TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS: THE PARALLELS AND CONTRASTS OF NETWORKING

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ABSTRACT

India is known to be a linguistic melting point, an abode to numerous languages and dialects; and hence numerous means of communication also dwell here. This paper tends to comprehend the means of communication associated with far-flung rural/tribal communities of India through their native languages. This paper draws parallels or contrasts to in the ways of communication associated with the 'naive' people especially tribal groups and with those of the technologically advanced. These people have drawn their own novel method of communication to pass on specific information through personal channels dealing only with humans. Day to day interpersonal experiences between them show that dissemination of information has a great bearing upon the social transformation of a society and its networking. It has been observed that those who are elderly population of different ethnic groups still clings on to the traditional mode of communication and the younger ones, under the effect of urban peer follow or have resorted to the modern/ new mode of communication. Therefore, mass media technologies must necessarily be based on ecological, geographical and socio-economic settings, keeping in mind the dialect, general and political scenario of the area.

INTRODUCTION

Though communication might sound to be just is a simple method of sending messages from one person or group of persons to another, yet it is essential for every interaction in all spheres of life. Communications, as a means of sharing information, is not simply a connection between people,

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but a link in the chain of the development process itself (Hudson,2011). Its necessity lies in networking, in harnessing knowledge, gathering experience and finding strength, making it a vital facet of life. We communicate with each other all day but fail to realize its potential importance. Communication is easily overlooked, but the ability to communicate effectively is crucial to carry forward the thoughts and visions of an individual. The importance of speech and words whether through any communication medium is a means to convey directions and provide synchronization. The success of an endeavor hinges on the ability to communicate effectively. Besides communication, there is no mode to express thoughts, ideas and feeling. Language is a subtle and complex instrument used to verbally communicate an incredible number of different things in this universe of communication. It is unique because it is a symbolic communication system that is learned and not biologically inherited. The ability to use language is a very important part of only human cognition (Tomasello, 1999). As anthropology deals with all components of human existence, language as a realm also lays itself under the anthropological umbrella. India is a linguistic melting point, known to be an abode to numerous languages and dialects; what enriches the anthropological review is the use of these abundant languages as means of communication in similar or contrasting ways. But even a more thought provoking question pertains to the means of communication, especially the ones associated with far-flung rural/tribal communities through their native languages. How do they communicate, in the absence of postal, technological and social networks? Do they draw any parallels or contrasts with the communication system of the 'urbane'? This paper plans to present the ways of communication associated with the 'naive' people and understand their parallels or contrasts with those of the technologically advanced.

In general discussion about communication today, we mean that TV, mobile, internet, and other means of information communication have exerted a considerable impact on social, cultural, political and economic aspects of the society, but when it comes to the rural or tribal part of India, the meaning changes because of the use of dialects and languages. It is crucial to understand that all promotional measures majorly use Hindi or English or some local languages of a particular region. But the tribal/ rural groups of distant areas have their own practices of passing information as they are associated with diverse regional languages and dialect. The singularity of the system lies in its uniqueness and exceptionally in its association with the region in question. These are regions which have still not been fully touched by boons of technological advancements like mobile phones, televisions, postal system etc due to geographical barricades or cultural barriers. Mostly, they are far from the reach of 'modernization', positives of globalization and perks of sanskritisation. Though process of "globalization" is often portrayed as a positive force which is unifying widely as a "global village" (Kheeshadeh, 2012) but there are numerous human differences that are manifested in different cultural approaches that are helpful in constructing a culture of coordination through communication.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

People Under Study

Indian subcontinent is known for population multiplicity but despite this diversity, its tribal and rural communities do have certain similarities, though broad generic ones. They are known to dwell in compact areas, follow a community way of living, in harmony with nature, and have a uniqueness of culture, distinctive customs, traditions and beliefs which are simple, direct and non-acquisitive by nature (Grimes et al, 2011). There distinctiveness in culture also underlines their exclusive dialect to language for communication and networking. Some of these broadly similar characteristics have been used as criteria for the last few decades to identify and declare a particular community as a Scheduled Tribe (ST). A section of the STs who are even more backward than others have been historically classified as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) since 1973. These tribes are 75 in number and their population as per the 1991 census is about 25 lakhs in 17 states and 1 Union Territory. The criteria used for identification of the PTGs are: pre-agricultural level of technology, remote isolated enclaves, and smallness of number, stagnating or diminishing population, low levels of literacy. These criteria also suffer from lack of specificity, but since it is not proposed to add any more tribes to the number of PTGs, a change at this stage is unnecessary. There is, however, a need to change the name, even though this may be merely cosmetic. It has now been changed through Ministry of Tribal Affairs to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). These autochthonous tribal populations of India live in virtually inaccessible forests and hilly areas completely isolated from the general stream of the society.

For the purpose of this study and in order to find similitude in patterns of communications, different populations were studied from all parts of the country.

Northern India

Bhotias of Uttarakhand: Bhotias show certain affinities to Mongolian stock, but living in relatively isolated areas, they have evolved a peculiar socio-economic structure in order to survive. They stand out clearly on the account of their distinct cultural trait and highly specialized adaptation to a mountain environment embracing rugged and wild topography. Seasonal nomadism was, once the only way of life for Bhotias, as the trans-Himalayan trade with Tibet shaped their entire course of socio-cultural life along with terrace cultivation, pastoralism, woollen industry etc. Agriculture has been a subsidiary occupation for Bhotias. In the traditional Bhotia society, joint family has been a rule rather than an exception (Kapoor A.K, 2011).

Rajis of Uttrakhand: Sometimes known as Vanrawats, meaning forest lords, the Raji was recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in 1967 and as PTG in 1975 by the Government of India. Rajis were completely nomadic in the past, and pursued a life of hunter gathering, taking shelter in caves or temporary huts but the present-day Raji are agriculturists who also collect minor forest products for exchange. Rajis are experts in making wooden pots, bowls and cutlery. The Raji's social

organization is based on both kinship and territorial principles. The traditional hunter-gatherer economy is practiced by 40% of the males and 78% of the females; rest of the tribe's livelihood comes from wage labour in agriculture/fishery and carpentry. The nuclear family dominates Raji society (Kapoor A.K. et al, 2009).

Rajputs: Rajputs in Himachal Pradesh (middle altitude) and Haryana (plains) were also included in the study. The key point here is that these are genetically similar population inhabiting two different environments. The Rajputs are patrilineal and practice caste endogamy but gotra exogamy. They are agriculturists and most find jobs in army and other forces (warriors). The data was collected mostly on farmers. In Himachal Pradesh data was collected from Sirmaur district, Solan and Rajgarh districts. The villages where data was collected were about 3000 feet to 8000 feet above sea level. These areas face intense cold in winters and have temperate summers. In Haryana the data was collected from villages in Rewari district and Mohindergarh district. Haryana faces intense heat in summers and cold in winters (Kapoor S. et al, 2010).

Jats of Uttar Pradesh: The Jats are a paradigmatic example of community, an elastic label applied to a wide-ranging, traditionally non-elite community which had its origins in pastoralism. Jat people became tillers of soil. They are fiercely independent in character and value their self respect more than anything, which is why they offered heavy resistance against any foreign force that treated them unjustly. In the government of their villages, they appear much more democratic and aware.

Western India

Minas of Rajasthan: Known to be the largest tribal group of Rajasthan, the study on Minas was conducted in Girwa tehsil of Udaipur. Agriculture is the predominant activity. Men plough the field and thrash the crop, men and women sow, while harvest and weeding is done by women and children. A few of them also go out of their villages to work as labourers in mines, factories and transport companies to earn bread. They are a patriarchal form of society and nuclear families are prevalent (Kapoor A.K. et al, 2010).

Siddis of Gujarat: The data for Siddis was collected from the Junagarh district of Gujarat. Known to be an ethnic group of Afro-Indian descent, Siddis are mainly Sufi Muslims. They reside on the fringes of Gir forest and are agriculturalists or laborers by profession (Bhasin et al, 2011).

Tadavis of Gujarat: The Tadavis are the subgroup of the "Dhanka" tribe and are believed to be the descendents of the Rajputs. Rice and wheat are the staple food of the people. The Tadavis are patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal. Tadavi were studied in Vadodara district, Gujarat. The district is situated in eastern Gujarat. The climate of the region is semi-arid. Rice and wheat are the staple food of the tribals. They mostly work as agricultural labourers. Some work as casual labourers earning meager sums (Kapoor S. et al, 2010).

Southern India

Nolias of Orrisa: Nolias are constitutionally categorized under the other backward class (OBC). They sustain themselves by fishing and related activities. They have no interest in agriculture. Almost all the households depend entirely on fishing for their livelihood. Adult men go into the sea ,women and children help them on the beach and old people does mending of the fishing net and training young ones for fishing. The role of women folk is vital in their economy as they dry the fish and go to market to sell it. Some women also work as wage labourers. Nolias are small scale fishermen who have a subsistence economy. Fish is the most important resource for them. They have their own boats and nets and the traditional way of fishing involves strenuous physical activity (Kapoor A.K et al, 2010; Kapoor A.K et al, 2012).

Desia Khnods : The Desia Kondh is a tribal group which belongs to the Dravidian race. They believe themselves to have existed in Orissa, eastern coast of India, from the beginning. Orissa has a tropical climate. It is warm almost throughout the year. The Desia Kondhs, since they are most by settled in the plains, practice wet cultivation. Rice is the staple food of the Kondhs. The main occupation of the Kondhs is agriculture labour. They also supplement their income by collecting edible roots, tubers and leaves from the forest, fishing and as daily wage labourers. The Kondh practice neolocal type of residence. There is clan exogamy and practice monogamous form of marriage (Kapoor, A.K et al 2009).

Andaman and Nicobar Islands: Located in the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the homeland of many primitive communities of India, one of which is Car Nicobarese belonging to the mongoloid stock. They have fully accepted the value of modern civilization and life and are in pursuit of acquiring modern technology and education. Economically and educationally they are most developed tribe in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They also get benefits from Christian missionaries. Traditionally they are gardeners (mainly coconut) and live in settled villages .Now they started getting jobs in government sector. They are economically well off, as they can feed themselves and sell the surplus coconuts and areca nuts in the market. They are availing the benefits of welfare measures in the areas of education, health and cooperative movements (Kapoor A.K et al, 2010; Kapoor A.K et al, 2012).

Extensive and intensive fieldwork was conducted in all these above states and districts in various phases from the year 1999 to 2011. Various techniques like observations, interviews, case-studies and schedules were used. In the present study, there is amalgamation of both etic and emic view for data collected from only observations and interview techniques has been used. All relevant information has been collected with help of informants from subjects with age varying from 45-73 years inclusive of all ethnic groups and genders.

These minimally-literate people are considered as oral societies and even their history is not written but orally it is kept in the form of poetry, songs, proverbs, stories, narrative dances and various

rituals. Their historical and cultural information is passed on from one generation to another through some of these means. To these oral societies, any written form of information and communication has little value. Personal encounter is a basic requirement of oral or verbal communication and is the most effective method. The use of storytelling, song, drama, dance, visual illustrations, art and rituals are the best methods of gospel communication (Ponraj & Sah 2003). These people have drawn their own novel method of communication to pass on specific information through personal channels dealing only with humans. Day to day interpersonal experiences between them show that dissemination of information has a great bearing upon the social transformation of a society and its networking. This network includes numerous individuals known or unknown to the source of the information like a native of the area etc. He/She would pass on the required details to the one planning to travel off to any corresponding area. This particular individual (let's call him messenger I) will forward the information to someone who might deliver it to person in question or make someone else do it. This channel is safest in the absence of technological instruments and at times faster than the postal service especially in far reached areas. The channel networks its way through mobile or sometimes, immobile mechanism which includes shops or stores in the vicinity of travelling station. The information remains intact at these stations till a messenger arrives to take it and pass it forward. These shops due to their close proximity with travelling stations are hot spots for gathering and delivering information. The fundamental news of the country or the world travels in also through such networks only.

On the other hand, in untouched parts of western Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana, only dialect is the medium of communication. Though due to the economic development, some of them have resorted to modern ways of communication (TV, mobile etc.) also. Their basic need is to communicate with or without use of modern communication technologies failing to understand the role of modern communication in their lives and the social effects it may have. From this it can be understood that in the era of technological advancement, along with the use of modern communication like mobile phones they communicate through traditional means of communication like oral networking. This indicates towards the "contrasts" of communication networking with the other world rather than the "parallel". These societies draw parallelism only with each other in terms of oral networking. It is a striking revelation that though these societies are slashed from the other parts of the world due to geographical or cultural or technological barriers, and at times are even unaware of the presence of similar counterparts, yet they follow an identical system of communication.

The contrasts are not only based on technology but also have generic connotations based on gender issues. Even if some of our villages have had a technological interface yet, in rural India, women are still under the veils of society which not only covers their face but also restricts their vision that might see the advent of the contemporary technology. Men might lay their hands upon mobile phones, radios, newspapers but the lack of education, household chores, rearing children, enculturation are so profound for women, that they hardly get to see or feel the ever changing world. Hence, these gadgets have hardly seen their way to a woman's hand or use. So, how do

women folks communicate? Again, the amalgamation of the dialects, oral communication and traditional communication serve the need of networking within their society.

All activities pertaining to networking, in the tribal belt are mounted by interpersonal communication effectively and efficiently, focusing on gender also. Other communication networking channels for these populations are weekly markets, local shops, mahila mandals and common washing areas, if any or through "walking approach". The role of neighbors, friends, barbers and local announcements, is very vital in these settings. With intricate analysis it can be shown how these methods can be held responsible for the maintenance of emotional and social life of the natives and create harmony, also relationship between Internet use and social isolation showed a clear association between number of hours online and social and emotional isolation and loneliness.

Most of these populations are non-users of mass media but some have resorted to modern way of communication due to migration to urban areas or increased level of cultural exchange from adjoining developed areas. Though globalization is defined as the growing worldwide communication network (telecommunication, television, print media) most of these are yet to reach our tribal world in entirety. In these populations the young adults have adopted modern methods of communication but the older people still resort to the traditional ones. This creates a gap between two methods of communication that network parallel to each other in the same society, yet is contrasting in root essentials. The lack of popularity in usage of mass media finds its reason in non-use of local language, poor economic condition, lack of electricity, and lack of knowledge about the media concerned. A different reference to cost structures is from Crede & Mansell (1998) noted that costs of using networks once they are in place are still prohibitive for many in the developing countries. The criticality of usage of media in education (Nachimuthu & Vijayakumari, 2012) or communication cannot be undermined but associated barriers need to be addressed as well.

The other issues with information and communication technologies lie in its absence pertaining to recognition of poverty and that its manifestations are beyond the income of certain households. It also includes non-material aspects such as social isolation, vulnerability, powerlessness, denial of rights, and lack of services in some parts of the country. These tribulations are part of the rural/tribal India alone. The needs for basic literacy for using mass media like mobile-phones and non practice of local languages in communication by mobile networks are other issue that blurs the possibility of their usage.

It has been observed that elderly people of these different ethnic groups still wish to follow the traditional mode of communication and the younger ones, under the effect of urban peer tend to follow the new means of communication for day to day lives. The elderly believe that traditional methods play a significant role in maintaining social cohesion in a group. How social solidarity in

the form of civil societies help in conflict management through communication is not unheard of (Olufemi & Adewale 2012). Women are an essential element of this communication networking. The earth if seen as a single ecological system, as well as the social, economic and even political globalization of the human enterprise, renders obsolete the concept of 'inside' and 'outside' that characterizes both sexist (Lindner, 1999) and individualistic chauvinism when it comes to communication systems. Therefore, mass media technologies must necessarily be based on ecological, geographical and socio-economic settings, keeping in view of the dialect, general and political scenario of the area.

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