

## **The Use of Traditional Forms of Communication for Honey Gathering in Rural Sri Lanka**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The different forms of traditional communication are used in honey gathering at the local and international levels. Therefore, the main purpose of the study is to examine the use of traditional forms of communication in traditional honey gathering in Sri Lanka. The conceptual and theoretical framework of this study is mainly based on the concept of development communication. The geographical location was Anuradhapura district, North Central Province in Sri Lanka. The study used the in-depth interview method for the data collection. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings show that, the different traditional forms of communication such as natural smokes, *Kem Krama* (kind of ritual treatments), rites and rituals, folk tales, folk poems, ceremonial occasions etc. are used to reach the honey hive and inactivate the bees without killing or harming, to cut honeycombs and to collect honey carefully and cautiously. The most important thing is that the responsible authorizes should also take necessary actions to empower traditional honey collectors to maintain the traditional honey gathering. Combing traditional folk communications, modern techniques and safety measures and educating honey collectors to avoid the potential risks are some of the solutions to increase the honey harvest as well as to empower the honey collectors.

Keywords: Traditional forms of communication; folk media; honey gathering; rural; Sri Lanka

### **INTRODUCTION**

The traditional folk media play a vital role in the rural setting. Traditional forms of communication can be used to empower people in the rural areas at the local and international levels. Chapke (2003) notes that people at village level in many Asian countries use different traditional forms of communication such as folk dance, folk songs, rites and ritual performances, storytelling, community teahouse, open markets, and village meetings to find solutions for the day to day needs and issues based on the creativity, cultural values, and beliefs of people. The literacy is also not essential to use traditional forms of communication.

Galagedarage (2021) states that the traditional forms of communication also play a vital role in different occupations such as agriculture, honey gathering, fishing, animal hunting etc. done by the communities in the rural setting in Sri Lanka. The traditional forms of communication are mainly used to protect the agricultural crops, to increase the harvest and to protect the cultural and religious values, heritages etc. in rural Sri Lanka.

This shows that traditional forms of communication can be effectively used for the different occupations done by the rural communities. Strickland (1982) notes that people in the rural areas in Asian and African countries engage in honey gathering/ hunting apart from the agricultural related occupations. The different forms of traditional communication are used for the honey hunting based on the traditional beliefs and practices of the people. But there is no research conducted to find out the use of traditional forms of communication for the traditional honey gathering in Sri Lanka. In other words, no research was conducted on this area in

communication perspective. In this context, the main problem of this study is how to use different forms of traditional communication for honey gathering in rural Sri Lanka. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the use of traditional forms of communication in traditional honey gathering.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **TRADITIONAL FORMS OF COMMUNICATION FOR OCCUPATIONAL NEEDS AND ACTIVITIES**

The rural communities are mainly away from the new media such as internet, but the mainstream media such as television, radio and newspapers are used for the information needs of the people. Therefore, traditional folk media are mainly used by rural people (Galagedarage, 2015). Traditional folk media are defined in different ways by the scholars and researchers in the field of communication studies. "Traditional folk media is any form of endogenous communication system which by virtue of its origin from, and integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilization of the values, symbols, institutions, and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes" (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1998: 3).

This shows that traditional folk media represent the cultural, social, and economic states, values, practices and beliefs of a society or a community or a culture. The traditional forms of communication are mainly used by the rural communities in their occupations, health related matters, information needs, informal education, security etc. in the day-to-day life. Madhubhashini (2021) notes that traditional communications are used by people for their occupations such as agriculture, honey gathering, animal hunting etc. Because the traditional communications emerge from the rural surrounding.

There are different forms of traditional folk media used for the professional needs at the local and international levels. Ansu-Kyeremeh, (1998) notes that in Ghana, rites and rituals, ceremonial occasions, storytelling, puppetry, folk dramas, songs, drumming, and dancing are used by the rural committees for their occupations such as fishing, cattle farming, honey gathering/hunting, chena and paddy cultivation etc. Panford et al (2001) also note that the different forms of traditional communication are used to provide updated and latest information about various health issues and agricultural related activities to the people in developing countries like Mexico, Philippines, Nigeria, Ghana. Folk songs and dramas are mainly used to educate rural communities on a wide range of health and social issues in Ghana. Moreover, healthy, and effective practices, methods and new innovations of farming are introduced for farmers using these traditional forms of communication.

The different forms of traditional folk media are also used in India for the occupational needs and goals. "The potential of the traditional media can be utilised wisely and systematically for agricultural as well as for the rural development in the Nagpur district of Maharashtra state of India. Five most popular traditional media were used viz. Tamasha, Bhajan, Kirtan, Dhandhar and Quawaly by the people. Most preferred themes by the viewers through these media were, on social development including agriculture and patriotic songs" (Chapke & Bhagat, 2006:123). Prasad (2013) also notes that rites and rituals, folk theatre, folk songs, dramas, religious prayers, ceremonial occasions etc. are the main traditional folk media used for the professional needs in the day-to-day life in rural India.

Being a multi-cultural and multi religious country, Sri Lanka also has different forms of traditional communication unique to different part of the country based on the practices, values, norms, and beliefs of communities.

Madhubhashini (2021) notes that in rural Sri Lanka, the different forms of traditional communication are used for the occupations done by the communities. Uva province and North

Central province have the highest rural population compared to other nine provinces in Sri Lanka. Moreover, rural people in these areas are more into chena cultivation, paddy cultivation, cattle farming, honey gathering, animal hunting, daily paid jobs, security forces, apparel, and government professions. Among the rural communities, many people engage in the agricultural related occupations. The interesting finding is that rural people mostly use traditional folk media in their day-to-day life compared to mainstream media. When it comes to occupational needs and activities also usually traditional forms of communication are used. Furthermore, the traditional folk media such as folk tales, folk poems, rites and rituals, ceremonial occasions, *Kem Krama* (kind of ritual treatments), religious practices and beliefs are used for the occupational needs and activities.

The researchers are locally done on the use of traditional forms of communication for agricultural related professions in Sri Lanka. But the literature review shows that no research has been conducted to examine the use of different forms of traditional communication for the honey gathering in Sri Lanka. In other words, no research has not been specialised on traditional honey gathering in the rural context, in terms of traditional communications.

#### **TRADITIONAL FORMS OF COMMUNICATION FOR HONEY GATHERING AT THE LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS**

Honey gathering became an occupation especially among rural communities in Asia and Africa. Even though it became an occupation, honey gathering is done based on the socio-cultural and spiritual practices, values, and beliefs. “Honey hunting/ gathering is the general term given to the collection of honey from wild honey colonies. Traditional honey hunting/ gathering is an important element in the life of several groups including the Rajis in Nepal, and Kurumbas in south India. In the Hindu Kush Himalayan region more than 50% of total honey yield is collected mainly by honey hunters from wild honeybees. In Nepal, honey hunting is practised not only for economic gains, but it also has spiritual, cultural, and social significance. Nowadays, the spiritual, cultural, and social values however are declining” (Gurung & Joshi, 2005:63).

The different traditional forms of communication are used in honey gathering in Asia and Africa. Strickland (1982) states that honey gathering has a long history. Rock paintings in old India, Ceylon and Africa show that in the ancient ages also, people engaged in honey hunting/ gathering. Moreover, the different forms of traditional communication such as rites and rituals, religious prayers, natural smokes, folk tales, and beliefs etc. were used by ancient people in honey gathering.

Akpoke et al. (2015) note that the people in rural Nigeria believe that honey gathering should be done in the night specially during the dry season. Moreover, people wait until the moon properly rises in the night to collect honey. Because there is a belief that honey can be taken from the comb when the moon is properly risen, otherwise the harvest can be decreased. There is another folk belief that if honey gathering is done during the rainy season, there is a high possibility that the honey collector dies if the person sees his face on water. Because the basket or pot used for honey collecting can be filled with rainy water. Furthermore, the communities consider that honey is pure and reflects the prosperity of a community or a society. It is obvious that folk beliefs and folk tales can have a tremendous impact on traditional occupations of rural communities.

Akpoke et al. (2015) further note that people take some equipment like a ladder, a sharp cutlass, a sharp axe, well dried grasses, a fire source, a pot or a basin in honey hunting. The dry grasses are fired to kill bees or wasps or hornets to take honey from the comb which is bad to

the natural environment. Because increasing of bees is important to maintain a healthy environment for humans. Sometimes chemicals are also used to kill bees during honey hunting.

This shows that killing bees is not an environmentally friendly practice though people use different forms of traditional communication for honey gathering. Some environmentally friendly and safety methods and techniques are used for honey gathering in Asia. Gurung and Joshi (2005) note that, in traditional honey gathering in India, smoking is used to keep the bees away from the comb. If a fire is lit under the bee tree or mountain, bees can go away from the hive, but if the smoke or fire is lit near to the hive, there is a high possibility of dying bees. Therefore, a traditional sugar syrup which is prepared by boiling sugar and water and maintain its temperature at about 25-30 °C can be used to take the harvest without killing bees. There is a traditional belief that the person should reach to the hive without talking and making any noise. After reaching to the hive, the sugar syrup should be sprayed to the honeycomb. Then the bees slowly move towards one end of the comb. Finally, sugar syrup is sprayed again to cut the honeycomb using a sharp knife.

Same as India and Africa, honey gathering is popular in Nepal. Strickland (1982) notes that Gurung is an ethnic group located in hill tribe of Nepal who are mostly into honey gathering. Gurungs use some rites and rituals in honey gathering as there are some folk tales connected with honey gathering. A long time ago, a father and nine sons died while collecting honey due to arrow shooting. Therefore, Gurungs believe that the nine sons became evil demons and likened to the ferocious bees. According to the folk belief, Gurungs always practice certain exorcistic rites with honey.

This shows that different forms of traditional communication such as rites and rituals, religious prayers, natural smokes, folk tales, and beliefs etc. are used by different communities at the international level in honey gathering. There is no research conducted to examine the use of different forms of traditional communication for traditional honey gathering in Sri Lanka though some researches were conducted in bee keeping by people in Sri Lanka according to the literature. But any of these researches were not done focusing on traditional forms of communication. The research was conducted to fill in the gap and to achieve the purpose of the study.

The conceptual and theoretical framework of the study is mainly based on the concept of development communication. In simple term, development communication is use of communications for the development purposes. "Development communication is the science of human communication linked to the transitioning of communities from poverty in all its forms to a dynamic, overall growth that fosters equity and the unfolding of the individual potential" (Quebral,1971:1). Madhubhashini (2021) highlights that the traditional forms of communication also help rural people to effectively engage in the occupations based on the unique practices, values, beliefs etc. within the community. Therefore, the literature shows that traditional forms of communication can also play an effective role in empowering people in their agricultural related occupations, traditional honey gathering, traditional fishing, animal hunting etc. in the rural setting.

## **METHOD**

In this research, Mahavillachchiya and Thanthirimalee in Anuradhapura district, North Central Province were selected as the main geographical locations of the study. These two areas are popular for natural honey and people gather honey harvest using different traditional folk practices and beliefs. In depth interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth information from resource persons about a particular topic (Omar, 2018). This research was conducted in a

qualitative approach. The personal interviews were conducted with ten honey collectors who engage in traditional honey gathering as an occupation. There were only ten honey collectors in these areas. The purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. Apart from the honey collector, the interviews were conducted with *Wedamahattaya* (traditional doctor in the village) and the agricultural officer in the area. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The data were collected in September 2020 with support of three research assistances during the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of Covid after following all the health guidelines and instructions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is important to identify the socio- economic and cultural background of the people in these areas according to the findings of the study before identifying the use of traditional forms of communication by the honey collectors in the same areas. “I can say that almost all the people in the village are Sinhala Buddhist. The majority are belonged to *Govigama* (the highest cast, engaged in agriculture) while the minority consist in, *Rada* cast; *Dobhi*, *Hena* (traditional washer- men and women), *Berawayaya* (engage in performing arts), and *Vanni* (people who are coming from Kuveni family). The people now engage in chena cultivation, paddy cultivation, traditional fishing, animal hunting, honey gathering, cattle farming, work for apparel factories, security forces and a few engage in government jobs irrespective of the caste. The caste system is only applicable for marriages among the people nowadays. Other than that, now people do not engage in the work assigned for them according to the caste system. Honey gathering is done as an occupation by a few people in the area. The income levels of villagers are not sufficient for the survival. But people in lower cast like to give a honey bottle as a gift to *Govigama* people and government servants to show their respect and friendliness” (A fifty-five-year-old honey collector, 2021). Galagedarage (2021) also notes that low cast people like to treat government servants and people in *Govigama* caste by giving some unique food, some fruits, vegetables, honey etc.

The results also show that the people in these areas face various problems such as elephant- human confits, lack of clean water, post war challenges, low income, childhood marriages, illegal marriages, extra marital affairs etc. The other issue is that these people had gone through the civil war for more than thirty years and now struggling with the socio- cultural and economic issues. Moreover, the honey collectors also face several issues connected to their occupation such as elephant and bear attacks, animal traps and guns, legal factors affecting honey collecting in forest reserves etc. “Honey collecting can be done only during the dry season from June to September. Therefore, during the rest of the period in the year, we engage in chena and paddy cultivation or daily paid work. There is also a law that people cannot collect honey in the forest reserves. Since the traditional honey collectors use natural smokes, *Kem Krama* (kind of ritual treatments), religious practices and beliefs in honey gathering without harming to bees or wasps or hornets, these legal barriers can be reduced to facilitate the traditional honey gathering. Honey gathering is a risky job as honey hives are also built-in mountains and trees. It is true that none of the honey collectors were died due to any attack of bees or wasps, or hornets. But a few of them were faced to serious attacks of hornets and wasps. This is a risky job due to elephant attacks, animal taps and guns. The biggest challenge is to

protect us from bears as the bee honey is the favorite food of bears (A thirty-year-old honey collector)”.

*Weda Mahaththaya* (traditional doctor in the village) also emphasized that if these insects bit humans, the poison can be spread in the whole body. Therefore, there is a high possibility of dying a person if the treatment is not properly done. But honey collectors follow different traditional rites and rituals as well as safety methods and approaches to reduce the risks of honey gathering. The hornet and wasp honey gathering are difficult than bee honey gathering since the hornets and wasps are more dangers than bees.

The findings show that the different forms of traditional communication are used for honey gathering in rural Sri Lanka. Galagedarage (2021) also notes that, honey gathering is also one of the occupations done by rural communities in Sri Lanka based on the traditional beliefs, practices, and values. The results show that, some ceremonies such as “*Dolayak Ceremony*”, “*Rahuyak Ceremony*” are conducted to obtain the blessings of God to get more honey harvest. The ceremonies are done by offering pooja to God while doing traditional dancing and singing. Manthara are also used to protect the honey collectors from the insects (honey mantra). The honey collectors believe that honey represents the pureness and holiness as it’s a gift of gods. Moreover, *Rahu Kalaya* (bad time of the day according to the astrology) is avoided to go for honey gathering. The honey collectors also believe that honey gathering should be done after praying to God *Aiyanayaka* and God *pullryar*. The prayers are done by hanging a small branch of *Kiri gaha* (milk oozing tree) in a *nuga gaha* (Banyan tree) close to the honey hive. The purpose of doing this is to obtain the blessings of God to protect their lives as well as to get more honey harvest from the honeycomb.

The findings show that various folk ceremonies, rites, and rituals are done in gathering honey. “A team of honey collectors visit the jungle to find honey hives. Once a honey hive is found, there is an informal communication to inform to the rest of the members in the team about the hive. This communication is called “*Kata Thabima*”. We take some equipment, stuffs etc. for honey gathering such as a ladder to climb the tree or mountain, some baskets or pots or basins to collect honey, a sharp knife to cut the comb, a traditional mixture prepared using sugar and leaf juice to temporary make the bees or wasps or hornets inactive by spraying it to the honeycomb. This helps us to cut the honeycomb without getting any attack from the insects. The insects are also not killed as the mixture is used to temporary inactivate them. Apart from the essential tools, *Odiya* which is prepared by adding raw small branches of trees to make a smoke to send the bees away from the hive” (A fifty-year-old honey collector). This shows that in the traditional honey collecting, special techniques, rites and rituals are used to gather honey harvest without harming or killing bees or wasps or hornets.

There is an idiom unique to *Nuwara Kalawiya* (Anuradhapura district) “*Poson Mahee Hamuduruwo Meeyak Waladu wath paw ne*” (It is not bad even though a Buddhist monk takes honey during Poson season). This shows that honey gathering happens during the dry season without killing bees. According to the Buddhism, honey is also offered to Lord Buddha as it is considered as a holly, healthy and pure food.

There are also some folk beliefs in honey gathering among the rural communities. For example, the honey collectors should reach to the hive without talking or making any noise as these insects can be more aggressive with the human voice. “*Babara Kavi*” is a unique folk

song used in honey gathering in the rural setting. After gathering honey, the team members sing “*Babara Kavi*” to show the happiness and to highlight the hardness and riskiness of the occupation. One *Babara Kaviya* unique to this area is presented below.

මලේ හැම තැනම බඹරුන් අඩන්නා (wasps cry everywhere in the flower)  
බඹර බන්දි තැන් අපි වද සොයන්නා (we are looking for wasps’ hive)  
බඹර කපා පැණි හැමටම බෙදන්නා (wasp collectors distribute honey to everyone)  
බඹරු නොපට පිං අන්වෙයි කියන්නා (saying thank you to the wasps)

Language also plays a significant role in communication. Language and its words, jargons, slangs etc. can be vary from country to country, community to community and region to region. There are some specific words connected to different occupations (Riswan, 2014). When it comes to honey gathering, some specific words are used. For example, *Pani wadu lema* (collecting honey), *Odiya* (prepared by adding raw small branches of trees to make a smoke to send the bees away from the hive), *Gamarala* (the leader of the honey collectors in a team).

The findings show that honey collectors use several traditional folk media and communications in gathering honey. “The first honey harvest is offered to the Buddhist temple and *devalaya* (temple for God) before selling to the outsiders. The purpose of doing this is to offer the respect to the noble triple gem and to the gods to obtain the blessings to get more honey harvest even in the future. *Ihakada Poojawa* and *Peeree Poojawa* ceremonies are done for the god for this purpose” (A thirty-six-year-old honey collector).

It is true that the main purpose of engaging in honey gathering is to get some financial benefits. But still honey collectors engage in the occupation considering this as a spiritual duty and responsibility. “Ten to fifteen bottles can be taken from one beehive. A bottle can be sold for 500-750 rupees to the buyers, but the market price of a bottle is 1000-1500. Bee honey is more expensive than wasp and hornet honey as bee honey is healthier and more valuable” (A forty-five-year-old honey collector).

Therefore, the agriculture officer in the area is planning to facilitate the honey collectors by giving some advice and information to increase the harvest, to assure the safety of the honey collectors as well as to find a good market for honey. Moreover, agricultural officer stated that wearing safety clothes and using advanced nets, knives etc. in honey gathering are some of the solutions to overcome the issues faced by honey collectors.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was achieved, and problem was answered according to the findings. In other words, the use of traditional forms of communication for honey gathering in Sri Lanka was examined. The results show that the folk media are used by the communities for honey gathering such as natural smokes, *Kem Krama* (a kind of ritual treatments), rites and rituals, folk tales, folk poems, folk ceremonies etc. specially to reach the honey hive and to inactive bees without killing or harming, to cut honey hive and to collect honey carefully and cautiously. The conceptual and theoretical framework of the study is mainly based on the concept of development communication. Therefore, the findings show that the traditional forms of

communication also help rural people to effectively engage in the occupations based on the unique practices, values, beliefs etc. within the community. Therefore, it is obvious that, traditional forms of communication can also play a vital role in empowering people in traditional honey gathering in the rural setting.

The results also show that there are still some issues connected to this occupation such as elephant and bear attacks, animal traps and guns, legal factors, low income etc. Therefore, responsible authorities should take necessary actions to protect the traditional honey gathering in the rural settings in Sri Lanka. Exporting honey is also a profitable business as Sri Lankan honey is graded in high category. Therefore, it is important to see the possibilities of combining traditional methods of honey gathering and modern techniques and equipment to increase the honey harvest by limiting the possible harms to the insects as well as to the honey collectors.

To empower the honey collectors, it is also important to create a flexible legal system for traditional honey gathering. Because the results show that there is no harm for bees, wasps and hornets in traditional honey gathering compared to honey harvesting. There should also be a proper communication mechanism to educate and make aware the honey collectors to avoid the potential risks and problems. Gurung & Joshi (2005) also note that raising awareness among local communities, government and non-government institutions about the role and importance of wild honeybees are some ways of developing the bee honey industry to a positive direction.

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