

Analytical study of folk media as a medium of social awareness in Maharashtra during the pandemic

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Abstract:

While Folk Art has always remained an important aspect of culture and community, folk-lore or oral communication has always believed to be the primary education. In this era of changing forms of media with advent of digital platforms and social media, an analytical study was carried during the Pandemic in April 2020 to identify the use of folk media, one primary mode of communication during the new age media.

Samples were collected of various folk artistes in Maharashtra who composed and also performed folk songs including the content of Covid 19 and precautionary measures to be taken and how songs included social awareness topics. It was identified that most of the songs composed by keeping the tradition of folk arts alive, was also shared on social media. Though the folk artistes used the new media platform of social media, still the core values of folk arts remained uncompromised.

Keywords: Covid19, Folkart, Folkmedia, Maharashtrafolk, socialawareness

Period of Study: This study was carried in April-May 2020 and April-May 2021 (When Covid was at its peak in both the years), when most of the folk artistes in rural area of Maharashtra were introduced to the topic of Covid and how they weaved the topic which was being talked in the entire society into their folk art.

Introduction:

Folk art is the expression of the culture of a community and communicates with society through music, dance or drama. Performance is its basic characteristic. It is an inseparable part of community life and culture. Community life manifests itself through Folk-arts related to contemporary life. The legacy of Folk-arts in India is transmitted from generation to generation. The content used in folk art being easily moulded contemporariness is its basic characteristics.

After printing as mass communication modes, folk arts have always worked for hands in hands with print communication to spread awareness about the various topics.

Folk media plays a vital role in rural development by spreading awareness messages to the masses. For people in rural areas to lead a peaceful life, overall development in the social, economic, political and cultural field is important. Most of the population in India staying in rural areas is oblivious that their livelihood depends on agriculture, and we can rightly say that India is an agricultural country.

With the media's specialized and significant role, modern mass media alone cannot reach millions of people. Many families in rural parts of India still do not have access to the television internet. The main reason behind this inaccessibility is poverty and illiteracy. With the anecdotes attached to modern media as impersonal, unbelievable and glamorous, it is challenging to preserve cultural heritage. The promotion of performing arts is limited to modern media; it challenges the reach of folk artists to modern audiences. Therefore when we compare the reach of modern media with traditional media in rural parts, the latter can overcome barriers to communication like interest, understanding, engagement and language. When we talk about folk media, it has proved to be an important medium for social change and nation-building. With keeping the traditional media intact and changing the content in the message and style of preaching, folk media becomes an effective medium to spread the messages. Therefore it has become important to keep the traditional media alive by continuously safeguarding and preserving adverse effects on globalization.

Therefore, the folk art reflects the issues which are usually a part of the society. Therefore any change in the society; we can see that even folk arts imbibe the same change in itself. The research analytically studies this element, where how the pandemic situation and Covid 19 relatively new pandemic in society was immediately included in the folk arts. As soon as the pandemic was announced, folk artistes in various parts of Maharashtra composed songs revolving around the social

awareness during pandemic. While going out was not possible for them, social media platform was effectively used by these artistes to reach audiences and spread the social messages.

Literature Review:

Folk Art, which is defined as about people, by the people and for the people, is like that of a banyan tree. The branches, leaves and exposed roots become old and withered, and new ones sprout in their place. These manifestations of the people's songs, dance and drama springing from amongst the people, for the people, go into bloom; the building blocks of contemporary community life which have outlived their relevance, drop off, and new shoots of new expressions manifest themselves. Guru Dev Rabindra Nath Tagore, in his famous "Swadeshi Samaj" speech in July 1904, advocated "all traditional structure of art must have sufficient degree of elasticity to allow it to respond to varied impulses of life, delicate or virile, to grow with its growth, to the traditional performing art is an aesthetic object, the concept of belongingness and affinity in cultural context. The folk art forms satisfy our innate need for self." Folk art, the primary mode of non-verbal and oral communication in India, is considered an important mode of mass communication. Oral tradition has always believed to be the primary communication.

Dr Hairsh Kumar, in his research paper, said, "The first significant international recognition of the traditional media in the communication and the development strategies of developing countries came in 1972 when the International Planned Parenthood Federation and UNESCO organized in London a series of meetings on the integrated use of the folk and the mass media in family planning communication programmers. The interest generated by these meetings and the continued effort to highlight the folk media as effective forms to convey developmental messages resulted in several seminars and workshops around the world."

The outcome of various researchers has established the importance of rural media in development communication. Traditional uses of folk media were primarily for entertainment, social communication and persuasive communication. There have been sporadic efforts to involve folk media for conveying development messages through mass-media agencies. The international commission for the study of communication problems, the commission, also popularly known as the Mac bride Commission, was established by UNESCO to study issues as increasing importance to

communication as a social phenomenon and the consequent interest shown in the development of communication.

Following is the recommendation made by commission:

“Even when modern media have penetrated isolated areas, the older forms maintain their validity, particularly when used to influence attitudes, instigate action and promote change. Extensive experience has shown that traditional forms of communication can effectively dispel the superstitions, archaic perceptions and unscientific that people have inherited as part of traditions and which are difficult to modify if the benefits of change are hard to demonstrate. Practitioners of the traditional media use a subtle form of persuasion by presenting the required message in locally popular artistic forms. This cannot be rivalled by any other means of communication.” (Many voices-one worlds)

If we want to penetrate the message of development among the masses, we would have to opt for the folk forms of this country in a more planned manner.

As veteran folk media scholar Balwant Garhgi rightly said, “Folk media represents the people in their natural habitat with all their contradictions and diverse activities. It gives a glimpse of their style of speech, music, dance, dress and wisdom. It contains reach store of mythological heroes, medieval romances, chivalric tales, social customs, beliefs, and legends. To understand the colourful diversity and unity of India, it’s important to see the folk theatre in its natural settings.”

Folk-Media and Nation-Building

While we talk about folk media and nation-building or social awareness, we can reflect the same.

In Maharashtra, post-independence, Shahirs (Ballad singers) played an important role in Samyukt Maharashtra Movement. Ballad singers like Shahir Amar Shaikh, Annbhau Sathe are known for their contribution to the Separate Maharashtra movement through their Ballad singing and spreading the message through their oral communication. After that, the folk media artists concentrated more on contemporary issues and continuously spread the various social messages.

Folk media artists in Maharashtra are Shahirs, Bharudkars, Kirtankars, Tamasha artists, among others. To date, all these artists are working with major government departments like Aids

Awareness, Save Girl Child, Cleanliness Drive, Preserve Environment in various government departments to spread the social messages. The artists who migrated from rural areas to the cities due to various work opportunities have a significant contribution towards including contemporary issues in their performances.

Ballad singers like Shahir Sable, Vitthal Umap, among others after the Samyukt Maharashtra Movement, got various performances. This is where the transition of folk artists from rural to urban areas also started.

Folk Media during Pandemic:

After the pandemic stuck in India in January 2020, social awareness about taking precautionary measures to safe and avoid the spread of Covid-19 became important. While the modern media took its platform to spread awareness about spreading awareness like wear mask, wash your hands, use sanitisers and stay indoors, similar messages penetrated the rural masses in Maharashtra.

The beauty of folk artists is they make the way of life a part of their folk art, and society's change reflects in their creation. The same was seen in folk artists, too, during lockdown post-pandemic. Various traditional folk artists used the guidelines given by Maharashtra Government, incorporated the same in their traditional form of songs and made it available to the masses through social media platforms.

About Research

This research analysed at least 8 folks songs composed by the artistes through different folk forms like Gondhal, Bharud, Povada. Research also concentrated how folk artistes used their social media mostly Facebook as medium to spread their awareness.

Folk Songs revolving around Covid-19 (Excerpts of Interview)

One among them is Bharud artiste Niranjan Bhakre from Sillod region in Aurangabad.

An oral tradition called Bharud also enjoys renown in the state. It is usually described as 'Bahu Rudh Te Bharud' — referring to the performance which keeps the roots of society and culture alive. Bharud, which usually contains hidden messages or trails symbolism, reflects various traditions of poetry. It is also believed that the word Bharud came from an imaginary bird with two beaks.

Bharuds, written by Sant Eknath, are performed extensively in Maharashtra. The main aim of Bharud artiste is to convey the writings of saints to the masses and reach them with spiritual messages, enlighten them with knowledge. The spiritual messages slowly shifted to the more contemporary messages to be communicated to the masses. Metaphors are usually used by Bharudkars to preach the messages. During the pandemic, Bhakre wrote a song based on his Bharud tradition. Soon, the song was recorded for the local administration and was played as a part of social awareness planed by Gram Panchayat. Similarly, Prof. Dr Ganesh Chandanshive, a traditional folk artist and a professor at the University of Mumbai's Performing Folk Arts Department, also wrote a song on social awareness in the form of Gondhal.

In Gondhal, the Gondhali (male performer) dances to the beats of Sambal while he sings Gondhal devotional songs. Gondhal is a ritualistic folk play performed to worship Goddess Amba or Renuka by only male artists. At the same time, the folk play consists of songs and drama enactment, Gondhalis, during their drama enactment, passes some satirical comments on the society and contemporary situations. The same goes with Jagran, another ritualistic folk-play that is performed on any auspicious occasions.

Dr Ganesh Chandanshive created various songs based on the type of songs of Jagran and Gondhal, which sent out the messages of the pandemic and precautions to be taken.

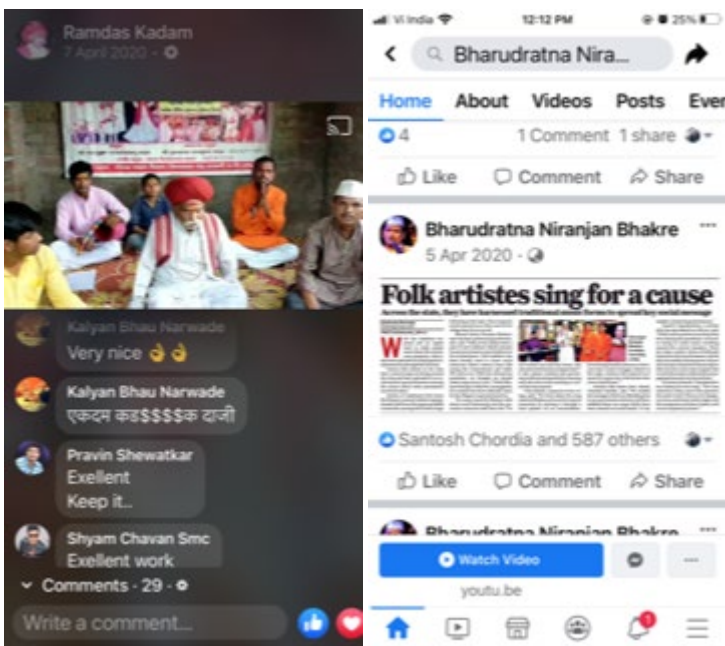
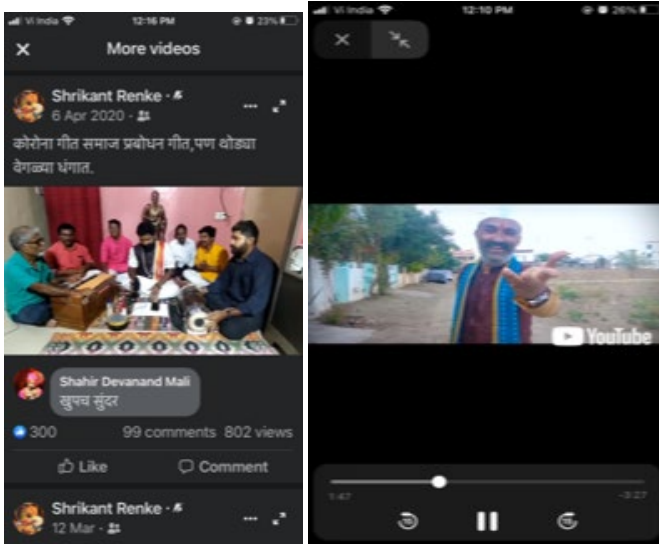
The song created by Bhakare refers to "Do not venture out, wash hands, do not socialize", is very creatively woven in the Bharud artform. The songs also salute the frontline workers who have been on the forefront and fighting during a pandemic."

Chandan Kamble, another folk artiste from Alandi, had also created a folk song and talking to the researchers emphasized that these days artists also study the social message given.

Kamble said, "As folk artists, we also study the message which needs to be given to the masses. During a pandemic, we studied the guidelines given by Maharashtra government and accordingly included the same in our songs."

Prof. Dr Ganesh Chandanshive said, "An artistes' creation reflects society; therefore, an artist needs to be aware of society and its surroundings. We have examples of great folk artists like Dada Kondke, who would never miss reading the daily newspaper. He would very beautifully imbibe the situation in society in his folk plays and would pass satirical remarks on the government. As a part of society,

folk artists impact its masses, and they are the best medium to send messages effectively and engage the masses in their art. Therefore, be it any social message, folk art imbibes the same in their art and helps spread the social awareness.”



Above images are snapshots of Folk Artistes and their social media pages revolving around their work during Covid through folk form.

Another Gondhal artiste, Ramdas Kadam from Parbhani, composed a song based on Gondhal folk art and performed it on social media during the lockdown.

Kadam who has inherited the art of Gondhal from his father Late Radhakrishna Kadam who has been an internationally acclaimed folk artiste said that as an artist they feel responsible enough to give society through their art form.

Kadam said, “We made a song based on Gondhal which spoke about the situation and how the pandemic slowly penetrated the country and changed the social life. We also included social awareness message for people to take care and follow all the guidelines.”

Shahir Shrikant Renke, who is a traditional ballad singer in Maharashtra, also composed a folk song spreading the message of “Stay Home and help to reduce the spread of Corona”. While he sang the song, he ensured that the message of staying home can lead to reducing the spread and it emphasized on the the messages given by Indian Government.

Aniruddha Wankar, another folk artiste, while presenting a folk song revolved his message around the limitation on marriage. During lockdown, there was a limit on marriage functions and social gatherings. Therefore, after studying the norms revolving around social gatherings, Wankar composed a song on how can one ideally reduce the social gathering during marriages.

Shahir Yogesh Chikatgaonkar, another folk artiste used his Gondhal as a format to spread the message of vaccination.

Shahir Devanand Mali, another ballad singer who performs traditional Povada emphasized on how it is important for a folk artiste to also study the message before and then composing songs. Povada is a songs of valour which are sung by ballad singers. It usually narrates the stories of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and uses Veer Rasa.

Mali said, “While the traditional forms remain the same, the content in the songs changes but at the same time, we can ensure that the tradition of folk form also remains intact. We are also striving hard to preserve various traditional art forms. Therefore, the format of folk art like in Povada, we will first have percussion instrument playing, then Gan and Naman which means worshipping Lord Ganesha and then our freedom fighters and our teachers and then presenting the ballad song based on the

social message. It is a win-win situation wherein the tradition of folk art remains intact and also the message reaches audience which is based on contemporary life.”

Conclusion:

As a researcher, it was very interesting to see how the songs depict the minute intricacies, like how the pandemic started in Wuhan in China and how it spread throughout the world. As a folk artiste coming from interiors of the Parbhani region, it is amusing to see the truth and facts is included in the folk songs after studying the situation in detail. Most of the folk artistes, studied the messages first and then imbibed the same effectively in their songs. While it was not possible

While folk artists also suffered during pandemic where their cultural programmes were stopped completely, the state government of Maharashtra, to help these folk artists, also started a scheme to spread social awareness through folk media. Launched on May 5 2021, the scheme will provide a door-to-door programme in each village to not more than three artists in a troupe. The state government also provides study material to the artists and help them to understand the situation. Similar social awareness programmes have always been observed for environmental causes, HIV Aids social awareness, and Save Girl Child.

While the researchers analyzed the songs created by the artists during a pandemic, it brought to light that artists are well aware of the happenings in society and study the same in detail. It also has a greater reach in rural areas as the art form is engaging and at the same time helps to spread the message. Folk Artistes also used social media to a greater extent rather than performing live shows or door-to-door programme. All the artistes whose songs were analysed, are easily available on social media platform and is being heard by the rural population and to some extent in city area. This is the beauty of folk art which boasts its characteristics as elasticity. Folk Art is extempore, elastic and contemporary due to which it continues to be a part of the society with great pride and at the same time preserves the culture in its purest form.

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