studied.

- Exploration of various data and content available in books, research journals and websites etc, provided a theoretical framework for the research paper. A study of the various policies and initiatives of Government and nongovernmental organizations helped in lending course to the study.

Review of Literature

Shyam Parmar in his book *Traditional Folk Media in India* says that traditional folk media has no grammar or literature and since years has passed down from one generation to another, orally through different sources. Discussing the significance of use of traditional folk media in times when mass mediums' reach and availability have proliferated, he says: - "so long as the contents satisfy the psychological and social needs of a society, they are carried forward by people themselves. If they are not found to be vital enough to survive against the

onslaught of the modern age, people, on their own, make provisions to input fresh contents into them. The more the folk forms prove their susceptibility as channels of expression, the more they are regarded worthy of their use in society."

Sloan et-al (1995:291) and Okunna (1994:24) have stressed that modern, mainstream mass media of communication like newspapers, radio, television, and magazines many a times fail to understand and take up issues affecting tribal or rural areas thereby leading the traditional media to take over information dissemination to the rural areas.

Anand Jha in an article "**Swang, the folk dance of Malwa**", in **boloji.com**, describes how *Swang* has evolved and patterned itself to suit the needs of twenty first century. Even the district administration of Indore has used *Swang* to impart health and hygiene messages or communicate the importance of family planning, girl child education among other issues.

The song and Drama division and directorate of field publicity of Government of India, state that, "The scripts of folk media programmes are traditionally prepared by the artists themselves and mostly such programmes are extemporized as per changing requirements of circumstances and audience. In such cases, the direction and treatment are approved before hand by local officers on the spot."

Jahnavee Sarmah, a reporter at *Dainik Agradoot*, while writing for *Eastern Panorama*, a reputed news magazine of the North East, highlights the benefits of juxtaposing Folk and electronic medium. She says that while on the one hand the Folk forms are easy to comprehend and connect with ,are flexible and repeatable, give a personal touch to the audiences. In an electronic medium like Television, on the other hand, messages come out of an impersonal electronic box and reiterating messages on it is an expensive proposition. Electronic media has an advantage in that it can reach out to a large number at one time, whereas in folk media, it takes a long time to reach a larger audience. The reach, in terms of numbers, is greater in electronic media but this reach is far more effective in its impact through folk media. By juxtaposing folk and electronic media, a large audience can be catered to with greater effectiveness in a single effort. She also quotes certain instances of how nowadays, various advertising agencies and companies use folk songs, dance and drama to convey information among the rural people.

Relevance of Folk Forms in the Twenty First Century

Times have changed and so have the societies. In this new materialistic and consumerist world, people have become products of a never-ending quest for fulfillment of worldly needs, where they are mostly restless and ungratified. They no longer have time, neither are they interested in elaborate forms of merriment, unlike in earlier days where events, of joy or lament, in villages were commemorated in grand ways along with folk songs, dances, sketches, illustrations and motifs, enactments etc. Today CFLs have replaced oil lamps, tractors are used to till land instead of oxen or for that reason, supply water;

dams or tube wells have put an end to the plight of women fetching water from long distances. Joint families have given way to nuclear ones. Festivals and rituals that were earlier celebrated in large groups are today enjoyed either individually or within ones' family or in very small groups. Besides, westernization of our culture is also rapidly on rise, evident in our food habits, attire choices, or language preferences. Clearly a number of changes have swept into the way of living and mannerisms of Indians because of which the earlier charm and relevance of folk songs and dance seems to have diminished. Moreover availability of other choices of entertainment and communication like TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, internet, mobile etc have decreased the dependability of masses on folk forms.

However, various factors convince us to believe in the relevance of folk forms in the present era, some of which are enumerated as follows:-First, in this era of globalization, countries are influencing each others' culture and it has been seen that the developed and economically wealthy nations have many a times dominated the process of information dissemination and have culturally colonized the developing or the underdeveloped countries. 'Americanization', 'coca colonization' etc are few such terms referring to the process of cultural dominance and subsequent homogenization. Given such a backdrop Folk forms are harbingers of our rich cultural heritage. Second, even today in certain rural nooks of India, people find folk media more credible than contemporary forms as folk artists use local dialect for communication, dress up in local attires, take up themes relevant to the area where they perform and their messages are replete with proverbs, idioms, stories and tales popular amidst masses of the place. Third, the direct, face to face and participatory form of communication is not only effective owing to instant feedback of audience and minimum gap between the sender and the receiver, but also economical as it does not involve any expensive communication technology. Fourth, IIN, FB, Whats App, 3 G may be common terms for Indians living in cities but in rural, unlettered and tribal areas, recurrent power cuts, poor internet connectivity, low affordability of cable connection on TV, computers or smart phones is a reality.

Folk traditions have special place in the lives of Women in India. Women in both rural and urban areas of our country, still draw *Mandana* and *Sanjhi*, where forms like that of the moon, the sun, the nine planets, *kalash*, a lotus flower, a *swastika*, four arms of lord Vishnu, the four directions are drawn on festive and auspicious occasions. Since it has been a tradition in India to worship plants, animals, earth, fire, wind, sky, water and various other elements of nature, these forms find a place in *Mandana* motifs in Rajasthan. Vatsyayan in his book *Kamasutra* also mentions *Bhoomi chitan* as one of the sixty four arts in women. Even today women and girls in houses draw *Rangoli* and incorporate various afore mentioned forms in their art. These folk traditions not only bring out their creative spirit but are also means to decorate and beautify their abode. Moreover given the devastation of nature brought about by human beings today these motifs remind us of the importance of nature in our lives. It is also important to note that these folk forms have evolved and changed with time. What was once drawn on the caves now finds place over the walls of our drawing rooms. A variety of folk

images and designs are printed over saris, bed sheets, *kurtas* and other attires. Folk artists are singing over microphones, using light and audio video equipments for their performances and collaborating with foreign artist .For Example Kalbelia dancer Gulabo Sapera's tie up with Titi robin.

Efforts for the Revival of Folk Forms

Several folk-forms - songs, dances, paintings, illustrations, motifs, etc. - are dying a slow death due to lack of patronizers, lack of documentation or formal training, diversion of folk artists towards other means of livelihood, western influence on Indian culture, availability of other mediums of entertainment etc. However, realizing the relevance and significance of Folk forms various institutions in India have been struggling to save various folk forms from the brink of extinction. Bhartiya Lok Kala Mandal, Udaipur imparts training to hundreds of teachers on puppetry and its puppet repertory enthralls hundreds of tourists everyday by their puppet shows .The Board of secondary education, Rajasthan has incorporated puppetry as one of the optional subjects in secondary classes. Institutions like Centre for cultural resources and training; New Delhi, Theatre craft Museum, All India Handicraft Board, Darpan Academy, Ahmedabad; Bhartiya Natya Sangh, Bhartiya Kala Kendra, Delhi; Sri Ram Centre, Delhi are just some of the many organizations that have been working tirelessly towards preserving and promoting folk traditions of India. Legendary folklorist, ethnomusicologist from Jodhpur -the late Padma Bhushan and Rajasthan Ratna awardee-Komal Kothari, founded Rupayan Sansthan at Borunda village of Rajasthan in 1960, along with Vijaydan Detha. This foundation has documented Rajasthani arts, music, folklore etc, recorded and documented the Manganiyar and Langa songs and promoted them all over the state.

The song and Drama division and directorate of field publicity of Government of India have promoted Folk artists of our country by providing them a platform to perform and have used folk forms for development in rural areas. Several shows on Television today juxtapose folk and contemporary form of entertainment. For instance MTV's Coke studio, a highly popular programme especially among youth, gives a platform to folk singers and instrumentalists from every alcove of India and is well appreciated for the novel fusions of Indian folk and western music. Instruments like *ravanahatta*, *harmonium* or *tabla* are played alongside drums and guitars, while artists sing in regional languages and dialects. Example-Amit Trivedi's song *thari Shararat sab janu me chaudhary* or Papon and Kalpana Potwary's song *baisara beera moha peehari le chalo,pihari mori olu aawe*. Doordarshan's sister channel DD India and DD Bharti air several programmes on indigenous cultures, their convictions, their art, their songs and dances etc.

Even private organizations like 'De kulture Music' have endeavored to research and locate indigenous musicians and singers or their forms, followed by their documentation and promotion by organizing live concerts, album releases ,cultural nights and exchange programmes with foreign nations, music festivals etc. Similarly, 'The Rhythm of Rajasthan', an initiative of Mr. Nitin Harsh, has

endowed the artists from all around Rajasthan with platforms in India and abroad, to perform and showcase their talent.

Popularity of Folk Forms among the Youth

To determine the popularity of folk forms amidst youth in the city of Jaipur, a structured questionnaire was given to hundred undergraduate and postgraduate students of various universities in Jaipur. The findings of the survey are enumerated as follows:-

Results

Table 1: Level of awareness of the youth regarding the traditional folk dances of Rajasthan

Question 1		Male (50)	Female (50)	Total (100)
How many of the following dance forms have you seen (Ghoomar, Teratali, Kalbelia, Ghindar, Bhavai, Kuchhi ghodi)?	All of the forms	00	00	00
	More than 3	24	37	61
	Three	03	02	05
	Less than 3	23	11	34
	None of the forms	00	00	00

Table 2 : Popular folk artists of Rajasthan

Who according to you is the most popular folk artist of Rajasthan?	Had no idea / could not recollect a name	31
	Ila Arun	14
	Gulabo samera	36
	Swaroop Khan	19
	Total-100	

Table 3: Respondents' awareness regarding folk musical instruments

	Male (50)	Female (50)	Total (100)	
The respondents were asked if they could identify the following instruments:- Khamayicha, Dhol, Khartal, Chang, Manjeera, Pakhawaj, Ravanhatta, Saaranji.	All the instruments	00	00	00
	More than 4	32	24	56
	Four	07	08	15
	less than 4 instruments	11	18	29
	Total 100			

- Maximum number of respondents could not recollect Khamaicha and Ravanhatta.
- 17 out of 100 respondents had seen Raslila and only 09 of them liked seeing it.
- 11 respondents had heard songs of Manganiyar and Langa community and could recollect the songs, while 25 said they may have heard but could not recollect it, while rest said they had no idea about it.
- 18 out of 100 respondents knew about *phad*, and only 04 of these 18 students had seen a *phad vaachan* while others were unaware of it.
- 32 of 50 girls knew about *Mandana*, while only 12 of 50 boys knew about it.
- 08 out of 100 respondents knew about *Sanjhi*, while others had no clue about it.
- 67 of 100 respondents could sing or dance a folk form of the state.
- Only 13 of 100 respondents said that they enjoyed watching puppetry.
- 74 of the respondents had seen folk forms on television at some point of time in their lives.
- 54 respondents feel that folk forms are boring; while 21 said that it depends on their mood and 25 said that they enjoyed folk songs, dances and art.

Table 4 : Respondents' views on the traditional folk forms of Rajasthan

Traditional Folk forms are boring.	Strongly Agree	31
	Agree	23
	Cannot say	21
	Disagree	11
	Strongly Disagree	14
Total		100

- 78 of 100 respondents said that given a choice they would prefer watching a Bollywood hit movie rather than a folk artist's performance.
- 53 of 100 respondents would prefer fusion of folk and contemporary rather than the original form.
- 69 of 100 respondents feel that folk forms are relevant in the twenty first century and most of them said that folk songs, dances or art and craft are harbingers of Indian culture.
- 31 of 100 respondents said folk mediums are not relevant in the present times.
- 72 of the 100 respondents said that they would like to purchase folk art work for their houses.
- 83 of 100 respondents answered in negative when asked if they have seen any folk form over the cyber medium.

Data Analysis

After analyzing responses of the 100 respondents in Jaipur, it can be stated that dance as a performing art is more popular than other folk forms of Rajasthan. In fact Kalbelia, Tera tali and Ghoomar are widely recognized and popular dance forms among the respondents. It is also observed that Folk artists who have showcased their art in Indian cinema like Ila Arun or who have appeared in reality shows on Television like Gulabo Sapera in Big Boss and Swaroop Khan on Indian Idol are instantly recognized by youth. It is surprising to note that though the songs of manganiyar and langa community were heard by youth they knew little about the folk singers or their community. While certain folk forms like Rangoli or Mandana are still drawn on floors during auspicious and festive occasions, many other traditional forms of expression like *Sanjhi* or *Phad* are fast declining in their popularity and presence in the state.

The fact, that many of the respondents at some point of time in their lives recollect watching folk forms on television, indicates that modern mainstream mass media can be used to promote many traditional forms which stand at the brink of extinction. One important fact drawn out of responses is that though majority of respondents realize the importance of traditional folk forms as harbingers of India's cultural heritage, yet their content and themes do not appeal them. Some of them felt that the themes of folk forms are obsolete while few others felt that better modes and novel forms of entertainment are available. Many respondents preferring fusion of the contemporary and traditional over pure traditional forms intimates of the public demand for reshaping the old. Since majority of respondents could not recollect seeing folk forms over cyber medium and given the potential internet has as a medium, the new media can be used extensively in future for promoting Indian traditional folk forms.

Conclusion

Though we have several advanced modes and forms of communications today, yet the importance of traditional folk forms cannot be negated, especially because they are the forerunners of Indian tradition and culture. They not only attract tourists to our land but also help us upkeep our identity in this fast homogenizing world dominated by western cultural influence. The study indicates that the youth, despite having umpteen modern means of entertainment, is still interested and overwhelmed by folk songs, dances, art work etc. Working women even though busy enjoy drawing *Rangoli* or making *Maandna*. Television programme makers have juxtaposed new messages and themes with folk forms in their efforts to bring about development among masses. It is heartening to see numerous non government organizations, institutions, and individuals working hard to revive folk forms which due to financial hardships, lack of patrons or of formal training, are on the verge of extinction. It is time that in this cyber world we use the online platform to promote our folk forms and design mobile apps or content, especially for the young generation to connect them with their indigenous culture. Moreover training institutes should be established to impart formal training in folk dances or songs or art and handicraft to students

in schools and colleges so that we have more forerunners to carry forward the legacy of folk forms. It is also pertinent that new themes relevant to contemporary times be taken up by folk artists and do away with the monotony which many of our respondents felt, but without disturbing the basic flavour or elements of the form.

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