



Marginalisation, Communication and Media Life: An Explorative Study of Santal Community in India

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Abstract

In the era of globalisation, the production and consumption of media and communication varies from individual to individual as well as group to group. Some groups live with a highly technocratic media life, some groups still live with a traditional media life. Nevertheless, it is assumed that media life has affected irrespective of social groups in every parts of the world, though the divide between the information rich and the information poor has grown exponentially. Thus, the process of social development among different social and marginalised communities in India differs according to the nature of consumption of mediated information and communication. This paper seeks to analyze media life in the context of access and consumption to modern mass media and as well as the cultural life of Santal. What are these symbiotic relations between the media life and marginalisation among Santal community? Study suggests that due to the globalisation and the intervention of state's policy, both form of media life emerged and prevalent in Santal villages where it has substantially occupied and captured the everyday life. It also creates new form of communication, information and knowledge in Santal society. Thus, the symbiotic relation between media life and marginalisation among Santals has narrowed down to some extent. Thus, the study implicates to highlight the different aspects of marginalisation among Santal tribal community and explored their mediated life as well.

Keywords: Mass media; Marginalisation; Socio-cultural life; Tribal development

Introduction

Tribal people over the years have become the most disadvantaged, exploited and the neglected a lot in our society. They live at the margin of periphery and dwell in forest areas. Their deep rooted problems are completely invisible, historically ignored and unnoticed [1]. Tribal society in general, Santal in particular suffers from various problems and

experience with different form of marginality. Marginalisation is a process where different community in India suffer to access of equal opportunities. India is a nation having a number of social groups and each group continues culturally homogeneous and distinct social character. Apart from different social group, tribal community, particularly Santal, commonly signifies common language, distinct ethnic character, observing uniform rules, living together and for collective identity. These communities relatively hold uniform culture or way of life and a tradition of common descent. They live at the margin such as in hilly areas, forests and are considered as the most backward and underdeveloped. They are not only historical marginalised, different form of marginality is visible over a period of time. Villagers are supposed to be repositories of their cultural traditions. Those traditions become identity of the local people. Cultural identity is generally recognised through indigenous form of communication. The local traditions and oral form of communication practiced by the people at village level particularly in tribal areas needs more attention. Communication as a social phenomenon has well integrated into people's everyday life, but received less attention into the habits of analysis by the marginalised tribal community. Thus, this research paper emphasised to understand and analyse the emergent patterns of communication and information that tribal community use in their day to day life and consequent changes in the culture and communication along with social structure. How these process makes empowered tribal community or emancipate from the process of marginalisation? How do communication play its role and it affects on life of tribal community? How does it bring changes in their life style and the process of development? First, paper not only tries to understand the nature and process of marginalisation among the tribal community but makes an attempt to examine the process of social change takes place over a period of time. Lastly, paper seeks to explore and understand the process of media life of tribal group in eastern India.

Nature and Process of Marginalisation

Marginalisation process can be viewed at this juncture due the paucity of information and communication that they receive in the society. Marginalisation is the social process

which can be identified at individual, community, and societal level. The idea of marginalisation denotes an abstract ideal and a concretized reality that is representative of some of the cruelty callous situations to be faced by human beings. Since it is portrayed as invisible, but a continued process that is highly contextual to understand and explore. As Cox finds that, "Marginalisation is neither be quantified nor even defined in concise rather it is basically signifies is a situation in which a section of the population is pushed to the margins of a society".

They remain excluded from mainstream society in terms of culturally, socially and even unequal access of opportunities of developmental means. However, regional inequalities and gender inequality denotes to a level of marginal form of specific tribal community. The base of the concept may be due to economic, social and political circumstances, some population or groups are pushed to every margins of survival that can barely eke out a living. It can be argued that it is necessary to place the concept of spatiality, the created space of social organisation and production at the very heart of critical human geography in order to disclose the social relations that are inscribed within and constituted through its various forms and production [2]. Tribal community in general, Santals in particular are at the margin of the society. Not only, they are at the margin in terms of the geographical location but also less representation and participation in political and public sphere. In terms of religion, region, participation, caste, equal access of opportunities in health and education, they are not only backward, but historically marginalized. Since they are at the margin, it was made little effort to be part of mainstream society. Mass media makes further marginalized these groups since their voices are not properly heard, their issues are hardly covered and under represented. Even if their issues are discussed, reported but it remains only one way of interaction and communication where tribal community does not have much role to respond and raise their voices. Thus, tribal communities are identified as disadvantaged sections of society. By and large, it is observed they are at the margin of the society due to their unequal tribe, clan, class, gender status and poor socio-economic conditions where neither they are at par with the mainstream society nor they do participate largely in the developmental and decision making process.

Tribal in general, Santal community in particular, over the years has become the disadvantaged, exploited and the neglected a lot in our society. They live at the margin of periphery and dwell in the forests areas of Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Bengal and Assam. This community suffers from numerous problems due to lack of information and communication. Media life as means of communication is considered to be the key instrument for their development and change in contemporary times. Still their deep rooted problems are completely invisible, historically ignored and unnoticed. Social marginality is clearly visible due the lack of source of social power, but potential sources of prejudice and discrimination prevails among Santal community in tribal society.

Marginalisation: A Historical Context

Tribal societies in India have a very ancient and alive history and heritage of their own. They have their own cultural, religious, social, economical and political structures over generations for the centuries. The indigenous peoples' myths, stories, tales and songs reflect their social, political and cultural organisation. Nature, environment and ecology play important role in their lives. They have developed their religious beliefs and practices around these life-giving forces. But modern and literate society finds their religion 'animistic'- a derogative term that looks down upon the tribal religious way of life, makes them inherently marginalised.

As the tribals' settled in the forest established a symbiotic relationship with nature and built up with their social, economic and religious lives, the men in better position through deceit, fraud and force took away years of hard labour, individual-collective toil and dispossessed the tribal's livelihood, culture and religion making him further marginalised. Historical evidence, however, suggests three major trends emerged. First, there was colonisation and establishment of settlements (bhums) by peasant castes, who were encouraged by the Mughal rulers and Zamindars to reclaim lands and offered various incentives for this purpose, of by other categories of immigrants. The land system in the tribal area was integrated within the two broad systems of land tenure, the Zamindari and the Ryotwari systems. The tribal regions in Bihar, Bengal and eastern parts of the central provinces belonged to the first, and those in Bombay, Gujarat and the western parts of the central provinces to the second category. Tribal or non-tribal chiefs in the tribal regions were recognised as Zamindars/Malgujars; Ghatwals, the guardians of passes and wardens of marches (Bengal, Bihar, Berar); and Bissoyies, Muttadars and the other classes of the tribal landowners as occupancy tenants or sub-tenants. The processes of 'peasantisation' and 'de-peasantisation' were at work simultaneously. The latter could be seen in large-scale incidence of alienation of land from tribal's to non-tribal's.

A consequence of the imposition of the feudal superstructure on the tribal society was its breakdown and fragmentation into distinct social strata based on corresponding distribution of power and economic interest in land and defined in terms of ritual status. The new states acted as the agents of Sanskritisation but they also strengthened the sense of tribal identity. State-formation stimulated commercial activities developed trade routes and promoted small-scale urbanism. Land alienation and expropriation of forests during colonial period in tribal areas makes tribal people ousted from their society. At result, there were revolts like Kol and Bhumj during 19th century emerged against these oppressive acts. Thus, there were movements called the Santal 'hool' of 1855, the Birsa Munda-led 'ulugulan' in the 1890s, the uprising in Bastar in 1911, the protests in Gudem-Rampa in the 1920s, and the Warli revolt of 1945-46 [3]. Historical data abounds with the fact that the tribal were the original settlers where most of them survived today, or which their ancestors had occupied centuries ago. But their history has created and

brings tribal community as one in to the fold of exploitation, subjugation and marginalisation.

Post-colonial situation

During the post-colonial period, exploitation of Adivasi continued to be prominent in independent India where it resulted Maoist revolutionist. It became active in tribal areas due to neglect and exploitation. Lack of adoption of developmental policy and programs have forced the tribal people to get further marginalised. Over the past four decades from independent India, the Adivasis of central India have often expressed their public and collective discontent with the policies and programmes of the state. Due to neo-liberal policy, large scale industries were established in heart of tribal region in recent past, where the tribal people are displaced and make them alienated from their own land. Thus, tribal have been exploited and further marginalised.

Apart from these, it is evident that tribal people have remained backward since acute poverty of the these areas which is inflicted in several forms i.e. high level illiteracy, ill health, unemployment, low literacy, failure of commercial markets and lacking infrastructure. Coincidentally, tribal people are also subjected to ruthless exploitation in the hands of corrupt officials, middle persons, contractors and politicians. Despite all the promises and claims made by the government, they are hardly getting in terms of access to plans, programs and equality of opportunities. It has led them to remain socio-economically backward and marginalised.

Media Life and Social Change among Tribal Community

There are few scholars who conceptualised media life as a form of communication where people receive information in their everyday life. These means of communication could be it through mass form, indigenous form, cultural form or traditional form etc. Even if social scientists and media scholars argued that new media such as mobile, internet, social networking sites and all digital forms has become part of everyday life. Deuza argued that in these days, people live with media and has become media life among students and youth in contemporary times. For the marginalised community in general, in India particular, it is seen that people spend their quality time with their culture and social structure. These are considered as media life among Santal tribal community since they almost spend their life with culture and receive information through oral tradition and inter personal communication. Thus, there was felt need to understand the media life, its importance and the process of social change among these communities. This paper tries to look at media life and understand it in the context of communication through culture and society rather than examining modern and new media. It has been contextualised from the perspectives of communication irrespective of modern and cultural form and it's overlapping context. This paper on the exploration of media life and margin particularly among Santal

community is critically described through the communication and indices of change.

Communication system among tribal community in Odisha

Odisha is a state having 62 tribal communities, but Santal represents and occupies a unique position in the ethnographic map of India. Santals considered to be the third largest community in Odisha and scattered in eastern part of Odisha particularly in Mayurbhanj, Balasore and Keonjar district. They are found more than one third of their total strengths in India. This group at one extreme lead a relatively secluded of life keeping their core culture intact and the same time they depend generally agricultural activities. Santal tribal embodied the certain kind of cultural values, ethnicity and characterised with core contact of different form of communication which they become of part of cultural activity. Therefore, Santal indulge in cultural activity in such a way which creates an identity and distinctiveness. Even social activities i.e. ethnicity, language, rituals and festivals play a greater role in communicating and symbolising their identity. Nevertheless, their dress, ornament, art and craft are unique and provides meaning to the Santal community. At the same time, it considered to be one of the most important forms of communication which they retained their cultural form called cultural communication. It is important that media life has been explored through various mode and process of communication at village level. In Odisha, this communication process occurs among many tribal communities in some form or other, but Santal occupies with special distinctive character based on cultural and social structure. The following pattern of communication is widely used since it is the part of culture and it is very common for a tribal society

Oral tradition

The word of mouth is not measured in terms of price than any mode of communication, but it is required to identify the variety of this mode of communication as it revealed to us the inner compulsion of social formation. The rural poor have a greater affinity to the oral mode of communication because they cannot afford the increased costs of modern means of communication [4]. Therefore, media life among Santal in the form of oral communication, indigenous communication has been more attentive vociferously across their cultures to understand the change.

Language as culture

Traditional modes of communication persisted and still continue to persist in spite of efforts to introduce modern means of communication and mass media. Interpersonal communication such as word mouth vociferously displaces voracity as a means of communication in the tribal village. In terms of script and language, the efforts to evolve a script and build up an indigenous literature in tribal languages could be seen as part of an overall movement to define and assert tribal identity. The Alchiki (Santal script) has in fact become the

symbol of Santal identity. The Santali language was officially recognised in 2003 as per the constitutional amendment but before that the script was recognised in 1961 by the West Bengal government and arrangements to impart primary education in it were announced. Communication in the tribal society is inter-personal and intra-personal through which society is closely linked with its own ethos. The communication is devoid of any employment of the technology for dissemination of news and information in tribal society. In fact personal relations are heavily relied in traditional communication. Traditional modes of communication are institutionalised in various rituals i.e. Sanskars, art forms, music, festivals, leisure and so on. The communication is circumscribed by culture of society in which it operates with its local moorings [5].

Communication and culture

Communication is a product of culture and culture determines the social code, structure, meaning and social context of the communication that takes place in any society. Communication and culture are intricately related. Thus, culture also plays an important role in the social development of communities. For generations, rural populations living in isolated villages without access to modern means of communication rely on the spoken word and traditional forms of communication as a means of transmitting culture, knowledge, history and customs. Therefore, the proverbs, songs, stories, dance and other entertaining forms have a special function in culture since it has communicative and symbolic meaning [6].

Media life through culture broadly subsumes three aspects. Firstly, communication is preserved through rituals, festivals, customs, day to day practices, folk dialects, folk songs, other oral traditions, and aesthetic folk culture. Secondly, all these cultural goods and practices communicate about social stratification, economic and political structure which are all part of communication structure. Thirdly, these all overlap each other to express themselves in the communication process. According to Wilbur Schram, communication is an integral process of a society. It preserves and transmits the culture of society. The definitions of tradition and communication by and large are synonymous and complementary with each other. Tradition means something which is transmitted from generation to generation through the medium of communication. Only the nature of channel has been changing from generation to generation. Now word of mouth is replaced by mass media to some extent. Thus, communication has played an important role in preserving and communicating tradition.

Communication among Santal community

Santal are homogenous in terms of their culture, life style and concerns for their own community. There is numerous form of indigenous communication through traditional media like folk theatre, folk songs, narrative forms like ballads, folk tales, other story telling religious discourses, puppet shows etc are found to be seen where Santal community communicates

through these cultural artefacts. Other than this, oral folk lore like folk speech, proverbs and riddles folk rhymes; traditional poetry like folk narratives and their music; customary folklore such as folk beliefs, superstition, folk customs and festivals; folk dance, drama gestures and folk games are found to be more prevalent in Santal society. Material folklore like folk architecture; crafts, arts, customs and foods and folk dances, rituals, symbols, gestures, the use of colour-all of these played an invariably vital role in communication by Santal community.

Drama, dance, song, storytelling, puppetry and representation are found to be played a major role for communication in terms of spreading messages and information. Even the tribal indigenous language gives evident of this; for instance an extensive vocabulary was developed in relation to hunting, tracking and bagging of prey. These cultural practices have communicative meaning and symbolic cultural messages. Thus, traditional communication forms are a part of the culture of the tribal society. Not only these are familiar to the members of tribal society is concerned, but they take the form of social events like parties, celebrations etc. for cultural communication.

In everyday life, communication in the form of mediated information and the cultural values of marginal groups is to be considered as a communicative resource and tool. Preserving cultural diversity, local languages and traditional systems of communication in the era of globalisation is considered to be one of the major challenges for communication practitioners in this new information age. Not only the culture and social structure, availability and consumption of mass media by Santal community of India in general, Odisha in particular, is found to be hardly seen. Thus, mass mediated form of communication may be one way communication which is necessarily secondary for a tribal community in India, but culture is the most important form of communication for tribal community in general, Santal in particular.

Folk media and socio-cultural rites

The study of the social cultural rites like marriage and other Vedic rites are important to know how communication is integrated with cultural ethos of society. Such studies on oral tradition and folk culture have been done by sociologists like Majumdar [7], Stephen Fuch and Shyam Permar [8]. These studies highlight folk cultures and aesthetics in the context of culture and diversity and it's changes in the folk society. Rituals, songs and recreational media are parts of culture which has communicative value and system. The status of a person within the social stratification is communicated in social functions, and festivals [9]. Indigenous media aims to entertain, educate and inform as well as it ensures social and persuasive communication. Over a period of time, traditional media or indigenous form of communication makes an attempt to reach common people for the change and development. When modern media has penetrated isolated areas, the older forms keep intact their validity.

The various literatures suggest that traditional forms of communication can be effective in dispelling the superstitions, perceptions. People in rural and tribal areas have inherited

their traditions and cultures since it penetrates the message of development through different mode of communication. One will have to opt the folk forms of this country in more planned manner since it represents the people in their natural settings, with all their multifarious activities. Considering the diversity and unity of India, it is important to see the folk theatre in its natural settings which becomes a part of culture since it communicates and helps in getting everyday information. Social change among tribal community reflects at the result of amount of information they consume through their culture.

Mass media and social change

Other than culture and communication, paper emphasizes the modern form of mass media like television and radio which impacts and influences tribal life. It is evident that the cultural background of tribes, communication system in tribal habitats, tribals' problem has been quietly resolved through mass media [10]. Wide exposure to mass media is limited in tribal habitats, thus it emphasizes and impacts on their socio-cultural life, the development and change. Transport communication and mass media brings the isolated tribal communities into the limelight and integrates them into the main stream. Discussion suggests that the role played by communication for development process and the diffusion of innovations need re-examining. There was close relationship between an increase in mass communication and indicators of development such as literacy, urbanization and mobility rates and modernisation begins with how public communication-which diffuses new ideas and information that stimulates people to want to behave in new ways. The mass media is hardly playing a major role in bringing changes in the life styles of the people in Santal society since it the mode of communication is not a direct way for everyday interaction. In the process of communication, the people know about the things happening around them. It is the needful for a human society to improve knowledge and for knowing the new innovations and modern technology.

Mass media acts as means for development and social change. The media helps bringing peoples together; give those voices and power to bargain in the choices of development and rights in an era of modern science and technology due to the forces of globalization. It has been evident that most of the problems in modern era are largely due to a lack of better mode, patterns and availability of communication. Thus, communication is said to bear a potential role in solving such problem.

Media life and emancipation of marginalisation

There has been a major shift from cultural marginalisation to social change among tribal community over a long period of time. Socio-cultural life has long been seen with cultural communication. Socio-cultural processes are invisible but are seen in wider context in their changing life style and manage their day today life. Economic and social life of Santal communities is relatively found to be improved since they are dependant with the modernisation and urbanisation. It can be argued that there is strong relation between the practices of modernity and changes in life style with the influence of

source of information and communication. Therefore, information necessity and hunger for news could solve the problem and change a human society. Particularly, tribal community in general, Santal in particular could be in the process wiping historical marginality. Socio-economic change may lead to emancipate of marginality of tribal community as a result of modern form of communication along with communication through culture. This paper made an attempt to help to understand the process, volume and nature of change of tribal society in general, Santal in particular as due to the modernisation process. Media life, not only through mass form of media, but both oral, traditional and culture has been critically analysed in the context of Santal. Thus, the study helped to understand for the process and emphasizes of policy making for tribal development. Further marginalisation processes among the Santal tribal community were understood in the broader context of communication, culture and information. Therefore, the paper extends the ideas of communication which has been embedded in culture and media both together.

Conclusion

The communication plays an important role in socio-political and economic development of country. The analysis reveals that the media life may be either modern means of communication or traditional, but both have equal influence on social development of community since it helps to find alternatives ways of living with dignity. Communication not only helps to raise a family's socio-economic status, but creates demand for goods, help in increasing literacy rate and living standards etc. Evidences and findings suggest that there has been a shift from age old traditional knowledge and status; and ability to achieve power and prestige due to means of communication. Thus, not only the mass media alone, rather the culture of the community helps to bring changes from hereditary to achievements, tradition to modern etc. Similarly, the increases in awareness and conscious among tribal community significantly increased through mass media as well as through their culture in everyday life. Thus, they were able to get not only developmental information and knowledge, but it makes the community to achieve the power through unity and connectedness [11]. Paper also suggests that the development of the mass media enables the people to get the necessary information and make them to participate in the national system [12]. Similarly most of the tribal problems have been resolved with appropriate and effective mode of communication with their culture in recent times as it has become the part of media life. Henceforth, media life brings the marginalised tribal communities into the forefront of mainstream society and helps them in participation of developmental process in everyday life.

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