The Impact of the Mass Media on Indian Culture and forms of Communication

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Abstract

The impact of mass media in India is very significant and this is clearly apparent through the rising number of advertisers who are capitalizing on these media channels to spread their messages. Rural or urban, regardless of caste and religious boundaries, Indians are glued to television and radio serials. The question this essay aims to examine is the intangible cost involved in this burgeoning mass media culture. "Films are seen once or twice while ad films are seen over and over. Yet the advertising for many of these iconic brands doesn't seem to drive social change in behaviour and values as strongly as some of the heroes and heroines do through their portrayals in films and serials."

It is the people and their characters that the masses of India seem to identify with. With regards to their dressing and personifications of themselves, mass media has affected the lives of people in many ways. As village politician ChandraprakashDrivedi said "Now village girls want to dress like Rani Mukherjee in Bunty aurBabli -- this within four weeks of the release of the film." Men want a hairstyle like "RadheBhaiya " in hit movie Tere Naam. Bindis, blouses, and bangles define the concept of beauty for girls in small towns - influenced by the looks of the saas-bahus in the umpteen TV serials beaming into their drawing rooms on various satellite channels.

In Kirk Johnson's study of a small town two hours away from Mumbai city where television had just reached, he noted how television upset existing social structures and created new ones. This essay aims to answer the question it has put forth above through the examination

of the differences in social structures in India from the past to the present; as well as the differences in forms of communication and entertainment.

Folk Music, television and cinema will be examined under the category of communication and entertainment. Communication in India often took on a musical tone, especially in the communication of religious works or literature. Poetry and religious texts were often sung. The advent of television however has made this rather obsolete. Similarly, village theatre and dance has been replaced by cinema and television serials.

Social structures in India have also changed with respect to the caste system as Johnson's work shall demonstrate. Owning forms of media and communication (televisions) has becomes more a more important symbol of class than caste. Similarly; village story-telling and word-of-mouth has lost its following and has thus changed the social structure of things as well.

"Traditional forms of communication and entertainment"

Keywords:-Mass Media, Behaviour and Values, Indian Culture, Social Structure, Communication and Entertainment

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Introduction: -

The culture of India is one of the oldest cultures in the world and yet it is so diverse as to be impossible to pin down and define. The South, North, and Northeast have their own distinct cultures and almost every state has carved out its own cultural niche. In spite of the diversity, it's bound by a common thread as one civilization perhaps because of its shared history of colonialisation and the following struggle for independence from the British Culture and its preservation matters a great deal to Indians, at least in rhetoric. The Government of India has even formulated a "Cultural Policy" which lays out three major objectives as preserving the cultural heritage of India, inculcating Indian art consciousness amongst Indians and promoting high standards in creative and performing arts. Unfortunately, it seems the advent of mass media has made the cultural policy redundant as performing arts seem to have virtually disappeared for the masses of India. In the past, Indian drama and theatre were a significant part of "Indian culture" and some of the oldest plays in the world originated from India. The tradition of folk theatre was also alive in nearly all the linguistic regions of the country. In addition, there is a rich tradition of puppet theatre in rural India. There were many theatre groups that used to travel from village to village putting up small skits and these served as entertainment and also as a means of communications between different villages as information travelled through word of mouth. These nautanki groups have since been replaced by Bollywood cinema and the tv-serial market. Similarly, the earliest Indian literary traditions were first orally spread and only later transcribed. Most of these spring from Hindu tradition and are represented by sacred works like the Vedas, the epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana. These works were narrated with an accompanying discourse by learned speakers or visiting Sanskrit scholars and Brahmins.

Finally, the music of India includes multiple varieties of folk, pop and classical music. India's classical music tradition, including Carnatic and Hindustani music, has a history spanning

millennia and, developed over several eras, remains fundamental to the lives of Indians today as sources of religious inspiration, cultural expression and pure entertainment. India is made up of several dozen ethnic groups, speaking their own languages and dialects; as a result, folk music plays an essential role in uniting people of the same dialect group who may be far apart geographically. An example is the folk music of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Bhojpuri music. It serves as a means of communication as the lyrics of the songs often cover recent cultural changes and events; as well as religious content. Bhojpuri music is spread through visiting singers as well as everyday singing by laypeople. The songs are not static and their lyrics are often played around and substituted by the singers. This allows for communication between geographically disparate groups. Later in this essay, the loss of such a means of communication will be examined with regard to the invention of cassette, tapes and television.

Impact of Media on Culture:-

Today culture of media has changed significantly which has radical impact on youth of India. Being such a huge and diverse country, media culture influences perceptions and actions of people today. Therefore, positive and objective media must be consumed rather subjective which only throws judgments over solutions. Indian media has grown manifold since last few years, having results in every field of life from education, lifestyle, fashion, health and more. Media culture brings new way of life in lives of people due to the rapid information available and spread through media. There are various sources of print, electronic and new media which have perpetuated in Indian context and heavily affected the roots of it in many ways, be it from Gurukul form of teaching now transformed to online education or be it the clothing style of people. Media offers plenty to all, but it leaves on you what to take, how much and of what quality to take?

There is a time of media when it should be taken as that is when best absorbed and impacts in ideal manner on minds of people. Kids must be reasonably exposed to media as what is required is available but the undesired also. Mind and acceptance of every kid varies which results in immediate effect and action. Rape, sexual assault, high education videos, rhymes all are imparted through media. Now, this becomes responsibility of parents to ensure types of media subjects consumed by kids as per their level of understanding and age.

Over exposure to media has a grave impact on early age groups due to the urge of experimentation which can be fruitful and fatal, complex enough to map when adverse.

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Media is a strong entity which presides over many daily decisions on the sense of our world. Media also exposes human beings to completely new perspective. Perhaps, the affect on media and its culture has both positive and negative effects…

All human beings are easy to manipulate species which makes the media feed such constantly growing traits which lies in human beings. This has great affects on us in conscious and other ways. Most of the times, we are unaware of how media plays on our senses.

Advertising is the fundamental media tool which generates millions of revenues each day. This is the most bankable create of the media world.

Influences of media are sharp and can change the perspective of the person for better or worse.

1. Positive Impact:-

Newspapers, magazines, journals on specialized beats inform, educate and build strong opinions among masses on subjects of national and global interest. The feedback polls conducted on key issues, assert people to respond which reflects the culture prevalent in society. If positive stories and features are published then people get inspired and try to become one.

The electronic media shows constructive information on many news channels, educational shows, travel & food shows in its own way. Educational shows are popular among children as it boosts the confidence and self esteem, increase the interest level for particular subject and encourages children for asking relevant questions. Choice of TV shows is important to make significant improvements in culture as on one hand we have soap operas while on other discussions, chat shows on national issues.

Social or (New) Media is another form which involves direct participation of people and gives them sense of democracy unlike other mediums. The constant updates about one's life through websites, blogs, Face book, Twitter connects the scattered blood ties, making them feel close. Social media impacts culture either ways. It can be positive for the matured and can create anxiety and curiosity among the adolescents due to bombardment of information.

2. Negative Impact:-

Violence is another important factor which creates adverse impact on young audiences. This may also lead them to imitate such extreme acts on elders, fellow mates and so on.

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Advertising makes people notional about materialistic things like cosmetics, food, clothes and more as an entity for happiness. It can make people obsess to try such products and then be dependent on them.

Obesity has increased among people due to constant connection with devices like Laptops, TV's, tablets which prevents physical movement. This can make the person inactive, introvert and gain weight easily.

Changes in forms of Media and Communication:

Music, drama and literature have all changed with time and are now digitally enhanced are available to a wider base of people. The television and print revolutions have granted access to these forms of media to the masses across India. Villages often have their own newspapers and access to television is readily available to the majority. Bollywood cinema is not restricted to the urban community and is in fact highly popular with the rural masses.

The ease of making cassette tapes and now compact discs has allowed for a very widespread distribution of music; negating the need for traditional folk singers and concerts. Bhojpuri folk music is an example of a dying genre of music that is now regaining some following due to overseas Diaspora groups desperate to maintain their links to their dialect. As Ajeet Perm Singh, leader of the Bhojpuri singing group D'BhuyaaSaaj said, "We don't speak Bhojpuri anymore, so all that we sing is by the ear. But we love this form of music and we perform quite often".

In Cassette Culture, Peter Manuel tells how a new mass medium, the portable cassette player, caused a major upheaval in popular culture in the world's second-largest country. The advent of cassette technology in the 1980s transformed India's popular music industry from the virtual monopoly of a single multinational LP manufacturer to a free-for-all among hundreds of local cassette producers. The result was a revolution in the quantity, quality, and variety of Indian popular music and its patterns of dissemination and consumption. Manuel shows that the cassette revolution, however, has brought new contradictions and problems to Indian culture. While inexpensive cassettes revitalized local subcultures and community values throughout the subcontinent, they were also a vehicle for regional and political factionalism, new forms of commercial vulgarity, and, disturbingly, the most provocative sorts of hate-mongering and religious chauvinism.

Television has had a more or less similar impact due to its widespread reach. It is nearly impossible to establish the precise number of people with access to a television set in "the poor world ", as James Murdoch, chief executive of STAR TV Group told a cable

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conference in India; due to the fact that individual cable subscribers sometimes pass on the service illegally to an entire neighbourhood. "Moreover, in parts of the developing world, large numbers of people often crowd into one house or cafe to watch television, a factor that is hard to quantify".

In the case of India, media empires have had to adjust their strategies to suit the Indian context. STAR TV realized that its mainly American oriented programming was only reaching a tiny, although wealthy, urban audience. It therefore started adding Hindi subtitles to Hollywood films broadcast on its 24-hour channel and dubbing popular U.S. soaps into Hindi. In October 1996, STAR Plus began telecasting programs in English and Hindi. In 1999, it claimed 19 million viewers in India.

Another example of this cultural hybridist is Zee TV, India's first private Hindi-language satellite channel. Zee was launched in October 1992 and depended initially on recycled programming. It then broke television taboos by broadcasting programs about sex, relationships, and horoscopes. The channel thrives on a mixture of Hindi film, serials, musical countdowns, and quiz contests. Zee's innovative programming includes news in "Hinglish." Despite the influence of the English language in India, the biggest media growth is in regional languages. Even U.S. series like "Friends" (known as "Hello Friends" in India) have been hybridized, although the latter has not been as successful as expected—the lifestyle of the Hyderabad versions of the New Yorker originals did not settle in the Indian imagination. Such television shows are the prime example of how American culture has become more popular in India than Indian culture. Even Indian soap operas, set in traditional households often portray traditionally dressed women who behave and dress in a completely Western manner out of the house. Television serials, both Indian and western oriented ones have deemphasized traditional dress. As a Bengali fieldworker commented, in the cities it is difficult to tell men and women apart by their dress. Movies and television have created a new fashion that is being emulated all over the country, rural and urban.

Changes in Social Structure:-

The people of India belong to thousands of castes and caste like groups--hierarchically ordered, named groups into which members are born. Caste members are expected to marry within the group and follow caste rules pertaining to diet, avoidance of ritual pollution, and many other aspects of life.

With the advent of mass media and channels of communication and information, the Brahmins who have traditionally been at the top of the caste system have been replaced by those with colour television sets in their homes reports Kirk Johnson in his study. The next

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level seems now to be those with access to colour TV, followed by black and white TV owners and then those with access to black and white TVs.

Caste lines have been blurred in the quest to gain access to information; which in itself is not a bad thing. Television watching, especially in the rural areas has become a communal event and it is not uncommon for TV owners to position their television sets such that they are facing the open door; allowing members of other caste groups to sit outside the home and enjoy the shows . Similarly, in villages where there is one common, government-provided television set, members of the village gather around to watch communally. This is especially the case for religious programs as well as those related to agriculture.

However, such interaction means that traditional social structures have been destroyed and more people are flocking to the cities that they see on television in the hopes of achieving the material goods that are telecast. This has resulted indirectly in an increasing number of unemployed in the cities as well as a growing number of slums, as these internal migrants are often lowly skilled and unable to find suitable jobs in the city.

Other than changing the social structure and norm, the media revolution has also contributed to the disintegration of so-called 'Indian norms'. Movies such as "Monsoon Wedding" are an ideal demonstration of the culture shock faced by many young Indians today. There is a chasm between traditional values of chastity and dressing conservatively and the TV values of stylish and often skimpy dressing and more liberal values, including dating before marriage and other 'western norms'.

Although information and communication links that television, cinema, radio and newspapers have brought about are immense; it is undeniable that they have had a very strong and not altogether beneficial impact upon the masses who watch them. Culture and social structures have suffered, as have traditional art forms and methods of communication.

Conclusion:-

Other than dress; many other aspects of culture have been sacrificed in favour of western influences. Folk music and travelling singers have given way to cassettes and compact discs, nautanki shows have dissolved under the pressure and competition brought forth by television and cinema. The traditions of storytelling have also taken a back seat due to cassette playbacks of discourses and the ease with which printed material is cheaply available.

Just as traditions have gone 'out of fashion', it seems that many beliefs have done so as well. Television has reached a stage where even religious discourse is broadcast, negating the need for temple visits and religious-social gatherings. Infrastructure and the mass media

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influences that it has brought with it have created a culture where person to person interaction has nearly stopped. Information is relayed to us through media channels, radio, television, books and newspapers.

It seems almost as if we have entered an era of 'cognitive imperialism' where as Carolyn Martin famously commented, "Western civilization was the centre of the stage play for which the rest of the world was an awestruck audience." The interaction between the media and the people it impacts is ever changing and evolving; the Indian-themed but Hollywood made movie, "Monsoon Wedding," demonstrates how globalization and the media reveal striking features in cultural contexts. Societies like India's are being affected by globalization and the western influences that are a large part of it, but their interest also plays an active role in fostering it.

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