



## ROLE OF FOLK MEDIA IN CREATING AWARENESS ON HIV/AIDS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

Media contributes highly in education and awareness generation. Though the new-born electronic and print media are the modern trend, the age long folk and traditional art still retain its glamour among the illiterate and rural mass. Folk art forms are the fond entertainment and education in villages. These folk art forms could reach faster, wider and deeper when used as media for any purpose. The problems faced by the democratic India are many. One among such crisis situations in India is HIV/AIDS. Focusing this as one of the problems, this paper aims to study the role of Folk Media in creating awareness on HIV/AIDS with special reference to Kanyakumari District. Keeping its objective to identify the rate of influence on Folk Media, the researchers selected six blocks covering nine villages on the basis of prevalence of HIV/AIDS, significance of various folk arts and operation of NGOs with respect to awareness programmes. A structured interview schedule with close end and open end questionnaires was used for data collection. Almost all of them (100%) have expressed that they had got awareness about HIV/AIDS through folk media as it is easily reachable to the village people.. The study strongly reveals the fact that folk media is still on the forefront in the cause of awareness generation especially on HIV/AIDS in Kanyakumari district. The art forms of folk media are lively, flexible, interactive, participatory, and emotional. Hence it is proved more effective for social changes and awareness.

**KEYWORDS:** HIV/AIDS, Folk Media, NGOs, Awareness & Social Changes.

### INTRODUCTION

Awareness is a basic requirement of social development. In a country like ours where rural and illiterate population occupies a considerable percentage, lack of awareness poses a major hurdle for any development initiative. So, awareness generation becomes an inevitable component for addressing any issue that has social importance. There are numerous ways to convey messages that would educate or raise awareness among people. As media has entered into the nook and corners of the modern world, there is no other better option than mass media on hand to serve the purpose. Electronic and print media that excessively influence the modern society are the most popular and powerful mass media of the day but unfortunately they are under the clutches of unscrupulous commercial sector and are being exploited for mere profit making. The purpose of the mass media should be otherwise to inform, to educate and to entertain. But in reality, the first two find very little importance before the predominance of the last one and thereby mass media prove to be weak in fulfilling the genuine need of the society. Hence identification of a result oriented and cost effective alternative for education and awareness generation for social development become the first and foremost need of the hour. As known, traditional or folk art is our rich heritage and it has been used by people from time memorial to convey messages through popular entertainments like singing, dancing or acting. Since folk art is intimate to rural people who are attached to it for generations, the messages conveyed through



folk art forms powerfully penetrate into the depth of their conscience that induce their attitudinal change. Mitigation of HIV menace in certain parts of our country stands in witness for the incomparable effects of folk media in awareness generation campaign against HIV spread. On these solid grounds, this earnest attempt is made to establish that folk media is an effective tool for generating awareness to address any social issue.

### WHY FOLK MEDIA?

Though the new-born electronic and faint media have madly captivated the modern society, the age long folk and traditional art still retain its glamour among the large illiterate and rural masses. Rural people are closely attached to folk art that occupies important place and plays significant role in village festivals and ceremonies.

Folk art forms are the fond entertainment as well as education in villages. Along with live and cost effective entertainment, it serves as a powerful preacher, counselor or teacher of moral values and ethics. These folk art forms could reach faster, wider and deeper when used as media for any constructive purpose. This has been proved most effective by NGOs in their awareness programs related to alarming social issues.

### RESEARCH PROBLEM

HIV/AIDS is a major threat for the developing countries. Our country stands second in the high prevalence category. State of Tamil Nadu is leading in India. Southern district like Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli become more vulnerable due to tourism and occupational migration.

In a country like ours, which is rich in human resource, the productive age group (20 – 40) plays a vital role in development. As HIV prevalence is more in this age group, the productive human resource is feared to face heavy damage in future. Ignorance and lack of awareness are the main cause for any social issue like HIV/AIDS. Rural and semi urban population takes considerable share in the proportion of HIV prevalence. Awareness generation is the only way out for such target population.

As preventive measures are more effective to fight against any such epidemic, awareness generation and sensitization become most essential. From time memorial, folk art forms have been used as the best media for effective communication in general and in the development sector. Therefore a study to assess the effectiveness of a strong media in eradicating a dreadful disease is felt the need of the hour.

### OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the value of folk art in traditional practice by rural mass.
2. To expose the silent and unnoticed contribution of folk media in education and awareness.
3. To find the intensity of the impact delivery by the usage of folk media in creating awareness with reference to HIV/AIDS mitigation initiatives.
4. To find out the interest and opinion of viewers of traditional folk media.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present study aims to review relevant literature concerning the role of folk media in awareness generation of HIV/AIDS. It analyses the paradigms in which health communication fits and the existing literature concerning especially the use of folk media as a communication tool in promotion of public health which this research spins on with the objective of revealing awareness generation

90% of the world's population lives in developing countries and 70% of them live in rural areas. Mass media such as newspapers, television and the internet do not effectively reach these people or as many research studies show, these media do not have the required impact in terms of motivating change and development. The high rate of illiteracy added to the inadequate reach of mass media impede almost 80% of India's population who reside in the rural areas. Folk arts and traditional media are the aesthetic components of the concepts of belonging and affinity in a cultural context. In traditional societies, art is an integral part of the process of living in the community (Source: The Drum Beat - Issue 393 - Let's Use Folk Arts and Traditional Media for Development, May 7 2007)

Information, Education and Communication(IEC) is an important thrust area for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and the Government has taken a number of steps to create awareness, both in rural and urban areas and bring about behavioural change.

A National campaign had been launched through the mass media like. Doordarshan, AIR and Print Media on the national networks and regional channels to create awareness among the general public. Greater emphasis is being given to creating awareness in rural areas through folk media, local troops, street plays etc. An intensive programme had been taken up to provide information and counselling services through centres run by NGOs. This includes the setting up of the National AIDS Telephone Hotline. A number of NGOs have been given financial and technical support to take up targetted intervention programmes among high risk behaviour groups such as sex workers, intravenous drug users, truckers, street children, migrant labour etc. A National Plan has been launched for education and sensitisation of youth through a school based programme. College youth are being sensitised through the NSS activities. For non-student and rural youth, programmes are being launched through the Nehru Yuvak Kendras. The Directorate of Field Publicity is being utilised for interpersonal communication through its field publicity units.

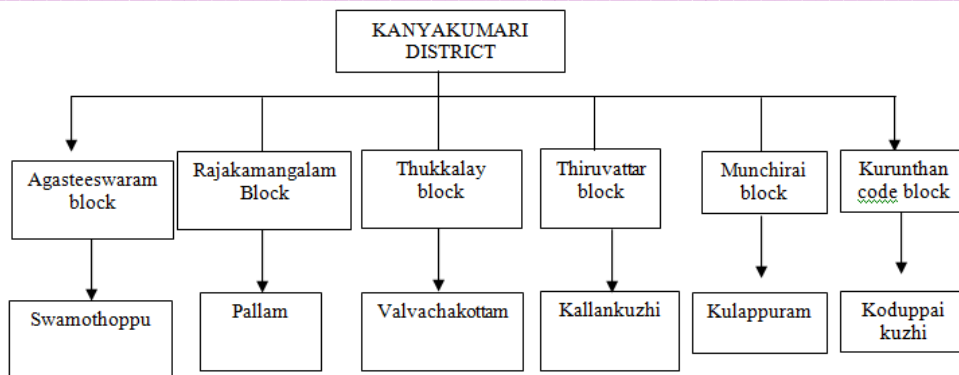
This information was given by the Union Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare, Shri Dalit Ezhilmalai in Lok Sabha today in his written reply to the question of Shri Gordhanbhai Javia (AIDS awareness through folk arts 2007-08-24)

Artistes performing at a workshop for cultural troupes on AIDS awareness in Bangalore on Wednesday. Folk artistes will be performing in villages and towns, subtly promoting awareness about HIV/AIDS. The Song and Drama Division (SDD) of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is holding workshops for folk troupes to train them to include understated messages about the disease in order to prevent its further spread. Street play actors, for example, will bring up the issue of AIDS in their performances by skilfully weaving it into the storyline instead of an in-your-face manner. Yakshagana, puppetry and Srikrishna Parijatha troupes in Karnataka and katha prasangam, kalaripayattu, and vilpaattu troupes in Kerala are being used to achieve the goal, according to SSD's Regional Centre Manager Jitendra Panpatil. The country has 12.5 lakh people with AIDS as on August 31, 2006, according to the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) (HIV/AIDS Cases In India About Half of Previous Estimates, Health Minister 2007-07-11)

The number of people estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS in India is about 2.47 million, or half of previous estimates, according to United Nations-backed government estimates released on Friday, Indian Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss announced, Reuters reports (Zaheer, Reuters, 7/6). UNAIDS estimates from 2006 said that there were about 5.7 million people living with HIV/AIDS in India (Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report, 7/3). The new estimate decreases India's HIV prevalence from 0.9% to 0.36%, Ramadoss said. The new estimate was calculated with the assistance of international agencies, such as the United Nations and USAID. According to Reuters, the earlier estimate was based on blood samples taken from pregnant women and high-risk groups, such as injection drug users and commercial sex workers. The new estimate was based on a population-based survey that took blood samples from 102,000 people to determine HIV prevalence among the general population.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is an attempt to assess the role of folk media in creating awareness on HIV/ AIDS with special reference to kanyakumari district. This study was conducted by adopting purposive random sampling method. The area chosen for the study is Kanyakumari district in which six blocks namely Agasteeswaram, Rajakamangalam, Thuckalay, Thiruvatar, Munchirai and kurunthankodu were selected covering six villages namely Swamithoppu, Pallam, Valvachakottam, Kallankuzhi, Kulappuram, Koduppaikuzhi. The villages were purposively selected based on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, significance of various folk arts, operation of NGOs with respect to awareness programmes.



The population for the study constitutes the General public, SHGs, Folk artists, NGO programme coordinators and NGO heads. A descriptive Survey method was adopted for this study.

**Sample of the study**

An interview schedule was administered personally by the researchers at the residence of the respondents. The researchers visited households and collected data from 250 respondents among the total population. The number consists of 119 general public, 69 SHGs, 39 folk artists, 17 NGO staff and 6 NGO heads.

**The Research Instrument (Interview schedule) development**

The first part of the interview schedule was developed to elicit demographic data of the respondents like Age, Gender, Educational qualification and marital status.

The second part of the interview schedule was developed with details regarding, getting opinion about folk media for Awareness generation, Level of Awareness on HIV/AIDS, Media contribution on Awareness generation, Preference for Folk Media, Effectiveness of Folk Media in Raising Awareness, Present situation of Folk art.

**Opinion based questionnaires**

To obtain the opinion of the respondents, Qualitative research was carried out to deal with the observation, impression and interpretation. It entails descriptive or analysis of phenomena whose variables are not easily measured while a quantitative research uses measurement and statistical principles and models, this involves quantification of the phenomenon under study. It is mostly used in the cases where the phenomena under study can be expressed in terms of quantity.

**Statistical Method**

The collected data were analyzed by using simple statistical tools frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation

**DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

Vast majority (83%) of the respondents was below the age of 25 years. The SHG members (36%) who were interviewed were above the age of 25 years. Fifty Eight percentage of the general public were males and (43%) were females.

Majority (44%) of the males among the general public were unmarried and only (30%) were unmarried among the females.

Thirty three percentage of the respondents had an education below 10<sup>th</sup> std level and (53%) of the respondents had studied between 10\* and 12\* std and only (24%) among the general public had their collegiate education.

From the opinion based questionnaires the following findings were evolved. The general public and SHG members expressed the following statements that HIV is spread through having sex with an infected person. They

added, having unprotected sex can kill them. They think that they are responsible to control their body and can also go to have HIV test and counseling for further measures. If someone has AIDS, he should live a good life and should not infect others, they are well aware that they should not discriminate people with AIDS and those without it.

From the opinion of the Respondents about folk media in creating awareness on HIV/AIDS the following findings were evolved. Folk media was chosen to be used as one of their communication methods. Folk media is highly participatory as it combines entertainment to educate and inform members of the audience. Folk media brings the audience and the communicator together at the same time, same place and therefore involves and engages the community as a whole. The long-lived participatory component of folk media is facing high competition from the other media channels as globalization. Folk media has high emotional content because what is happening is *live*. Participant can see the performer as being like them which makes them feel that what has just happened to the performer can happen to them too.

From the opinion of the Respondents about the advantages and disadvantages of using folk media in HIV/AIDS communication the following findings were evolved. It reflects sensitive topics in a form of story telling and furthermore trigger the audience to discuss and to think. It includes the folk artist in the performance, in script development, acting and promoting, hence giving ownership to the folk artist it offers an educational experience that is participatory and learner centered rather than teacher centered. Performance might be limited due to the facilities, bad weather and the environment. The audience is not constant and therefore performers may keep meeting different audiences during different sessions. The audience might try to practice the bad ideas they watch in drama to find out for themselves if things they were told about in the play are real.

## CONCLUSION

People receive information through various channels of communication. Besides informal and interpersonal communication, they are commonly exposed to newspaper, radio, television, cinema and even internet in this modern age. The rapid growth of communication technology paves the way for easy access and fast reach of information at any time or at any level. In this scenario, the study strongly reveals the fact that despite all these, folk media is still on the forefront in the cause of awareness generation especially on HIV/AIDS in Kanyakumari district. It is learnt that the role of folk media has had certain distinct features that no other means of communication could have contributed with all their attractions and advantages. The art forms of folk media are lively, flexible, interactive, participatory, and emotional and hence have proved more effective for social changes and awareness.

It was discovered that folk media, once utilized well is a better communication tool than radio, television and print in disseminating crucial information targeted towards changing people's attitude to appreciate the dangers of HIV/AIDS pandemic so as to guard themselves against it. The reason behind this is that, as the study discovered, with folk media, many interviewers asserted that its components such as plays, songs and dances were fun, enjoyable, good, exiting, interesting, creative and participatory, educational and informative. With such characteristics, certainly folk media hooks the audience and as the audience listens, interacts with the communicators and as all these go on the message is absorbed. It is also important to note that most of these characteristics of folk media such as participatory and fun are minimal in print, radio and television

Folk art forms can motivate and initiate discussions among the audience and thereby leads the community towards problem solving processes. Hence, folk art and media, though not for their own sake, should be fostered and developed at least for the sake of people's progress.

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