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Folk arts and Agricultural Communication: A study of model farmers in Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Rapid advancement in electronic and communication technologies has opened up new and more effective channels for agricultural information dissemination. Despite that folk formats are used in agricultural communication by various agencies such as governments, NGOs, farmers networks etc. This study was carried out to analyze the determinants of effectiveness of communication in the delivery of agricultural information to farmers in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. Data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire administered to 300 farmers randomly selected from Guntur district. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results of the analysis showed that 35.56% give firs rank to Dandora followed by folk songs (28.15%), folk drama (12.58%), fairs (11.48%), government cultural programmes (10.38%) and finally only 1.11% gave first rank to Burra katha. Based on the results and the need for improving the effectiveness of the folk tools the study recommended that more competent presenters knowledgeable in the area of agriculture for folk formats should be engaged. Programmes that create awareness about agriculture should be designed based on folk formats by the governments, NGOs as well as extension staff of agricultural departments. Necessary training may be provided to those who participate in these activities.

1. Introduction

A two-way process enables farmers to share lessons and best practices related to their farm enterprise, which ultimately broadens their knowledge base as well (de Silva and Ratnadiwakara 2008). In addition to information on sustainable natural resource management (Swanson 2008) production-oriented information, off-farm income-generation options implications of changing policies as well are also important for the farmers (Van den Ban 1998). A farmer may highlight an important information need based on his or her requirements and interests, but unfelt or unrecognized needs will not be revealed through this approach (Carter and Batte, 1993).

While the important role of groups in facilitating action learning, participative research, social networks, capacity building, informing researchers is well recognized. The relative value of the information they generate and delivery has received less attention. Beyond the participative research and capacity building activity undertaken at the core of farmer groups, most engagement between farmers and groups is through the simpler and less personal methods most commonly associated with traditional communication, e.g. field days, seminars, newsletter, publications, etc.

Kibat (1990-91) reported that the majority of population in Southeast Asia lived in rural areas and was engaged in agricultural activities. The information dissemination in these countries relied on the acquisition of printed material which would reach only a small fraction of the population because of illiteracy, low income (prohibiting the purchase of high-priced printed material), and language barriers. In India especially in rural areas widely dispersed rural population and poor communication infrastructure were the major obstacles that have been hindering the provision of useful information services. Indian agriculture has been witnessing tremendous transformation over all these decades. Despite its struggle with traditional methods and patterns of practices not much has changed and continue to be traditional in its outset. Not only the traditional cropping patterns even information procuring systems also have not changed drastically over all these years. In the context of globalisation and in the event of encouragement of successive government's farmers seem to have been shifting from traditional to modern tools such as television and ICTs.

Recent studies go beyond the factors influencing farmer information that use to identify opportunities for interventions that will help increase information dissemination, based on the information search behavior of the farmers. Bekele (2006) used Ethiopian farmers' subjective rankings of agricultural problems and a stated preference model to determine their preferences for development intervention. Socioeconomic circumstances and ranking of agricultural problems play a major role in the type of development intervention preferred. Villamil, Silvis, and Bollero (2008) found a high degree of variability in preferences for methods of information delivery among farmers, even in small geographic areas, and suggested segmenting the population into target groups to increase the efficiency of knowledge communication through each group's preferred information channels. On the same lines in central India, AIR stations such as Bhopal, Indore, Raipur and Nagpur targeted the farm communities for education in almost identical fashion. The focus of communication was innovation in agriculture suitable across different agro-ecological conditions of the region. The common element in the process of communication

was the local 'dialect'. For instance, "Barsati Bhaiya" at AIR Raipur interacted with his farmers in Chhatisgarhi whereas "Shankar Bhaiya" of AIR Bhopal communicated in Bundeli, the local folk dialect. The popularity of farm programmes of AIR Indore is still alive among the elderly persons of Malwa. People in the region recall Lachhu Kaka (the old man of the village), Master ji (the village school teacher) and Ramji (a farmer) for their contributions in imparting knowledge to the farm communities of Malwa region.

Published studies on farmer information needs and preferences are limited in developing countries. In Africa, farmer information sources and information needs have been analyzed (Aina 2006; Stefane et al. 2005; Kaniki 1991), and a number of studies have examined the factors that influence farmer search strategies (Okwu and Dauda 2011; Opara 2010; Adolwa et al. 2010). In India, for example, where more than half the population is dependent on agriculture and allied activities, improved knowledge delivery to farmers is needed to support sustainable farm productivity. But the factors that influence farmers' information needs or sources are rarely explored.

The mass communication channels in India have been expanding and serving various sectors like agriculture with specialised message construction. With the availability of new technology, newspaper publication has increased manifold and India publishes more daily newspapers than any other country in Asia, covering a range of languages and cultural diversity that is unparalleled in the world (Singhal and Rogers: 2001: 54).

Traditional media and new Information and Communication Technologies have played a major role in diffusing information to rural communities and have much more potential. There is a need to connect rural communities, research and extension networks and provides access to the much needed knowledge, technology and services. (Forno, 1999). Despite these developments where print, electronic media as well as new media have been growing from strength to strength and helping the farmers in acquiring information to the optimal level folk media continues to b in vogue in villages. Especially small and tenant farmers who happen to be less educated and can't afford to newspapers and television channels prefer folk as well as media. In villages Dandora etc. are still used as they reach large number of people simultaneously. The usage of folk and traditional media also don't seem to have any correlation with the age. Due to the quality of nativity even youngsters are passionate but folk media and patronize it.

2. Folk Media

Folk media including traditional forms of entertainment can be inexpensive media (Adebayo 1997). They are used primarily for entertainment in the rural areas and can be adapted to transmit messages about agricultural practices and ideas (Obinne 1994). Folk media are interactive and participatory (Adoyo 2004). Even in many development activities especially in health and education folk formats are encouraged. Especially in HIV awareness Kalajathas have been highly successful in driving the messages. Cultural troops fewer formed with the artistes of local media that go across various places and promote social problems and issues such as pollution control, promotion of greenery etc.

In the traditional societies, traditional forms of communication like folk songs, plays and sermon have credibility and meaningfulness which cannot be equaled with imported technologies (Ithiel, 1983). Sankanagoudar (1999), in her study on impact of folk media on farmers, has found that there was positive and significant relationship between cosmopoliteness and acquisition of knowledge by farmers on watershed development technology. Dakora (1996:110) and Akullo et al. (2007:2) argue that for centuries, farmers have planned agricultural production and conserved natural resources with the instruments of indigenous knowledge (IK). Akullo et al. (2007:2) explain that IK is stored in people's memories and activities; it is expressed in stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dance, myths, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local languages and taxonomy, agricultural practices, equipment, materials, plant species and animal breeds.

In Andhra Pradesh agricultural communication has assumed larger proportion as the mass media, the extension activities of agriculture departments of the government as well as the academic institutes gained prominence. In the state agriculture is a prime occupation for millions of people and exhibits great diversity of crops. The demand for information is also immense. As farmers are enterprising in nature the blend of trade, commerce and agriculture continuous update of information has become much sought after in this field. Along with the traditional media like gramasabhas (Village level meetings), dandora (drum beating), folk songs, dance, drama and other formats print and electronic media have become potential sources of information in it. Though nonformal formats are very common newspapers, magazines have been taking up the problems of farmers in agriculture and are represented effectively. Apart from these newspapers have been providing the necessary inputs on a regular basis by publishing full pages about agriculture, its practices and problems etc.

Balladeer Gaddar has been more popular for his folk songs and lyrics as he uses the local dialects in bringing out the problems of back ward areas in the state of Telangana. He also changed his attire to attract the attention of rural people. In the combined state of Andhra Pradesh, Deccan Development Society located in Medak district has been trying to promote the traditions of agriculture through folk formats. They have been actively promoting innovative practices of preserving old seeds of various crops. The NGO has been involving women especially Dalits in Sangam radio, a Community Radio initiative where they take part in recording and editing of the radio programmes. In Karnataka also seed festivals are conducted as a regular programme for many years. Farmers from many districts come together and share the old seeds preserved by them and share with others amidst folk arts such as dances, music and performances.

3. Review of Literature

Many studies were also taken up for usage of folk media in the dissemination of information regarding agriculture. Kumar and Sen (2001) reported the third preferred mode was folk songs and this mode of presentation was preferred by 56.6% of the respondents. Being a traditional mode of presentation, radio listeners showed keen interest in this mode of presentation.

Chapke and Bhagat (2005) found that traditional folk media are still popular in rural Maharashtra though they show a declining trend. Quality of performers needs to be improved by offering proper training with the help of established music and dance schools which are virtually non-existent at the moment. They conducted a study in Nagpur district of Maharashtra state of India. Three villages namely, Ghorad, Budhala and Kaniyadhol were selected purposively in which traditional media shows were performed regularly and five most popular traditional media were selected viz. Tamasha, Bhajan, Kirtan, Dhandhar and Quawaly. Majority of the respondents were visitors of Tamasha (71.59 %) and Bhajan (59.94 %). Almost every body's preferred place was village itself (71.59 to 100 %) for viewing these programmes. The shows of Dhandhar (100 %), Tamasha (77.22 %) and Kirtan (76.44 %) were usually performed on the festivals like Diwali. Most of the viewers (61.61 per cent) liked "Tamasha" due to lively performance (40.50 %) followed by Bhajan (46.62 %) due to contents covering familiar religious themes (85.68 %). Most preferred themes by the viewers through these media were, social development including agriculture and patriotic songs. Almost all Government officials opined that the traditional media programmes are effective and had good impact on rural masses.

Surekha et al. (2008) concluded that both lavani-live version and lavani video version of folk media were significantly better than group meeting farmers, gain in knowledge, and retention of knowledge, symbolic adoption and overall effectiveness. Yadav et al. (2008) concluded that the 'traditional media' was perceived as the least credible source of agriculture information by the total fenugreek growers as well as by the big fenugreek growers and accorded last rank with regard to source of agriculture information.

Daudu (2009) investigated the problems and prospect of folk media usage for agricultural extension service delivery in Benue State in Nigeria. The analysis showed that the types of folk media used in descending order of their usefulness were folk songs, friends,/Association, folk puppet theatre and drama. While the most frequently used folk media were folk dance, folk songs, friends/Association, and groups/Association. The result further indicated that the three most frequently mentioned problems associated with folk media usage were lack of fidelity, costly to organize and poor clarity.

In Pakistan Hassan et al. (2009) in his study on the usage of mass media among the farmers' community in the rural areas found that majority of them still relied on the traditional mass media such as television, newspaper and radio, thus bring to a probability that these three mass media sources can be effective sources for agriculture information dissemination among the farmers in the rural areas.

4. Methodology

The newly formed Andhra Pradesh has been exploring the options for development of various prime sectors that need to be encouraged. Agriculture is one sector which continues to contribute to the growth and the contemporary trends have been supporting it to sustain the growth. In the state of Andhra Pradesh earlier government identified model farmers and were provided necessary inputs of information about agriculture. They in turn were expected to guide his fellow farmers in disseminating innovations. In this context the researcher took up the study to find out how the communication is supporting the government identified model farmers in disseminating information and how did they broaden the communication spectrum within less time and minimize the losses during the unfavourable conditions such as drought, floods, unhealthy market scenario and other times of crisis in the agriculture sector.

5. Objectives of the Study

The study has been taken to

1. Identify the demographic profile of the model farmers.
2. To find out types of folk media used in agriculture communication.

6. Hypothesis

In view of these objectives, the following hypothesis has been formulated for examination. Farmer's interest on folk media depends on the age as youngsters who have greater access to mass media do not pay much attention and interest to folk media.

The researchers have studied utility of folk formats among model farmers as they in turn influence a large number of other farmers on the lines of opinion leaders. Survey method was executed to examine the conditions, situations or value-appraise; to query (someone) in order to collect information about some aspect of a group or area; to view or consider comprehensively and to inspect, scrutinize the prevailing system. The research setting of the study, Guntur District offers a wide scope due to its vast diversity of crops where different Agricultural and Horticultural crops are being raised by these model farmers. For the present study multi stage sampling method was adopted and 300 farmers were selected for the study. The data collection was taken up by a structured questionnaire. A total of 290 questionnaires were received by the researcher at the end of the data collection session among which twenty were rejected.

7. Data analysis

People who belong to agrarian families are born in such an ambience that right from their birth farming becomes more of a social and cultural activity rather than a profession. In a general sense there will not be any fixed age of farmers to join agriculture as for majority it is a domestic affair and enter into it at a very early age and continue to do till their last stage of life. Hence from a very young age they get used to all those activities. But as the age progresses they develop professional outlook and become model farmers. In the study majority of the respondents are 41 and above years of age, 31.11% come under the age group of 36-40 years followed by 31-35 years (26.30%), and 26-30 years (3.70%). The mean age of the respondents is 38.26 years and Standard Deviation is 4.47 (Table. 1).

Table 1
Percentage distribution of respondents according to age

S.No	Age	fr	%
1	Below25	-	-
2	26-30	10	3.70
3	31-35	71	26.30
4	36-40	84	31.11
5	41 and Above	105	38.89
	Total	270	100

Contrary to the old practices where the farmers are mostly illiterates and have meagre education current trend shows good educational qualifications to farmers. Interestingly highly educated youth are also taking up agriculture as a full-fledged profession. With regard to this study the level of education shows that 60.7% of the sample have passed tenth class, 23.7% passed intermediate, 13% have completed under graduate courses and 2.6 % have post graduate degrees (Figure .1).

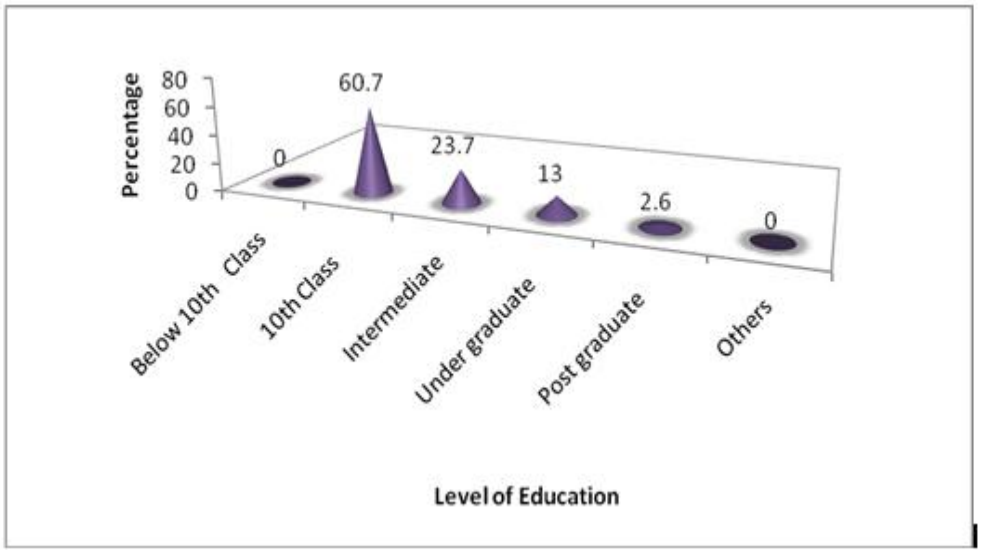

Figure.1: Distribution of education of sample model farmers in Guntur district

When the respondents were asked to rank the nature of accesses to folk media and folk songs on agriculture folk songs were ranked first by 28.15% followed by folk drama(12.58%), Burrakatha(1.11%), Dandora (35.56%), Fairs (11.48%), Government cultural programmers were ranked first by 10.38% (Table 2).

Table 2
Percentage of distribution of the respondents as per ranks given to types of folk media on agriculture

S.No	Type of folk media	Ranks													
		1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
		fr	%	fr	%	fr	%	fr	%	fr	%	fr	%	fr	%
1	Folk songs	76	28.15	30	11.11	11	4.07	101	37.41	20	7.41	31	11.48	1	0.37
2	Folk drama	34	12.58	42	15.56	16	5.93	35	12.96	122	45.19	21	7.78	0	0.00
3	Burrakatha	3	1.11	3	1.11	16	5.93	29	10.74	53	19.63	166	61.48	0	0.00
4	Dandora	96	35.56	35	12.96	64	23.70	23	8.52	19	7.04	32	11.85	1	0.37
5	Fairs	31	11.48	120	44.44	48	17.78	51	18.89	17	6.30	3	1.11	0	0.00
6	Government cultural programmes	28	10.38	40	14.81	115	42.59	31	11.48	39	14.44	17	6.30	0	0.00

Correlation coefficient between the respondent's age and access to folk media on agriculture based on the first rank is -0.085, low degree negative correlation is noticed which means that practically there is no correlation.

The chi-square test is not significant at 5% l.o.s, χ^2 =16.454,p(0.35) >0.05. In this case, the significance value is high that it is displayed as 0.35, which means that it would appear that the two variables are not related. We conclude that the proportion of farmers who assigned the first rank to access to folk media on agriculture is same in the different age groups.

8. Conclusions

Age wise analysis shows that farmers of all age groups are found in this category of model farmers. Since education has got nothing to do with agriculture majority of the sample are not much studied. But compared to earlier times they have better qualifications. Some of them have even acquired degrees and

PG degrees indicate that either they are taking up agriculture after studies or along with farming and are acquiring educational qualifications. In general it is expected that people with high levels of education are expected to learn more from mass media than those with low levels of education (Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, 1970). This means they will be exposed to the mass media and learn news at a faster rate than the less educated (Price and Zaller, 1993). Despite the invasion of technology and modern methods traditional as well as folk media are still patronised by rural farmers. Since they would be large numbers the study has assumed significance. When the respondents were asked to rank the nature of access to folk media and folk songs on agriculture Dandora was ranked first by majority followed by folk songs, folk drama, fairs and Burrakatha is ranked first by just 11.48%. Government cultural programmers are ranked first by (10.38%) showed that farmers still pay interest in the following which is closely related to the Kumar and Se (2001) study which found that third preferred mode was folk songs. Chahal (1992), Singh (2002) and Yadav et al. (2008) reported similar findings. Coefficient of correlation between the respondent's age and access to folk media on agriculture based on the first rank is -0.085, low degree negative correlation means that they are negatively correlated. Irrespective of age the respondents pay interest in folk arts which is contrary to the hypothesis that old people prefer folk arts more than the youngsters. Hence the hypothesis is not proved.

9. Suggestions

It is understood that in the current times usage of modern technologies has been noticed even in case of agriculture. Governments are also encouraging them as they would reach more number of people simultaneously with precision. But in the context of cultural diversity folk media shall help farmers in sharpen their reception of information as the music; the literature associated with the folk media readily awakes the cognitive skills.

It was therefore recommended that

- Since education levels are still not much encouraging and don't match the needs of ICTs the communication can be supported by folk media.
- More competent presenters knowledgeable in the area of agriculture for folk formats should be engaged.
- Programmes that create awareness about agriculture should be designed based on folk formats by the governments, NGOs as well as extension staff of agricultural departments. Necessary training may be provided to those who participate in these activities.
- In Radio and Television exclusive folk based song and drama progrmmaes can be arranged by government as well private channels.
- Research can be improved in the folk arts exclusively for the agriculture.
- Regular competitions can be arranged to promote and encourage the local dialects and slangs. Government agricultural departments also shall concentrate on specialising the folk based communication programmes.

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