

# Information Seeking Behaviour and Exposure to Mass Media in Socio-economic Empowerment among the Santals of Birbhum, West Bengal

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## Abstract

**Background of the study:** Though a small venture, this article is intended to investigate the information seeking behaviour and the role of mass media in socio-economic empowerment of the Santals, who are the major tribal communities of West Bengal in general and Birbhum district in particular and mainly depend on interpersonal mode of communication to share information. **Objectives:** Specific objectives of the study is to investigate information seeking behaviour and role of media in socio-economic empowerment of the Santals of Birbhum district, West Bengal. **Population of study:** The study conducted in 4 villages, viz, Balipara, Kaliganj, Baganpara, Pearson Pally in and around Santiniketan, within a radius of  $\pm 1$  Km. from Visva-Bharati, the first central university of independent India. **Methods and tools:** The study is based on questionnaire survey, though interview was taken from the illiterate Santals. 100 respondents from the 4 study villages (50 male and 50 female) were selected applying multi-staged stratified random sampling technique. **Findings:** (i) Most of the Santals suffer for lack of education and information due to various socio-economic and cultural factors like economic backwardness, unemployment, massive poverty, illiteracy, language problem etc., (ii) Santals till now believe interpersonal communication and traditional media to share information (iii) Mass media like radio and television is mostly used by the Santals for their entertainment, (iv) Best time for listening radio or watching television is evening. **Conclusion and suggestions:** The study finally suggest for balanced combination of traditional and mass media in human empowering as well as aware the Santals towards active participation in various ongoing developmental programmes, which in turn will help to achieve sustainably developed of the Santals.

**Keywords:** Information seeking behaviour, Information communication, Mass media, Socio-economic empowerment, Sustainable tribal development, Santals,.

## 1 Introduction

The present age is termed as 'information age', where information is treated as a vital and powerful tool of socio-economic development, no less important than land, labour and capital towards empowerment of people towards attaining Sustainable Development (SD). SD depends on attitude towards information, adjustment for sharing information, and proper consumption of information of the people (Sinha, 2016). SD is usually barometered by the degree and extent of attitude towards nature, i.e. sustaining the ability of natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depends (Sinha, 2017). Mass media, in this respect, plays a pivotal role as a powerful instrument of information communication and acts as means for social change developing the lifestyle of all type citizens. It has spread its wings in all spheres and popular for providing right information to the right user at the right time in right form creating awareness in political, social, economic issues and improving the levels of knowledge as well as giving an insight about what is happening in all through the world. Mass media not only preserve traditional values and communicate it to the next generations but

also communicate new ideas, thoughts to create awareness among the present generations. Presently, maximum responsibilities to make the

developmental activities clear and to make it accessible to common people lies on mass media.

India, the second largest tribal dominated area, after Africa (Sahoo, 2017) has a wide tribal population due to its diverse ecosystem. Tribal society in general and the Santals in particular face tremendous cross-culture hazards after introduction of different agents of transformation such as, modernisation, commercialisation, industrialisation, liberalisation, politicisation, etc. Santals are the third largest tribal community of India, among the 650 tribal groups in India. They are distributed in the states of Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa. According to the Demographic Status of Scheduled Tribe Population of India (2011), tribals form a major part having 8.61 percent of total population (consisting 10.43 crores) in India, with a decadal change of 23.7 in respect of tribal population of the year 2001. According to the Census of India 1991, the Santals constitute the population of 7.35 percent all over India among the STs. According to last updated Census of West Bengal, 2001 (Data Highlights: Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal), population of STs (4,406,794) constitutes 5.5% of total population of West Bengal (80,176,197) and Santal population (2,280,540) form more than half (51.8%) of total ST population in this state. In Birbhum, almost 44.21% of total area of land is declared as Schedule area (Barman, 2014). According to Basic Data Sheet of Census of India, 2001 in Birbhum, Santals are the largest ST community consisting a population of

sustainable development for tribals in general and the Santals in particular is really major challenge in India, the country where there is lots of diversity. This study will also aim to investigate whether the mass media can change the mindset, adopt moderate healthy lifestyle as well as whether through active participation, they are capable to obtain the benefits of development projects implemented by central or state government even by the various NGOs.

## 2 Purpose of the Study

Indian society is combination of multi-culture, multi-tribes, multi-castes, multi-lingual and there exist disparities like rural-urban divide, digital divide ('information haves' and 'information havesnot') etc.

India has been changed dramatically over the past decades. Still after seven decades of independence, tribals in general and Santals specifically are the economically impoverished and marginalised group in India. Tribals in general and the Santals in particular believe in interpersonal communication (IPC) as well as traditional media for communication of information for their day to day requirements.

In Birbhum district, Santals are major tribal population and most of them are living with very poor socio-economic status and have little or no knowledge about recent development around them. Most of them, particularly female Santals have to start their daily work early in the morning and it continues till evening. Their life style, daily habits, family interaction and culture are greatly affected by the attitude and adjustment towards information. Though the initiatives like *Sarva Siksha Avijan* (2000), *Right to*

*Information Act* (2005), *Right to Education* (2009), *National Knowledge Commission* (2005) recommendation have been implemented by the Government of India, Santals remain still backward due to their illiteracy and unawareness towards information.

Therefore, the logic behind selecting the topic of the thesis titled **The logic behind selecting the topic titled ‘Information Seeking Behaviour and Role of Mass Media in Socio-economic Empowerment of the Santals of Birbhum, West Bengal’** is most important as Santals are the third largest tribal community of India, first largest tribal community in West Bengal, in the district Birbhum and its Community Development Block Bolpur-Sriniketan. Keeping the background of the study in mind, the present study is devised with the purpose of exploring the level of attitude and adjustment towards information communicated by the mass media, and to find out how much the information seeking behaviour of the Santals under study area are influenced by their socio-economic, educational and social behaviour as well as family climate and adjacent non-tribal community.

### 3 Objectives of the Study

Specific Objectives of the study are:

- (i) to study the socio-economic status of the Santals of the selected villages;
- (ii) to examine the generation-wise attitude and adjustment towards information of the Santals in the study area;
- (iii) to prescribe the types of information is needed by the Santals for their empowerment in the study area;
- (iv) to determine the source of information of the Santals in the study area;
- (v) to study information seeking behaviour of the Santals of the selected villages under study;
- (vi) to investigate the use of various communication media for empowering themselves in the study area;
- (vii) to examine how far the communication of information improved the Santals of the study area beyond the traditional knowledge;
- (viii) to identify the way of challenges towards improving the access and dissemination of proper information for empowerment of the area under study;
- (ix) to investigate the constraints and limitations of communication and access of information by the respondents in the study area;
- (x) to identify whether the environment of Visva-Bharati (first Central University of independent India) having the Institute of Agriculture as well as the adjacent rich socio-culture have influenced the status, attitude, adjustment, etc.

### 4 Population of the Study

The study is conducted in 4 villages, viz, Balipara, Kaliganj, Baganpara, Pearson Pally (Table 1). These villages are within a radius of  $\pm 1$  Km. from Visva-Bharati (international famous educational cultural university of national importance). In the selection of villages and the respondents, multi-staged stratified random sampling technique is adopted. All these villages

were randomly selected to represent the different characteristics like close proximity to Bolpur-Santiniketan urban settlement, enjoy the Self Help Group Scheme facilities provided by Visva-Bharati, population comprises reflects a mixed habitat of STs and general castes people.

**Table 1: Household-wise Distribution of Santal Population**

Sl.No	Name of the Village	No. of Households	Population		
			Male	Female	Total
1	Balipara	182	394	334	728
2	Kaliganj	82	192	220	412
3	Baganpara	45	185	155	340
4	Pearson Pally	63	156	230	386

Source: Survey by Author.

## 5 Methodology and Administration of Tools

For measuring the attitude and degree of adjustment of the Santals towards education, socio-economic status scale (SES) of Udai Pareek (1964, latest updated 2014) was used. In case, who were illiterate, interview was taken from them and otherwise they were requested to fill up the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher. To complete the study smoothly, initially a contact was made with the heads of some of the Santal families. A meeting was arranged with them and they were informed about the purpose of the investigation and requested to extend their whole-hearted co-operation.

## 6 Findings and Interpretation

Data was collected from 100 respondents from the 4 study villages (50 male and 50 female) and then scored each response separately in an MS-Excel worksheet. The data have been interpreted in Table 2- 7 below.

**Table 2: Socio demographic data of the respondents**

Variables	Measures	Frequency	
		Male	Female
Age (in Years)	12-18	10 (20)	12 (24)
	18-24	12 (24)	13 (26)
	24-30	9 (18)	6 (12)
	30-34	7 (14)	8 (16)
	Above 34	12 (24)	11 (22)
Education	Illiterate	6 (12)	9 (18)
	Primary schooling	26 (52)	24 (48)
	Secondary Pass	7 (14)	9 (18)
	Higher Secondary Pass	8 (16)	7 (14)
	Graduate and above	3 (6)	1 (2)
Income (in Rs.)	Below 3000	12 (24)	17 (34)
	3000-5000	23 (46)	14 (28)
	5000-8000	13 (26)	16 (32)
	Above 8000	2 (4)	3 (6)
Source of Income	Daily labour	20 (40)	38 (76)
	Farmer	14 (28)	0
	Livestock keeper	7 (14)	6 (12)
	Service (Govt./Private)	3 (6)	3 (6)
	Rickshaw/Van puller	3 (6)	0
	Toto driver	2 (4)	0
	Shopkeeper	1 (1)	3 (6)



**Source: Field survey. N=100. Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of the respondents.**

Age-wise distribution of the respondents has been shown in Table 2. Age up to 11 years has not been considered for the present study. Findings regarding education depict that majority of the male respondents (26, 52%) and female respondents (24, 48%) have primary schooling. The finding also shows that 6 (12%) male respondents and 9 (18%) female respondents are till illiterate. Income of the male respondents between Rupees 3000-5000 is highest (23, 46%) followed by 13 (26%) whose income lies between Rupees 5000-8000. Among the female respondents, 17 (34%) persons have income below Rupees 3000 whereas others have comparatively better income. Data regarding source of income depict that majority of male respondents (26, 52%) are daily labour followed by farmers (14, 28%). Female respondents were mostly daily labour (Table 2).

**Table 3: Types of information needed for empowerment of the respondents Categories**

Categories	Respondents	
	Male	Female
Decision making	5 (10)	7 (14)
SHG activities	8 (16)	10 (20)
Agriculture	9 (18)	4 (8)
Livestock farming	4 (8)	5 (10)
Employment	5 (10)	7 (14)
Savings	2 (4)	8 (16)
Migration elsewhere for work	6 (12)	6 (12)
Awareness about health	3 (6)	3 (6)
Awareness of various schemes of Govts./NGOs	6 (12)	9 (18)
Awareness of modern ICTs	2 (4)	1 (2)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>

**Source: Field survey. Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of the respondents.**

It was clearly observed that, purpose of information requirement differ among the male and female respondents. Among male respondents, 9 (18%) persons require information for agricultural purpose followed by 8 (16%) who require for SHG activities. Among female respondents, 10 (20%) require information for SHG activities followed by respondents (9, 18%) who require it for awareness of various schemes of Govt./NGOs (Table 3).

**Table 4: Sources of information of the respondents**

Channels of information	Respondents	
	Male	Female
Family member	11 (22)	8 (16)
Friends/Neighbours	8 (16)	10 (20)
Training programmes	3 (6)	5 (10)
Panchayat members/Village leaders	3 (6)	4 (8)
Newspaper	2 (4)	1 (2)
Radio	5 (10)	4 (8)
Television	5 (10)	6 (12)
Mobiles	4 (8)	1 (2)
Fairs & festivals	2 (4)	4 (8)
IPC & combination of other channels(s)	7 (14)	7 (14)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>

**Source: Field survey. Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of the respondents.**

Source of information of majority of the male respondents is family members (11, 22%) followed by friends and neighbours (8, 16%). Majority of female respondents answered their source of information was friends and neighbours (10, 20%) followed by family members (8, 16%). It was significantly observed that IPC and combination of other channels was preferred by both male (7, 14%) and female (7, 14%) (Table 4).

**Table 5: Satisfaction with various media of the respondents**

Responses	Respondents							
	Folk media items		Newspaper		Radio		Television	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Satisfied	41 (82)	42 (84)	35 (70)	34 (68)	37 (74)	37 (74)	38 (76)	39 (78)
Unsatisfied	9 (18)	8 (16)	15 (30)	16 (32)	13 (26)	13 (26)	12 (24)	11 (22)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>

**Source: Field survey. Responses are mutually not exclusive. Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of the respondents.**

Satisfaction with folk media items of the both male (41, 82%) and female (42, 84%) respondents was higher than various mass media items. Among the mass media, television was more preferable by the male (38, 76%) followed by radio (37, 74%) and newspaper (35, 70%). Similarly, among the female respondents, television was choice by 39 (78%) followed by radio (37, 74%) and newspaper (34, 68%) (Table 5).

**Table 6: Frequency of using various media by the respondents**

Responses	Respondents					
	Newspaper		Radio		Television	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Once a day	18 (36)	4 (8)	21 (42)	17 (34)	22 (44)	18 (36)
Once a week	10 (20)	6 (12)	10 (20)	11 (22)	10 (20)	10 (20)
Twice a week	5 (10)	7 (14)	9 (18)	5 (10)	89 (18)	9 (18)
Once a fortnight	7 (14)	9 (18)	3 (6)	7 (14)	3 (6)	3 (6)
Once a month	4 (8)	5 (10)	2 (4)	4 (8)	2 (4)	2 (4)
Rarely	4 (8)	12 (24)	3 (6)	4 (8)	2 (4)	6 (12)
Never	2 (4)	7 (14)	2 (4)	2 (4)	2 (4)	2 (4)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>

**Source: Field survey. Responses are mutually not exclusive. Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of the respondents.**

Frequency of reading newspaper of female respondents is very poor. Majority of them read newspaper rarely (12, 24%) followed by habit of reading newspaper once a fortnight (9, 18%). Radio and television show moderate response by both male and female respondents major portion of them listen radio or watch television once a day in comparison to the respondents who listen radio or watch television once or twice a week (Table 6).

**Table 7: Preference of timing for listening radio/watching television by the respondents**

Time	Respondents	
	Male	Female
0800-0900 hrs	2 (4)	2 (4)
0900-1000 hrs	2 (4)	2 (4)
1000-1030 hrs	8 (16)	6 (12)
1300-1400 hrs	3 (6)	3 (6)
1730-130 hrs	24 (48)	22 (44)
1800-1900 hrs	9 (18)	13 (26)
Any time	2 (4)	2 (4)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>	<b>50 (100)</b>

**Source: Field survey. Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of the respondents.**

It was observed among the respondents only 4% (2 male and 2 female) don't watch television or listen radio. This may be that they don't have interest on these media or have no radio or television of their own. It was also found that at morning, they don't prefer to listen radio or watch television- this may be they are busy in this time. Evening is the best time for listening radio or watching television. Majority of the male respondents prefer to watch television or listen radio at 5.30-6.30 p.m. (24, 48%) followed by 6.00-7.00 p.m. (9, 18%). Among female respondents, major portion (22, 44%) prefers listening radio or watching television at 5.30- 6.30 p.m. followed by the time 6.00-7.00 p.m. (13, 26%) (Table 7).

## 7 Conclusion and Suggestions

Not only education but also information is the source of knowledge and knowledge is the key for attaining sustainable tribal development (STD). In this respect, through mass media, tribals in general and Santals in particular, may able not only to establish social relationship to get knowledge and improve their quality of living, but also solving most of the problems with information gained by appropriate and effective mode of communication. However, the present study conducted in four selected Santal villages of Birbhum district of West Bengal, reveals that family members, friends and even neighbours are main source of information and folk media is more preferable than mass media. The role of mass media is not satisfactory and shows very poor awareness about information, and suffer most for lack of education and information due to various socio-economic and cultural factors like economic backwardness, unemployment, massive poverty, illiteracy, language problem etc.

It was also observed that, interpersonal forms of communication (IPC) are the biggest source of education and information and very useful in the exchange of indigenous knowledge till now. Most of the Santals favour to use face-to-face communication than explicit source of knowledge (viz, books, leaflets, newspapers etc.) and have their own traditional form of communication system like myths and legends, songs and dance, fair and festivals. The study also depicts that mass media are mostly used by the Santals for their entertainment and evening is the best time for listening radio or watching television. Governments and the NGOs should give the priority to organise various awareness programmes by the singer, comedians, folk-dance groups, film show, etc. giving access to the remote areas of India.

Village leaders, extension workers, political leaders, etc. should come forward to motivate the Santals about the merits of mass media and in application of a balanced combination of traditional and mass media in human empowering as well as to aware them towards active participation in various

ongoing developmental programmes, which in turn will help to achieve sustainably developed of the Santals.

## 8 Reference

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