

## **Traditional Folk Communication among Upcountry Tamil Community in Sri Lanka**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Traditional folk communication is essential for empowering various communities in Sri Lanka such as Sinhala and Tamil communities since it emerges from the surroundings based on the available resources, socio-cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs, norms, traditions, values and practices. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate the use of traditional folk communication for empowering Upcountry Tamil community in Sri Lanka. The specific objective is to examine the use of traditional folk communication in empowering communities to address struggles, issues and needs in their day-to-day lives. Community Based Communication (CBC) is the main conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. The study used the qualitative approach to obtain data using Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), participatory observation method and interview method. The samples were selected from Nepier Estate, Hali- Ela in Badulla district. The qualitative data were analysed thematically. The results showed that the traditional folk communications were used to find solutions for the day-to-day struggles, issues and needs of the communities such as low income, lack of infrastructure facilities including lack of land rights, poor housing (line rooms), disaster risks such as landslides, childhood marriages, illegal affairs, extramarital affairs, health issues including alcohol/ drugs consumption, family planning, school dropouts, cultural marginalization, post-war challenges etc. Therefore, the findings also showed that the community based traditional folk communication mechanism was successfully used to empower its own communities economically, socially, morally and culturally. In this context, the responsible authorities should find solutions for the challenges faced by the communities.

**Keywords:** Traditional Folk Communication; Community Based Communication; Upcountry Tamils; Minority communities; Sri Lanka,

### **INTRODUCTION**

Traditional folk media can be used to empower various communities in a country in addition to the mainstream media such as television, radio, and print. Padmanabha & Sathish (2020) note that traditional media such as puppet shows, folk dramas, storytelling, the community teahouse, open markets, village meetings etc. are used to empower rural and minority communities in developing countries. Folk media play a vital role in providing effective communication to empower minority communities in developing nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Chapke (2003) also notes that minority communities in many Asian countries use traditional folk communication to fulfill their socio-cultural, economic, spiritual and moral needs, since the folk media origin within the community with their creativity, cultural values, beliefs and practices.

The minority communities in India and Sri Lanka have been using traditional folk communication to find solutions for their day-to-day needs since these communities face several challenges socially, economically, culturally and morally. Mathiyazhagan et al. (2015) note that the Tamil community in Tamil Nadu conduct Therukoothu (Street Theatre) which is a popular traditional folk theater for disseminating stories, social messages and social issues such as social harmony, health issues, family planning, dowry etc. while in the villages of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in India use Burra Katha or Burrakatha, which is an oral storytelling technique usually performed by a main narrator and two assistants, often highlighting historical, mythological, and current political issues to make the communities aware of the contemporary issues.

It is evident that being a multi-religious and multi-cultural country, India has different traditional folk communications unique to different regions in the country. Madhubhashini (2021) notes that being a multi-religious and multi-cultural country, Sri Lanka also has different traditional folk communications unique to different regions in the country. Madhubhashini further notes that the rural communities in Pelwatta in the Buttala Divisional Secretariat in Monaragala District, Uva Province conduct Dewol Madu ceremony which is a traditional Sinhalese dance that is practiced to propitiate Devol deity, after getting the first agricultural harvest to obtain holy blessings from Goddess Paththini and God Kataragama to sustain the agricultural related livelihood, to get rid of diseases and epidemics and for the protection of agricultural crops while rural people in Billewa in the Mahavilachchiya Divisional Secretariat in Anuradhapura District, North Central Province conduct Mutti Mangalaya (Kiri Ithiraweeme Mangalaya) to obtain blessings from God Aiyanayake and Goddess Muththumari Amman after getting the first harvest for the prosperity of whole community.

This shows that folk communications vary from place to place, culture to culture, region to region and community to community. For instance, Sinhalese which is the largest ethnic group practices unique traditional folk communications to them while Tamils, the largest minority ethnic group uses different unique traditional folk communications to fulfill their day-to-day needs. Therefore, traditional folk communication can be seen in various parts of the country as there is proximity between communities and these communication forms.

Several studies have been conducted on Tamil socio-cultural practices in Sociological and Anthropological perspectives. Asghar, M.M et al. (2021) state that Tamils in Sri Lanka face significant challenges including land seizures, economic deprivation, cultural marginalization and post-war challenges include high unemployment. Achieving equal rights and harmonious coexistence among all communities, Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, and others is widely recognized as a critical requirement for Sri Lanka's long-term peace and economic prosperity.

This shows that the Sri Lankan Tamils face several issues though this community is the largest minority in Sri Lanka which has unique socio-cultural identities. "Cultural diversity refers to people who identify with particular groups based on their birthplace, country of origin, ethnicity, language, values, beliefs or worldviews. The Tamils of Sri Lanka have a long and distinguished history and heritage for over two and a half millennia. Tamil culture in Sri Lanka is a distinct, ancient tradition characterized by Hinduism, the Tamil language, and unique

customs, including specific culinary styles, literature, and social structures” (Thiagarajah, S., 2022: 25).

It is obvious that Tamils have their own unique customs, traditions, beliefs, rituals and norms. “The Tamil folk art performances have efficient expressions and natural communication aspects in their process and products. Further, it has been observed that the folk-art performances have numerous chances to ensure their capacities in both ritual and social contexts. Anyhow, the performances in social context have more advantages than the performances in ritual in using them in the process of change and development” (Raguram, S. 2014: 28). Raguram (2014) further emphasizes in this literature-based desk research study that Tamil folk art performances of Indian Tamils and Jaffna Tamils in Sri Lanka can be used as an effective communication tool to empower communities.

There are several research conducted on cultural practices and identity of Upcountry Tamils in Sri Lanka. “The upper caste estate workers took the lead in cultural activities in the estates despite the fact that the majority population consisted of low caste estate workers such as Pallar, Parayar and Chakkiliyira. However, the Upcountry Tamils continued their cultural traits in the plantation sector. Most of their cultural activities are similar to those within the subsistence agricultural system of their ancestral villages in Tamil Nadu. Large numbers of the Indian Tamils are still living in the large-scale housing schemes of the plantation sector in the country” (Chandraboose. A.S. 2020:154). Sarawanakumar, P. (2022) also notes that the Upcountry Tamils have distinct or vibrant culture based on their identities, hierarchies, lifestyles, beliefs, rite, rituals, customs and norms.

The literature shows that there is no scholarly research conducted on traditional folk communication among Upcountry Tamils in Sri Lanka though several research conducted in sociological, anthropological, and cultural perspective. The literature also further shows that there is a high possibility of using the traditional forms of communication in empowering Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. The traditional folk communications can be effectively used to educate and motivate people providing information and entertainment to make Upcountry Tamils stronger in facing day to day struggles, needs, and issues. In this context the main problem of the study is how to use traditional folk communication in empowering Upcountry Tamils in Sri Lanka. The main purpose of the study is to investigate the use of traditional folk communication to empower Upcountry Tamil communities in facing struggles, issues, and needs in their day-to-day lives.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Traditional folk communications help maintain traditions, values, and social norms across generations. Rogers, E. M (1962) defines folk communication within the diffusion context as traditional, interpersonal channels that are highly effective in rural and marginalized societies, because they rely on trust, cultural familiarity, and face-to-face interaction. Chauhan A.S. (1983) also defines folk communication as a participatory and community-centered mode of communication where people actively engage in the creation and sharing of messages through traditional cultural expressions.

This shows that traditional folk communications represent a particular culture. Moreover, traditional folk communications have emerged based on the socio-cultural, moral,

spiritual, and religious practices, beliefs, norms and values of a particular community, culture, region or setting. It is evident that traditional folk communications can play a vital role in empowering rural and marginalized minority communities. Therefore, various kinds of traditional folk media are used to empower these communities using effective communication. “Traditional folk communication refers to indigenous, community-based systems of sharing information, ideas, and values through culturally rooted forms such as storytelling, music, dance, rituals, and symbols, typically transmitted orally across generations. It is a participatory communication process using folk media—such as dramas, puppetry, and folk songs—to educate, mobilize, and influence rural or local populations in ways that align with their cultural context” (UNESCO World Heritage committee Report, 2024: 22).

Folk media are community-based communication tools or methods rooted in culture to educate, entertain, and promote social change, especially in rural, remote and marginalized areas. Madhubhashini (2021) notes that the traditional folk media does not distance itself from the community and is created from their surroundings which has interactive communication skills, creativity, and liveliness without requiring literary skills. There are different forms of traditional folk media such as folk singing, music, dance, dramas, tales, rites and rituals, ceremonial occasions, idioms, gossip, petitions, Kavikola, Kelapaththara etc.

UNESCO World Heritage committee Report (2024) also highlights that folk media communication can play a significant role in empowering rural, remote, grassroot, marginalized and minority communities in developing nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Chapke (2003) also notes Kakkariissi Nadakam, a satirical musical drama popular in Southern Kerala is used to discuss the social issues such as feudal landlords, caste hierarchies, gender roles etc. while Pagati Veshalu is a satirical folk theater unique to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to highlight social issues such as caste, corruption, economic disparities and dependence etc.

It is evident that being a multi-religious and multi-cultural country, India has different traditional folk communications unique to different regions in the country. Several research also show that Sri Lanka being a multi-religious and multi-cultural country has different types of traditional folk communications unique to different regions, culture, and communities. Madhubhashini (2021) notes that folk communications vary from place to place, culture to culture, region to region and community to community. The people in various parts of the country use different forms of traditional communication. As far as Sinhalese, which is the main ethnic community in Sri Lanka are concerned, there are different ceremonial occasions, rites and rituals used by people in low country, up country and Sabarugamuwa, Sri Lanka. For instance, Kirimaduwa is a specific folk ceremony confined to Sabaragamunwa which is used to get rid of diseases and epidemics and for the protection of agricultural crops while Kohomba Kankariya is conducted by up country Sinhalese and Devol Maduwa is done by low country people for the same purpose after getting the first harvest. Likewise, indigenous people like the Veddas community in Sri Lanka uses traditional folk communications unique to them to find solutions for the problems faced by them and to fulfill the needs of their day-to-day lives.

The literature shows that different ethnic groups and communities use different forms of traditional folks. The Tamil community which is the largest minority in Sri Lanka also uses traditional folk communications based on their own unique customs, traditions, beliefs, rituals and norms. Sarawanakumar, P. (2022) notes that Tamils in Sri Lanka are mainly divided into two main groups: Sri Lankan Tamils (Ceylon Tamils) who are long-term residents in the

country and Indian Tamils, Upcountry Tamils who are descendants of colonial-era plantation workers. In addition to these two groups, Sri Lankan Tamils are further divided into subgroups by regional dialects: Jaffna, Batticaloa and specific sub-communities like the Negombo/ Puttalam Tamils, Muslim Tamils etc. The caste system of Tamil communities, deep-rooted, structured entrenched and rigid social hierarchy. Caste system among Sri Lankan Tamils is quite similar to Sinhala caste system both of which are primarily divided based on traditional occupations: Vellalar (Dominate caste- farmers/landowners), Karaiyar (fishermen/soldiers), Koviyaar (traditionally domestic servants), Pallar (farm laborers), Nalavar (toddy tappers), Kammalar (artisans, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters), Vannar (washermen -dhobies), Paraiyar (traditionally drummers/service workers) Chetties (historically traders). Kudiyanavar etc. As far as the Upcountry Tamils are concerned, the castes practiced among them include Kudiyanavar (dominate caste -landless labor and dependent service roles), Pallar (agricultural laborers), Paraiyar (drummers), Sakkiliar (leather work and sanitation-related occupations), Vannar (washers), Ambattar (barbers) etc.

Tamils in Sri Lanka face several challenges as the minority community including the rigid caste system exists among Tamils. Asghar, M.M et al. (2021) state that Tamils in Sri Lanka face significant challenges including land seizures, education and economic deprivation, cultural marginalization, post-war challenges include high unemployment, human right concerns, legal challenges etc.

The literature shows that Tamil communities face several challenges. Thiagarajah (2022) shows that Tamil communities can find solutions for the challenges based on their socio- cultural, spiritual, and moral practices. Because the Tamil culture in Sri Lanka is a distinct, ancient tradition characterized by Hinduism, the Tamil language, and folk beliefs, traditions, norms, practices etc. “Upcountry Tamil community in Sri Lanka has unique social, economic, and cultural elements. Today, the so-called Upcountry Tamils of Sri Lanka are those who were brought from the rural areas of South India to cultivate cash crops such as coffee, tea, and rubber, which were introduced by the British in the 19th century. The literary works about them are the Sri Lankan Upcountry Tamil Literatures. They are also literary copies of the unique cultural treasuries of Upcountry Tamils” (Sarawanakumar, P. 2022: 18). Chandrabose. A.S (2022) notes that Upcountry Tamils are engage in traditional folk dramas, dance, singing etc. in day-to-day life based on the cultural, spiritual, and moral beliefs, norms, traditions and customs.

The literature shows that no scholarly research has been conducted to investigate the use of traditional folk communication among Upcountry Tamils in Sri Lanka in communication perspective though several research have been conducted in sociological, anthropological and cultural perspective. The literature also further shows that there is a high possibility of using the traditional forms of communication in empowering Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. Therefore, in order to fill in the gap, this research was conducted to investigate the use of Traditional folk communication among Upcountry Tamils in Sri Lanka.

As far as the theoretical background of the study is concerned, traditional folk communications and community-based empowerment come under the border area of development communication. Therefore, communication for development can provide conceptual and theoretical background for the study. In simple terms, development communication is, use of communications for development purposes. “The use of communication to promote social development by influencing attitudes, knowledge, and

behavior in a planned and systematic way. It is a process of social interaction through communication aimed at improving the living conditions of people by encouraging participation, dialogue, and information sharing (Schramm.W .1964: P: 10). “Communication for development refers to the purposeful use of communication to support social transformation and uplift communities by addressing issues like poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment” (Quebral. N. C 1970: P:5).

The literature shows that communication can be used to empower communities by addressing issues like poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment. UNESCO (2024) highlights that Community-Based Communication (CBC) is a participatory process in which local communities actively create, share, and manage communication in order to address their own needs and support social change. Likewise, in this research, traditional folk communication can be used to improve the living conditions of Upcountry Tamil communities by addressing issues like poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment. Therefore, the CBC can be considered as the main theoretical framework for the study.

Because the purpose of the study is to investigate the use of traditional folk communication to empower Upcountry Tamil communities in facing struggles, issues and needs in their day-to-day lives. Hewage (2024) developed the following CBC model to show how traditional folk communication can be used to empower rural, remote, minority and marginalized communities.

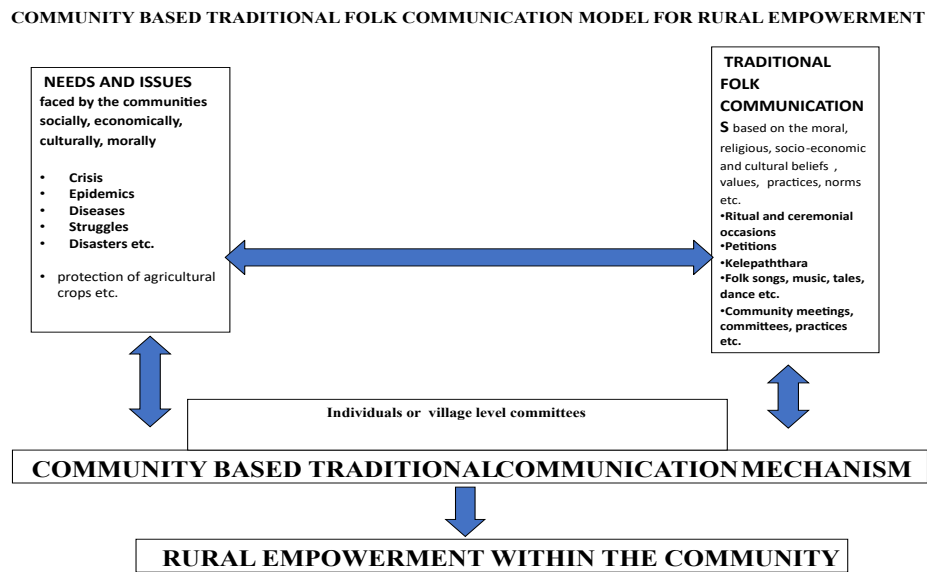


Figure 1. Traditional Folk Communication Model for Development  
Source -Hewage, G.T.M. 2023: P: 159

The model explains how to use traditional folk communication to empower communities in facing struggles, issues and needs in their day-to-day lives. But as far as this study is concerned, the CBC model can be used to examine the use of traditional folk communication to empower Upcountry Tamil Communities in facing struggles, issues and needs etc. in their day-to-day lives.

## METHOD

The geographical location of the study was Napier Estate in the Hali- Ela Divisional Secretariat in Badulla District, Uva Province. Napier is marginalized and rural in geographical sense, which is known as one of the estates in Badulla District.

The Upcountry Tamil population is approximately 2.8% of Sri Lanka's total population. The Central province and Uva Province have the highest Upcountry Tamil population (500,000-2%) compared to the other provinces in Sri Lanka (Census of Population and Housing, 2024, Department of Census and Statistics). According to the Agriculture and Environment Statistics of the Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka estate population is directly or indirectly linked to the plantation sector. The majority of field workers in the plantation sector is women. Many workers have limited access to education, health and infrastructure. The report on the Census of Population and Housing 2024 shows that Napier Estate which is located in Uduwara Grama Niladhari Division has population of 1988. The Department of Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka (2002) shows that Tamil workers in Napier Estate have a distinct sub-culture marked by unique folk rituals, traditions, and customs, largely shaped by their isolation, migration history, and religious practices.

This literature shows that the traditional folk communication among these communities based on their rituals, traditions, practices, beliefs and norms helps fulfill their needs and issues faced in day-to-day lives. The location of the study was selected based on the above-mentioned criteria, statistics, facts, and justifications.

A qualitative research approach was used to obtain data using Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), interview method, and participatory observation method. Moreover, a survey was carried out using FGDs, participatory observations and personal interviews. FGD is a structured discussion used to obtain in-depth information (qualitative data-insight) from a group of people about a particular topic (Omar, 2018). Therefore, the Focus Group Discussions were conducted with 25 respondents in Napier Estate. The purposive sampling was used to select the respondents.

Gill et al. (2008) note that interviews provide a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon. Therefore, personal interviews were conducted with 07 key informants in the same community: presidents of welfare society in the village, a priest in Tamil Kovil (Hindu Temple), the grama seva officer, the development officer, the Public Health Inspector (PHI) and the midwife in this area, management level officer in the Napier Estate. The data were collected with the support of three research assistants. Therefore, participatory observation was also used to collect data for the study.

The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Some limitations were caused in the study due to some geographical and subjective reasons. The respondents were only selected from Napier Estate due to time and financial constraints in travelling to other areas. But the population and sample size can be expanded to find more practical findings in a future study in a systematic and methodical manner.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As far as the demographic details are concerned, almost all the people, nearly 90%, were Tamil Hindu in Napier Estate. Some Sinhala and Muslim families were living close to the estate. The results also showed that the people in Napier attached to different castes such as Kudiyanavar (dominant cast - landless labor and dependent service roles), Pallar (agricultural laborers), Paraiyar (drummers), Sakkiliar (leather work and sanitation-related occupations), Vannar (washers), Ambattar (barbers). Sarawanakumar, P. (2022) notes that the castes practiced among them include Kudiyanavar, Pallar, Paraiyar, Sakkiliar, Vannar Ambattar etc. Upcountry Tamils primarily from lower-caste backgrounds within the South Indian structure, differentiating them from the dominant Vellalar-dominated Sri Lankan Tamil community in the North. Chandrabose. A.S (2022) notes that although estate work is not caste based, all the castes are identified by hereditary occupations. But when it comes to providing services, the duties are performed based on castes. For example, Temple priests are upper caste and swept by lower castes such as Paraiyar, Sakkiliar, Vannar and Ambattar.

It is obvious that the caste system is rigid among Upcountry Tamil communities in Sri Lanka based on their folk beliefs, traditions, norms, practices, customs etc. This shows that communication among these different castes is hierarchical. But the study shows that the caste system has been changing over the years since the high caste people leave estates and low caste people have become sound educationally and economically.

“45-year-old woman said that it is not even allowed to have a marriage or love affair with a low caste girl or a boy some time ago. Both parents fight with each other and Kele Paththara (informal notices) are pasted in public places in the estate by the neighbors to show their disagreements for these kinds of relationships”.

This shows that traditional folk communication is used by the communities for their issues and needs in their day-to-day lives. Irrespective of the caste, the majority are into estate work directly or indirectly. However, many elderly workers are working in the tea estate while young and middle-aged people work in garments, beauty salons, hiring three-wheelers, abroad, house made work etc.

Media usage of the people is concerned, mainstream media such as television, radio and newspapers and new media such as mobile phones and social media were used. But the results showed that the traditional folk media were more effective and closer to these communities compared to the mainstream media.

The findings of the study showed that the community face significant challenges including land seizures, education and economic deprivation including poverty and school dropouts, cultural marginalization, high unemployment, disaster risks such as landslides, social issues such as drug and alcohol addition, child abuse, extramarital affairs, addition to social media and South Indian teledramas among teenagers which leads to a dependent life pattern without employments.

“55-year-old woman states that the younger generation is into mobile phones, social media and drugs. Unfortunately, my grandson is addicted to Ice drugs. Since his mother works as a maid in Dubai, my grandson bought a motorbike, three-wheeler, TV, mobile phone etc. without even doing A/Ls. My husband passed away 2 years ago, and I had been facing domestic

violence for more than 40 years due to his alcohol addiction. I never had school education, and I worked as a tea plucker for many years. My granddaughter elopes with a married man she got to know on Facebook one year ago. Even she was raped by a neighbor a few years back. Since my son-in-law and I worked for the estate, there was nobody to pay attention to our children. Management of the estate does not pay adequate salary for us to have a proper life. Now we are planning to buy land near to the town with the money sent by my daughter as the Napier community was asked to leave this area due to landslide risk. We still live in an old-line room”.

It is evident that communities face numerous issues in their day-to-day life. People mainly face socio- cultural and economic challenges such as economic and attitudinal poverty, lack of infrastructure facilities, school dropouts, insecurity for children and family as many mothers go abroad recently due to financial difficulties, cyber bullying and cheating among youngsters due to lack of digital literacy etc. “Upcountry Tamils have faced a distinct set of long-standing challenges shaped by history, geography, and socio-economic conditions such as citizenship and identity issues, poverty and economic hardship, poor living conditions, limited access to quality education, infrastructure gaps, healthcare inequality, political underrepresentation, social marginalization and discrimination, gender inequality and youth unemployment and migration” (Chandrabose. A.S :2022. P: 76).

In this context, solutions were found for the issues faced by the communities by using traditional folk communications. Because traditional folk communications are mainly based on creativity, socio-cultural, moral and religious beliefs, norms, values and practices of the communities, available resources etc. There is also no proper mechanism introduced by the government authorities or management of the estate to find ways out for the issues faced by the people in Napier. Therefore, people have already established community-based mechanisms to fulfil their needs within their community according to the findings of the study.

“A forty-nine-year-old plantation worker states that management of the estate does not pay adequate salary or welfare facilities for us. So, once we conducted a continued protest for 10 days in front of the factory with placards. We also sent a petition to the authorities responsible. After that the management of the estate has made arrangements for the welfare and infrastructure facilities including toilet facilities, community hall, renovation of line rooms, medical clinics, etc.”. This shows that Upcountry Tamil communities can use traditional folk media like petitions, placards etc. to find solutions for the challenges faced by them.

These kinds of community based folk communication mechanisms are used by the community in challenging situations like Covid- 19 period. Therefore, the findings showed that community-based traditional folk communication mechanisms have been developed by the communities with the support of the government servants working in this area such as police, Public Health Inspector, Midwife and Grama Sewa Officer.

The Public Health Inspector, Midwife and Grama Sewa officer advised them to follow the health guidelines by providing common announcements, leaflets and face to face interactions. Three representatives from the community have given the leadership of this community based traditional folk communication mechanism by motivating the other communities to practice healthy practices to prevent covid 19. Flora et al. (1989) note that mainstream media like TV, radio and newspapers limit the two-way communications while community-based media always encourage face to face communications.

Madhubhashini (2021) notes that many people in North Central and Uva provinces believe that Wewa (tank) is a God gifted property since water is essential for their agricultural needs. Sinhala Buddhists mostly use “Wahi Piritha” (a kind of Buddhist Suttas) to get blessings from Buddhism to have rain on time to sustain their agricultural related activities. Likewise different ethnic groups, marginalized and rural people in various parts of the country use different Kem Karema (a kind of ritual treatment), rites and rituals to fulfill their needs.

The Tamil communities in Napier Estate also use Kem Karema (a kind of ritual treatment), rites and rituals to have rain on time to sustain tea plantations, their water requirements and consumption. The community engages in religious ceremonies, prayers, rites and rituals such as performing rituals dedicated to rain deities, such as offerings to gods like Varuna. In addition to that, the community cut some tea plants, prepared a kind of lantern and lit them with lamps. Finally, people throw pepper and salt into the lanterns to obtain rain on time, increase tea harvest and prevent bad evils and spirits. Communities in Napier Estate also perform Karakattam (Karagam) which is an ancient Tamil folk dance performed by balancing a decorated pot on the head to worship rain goddesses Mariamman and Gangai Amman to obtain rain on time. This shows that people use different folk communications based on their beliefs, traditions, customs and norms to find solutions for the issues faced in day-to-day lives.

In addition to the folk-dance performance, Tamils in Napier Estate use Bajane (Bhajans- devotional singing) which is a significant cultural and spiritual practice to express gratitude or seek blessings for better lives. Chandrabose (2022) notes that Bajane is used by Indian Tamils for cultural and identity preservation, stress relief and emotional solace, celebration and ritualistic expression. The repetitive and rhythmic quality of the singing helps people to reduce stress and emotional balance since Indian Tamils face several challenges socially, economically, politically and culturally.

The findings of the study and the literature showed that traditional folk communications can be used to empower communities morally, spiritually, socially and culturally. Upcountry Tamils also celebrate several religious ceremonies throughout the year to obtain holy blessings from gods and goddesses based on their folk beliefs, traditions, customs and norms, to fulfill the needs in their day-to-day lives.

The findings showed that Thai Pongal is the main harvest festival and the thanks-giving ceremony dedicated to the Sun God and cattle. This shows that the Tamil community has a healthy and respectful communication to nature including sun god and cattle. In January, Tamils prepare Pongal- sweet rice, renovate houses and decorate with Kolam. Maha Sivarathiri is celebrated in February/ March fasting and involves all night prayers dedicated to Lord Siva.

The results further showed that Tamils celebrate the new year the same as Sinhalese in April. People follow auspicious time for key activities such as lighting the hearth, starting the first meal, and beginning work. Visiting Hindu temples and engaging in rituals and festivals are also some of the key activities done by the community during the new year. In order to maintain healthy relationships and communication, young people offer betel leaves and gifts to seek blessings from elders. Within the estate, people get together and organize cultural events to maintain an effective communication and bond among communities. In addition, sharing milk rice, sweet Pongal, and other sweets with the Sinhala and Muslim communities helps

foster healthy relationships, strengthen communication, and promote harmony among different ethnic groups.

It is evident that the rites and rituals done by this community help maintain proper communication among the communities and other ethnic groups around them. Upcountry Tamils visit Kataragama to obtain blessings from God Murugan (Kataragama) involving fire-walking ceremonies and rituals honoring the deity in June/ July. In the month of July, communities celebrate several festivals. Vel Festival which is held in honor of Lord Murukan and Adipirapoo which is a domestic festival celebrated on the first day of the Tamil month of Adi were celebrated in July. Saraswathy Puja / Navaratri is celebrated in September/October to commemorate the goddess of learning, which is also popular for initiating children into learning. Deepavali, which is known as the Festival of Lights, is held in October/ November to symbolize the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil. The community believes that Diwali is a period of renewal, reflection, and communal bonding.

The results also showed that, same as Buddhists, Upcountry Tamils more into religious activities on Poya days. On Poya days, many women and girls pray for their husbands' long lives and well-being, and unmarried girls may wish for a good husband in the future. Same as Sinhalese, Tamils also celebrate New year celebration in April as discussed above. These communities also visit Hindu temples in the estate on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays for their prayers. "Tamil and Sinhala cultures exhibit shared values concerning family welfare, marriage, and religious merit. Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Hindu communities have historically shared religious symbols, deities, pilgrimage sites, and ritual practices. These shared traditions indicate significant cultural interaction and demonstrate that the two communities possess common cultural foundations despite differences in language and religion" (Obeyesekere, 2018: 25). Existing literature as well as the findings of this study showed that there are similarities in the religion and culture of Tamils and Sinhalese.

As far as the name of Napier Estate is concerned, three folk tales explain the background of the emerging name of this estate. Some people believe that J. G. Napier, who was a British planter/ owner during the colonial plantation era started/ developed this estate while some believe that during Francis Napier, who served as the Governor of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) from 1870 to 1877, this estate was established under British rule. Third belief is that since Napier is a town/ city in the UK, this particular name has been given to this estate in Sri Lanka under British rule. These folk tales have emerged based on folk beliefs of the communities.

Riswan (2014) notes that language is a primary marker of community, acting as both a tool for communication and a symbol of shared identity, culture, and social solidarity. Language and its jargon, slang etc. can vary from community to community and region to region based on their folk practices and traditions. For instance, the Tamil community in Napier Estate have their unique Tamil slang compared to Sri Lankan Tamils such as Jaffna Tamils and Indian Tamils in other estates in the country.

## CONCLUSION

Traditional folk communication is essential for empowering various communities in Sri Lanka such as Sinhala and Tamil communities since it emerges from the surroundings based on the

available resources, socio-cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs, norms, traditions, values and practices. Therefore, this study investigated the use of traditional folk communication to empower Upcountry Tamil communities in Sri Lanka and examined the use of traditional folk communication in empowering communities in facing struggles, issues, needs etc. in their day-to-day lives.

The results showed that the traditional folk communications such as rites and rituals, Kem Krema (a kind of traditional rituals), ceremonial occasions, folk songs, folk dramas, folk music, folk tales, petitions, Kelepaththara (a kind of informal notice), community meetings, committees etc. were used to find solutions for the day-to-day struggles, issues and needs such as low income, lack of infrastructure facilities including lack of land rights, poor housing (line rooms), disaster risks such as landslides, childhood marriages, illegal affairs, extramarital affairs, health issues including alcohol/ drugs consumption, family planning, school dropouts, cultural marginalization, post-war challenges etc. Therefore, the findings also showed that the community based traditional folk communication mechanism was successfully used to empower its own communities economically, socially, morally, and culturally. In this context, the responsible authorities should find solutions for the challenges faced by the communities. Community Based Communication (CBC) has provided the main conceptual and theoretical framework for the study.

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