



Role of Media in the Life of Kumbharan Community in Kerala

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Abstract

Being one of the oldest potter communities in Kerala, Kumbharan is well-known for their livelihood, pottery making and selling. They are distinguished in terms of their language, culture and lifestyle as well with that of the other communities in Kerala. Kumbharan members are primarily found in five districts in Kerala where all of them are undergoing a transition period. The role of media is found prevalent among the community life with regard to the changes they are undergoing in the aspects of culture (language, folklore, traditional practices etc.) and livelihood. An attempt is made here to understand the influence of media and its impact on the Kumbharan community in Kerala. This paper is focusing on the role of media influencing the community's culture and traditional occupation. This study is also tries to understand the outcomes of media's influence on Kumbharan community. Qualitative methods have been implemented to comprehend data to support the objectives of this study.

Keywords: Kumbharan, Media, Community, Traditional Occupation, Livelihood, Culture, Lifestyle, Change

I. Introduction

Kumbharan is one of the oldest potter communities in India bearing different names across the states. In Kerala, the community is found primarily in the districts of Thrissur, Malappuram, Palakkad, Kozhikode and Wayanad with a total population of approximately 81,000. Pottery production and selling has been the primary livelihood for Kumbharan. They belong to the Other Backward Classes listed by the Government of Kerala. Having known for their expertise in their traditional occupation-pottery, Kumbharan is distinguished from other communities for their own language, culture and lifestyle. Though Kumbharan possesses a set of rich traditions, rituals and practices, they are regarded as economically and socially backward community. However, a visible

shift is seen among the community members with regard to their livelihood and culture. The young generation of the community has started to choose careers other than their traditional occupation; 'Kummara' language, which is exclusive for the community has been fading to history; and, there are several evident changes in the cultural practices of Kumbharan community. Such changes have been instigated by numerous factors yet, the role of media appears to be highly influential in this context.

II. Review of Literature

There are several literatures available indicating the high influence of media among traditional communities. Rao (1957) in his book, '*Social Change in Malabar*', has studied the changes in the Malabar region's culture, social institutions, and community activities based on lengthy fieldwork. He points out a few factors that lead to the change in people's way of life in a community. As he states, the innovations of radio, cinema, etc., have revolutionized leisure time activities and occupied a prominent place in the changed social order. *Get set for media and cultural studies* is a learning aid curated by Purvis (2006). *It aims to reach the students* aspiring to study about contemporary media and cultural studies. He has adopted case studies to develop this book. Purvis discusses the relationship between contemporary media and cultural identities. According to him, the media advocates for social concerns and enables communication and exchange of positive cultural values among different societies. *The Mediating Role of New Media Engagement in This Digital Age* is an article by Zhang (2022) focusing on the role of new media engagement in this digital age. A quantitative approach is used in this study. The influence of new media is evident in the changing aspirations among children and young adults.



III. Methodology

This research is based on an empirical study that aimed to understand the influence of media on the Kumbharan community in Kerala. Qualitative approach has been used to carry out this study. Six in-depth interviews and two Focused Group Discussions have been employed to collect primary data. Secondary data from newspaper articles, research papers, books and online journals have been collected as well. Kumbharan settlements in the districts of Thrissur, Malappuram, Palakkad, Kozhikode and Wayanad were selected as the area for this study. This study focused on the role of media influencing the community life of Kumbharan particularly, their culture and traditional occupation.

IV. The Role of Media in Kumbharan Community

The culture of Kumbharan is rich with its folklore and peculiar language. Their culture is also directly connected with their traditional occupation. Major cultural elements such as language, folklore, dressing pattern are changing rapidly among the community in the recent times and the influence of media has been found evident in this change process. The functionality of community's language is evident while exploring the modified nature of Kumbharan in today's world. *Kummara language* is largely spoken among the community members, yet there is an influence of Malayalam, which is the regional language, in their everyday life. Exposure to media is playing a vital role while explaining the change in language usage. Children observe and acquire language skills from a very young age. Media, especially visual and social media provides a vast scope for the children, including the toddlers, to see and listen to new and different languages and communication styles. This is largely influencing the children when it comes to the usage of their community's language. *Kummara* has no script, rather it is used for verbal communication only. But the scenario is changing where children use other languages more.

"All our children know Kummara but they don't speak it fluently or use it always. They understand what we say to them in Kummara, but they might reply in Malayalam or even in English. This is the result of watching TV and using mobile phones." - Participant Y, 60-year-old woman.

Culturally practiced leisure activities and entertainment events are drastically fading away from the community. The plentiful folklore of Kumbharan is not able to be transmitted in its full

swing in these modern times, and those treasures are gradually being lost. Platforms to perform folkloric art forms and the possibility of young children learning those art forms are decreasing. The community members used to practice their traditional art forms such as *Karakaattam*, *Kaavadiyaattam*, *Poraattu Naadakam*, *Udukku Kottu*, Folk songs etc. during the evenings as leisure time activities but nowadays, media has taken over their prime time for entertainment. TV serials, movies and social media are used largely among the community members as leisure time activity during evenings. It is also noted that many participants use mobile phones to listen to FM radio during their work time. They said it makes them feel energetic throughout the work along with getting news updates.

"We (men and boys) used to casually gather near the common well in Kumbharathara in the evenings. Our elders in the family used to tell the children about the stories about Gods and how Kumbharan was created. Today, children are not getting time to spend like those in the olden days. They watch TV or mobile phones during their free times." – Participant A, 81-year-old man.

School-going children are commonly using mobile phones since the Covid-19 pandemic and continue to do so as they are communicated and taught through WhatsApp. This setting has led to the users to have a great exposure globally. Children get access to mobile phones from their parents. The influence of media is also evident in the changing career aspirations of new generation in the Kumbharan community. The young generation is positively responding to unconventional career options like a YouTube vlogger. It is observed that children from many Kumbharan colonies across Kerala, especially boys, aspire to join the Indian Army, motivated by the film characters in heroic roles of an Army Officer or Police Officer. They do not want to take up pottery as their livelihood. Influence of new media is evident in the changing aspirations among children and young adults. New Media Technologies refer to all kinds of web-related technologies like social networking sites, blogs, online social media networking, and other forms of communication technology (Zhang et al., 2022).

"My grandparents and parents are engaged in pottery work. I know the basics of pottery. But I want to join the Indian Army. It is a challenging and secure job for looking after my family. I have seen many movies and YouTube videos related to the Army and war. My cousin



brother from this same colony had joined the Indian Army two years ago. He told his experiences to me and my friends when he came for the vacation. He gets a good salary. I will also try Police jobs but my biggest wish is to become an Army person like my cousin brother.” – Participant from FGD, 14-year-old boy.

The impact of media is found also in Kumbharan’s traditional occupation. Social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube are used for marketing and selling their products. WhatsApp groups are made for the effective marketing of clay products. Besides, varieties of clay products are made inspired from various media content and they depend all sorts of media to be updated about the trending tastes and new requirements among the consumers.

“I am actively involved in our traditional occupation with my husband. It is not the old type work anymore. We make different types of products. I do design work and painting on the clay made décor pieces. I learn it by watching YouTube videos and we use WhatsApp to sell our products now.” Participant R, 28-year-old female.

There are multiple changes happening in the community life of Kumbharan due to the influence of media. The role and impact of media is obvious in the areas of their cultural aspects of language, folklore, traditional practices and livelihood. Community members, especially the young generation is easily merged with the virtual world. Changing career aspirations found among the Kumbharan children is a fine example of the strong influence of media in their everyday life. An occupational shift is observed among potter communities (Sumathi and Sujadevi, 2016).

V. Conclusion

The influence of media is unavoidable in the present-day society and it has got a high impact on Kumbharan community, especially with regard to their culture and traditional occupation. Their own language is at the verge of extinction due to the influence of media among the children and young generation. The community’s folkloric art forms are decaying while their leisure time has been taken over by media. The entertainment is dominated by media and social media among the community members. Varying career aspirations by the new generation of Kumbharan is highly influenced by media content and it indirectly affecting the continuation of their traditional occupation by the upcoming generations. Parallely, media is used by the children for

academic purposes. Kumbharan members also depend on media and social media in the aspect of their traditional occupation. Their new products and new marketing and selling methods are inspired from various media content. Nevertheless, media is playing a vital role in all walks of life of Kumbharan community and it is growing as a challenge for their original culture and continuation of traditional occupation.

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