



## Media and Social Change: A Study on the Improved Conditions of Maternal Health among the Tribals Living in Birbhum District, West Bengal

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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper has attempted to study how media acts as an agent of social transformation to bring about changes in the existing health scenario of the scheduled tribes in Birbhum district, West Bengal. The paper focuses extensively in the domain of maternal health and how media has helped to bring about a transition in the concept of health. The main objectives of this paper are (a) to find out the different levels of educational status of the scheduled tribes across eight villages in Birbhum District, West Bengal; (b) to make a note of the various medical stances practiced by the 'Daima'; (c) to find out the utility of media among the tribals in the studied villages; (d) to analyse the role of media in the process of change and development in terms of maternal health of the scheduled tribes in the studied areas. To fulfil the purpose of this research study both primary and secondary data has been used. To gather primary data from the field interview method has been used. Through these methods, the paper reviews that instead of going for traditional methods of delivering children, the expectant tribal mothers are visiting the local hospital. Therefore, the present paper concludes by saying that though in the recent times the*

*new mothers are not engaging the "Daima" for the birth of their children, the fact that their service is required for the neonatal care of their children cannot be ruled out.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary society mass media is playing a major role in bringing changes in the life styles of the people in any society. It is through the process of communication that people are gaining information about the things happening around them. It is the responsibility of the human society to improve knowledge and know about the new innovations and modern technology. Theorists have explained that there is an influence of communication as a significant factor in development. They also refer to communication and economy as the means of development process. The development of the mass media has enabled the people to receive the necessary information and as a result gives them the opportunity to participate in the national system.

In the last decade the influence of media has grown rapidly with the advance of technology. At first there was the telegraph, then the radio, the newspaper, magazines, television and now we have the internet.



We live in a society that depends on information and communication to keep moving in the right track and do our daily activities of work, entertainment, health care, education, personal relationships, travelling and any other work.

Just as the way media has had an effect on the lives of the urban people, the tribal people have also felt the change that has been brought about by media. Media has brought about social change in various aspects of the lives of the tribal people. The most notable change in the recent times has been noticed in the domain of tribal health facilities, especially in the case of maternal health. In the villages of Birbhum district, West Bengal it has been noticed that most of the tribal populations possess the knowledge of Janani Suraksha Yojana, which is a safe motherhood intervention under the National Rural Health Mission (NHM). Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) was launched in April 2005 by modifying the National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS). JSY was primarily launched by providing the financial assistance of Rs. 500/- , which was available uniformly throughout the country to BPL pregnant women under NMBS.

The present study looks into how much useful social media has been in making the tribal communities aware of the various medical practices relating to maternal health. The role of the various types of media in providing knowledge and bringing about change and development in the tribal populated villages has also been traced. The paper also analyses the dominance of few traditional medical practices which the tribal communities still follow, even though

they are using and depending on modern technology for the fulfilment of other daily needs and necessities.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objectives of this paper are:

1. To find out the different levels of educational status of the scheduled tribes in eight villages, Birbhum District, West Bengal.
2. To make a note of the various medical stances practiced by the 'Daima'.
3. To find out the utility of media among the tribals in the studied villages.
4. To analyse the role of media in the process of change and development in terms of maternal health of the scheduled tribes in the studied areas.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The study has been conducted across eight villages in Birbhum District, West Bengal. The villages were namely Bondanga, Dhultikuri, Donaipur, Durgapur, Jaljalia, Kurumba Ghosh, Padmabatipur and Phuldanga. Qualitative and quantitative methods have both been used to serve the purpose of the study. The total number of households that has been studied in all the villages is 341. Primary data has been collected from every household that has been surveyed among the eight villages with the use of an interview schedule. Apart from the interview schedule, there were some open ended questions which were asked to maximize the collection of data to fulfil the purpose of the research.

## **DATA INTERPRETATION**

The empirical data of the studied villages are interpreted below:-

Table 1: Distribution of the Studied Households of the STs in Eight Villages, Birbhum District, West Bengal

<b>Villages</b>	<b>Total Households</b>	<b>%</b>
Bondanga	52	15.25
Dhultikuri	97	28.45
Donaipur	12	3.52
Durgapur	53	15.54
Jaljalía	17	4.98
Kurumba Ghosh	8	2.35
Padmabatipur	42	12.32
Phuldanga	60	17.58
<b>Total</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>99.99</b>

The survey was conducted across eight villages in Birbhum district, West Bengal involving a total of 341 households. 52 households were surveyed in Bondanga village, while 97 households were studied in Dhultikuri village. The number of households surveyed in Donaipur was 12, in Durgapur it was 53 and Jaljalía numbered 17 households. The number of households studied in Kurumba Ghosh, Padmabatipur and Phuldanga was 8, 42 and 60 respectively.

Table 2: Village-Wise Population Distribution of the STs as per Sex in Eight Villages, Birbhum District, West Bengal

<b>Villages</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Bondanga	115	7.67	114	7.6	229	15.27
Dhultikuri	204	13.6	194	12.93	398	26.53
Donaipur	28	1.87	28	1.87	56	3.73
Durgapur	115	7.67	113	7.53	228	15.2
Jaljalía	42	2.8	36	2.4	78	5.2
Kurumba Ghosh	13	0.87	11	0.73	24	1.6
Padmabatipur	86	5.73	91	6.07	177	11.8
Phuldanga	150	10	160	10.66	310	20.66
<b>Total</b>	<b>753</b>	<b>50.2</b>	<b>747</b>	<b>49.79</b>	<b>1500</b>	<b>99.99</b>

A village wise examination of the eight villages in Birbhum district, West Bengal revealed that the numbers of male and female inhabitants of Bondanga was 115 males and 114 females; Dhultikuri was 204 males and 194 females; Donaipur was 28 males and 28 females; Durgapur was 115 males and 113 females; Jaljalía was 42 males and 36 females; Kurumba Ghosh was 13 males and 11 females; Padmabatipur was 86 males and 91 females; and Phuldanga was 150 males and 160 females.

Table 3: Distribution of Population of the STs in accordance with the Specific Tribes, across Eight Villages, Birbhum District, West Bengal.

Tribes	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Kol	13	0.87	11	0.73	24	1.59
Kora	71	4.73	61	4.07	132	8.8
Oraon	109	7.27	86	5.73	195	13
Santal	560	37.33	589	39.26	1149	76.6
Total	753	50.2	747	49.79	1500	99.99

The eight villages studied revealed that their population consisted of the following main tribes, namely Kol which had a population of 24, Kora whose population was 132 and the number of Oraons were 195. The dominant tribe of these villages is Santhal which has a total population of 1149, which is more than the total of all the other three tribes.

Table 4: Educational Status of the STs in Eight Villages, Birbhum District, West Bengal

Class Standards	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Illiterate	149	9.93	266	17.73	415	27.67
Pre-Literate	180	11.99	173	11.53	353	23.53
I-IV	118	7.87	87	5.8	205	13.67
V-VIII	145	9.67	105	7	250	16.66
IX-X	126	8.39	87	5.8	213	14.20
XI-XII	23	1.53	17	1.13	40	2.66
U.G	9	0.6	12	0.8	21	1.4
P.G	3	0.2	-	-	3	0.2
Total	753	50.2	747	49.79	1500	99.99
Literacy Rate	40.26%		32.06%		72.32%	

Post the survey revealed that most of the population, both males and females were illiterate (27.67%) or had elementary education or had just passed class X (14.20%) and very few of the population were graduates (1.4%) or had completed their post graduation (0.2%). Thus the literacy rate of the males among the surveyed villages was 40.26% while that of the females were 32.06%.

Table 5: Health Information Sources per Household in the studied villages, Birbhum District, West Bengal

Sources of Information	Bondanga	Dhultikuri	Donaipur	Durgapur	Jaljalía	Kuramba Ghosh	Padmabatipur	Phuldanga	Total	%
Anganwadi Workers	6	16	3	5	3	3	7	5	48	14.07
Club	2	6	2	2	3	2	2	2	21	6.15
Health Workers	20	34	5	21	5	3	20	25	133	39.00
Internet	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mobile	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Newspapers	4	1	-	2	-	-	-	6	13	3.81
Political Leader	2	-	-	2	1	-	1	2	8	2.34
Radio	3	1	-	4	2	-	-	3	13	3.81
Teacher	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	3	0.87
Television	14	39	2	16	3	-	12	16	102	29.91
Total	52	97	12	53	17	8	42	60	341	99.96

The survey conducted has revealed the various sources through which most of the population in the villages have received information on the maternal health services. The percentage of the sources of information that has contributed to spread awareness are: Anganwadi workers – 14.07%, Club – 6.15%, Health workers – 39%, Newspapers – 3.81%, Political leaders – 2.34%, Radio – 3.81%, Teachers – 0.87% and Television – 29.91%. On the other hand it was found that the internet and the mobile have no role to play in popularising awareness among the villagers.

Table 6: Effects of Media on Health Awareness among the STs in Eight Villages, Birbhum District, West Bengal

Name of the Villages	Awareness About Maternity Services			
	Family Aware	%	Family Not Aware	%
Bondanga	44	12.9	8	2.35
Dhultikuri	90	26.39	7	2.05
Donaipur	12	3.52	0	0
Durgapur	43	12.6	10	2.93
Jaljalía	13	3.81	4	1.17
Kuramba Ghosh	4	1.17	4	1.17
Padmabatipur	36	10.56	6	1.76
Phuldanga	55	16.13	5	1.47
Total	297	87.08	44	12.9

The survey that was conducted among the eight villages in Birbhum district revealed that most of the families in the villages were aware of the medical practices that benefit the health of the women in the villages. According to them, the awareness in them was a result of the effect that media exercised in their villages. The percentage of the families that were aware of the maternity services in Bondanga was 12.9%; Dhultikuri was 26.39%; Donaipur was 3.52%; Durgapur was 12.6%; Jaljalía was 3.81%; Kuramba Ghosh was 1.17%; Padmabatipur was 10.56%; and Phuldanga was 16.13%.



## THE ANALYSIS

The survey that has been conducted in the eight villages across Birbhum district, West Bengal among the tribal communities reveal that the tribals are well in pace with the processes of change and development. Most of this change and development has been brought about by the influence of the media. Media has had a very strong impact on the lives of the urban cosmopolitan population and the tribals were not far from not being touched and influenced by media.

The electronic media, namely the television and the radio has played a very important role in spreading awareness among the tribal population in the studied villages. Through the radio the tribals have got to know a lot which concerns their health. The radio has made the tribal people think otherwise and go for modern remedies and solutions for their health related issues. A commendable job has been done by Akashbani Shantiniketan who has constantly conducted programmes on air to reach out to the common tribal people. They have managed to reach out to all those common people who live within a radius of 30 km in and around Bolpur, Shaniniketan. They have made the people aware of how important the health programmes are which have been made available for them by the Government. Most of their on-air programmes have been conducted with the help of the available doctors and local health workers who have also taken up the duty of serving the masses.

Along with radio, the television has also played an important role in the improving the health conditions of the tribal people. During the study it was revealed that most of the tribal households possessed a television for recreational aspects. It is during the time the tribals watch television that they realise that many modern medical facilities have been made available to the common masses. These modern medical facilities have been put across the television in such a dramatic and useful way, that it has a quick effect on the common masses. As a result of these

programmes, it has been seen that the tribal population are visiting the nearest hospital or medical centres for any treatment. Maximum responses were seen with regard to maternal services. Most of the tribal communities were well versed about the Janani Suraksha Yojana of the National Rural Health Mission. This was seen when most women visited the hospitals and medical centres for the delivery of their children. The tribal communities also wanted that their children be brought into this world in good hygienic conditions so that their children are born in the best of health and they are medicated properly. Therefore it can be said that social media has benefited the tribal communities and has been able to bring about a change in their way of life.

But how far the tribal population practice these new facilities that have been made available to them, remains a big question. It has been seen that even though the expectant mothers are visiting the nearby hospitals and medical centres for the delivery of their children, they are still relying on the services of the “daima” (ethnic midwife). The expectant mothers urge the “daima” to be along their side when they are on their way to the hospital prior to their delivery, for they fear that if the child is born on their way then the hospital will not in a position to anything. But if the “daima” is by their side, then they can play their role. Thus it is seen that even though the tribals are visiting the hospital for their delivery, they still trust the “daima” for their role in child birth.

Also it is seen that post child birth, the new mothers are engaging the “daima” for the care of their new born child. They still believe that the “daima” is the best for neonatal care of their children. They fail to believe that after a normal delivery of their child at the hospital the “daima” services are not required. But the tribal communities have chosen to cling on to these few traditional practices even though they are





entrusting the hospital and the medical centres for the normal birth of their children. Therefore it can be said that in spite of the successful attempts of the social media to inculcate modern techniques among the tribal communities, a section of the population still chooses to propagate the age-old traditional practices.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude it can be said that social media has proved an important agent in bringing about change among the tribal communities of the studied eight villages in Birbhum district, West Bengal. It has been through the radio, the television, the newspaper and other sources that the tribal people have come in contact with the socially advanced and modernised world. In fact these media sources have been effective in popularising the importance of new medical facilities for the maintenance of good health conditions. Most attention has been paid to improving the conditions of maternal health among the tribal communities. Therefore it can be said that social media has been successful in enlightening the tribal communities in the sphere of maternal health. Though the fact that the tribal population still depend on the traditional “daima” services cannot be denied and overlooked. Thus, the media has traversed a long and tough path in bringing about these changes which has proved beneficial for the mainstreaming of the tribal communities. But a lot more still remains to be achieved in the domain of improved maternal health among the tribal communities of the villages in the Birbhum district of West Bengal.

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