

CAMPAIGNING PEOPLE'S MEDIA BACK TO THE STONE AGE ?

En un tiempo, en el cual los medios de comunicación electrónicos también en India ganan más y más significado e influencia, se desarrollan paralelamente numerosas iniciativas, en especial a cargo de jóvenes laicos y sacerdotes, que propagan y renuevan en forma acentuada el empleo de formas culturales tradicionales como medios de comunicación,

Teatro callejero, juego de títeres, baile y canto son los medios de información de los pobres. ¿Se trata aquí de excéntricos que quieren abrir el camino de vuelta a la edad de piedra de la comunicación social con la ayuda de proyectos de "medios pequeños y baratos"?

Esas y otras preguntas en el contexto de cultura, desarrollo, medios de comunicación tradicionales y electrónicos - que con seguridad no solamente en India han ganado en actualidad a través de la influencia intensificada de las tecnologías de la comunicación moderna - desea desarrollar el siguiente artículo.

Electronic media is presently invading and capturing India and is definitely gaining ground - when at the same time several initiatives in the field of so-called "low-cost-media" form a vital movement. The younger members of the clergy - and laity - are especially campaigning to revive the use of traditional art forms as media. Street-theatre, puppet-theatre, dance, songs and shadow-plays are the media to deliver the message.

One interesting initiative - among others in India - is the Art-Forum, founded in 1989 under the patronage of Caritas India. Probably in about one year's time the Art-Forum will be officially acknowledged by the Indian government as a self relying body. Twice a year the members gather together to reflect on the meaning and use of traditional art forms as tools in the context of their overall approach: Empowerment of the Poor. The combination of participants may guarantee a vital exchange of different working experiences - involved are social activists, social analysts, responsables of communication centers, social workers - all using traditional art forms. This is a circle of people working at the practical as well as at the theoretical level, utilizing and animating the use of traditional art forms for social, religious and political awareness-building. But what does this use of "low-cost media" mean in the light of the electronic media developments presently taking place in India - are there some freaks on the way back to the Stone-Age?

LIVING CLOSER TO MOTHER EARTH

The provoked association to "cheap" may first come to mind when hearing the un-

fortunate name-tag "low-cost-media" for a communication form which could be described in general as: poor people using their traditional art forms as communication tools. But "cheap" or "low-cost" in comparison to "expensive" or "sophisticated" media seems definitely the baptism of the tribal child with a Western name.

"We eat with hands, not with knives and forks, we use banana leaves instead of plates and we sit on the floor instead of using chairs - call it low-cost-life-style. I mean, my people are living closer to Mother Earth." One logical consequence of this statement - from an Indian communicator - is to use theatre, dance or songs to deliver development messages in India.

RATIONALISM VERSUS INTERHUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Western communicators are tempted to measure the effectiveness of people's media with their eyes, which means they are

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influenced through their cultural background. Here "time" is mostly felt as linear, in successive order - like stringing pearls on a chain - added or subtracted - time can be in this sense lost or gained. Life in general is regulated by clocks - strict organizational methods and punctuality have a high reputation in this respect.

On the other hand, time, e.g. in Indian culture, has a different meaning: many different individual times or - activities - can take place - parallel or more or less independently side by side or also together. Instead of the "pearl-stringing method" it is more comparable to a multiple voice, polyphone music track. For an individual rooted in the Western culture, this must appear as capriciousness, incoherence - or simply as chaos. But time experience in non-Western culture is also well-ordered, not by time-pieces, but more by interhuman relationships.

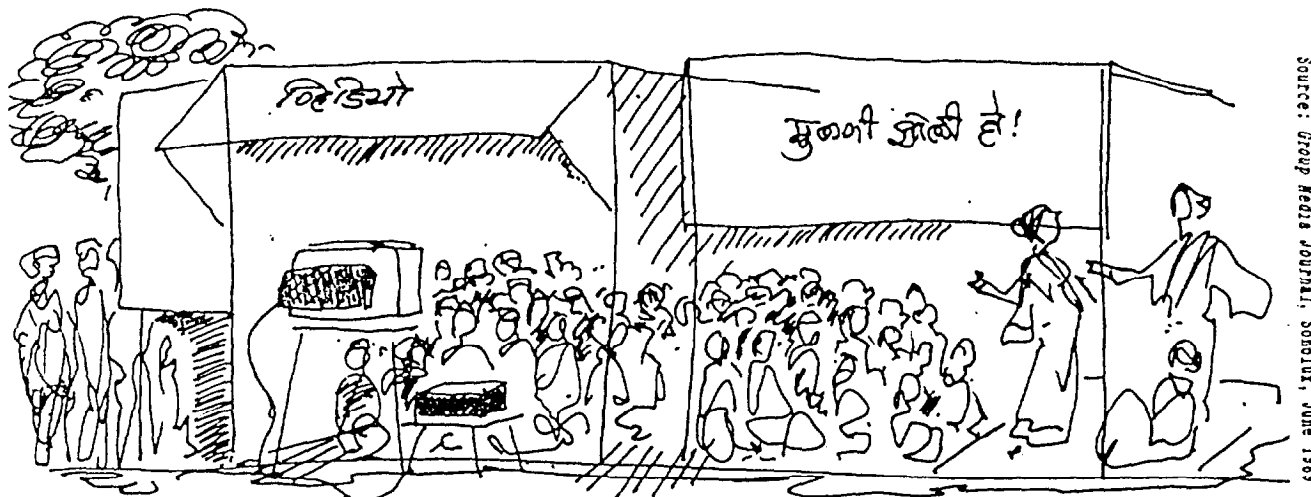
Using traditional art forms e.g. street theatre - which in India is one of the most popular traditional communication forms used by the poor people to deliver messages - means a "time-consuming" method of communication and is not seldom the target of questions from Westerners concerning effectiveness and structure. Mainly caused through the participatory model of interaction between audience and performers, it gives the impression of chaos. Gestures, spontaneous body expressions, the absence of special lighting effects, make-up or even costumes, and finally the concept of person to person communication through the involvement of spectator and performer, is in opposition to what is known as theatre in the Western world. Language e.g. has here a dominating character, actors learn the roles they play by

following a strict scriptbook - spontaneity is rarely found. The interhuman relationships during e.g. a street play in India form a basic of this approach, which is campaigned by several communicators. Badal Sircar, well-known Indian theatre activist and theorist, says: "We found that theatrical experience, rather than a narration of a story is more relevant in the Third Theatre, for it affords much more directness in communication than the conventional proscenium theatre. Physical acting and improvisation are more effective than an abject dependence on language."

It is against this background that an initiative such as Art-Forum appears to have an important mission. Not only to bring together and evaluate the national activities or developing strategies of effectiveness in the field of using traditional art forms as communication tools, but to strengthen and give confidence in the use of traditional art forms as an appropriate, independent and Indian communication tradition: the wealth and importance of rediscovering and protecting the cultural identity of the poor people - for most of them the only value left. A Star-TV programme does not answer the kind of questions arising when villagers gather for a street play, perhaps like this: "If you are told that saline water is sweet, have you lost your senses to believe it? If the heavens are to be reached only after death, what about life here below? "

ARTIFICIAL REALITY CREATED BY HIGH-TECH MEDIA

Modern Western industrial countries are strongly rationally organized and the media forms which have been developed and



could establish themselves in this culture are mainly ruled by rational time standards. Every broadcasting minute is estimated in relationship to costs, a feature lasting longer than 10 minutes is regarded as ineffective as people won't read, hear or listen to the message after this time span. High-tech media such as satellites, can guarantee a timesaving and fast information flow, and in a short time can provide a variety of information, pictures and programmes. In this information society, reality becomes artificial as the information delivered is not authentic, finally due to missing perception and the production circumstance of news pre-selection.

FULLNESS OF PERCEPTION THROUGH AUTHENTICITY

The use of traditional art forms, as the medium provides the fullness of perception and communication in its total opportunities - is based on the condition for the as ideal regarded communication situation, namely that thinking and feeling are authentic. It is the congruity in the message of language and expression, speech and activity, rationalism and feelings, clearness and conviction which gives this

media its strength and justification. Certainly it is one method of communication beside radio, TV, or newspapers. Using traditional art-forms ignoring or demonizing the "modern communication tools" would definitely mean a return to the Stone-Age. Therefore it seems to be necessary that campaigning people's media should also be combined with the aim that the people must have access to modern communication forms through education, and experience on how they can utilize these non-traditional communication forms for their needs.

Beside reflections concerning the meaningfulness and the effective use of traditional art as a communication tool, the Art-Forum can encourage a much more quantitative growth in the number of traditional art initiatives, also for the sake of the appearance of a qualitative enhancement - if deemed necessary by the people themselves. More important may be that the meaning of the Art-Forum for India in times of a high-tech media invasion in a tragic sense, may become a kind of "protection or preservation organ" for traditional art/communication forms - such as we need now e.g. to protect the environment against single-minded rational, economically guided world views. KW

COMMUNICATIONS IN AN ISLAMIC MILIEU

Depuis janvier 1992, après 5 ans de préparation et d'attente, l'Eglise du Pakistan possède un département national des communications appelé "Rabita Manzil" dont les activités principales, centrées sur les "Group Media", sont la production audiovisuelle, la formation aux médias...

Le Père Saldanha, responsable de "Rabita Manzil", retrace ici l'histoire de ce centre qui veut assurer la présence de l'Eglise dans un contexte culturel dominé par l'Islam et par un accès limité aux mass-média.

Pakistan was born on 14th August 1947, a Muslim State in which all citizens were supposed to be equal in status and dignity. Over the past forty-five years there has been a gradual shift to the fundamentalist Islamic ways of life, as laid down in the Quran and Sharia. A new ruling about issuing a separate ID card to minorities has given rise to fear and dread in the hearts of the minorities, which increased considerably when temples and churches were attacked during the Ayodhya crisis of December 1992.

The population of this Islamic State is now

120 million, out of which 97% are Muslims, and 3% Hindus, Christians and animists.

The Christian presence, although dating back to the time of St. Thomas, was an influential presence in the courts of the great Moghal kings of the 16th and 17th centuries. The local Church dates back only 100 years. Today the Christians are just 1% of the population, or about one-and-half million, and Catholics would be nearly one million - most of them belonging to the poorest class of which only 20% can read and write.