

# Effective use of print media in rural communication

Murthy, Nadig Krishna.

1977

Murthy, N. K. (1977). Effective use of print media in rural communication. In AMIC-OSMANIA-ICCSR Asian Regional Seminar on Rural Communication : Hyderabad, Dec 18-20, 1977. Hyderabad: ICSSR.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/85859>

**Effective Use Of Print Media In Rural Communication**

**By**

**Nadig Krishna Murthy**

\*\*\*\*\*  
EFFECTIVE USE OF PRINT MEDIA  
IN RURAL COMMUNICATION

By  
Dr. Nadig Krishna Murthy  
Professor and Head of the Department of  
Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Journalism,  
Manasagangothri,  
University of Mysore,  
Mysore- 570006.

A paper presented at  
International Seminar on  
"Rural Communication "  
( December 18-20, 1977)

Convened by the Department of Communication and  
Journalism, Osmania University, Hyderabad in  
Collaboration with the ICSSR and the Asian Mass  
Communication Research and Information Centre,  
Singapore (AMIC)

\*\*\*\*\*

## EFFECTIVE USE OF PRINT MEDIA IN RURAL COMMUNICATION

By

Dr. Nadig Krishna Murthy

### THE PROBLEM OF RURAL COMMUNICATION

Rural Communication plays a prominent part in the national development of a country and more so in India with 75 per cent of the population living in Seven Lakh and odd villages, facing the twin problems of poverty and illiteracy. With the dawn of freedom in India, efforts have been made to eradicate illiteracy and raise the standard of living of the people by wiping out poverty. Still, after 30 years of plans, progress and development, the literacy rate in India is only between 30 to 40 per cent and the per capita income is only Rs. 851.08. Hence, the problem of national development should be tackled on a war footing to solve these gigantic problems.

In a country like India, with the majority of the population living in villages, the term 'national development' naturally implies rural development. The goal of progress has its own communication alternatives.

In order to assess the impact of rural communication, national surveys have been made, experiments have been conducted and statistics are given. The conclusions of the above point out how the rural parts continue to be deprived of even minimum facilities of communication. The truth is that both the print and the electronic media have not made that impact which they should have made with all the modern scientific and technological developments. The traditional media which are in existence in the rural parts are either languishing or have not made enough impact.

Without going into the causes of the failures and apportioning blame on governmental or private institutions, an attempt is made to analyse the role and effective use of print media in rural communication in a vast country like India. Planning in the air-conditioned cells of big buildings with sophisticated machines, just by the stroke of intuition alone will not help improve rural communication. The plan of action with indigenous know-how should start from the village areas. It is certainly not the intention here to reject outright the progress made by the country in many fields including mass communication. But, look at the critics who markedly point the finger at the fact that the growth rate in respect of newspapers, radio, television and other mass communication branches is an insignificant small number, when compared to some of the other developing countries.

It is true that comparison with the giant striders of the West is not fair considering the several restraining factors in a developing country. But a conscious self-introspection will certainly act as an energiser.

### THE TOOLS OF MASS MEDIA

There were not many newspapers, radio sets and stations in 1947 in India. To-day, they have recorded a quantitative increase. The television, which was nowhere on the Indian scene at that time, is firmly-landed in important metropolitan cities like New Delhi, Amritsar, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Hyderabad. The tools commonly used in mass media, as every body knows, are newspapers, radio, television, traditional media such as folk-music, folk-dance, Burrakathas or Harikathas, Mushairas, Dasarapadagalu, Yakshagana etc. and the most influential of all, the person-to-person communication.



- 3 -

In order to keep up the tempo of the information supply, the Menefees suggested a follow up action of continuance of distributing either the mimeographed paper or a printed one.

#### DINATANTHI EXAMPLE

Another example of how the print media made a great impact on the villagers and the people of the small towns is illustrated in the experiment conducted by the Tamil Daily, the Dinatanthi at Madras.

After the editor's failure to reach the neoliterates and the ill-folk by normal newspaper promotion methods, the editor came up with the real problem as to why his newspaper did not reach many. The solution was to simplify the language so as to be understood by the ordinary people. He got about 900 - 1000 simple words coined and collected in Tamil which would be daily used in the newspaper. The reporters and sub-editors were trained to use only those words in the news items which contained simple sentences. The banners consisted of one or two words understood by the common people. The types used were bold types and were full of pictures. This renovated newspaper was prepared and distributed in the particular area. After three months, it was found that not only, the papers' circulation was doubled but also, the people in the area were informed of the developments that were going on in Tamilnadu. Encouraged by the success of this method, the newspaper continued its policy in a large measure and found that constant and repeated exposure to the newspapers with rural bias would broaden the mental horizon of the villagers and the common people.

#### NEWSPAPER CRUSADE

Here is yet another example, how a newspaper continuously published news, feature articles and editorials on the use of water surplus in the Punjab and got the villagers interested in it. "A few years ago there was water surplus for irrigation in the State of Punjab due to the construction of Bhakra Nangal Canal system. The State government launched a widespread campaign through various media. But the English as well as language newspapers covered it extensively. Because of this campaign, within a year, the water surplus was exploited for increased production of agricultural commodities which certainly had an impact on economic bearing". The dissemination of information from the newspapers was done by the village-level workers and school masters to the illiterate villagers. Thus newspapers helped to carry news which are projected to help the developmental side.

By these examples, it is found how the rural newspaper or the print media could influence the lives of the people, though the newspapers from cities, the radio, the television and the documentary films do the same job but fall short of the communicator's expectations.

#### THE NEED FOR RURAL NEWSPAPERS

When the Indian Press Commission of 1954 made its recommendations to start small papers at the district level, it did have the rural newspapers in view. With the growth of literacy in India, the need is felt to start small newspapers at the district and taluka headquarters. In fact, a number of small one-sheet tabloid size newspapers have been started and the City of Mysore alone has thirteen such papers. These small papers devote much space to the happenings in the rural parts, which contain social, economic and political events of greater importance to the people living in small villages. These villagers would like to see something about them published in their own newspapers.



- 4 -

The rural newspaper is to be distinguished from the small newspaper with small circulation published in cities. These rural newspapers must have a pattern of their own, which should satisfy in a great measure the needs of the rural-folk. In fact the rural newspaper would undoubtedly be an effective means of informal education. Yet, the real challenge is how to use them as an effective tool of rural communication and a change-agent.

#### PRINT MEDIA HURDLES

Though the print media play a very important role in the effective rural communication, they too have many hurdles.

The first and the foremost problem is that of illiteracy. Barely 30 per cent of the total population is literate in a country of six hundred million. Acute poverty is another factor responsible for the tardy growth of the print medium as not many will be able to buy the newspapers and magazines. Even after 30 years of planning, the economic disparity between the haves and havenots is widening and more than 60 per cent of the people are below the poverty line.

Another phenomenon is the concentration of newspapers in urban areas. Leading newspapers both in English and regional language with large circulation are concentrated only in urban regions. They do not often touch the villages. Multiplicity of newspapers has also hampered the growth. More newspapers are competing with one another for the limited readership. A reader with little money is left high and dry in the selection of newspapers and periodicals. Magazines and books in India find it difficult to reach the reader's market because of their exorbitant prices. They hardly reach the villages.

Decks are not cleared for the newspaper industry too. The dominance of English -- the heritage of the British rule -- is a stumbling block in reaching the rural audience who do not understand the alien language. The problem is rendered complicated by the number of languages spoken in the sub-continent. This invariably leads to the fact that the potential readership in a particular language speaking area is limited.

The UNESCO yardstick avers that a country is deemed to have developed, if it has ten or more copies of daily newspapers for every 100 inhabitants. India revolves round the figure of 1.3 which is a ludicrously low point or when compared to its own counterparts in the block of the under-privileged.

#### SOME SOLUTIONS SUGGESTED

The first solution is the socio economic development of the country in which the print media directly participate. More village newspapers, magazines, books and pamphlets at reasonable prices should be published in all Indian languages and steps should be taken to see that they are distributed properly so as to reach the people.

There should be a change in government advertising policy towards the small, and village language newspapers giving them ample financial aid to create an ideal situation for a leap forward. The Press Commission in its report submitted in 1954 made many important recommendations. Some of them are relevant even to this day. Schemes to render financial assistance through soft loans should be chalked out to help the industry engaged in print communication which in turn must attempt to exploit the readership potentialities through publishing meaningful contents.



- 5 -

CLASSIFICATION OF RURAL-FOLK

The rural-folk can be classified into three groups: (i) illiterates, (ii) neo-literates and (iii) literates, for purposes of communication.

So far as the illiterates are concerned, the print media have no scope at all unless the newspapers themselves take to literacy drives over a long period and make almost all the villagers literate. It is a rare feat. It is here the electronic media like the radio and television will play a useful part in disseminating news and information. But one thing should not be forgotten. Even the illiterates are informed about the day-to-day events of the world published in newspapers through the village school master and the Gramsevak.

Generally newspapers for neoliterates are handled by the Government agencies in most of the developing countries including India, as such ventures are not viable in commercial terms of profit. To cite an example of a newspaper for neo-literates, the Karnataka State Adult Education Council is publishing a weekly paper, BELAKU in the Kannada language as a follow up reading material. With bold types, simple and short sentences, with common words, local, state and world news is published with pictorial representation.

The best modes for neo-literates and literates for rural communication are rural wall newspapers, periodicals and mimeographed newspapers in the local language. Producing an attractive rural wall newspaper, needs a small number of stories, set in large types with judicious distribution of white space, catchy illustrations and carefully done attractive lay-out. The information published should be intimate to the reader, which must interest him. An attractive presentation of contents will also enhance the readership.

As suggested earlier, simple language must be used in rural newspapers. Reporters, sub-editors and others working in the rural newspapers are to be trained in the use of this simple language as they have to write the news items and other articles using common words, understandable to the neo-literates in the villages. So, training in the basic art of journalistic writing is necessary, for the progress and development of a rural newspaper.

All the basic norms of newspaper writing are applicable to them also. Simplicity, variety, brevity and use of active verbs will make the content more readable. So far no readability research has been done in Indian languages. Some initiative in this field of research will certainly help remodelling the rural newspaper.

The most disturbing feature among many of the Indian language newspapers and magazines is the gross neglect of layout. Attention should be focussed on that important aspect. The tabloid format with text set in simple 12, 14 or 16 point types is preferred for the rural newspapers. Headlines composed in lower case letters help ease the reading.

Illustrations add life to the text. To the villagers, "Seeing is believing". Photographs coupled with action are realistic. Line drawings for rural people are not suggested because there is an inherent danger of misunderstanding them. Colour pictures add vitality to the message. Illustrations of unfamiliar objects may not interest the readers. One has to consider the cultural setting of his readers before writing, as the long-valued social factors also influence the reader in grasping the information.



- 6 -

A serious allegation levelled against some of the Indian newspapers is that they are not local, service minded and neglect the readers. Chanchal Sarkar mentions inimitable examples in his publications -- Challenge and Stagnation and Emerging Estate -- to prove this. Print media must be community-oriented both in approach and contents. Items of local interest and problems draw the attention of the authorities.

### SAMPLE SURVEYS

It may be of interest to mention here that the Post-graduate Department of Journalism of the University of Mysore recently conducted communication surveys in two villages, Hinakal and Ganjam near Mysore City.

The survey revealed that the broadcast medium was more influential than other media. This medium served the purpose of entertainment more with its programmes of film songs and other allied entertainment programmes. But the inter-personal communication remained supreme.

The rumour that school children were being vasectomised set afloat in Mandya, twenty miles from the surveyed village spread like a fire through person to person contact. Any amount of publicity through the mass media could not convince the villagers. Even the students and staff of the Department of Journalism who had been there for the communication survey were mistaken to be medical team of the village planning group! The personal communication remained so effective that the villagers even refused to talk to the surveying party of students inspite of the efforts made by the village leaders.

The villagers in these two villages pleaded their inability even to recognise the names of national and state leaders. At the same time, the traditional media like the Yakshagana, Dasarapada and Pithakathas were very much alive only to serve the entertainment aspect.

The survey suggested the opening and efficient managing of reading rooms in the villages to be entrusted to the village level worker or the School master, who should read the newspapers to the villagers.

The researchers also recommended the starting of a Kannada weekly, a rural newspaper with a simple style for effective diffusion of information on agriculture, health, education, science and family planning. The other suggestions included the installing of more community radio sets, group discussion after the listening and regular film shows by the publicity divisions. Use of dominant traditional media for development and the training of opinion leaders was also stressed.

### CONCLUSION

After having stressed the importance of print media, the vice to be rendered by the electronic and traditional media should be minimised. As long as the literacy rate remains very low in India, the use of radio and television will go a long way in the dissemination of information. Hence, all the communication media are only complementary. However, plans must be drawn to break the psychological barriers by utilising entertainment aspect as a medium to diffuse development information. Alongside, the electronic and traditional media can be used for literacy drives and popularising print media, thus making it effective in rural communication.



- 7 -

REFERENCES

1. S.G. and A.G. Menefee : Communications in Village India; Mysore. 1966.
2. Wilbur Schramm: Mass Media and National Development: UNESCO. Paris . 1964.
3. E.Lloyd Sommerlad : The Press in Developing Countries: Delhi. 1969.
4. L.R.Nair: An article entitled "Private Press in National Development" in "Communication and Change in Developing Countries". Ed: Wilbur Schramm: Honolulu: 1969.
5. Chanchal Sarkar: Challenge and Stagnation: Ed: Emerging Estate - Press Institute of India, New Delhi. 1966, 1969.
6. Indian Press Commission Report Part I. 1954.
7. Times of India Directory and Year Book. 1977
8. G.T.Parande: "A Model Pattern for Rural Newspaper"  
A paper read at AMIC Seminar on October 25-30, 1976  
at Hong Kong.

= = = = =