

Mass Media in Creating Awareness Among Agricultural Labours During COVID-19 Pandemic in Birbhum, West Bengal

Atanu Kumar Sinha^{1*} and Amit Kumar Hazra²

ABSTRACT

In the crisis period due to global health threat caused by COVID-19 pandemic in the last few months of 2020 and the imposed lockdown in India, mass media played a very crucial role to make the countless mass of recipients aware and conscious about what is happening throughout the world. The study aims to find out informative role of mass media over traditional media in creating awareness about agriculture during the pandemic and exposure to mass media by the Santals of Birbhum District, West Bengal. Telephonic questionnaire through mobile contact was applied to collect quantitative data from 100 Santal agricultural labours of both local and migrant (50 male, 50 female) from 4 selected villages. It was observed that, though availability of mass media with the Santals was limited, however, their accessibility to mass media like TV or mobile phone was found somewhat better in creating awareness and consciousness about agricultural activities during the pandemic period among the Santals. Mean value of agricultural information consumption based on mass media of female Santals ($\bar{X}_2 = 109.43$) was better than the male Santals ($\bar{X}_1 = 106.18$). 't' value, which was 3.40, much more than the significant level, indicated that the agricultural information consumption based on mass media of female Santals is greater than that of male Santals in COVID-19 pandemic. Study finally suggested for balanced combination of traditional media and mass media in developing more awareness and consciousness among the Santals in the epidemic and pandemic period.

Keywords: Agricultural labours, COVID-19 pandemic, Information communication, Information seeking behaviour, Mass media

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is not only backbone of India's economy, but also the primary source of livelihood for about 76 per cent of India's population (Census of India, 2001; Sinha, 2016), whereas 80 per cent of the total population is extremely poor living in rural areas and are marginal farmers or farm labours (GoI, 2013). Worldwide, in agricultural output, India ranks second. For majority of the tribal of India in general, and mainly of the Santals,

agriculture is the primary source of income. Despite the progress in agriculture sector, tribals in general and particularly the Santals feel incapable to solve food and health problems for decades. Due to various push factors like poverty, unemployment, unfavourable economic and social conditions, underdevelopment at the place of origin as well as natural calamities, they are migrated to neighbouring districts or states for sowing, harvesting and other agricultural activities towards improving their livelihood leaving their native places, even for years after

¹Professional Assistant, Palli Siksha Bhavana Library (Institute of Agriculture), Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan & Research Scholar, Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension, Palli Samgathan Vibhaga, Visva-Bharati, West Bengal

²Professor and Principal (Dean), Palli Samgathan Vibhaga, Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan & Head, Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension, Palli Samgathan Vibhaga, Visva-Bharati, West Bengal

*Corresponding author email id: atanusinhavb@gmail.com

years. The Santal agricultural labours require right and useful information at the right time and in right form regarding improved seeds, pesticides, insecticides, fertilisers, market price etc.

In the situation of the pandemic lockdown in India, the Santals are unable to make face-to-face (F2F) contact with others, as they are not attending the *Khoai Haat* (previously known as Saturday market) or local hotels for the tourist's enjoyment performing their traditional dances or even they are not allowed for working at the householder's houses. In this situation, mass media is the only way of their update information. It's true that media has both positive and negative effects on the society. Harding (2009) pointed out how mass media influence human behaviour with flow of health information during pandemic, which in turn helps to be conscious over long period of time. Baker (2016) highlighted the positive role played by mass media providing health information to the citizen continuously during the pandemic caused by Zika in Brazil. Sinha (2018) recommended for balanced combination of traditional and mass media for changing the attitude and adjustment of the Santals about the ongoing situation around the world. Shalvee and Sambhav (2020) observed social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp etc. creating panic with fake news or misinformation among the people. Plethora of information and misinformation going viral on mass media about COVID-19 and lockdown created information pollution rather than other important information, which causes panic, stress and mass hysteria among the citizen. Therefore, the logic behind selecting the topic 'Role of Mass Media Creating Awareness among the Santal Agricultural Labours during COVID-19 pandemic in Birbhum District, 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.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in 4 villages, viz, Balipara, Kaliganj, Baganpara and Pearson pally. These villages are within a radius of ± 1 km. from Visva-Bharati, the first central university of independent India and within

the close proximity to Santiniketan-Sriniketan Development Authority (SSDA). Most of the Santals of these villages enjoy the SHG Scheme facilities provided by Visva-Bharati and the population comprises reflects a mixed habitat of STs and general castes people. The study was conducted in the month of July and August 2020. Respondents were selected randomly and limited to 100 only (50 male and 50 female) from the 4 villages. Mobile numbers of the respondents were collected from the SHG employees working under the control of Visva-Bharati, from the Panchayat members or with whom a sudden meet occurred at the village shops, markets or tea shops. Telephonic questionnaire was applied to collect quantitative data. SES scale of Udai Pareek (1964, latest updated 2014) was used to measure attitude and awareness of the Santals about mass media in the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistical tools used include: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 represents the types of information required by the respondent Santals under study during the pandemic period. Findings revealed that information regarding use of fertilisers and seeds ranks first and second respectively followed by information about market place. The data also reveals that the Santals of the study area are not much interested in organic farming, as it ranks tenth.

Table 2 represents data about the sources of information, both informal and formal and their respective rank scores as well as rank orders, used by the respondents under study during the pandemic period. Findings revealed that the main informal source of information of the respondents was SHG members and it ranked first among all the sources of information. Among the formal sources of information, mobile phone was much preferable by the respondents followed by the TV, training programmes and radio during the pandemic period. It seems logical SHG members, mobile phones, TV, training programmes keep them updated providing latest important information regarding corona virus COVID-19 pandemic. Finding also indicates that importance of TV as relevant source of information is more with compared to radio or newspaper.

Table 1: Types of agricultural information required by the respondents

Category	Respondents (Percentage)			Rank order
	Male (N=50)	Female (N=50)	Total (N=100)	
About seeds	32 (64.00)	30 (60.00)	62 (62.00)	II
Improvement of soil	16 (32.00)	13 (26.00)	29 (29.00)	VII
Use of fertiliser	30 (60.00)	33 (66.00)	63 (63.00)	I
Pest management	35 (70.00)	22 (44.00)	57 (57.00)	IV
Use of insecticides	22 (44.00)	28 (56.00)	50 (50.00)	V
Production techniques	12 (24.00)	13 (26.00)	25 (25.00)	IX
Organic farming	9 (18.00)	8 (16.00)	17 (17.00)	X
Credit facilities	28 (56.00)	16 (32.00)	44 (44.00)	VI
Weather forecast	13 (26.00)	13 (26.00)	26 (26.00)	VIII
Market price	26 (52.00)	35 (70.00)	61 (61.00)	III

Source: Telephonic survey by authors. Responses are mutually not exclusive

Table 2: Source of information of the respondents

Source of information	Frequency of exposure			Total rank score	Rank order (N=100)	
	Less times	Whenever possible	Most of the times			
Informal source						
Family member	20	58	22	443	3	V
Friends/Relatives	65	20	15	121	2	III
Village leaders	20	23	57	110	4	VIII
SHG members	70	23	7	142	1	I
Formal source						
Newspaper	30	40	30	101	5	IX
Radio	25	52	23	111	4	VII
Television	30	38	32	119	2	IV
Mobile phones	20	35	45	125	1	II
Training prog.	20	43	37	112	3	VI

Source: Telephonic survey by authors.

Table 3 depicts the satisfaction level of the respondents about different information sources. Study shows that, SHG members, village leaders were found preferable information providers of the respondents, which ranked first and second respectively. However, mobile phone and training programmes, which ranked third and fourth, found as most preferable formal source of information of the respondents. It is logical that SHG members, mobile phones and training programmes are more influential to the illiterate or neo-literate Santals.

Table 4 shows that only 10 (10.00%) respondents subscribe newspapers personally. Among the respondents, 30 (30.00%) don't and can't read newspaper. Most of the occasional and regular respondents read newspaper at the offices or householder's house where they are engaged for work or while visiting the village shops. It was found that only 28 (28.000%) families own radios and 72 (72.00%) families have no radio. A total of 30 (30.00%) and 23 (23.00%) listened radio occasionally and regularly

Table 3: Satisfaction of the respondents about different information sources

Source of information	Satisfaction of the respondents			Total rank score	Rank order (N = 100)	
	Less times	Whenever possible	Most of the times			
Informal source of information						
Family member	32	50	18	77	4	VIII
Friends/Relatives	23	57	20	95	3	V
Village leaders	23	18	59	103	2	II
SHG members	18	20	62	118	1	I
Formal source of information						
Newspaper	45	30	25	71	5	IX
Radio	18	52	30	88	4	VII
Television	24	36	40	89	3	VI
Mobile phones	20	55	25	102	1	III
Training prog.	15	42	43	96	2	IV

Source: Telephonic survey by authors.

Table 4: Responses regarding exposure to mass media sources

	No. of family having own subscription (N = 100)		Frequency of exposure (N = 100)		
	Subscribe/Ownership newspaper	Non-subscriber	Read/ Listen/ use occasionally	Read/ Listen/ use regularly	Don't read/ Can't read/ Do not Listen
Newspaper	10 (10.00)	90 (90.00)	45 (45.00)	25 (25.00)	30 (30.00)
Radio	28 (28.00)	72 (72.00)	30 (30.00)	23 (23.00)	47 (47.00)
TV	80 (80.00)	20 (20.00)	30 (30.00)	65 (65.00)	5 (5.00)
	DTH-20 Cable-53				
Mobile phone	85 (85.00)	15 (15.00)	15 (15.00)	80 (80.00)	-
	Data connection (60.00)				

Source: Telephonic survey. Figure in the parenthesis indicates percentage of respondents.

respectively, while 47 (47.00%) don't show their interest in listening radio during the pandemic period. It was also observed that, who don't have personal radios listened radio at their friend's or neighbour's houses or at the village shops. Finding shows that most of the respondents had either cable connection or DTH connections for their TV. During the pandemic period, most of the respondents (65; 65.00%) regularly watched TV and 30 (30.00%) watched TV occasionally. Only 5 (5.00%) didn't showed their interest in watching TV. Majority of the respondents has personal mobile phone (85; 85.00%) and have data connection (60; 60.00%). Most of the responding Santals (80; 80.00%) had exposure to mobile phones at almost

all the times and only 15 (15.00%) exposed to mobile phones whenever possible. Respondents who don't have personal mobile phone were informed various issues regarding COVID-19 from their friends, family members or neighbours.

Table 5 represents the analysis of data pertaining to the hypothesis of the study, to test if there does not exist any significant difference in agricultural information consumption based on mass media between male and female Santals during COVID-19 pandemic, against that the agricultural information consumption based on mass media of female Santals is greater than that of male

Table 5: t-test showing difference of awareness based on mass media between the male and female Santals

Sample	Mean (M)	S.D. (σ)	S.E. (σ_c)	t_{obs}	df= (N-1) + (N-1), where N=100	$t = D/SE_D$	Conclusion
Male Santals	106.18	6.94	3.25	3.40	98	0.96	$t_{obs} > t_{0.05;98}$.
Female Santals	109.43	9.52					H_0 rejected.

Santals during COVID-19 pandemic. It was found from the Table 5 that the male and female Santals do not differ in agricultural information consumption based on mass media in COVID-19 pandemic. It is also interesting to note that the mean of agricultural information consumption based on mass media of female Santals ($\bar{X}_2 = 109.43$) is better than that of the male Santals ($\bar{X}_1 = 106.18$). The result of the study also indicates that, 't' is not significant at 0.05 level which indicates that male and female Santals of the study area do not differ about the mean adjustment ability. It is interesting to note that the mean adjustment ability score of the female Santals is slightly greater than of the male Santals. It may be concluded from the obtained results that male and female Santals do not differ significantly in their attitude and adjustment ability in the society.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that Santals of the study area are not very much dependent on forest for daily needs and unfortunately, most of them had medium level of information seeking and consumption behaviour due to their socio-economic backwardness, unemployment, massive poverty and illiteracy. Though interpersonal communication (IPC) is the biggest source of agricultural information and very useful in the exchange of indigenous knowledge till now, the findings of the study shows that the Santals use mass media like radio, TV or mobile phone mainly for their entertainment and has become more popular for getting updated information about the world. Thus, they should be provided easy access and more opportunities to these media in order to bring them to the mainstream of cultural, educational, social and health development. A balanced combination of traditional and mass media may be applied to get fruitful result in developing more awareness and consciousness among the Santals in consumption of agricultural information during the epidemic and pandemic period. Government, village leaders, extension agents, Panchayat members

should pay more attention to organise audio-visual programmes at regular basis and to encourage the Santals of the area towards consuming reliable and authentic information about agriculture activities and thinking critically through the information exposed from the mass media to change their mindset and adopting healthy lifestyle in the crisis period of global health threat caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

Paper received on : December 15, 2020

Accepted on : December 28, 2020

REFERENCES

- Baker, D.E. (2016). Zika virus and the media, *Hospital Pharmacy*, **51**(4), 275-276. Online at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4896326/>, Accessed on August 2, 2020.
- Harding, P. (2009). Pandemics, plagues and panic, *British Journalism Review*, **20**(3), 27-33. Online at <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956474809348261>, Accessed on August 2, 2020.
- Parikh, U. and Trivedi, G. (1964, latest update 2014). Manual of socio-economic status scale (Rural). Delhi: Mansayan.
- Shalvee and Sambhav, S. (2020). Role of mass media and communication during pandemic. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, **8**(5). Online at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342663311>, Accessed on August 12, 2020.
- Sinha, A.K. (2016). Attitude towards education and level of adjustment among Santals of Birbhum district, West Bengal: a study of influence of family climate and socio-economic status, *Indian Journal of Adult Education*, **77**(2), 59-68.
- Sinha, A.K. (2018). Information seeking behaviour and role of mass media in socio-economic empowerment of the Santals of Birbhum, West Bengal, *International Research: Journal of Library and Information Science*, **8**(2), 237-246.
- Sinha, A.K. (2018). *Sustainable Development of Santals through Communication of Information in and around Santiniketan, Birbhum*. Dissertation submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.). in Library and Information Science under the University of Calcutta, (Un-published).