

Mass Media and Tribal Life: A Study in Visakha Agency Area of Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT Communication become part of the life of mankind and a day passes without it. Through communication people can establish social relationship get knowledge and improve their living conditions. It is one of the means for development and change. The media brings the people together and helping for the globalization process in the modern scientific era. All of the problems of the world are communication problems and all the problems in this world can be solved by more and better communication. Similarly most of the tribal problems can be solved with appropriate and effective mode of communication. Transport communication and mass media brings the isolated tribal communities into the limelight and integrates them into the main stream. The present paper presents the cultural background of tribes, communication system in tribal habitats, tribal's problems and their exposure to mass media in five tribal settlements of Visakha agency area. It highlights the role of mass media in tribal development and change.

INTRODUCTION

The mass media is playing a major role in bringing changes in the life styles of the people in any society. In the process of communication the people know about the things happening around them. It is needful to the human society to improve knowledge and for knowing the new innovations and modern technology. Lakshmana Rao (1966) has explained that the "influence of communication as a significant factor in development". Schramm (1964) speaks of communication and economy as the means of development process. The development of the mass media enable the people to get the necessary information and make them to participate in the national system. Golding pointed out the "theories of exogenously induced change relevant to media theory, suggest that static societies are brought to life by outside influences, technical aid, knowledge, resources and financial assistance and by the diffusion of ideas" (1974: 43).

The media theorists assumed that social action can be understood mainly in terms of individual beliefs and attitudes, the ways in which attitudes may be the product rather than the cause of economic conditions and power relationships and this is crucial problem in understanding the role of media in any society. Long (1977) explained that developed economy is characterized as a highly differentiated structure and an under-

developed one as relatively lacking in differentiation. Hence, change centres on the process of differentiation itself. By differentiation Smelser means the process by which more specialized and more autonomous social units are established. This do he sees occurring in several different spheres: in the economy, the family, the political system and religious institution (1977: 9-10).

The cultural anthropologists are mostly concentrating to understand the cultures of different human groups, in holistic perspective. And also they are trying to examine the levels of development and change in the lives of different human groups due to acculturation, innovation and diffusion of new ideas through the process of communication. Paul Hartmann et al. (1989) carefully documented the role of mass media on the lives of rural people in India. There is no significant study on this problem in Tribal communities of India. The present study contributes to the problem and fills the gap.

The aim of the paper is to discuss the role of mass media on tribal life of Visakha agency area of Andhra Pradesh. The study was conducted in the tribal villages like Vanthala Chintala, Dumbriguda and Balluguda of Dumbriguda mandal, Lakshmipuram in Ananthagiri mandal and Vamugedda Kothuru in Chintapalle mandal of Visakhapatnam district. The villages Vanthala Chintala, Dumbriguda and Balluguda are situated on the road side and well connected with the

mandal headquarters Dumbriguda, Araku, Paderu and Visakhapatnam. The village Lakshmipuram is situated at a distance of 4 kilometers from the mandal headquarters Ananthagiri. The village Vamugedda Kothuru is situated at a distance of 7 kilometers from the mandal headquarter Chintapalle. These two villages are lack of proper road transportation communication facilities. Among these five tribal settlements, Dumbriguda have better infrastructural facilities because it is the mandal head quarters.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study is based on the empirical data collected from 198 respondents from five tribal settlements, namely Vanthala Chintala, Balluguda, Dumbriguda, Vamugadda Kothuru and Lakshmipuram, which are located in the sub-plan area of Paderu ITDA and falls in the Visakha agency. The study focused on the major tribes like Bagata, Konda Dora, Kotiya, Nooka Dora, Mali, Valmiki, Konda Kammara and Muliya or Duliya. Conventional Anthropological methods like observation, schedule and interview were used to collect the data from the head of the households. Tribe-wise selection of the respondents in the field villages shown in the Table 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural background of the tribals in Visakha agency area is presented in the paper. Apart from this the existing communication system and tribal peoples exposure to mass media items and its impact on their life in the study villages also explained in the paper. The study reveals that about 83.84% of the respondents have exposed to folk media items, 81.82% of them are exposed

to film media, 56.50% of them are exposed to radio media and 13.4% of them are exposed to newspaper media. They are not access to TV media. Among the modern media items, film media is access to large majority of the tribals in Visakha agency area.

Cultural Background of the Tribes: The study covers the tribes like Bagata, Konda Dora, Kotiya, Nooka Dora, Konda Kammara, Mali, Valmiki and Muliya. The material culture, food habits, dress and ornaments are almost similar in all the tribes of Dumbriguda, Ananthagiri and Chintapalle mandals of Visakha agency area. Majority of the tribal population in the selected villages are belongs to Konda Dora, Bagata and Valmiki tribes. Konda Doras claims to be the descendants of Pandavas and they call themselves as Hindus. They worship the Pandavas and a goddess called '*Thalupulamma*'. According to Thurston (1909) "The Konda Doras are a caste of Hill cultivators found chiefly in Visakhapatnam". And also he explains, they are completely at the mercy of late immigrants so much so that they call themselves Konda Doras, they are called by the Bhaktas, their immediate superiors Konda Kapus. If they are found living in a village with no Telugu superiors and they are known as Doras. The Konda Doras of the area claim themselves as Pandava Kulam and they have been written as a title of the Doras. In the local hierarchy they hold third rank, the first and second places are taken by Bagatas and Kotiyas, respectively. The Bagatas are considered to be the native tribals and superior group in the area. About 24% of the tribal population in the district of Visakhapatnam belongs to Bagata tribe. It is the dominant tribe in Visakha agency area. The Valmiki claim their descent from the Sage Valmiki and they are considered as the immigrants. Their ancestors

Table 1: Tribe-wise selection of respondents in the field villages

S. No.	Name of the tribe	Name of the village					Total	% to total
		Vanthala Chintala	Balluguda	Dumbri-guda	Vamugadda Kothuru	Lakhmi Puram		
1.	Bagata	-	8	-	27	-	35	17.67
2.	Konda Dora	14	-	-	7	43	64	32.32
3.	Kotiya	-	-	11	-	-	11	5.55
4.	Nooka Dora	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.51
5.	Konda Kammara	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.51
6.	Mali	-	-	-	3	-	3	1.52
7.	Valmiki	-	27	42	6	-	75	37.88
8.	Muliya (Dulia)	-	-	8	-	-	8	4.04
	Total	14	35	61	44	44	198	100

migrated into agency area long ago from the plain area. The Valmiki in the agency area considered to be the inferior and down-trodden community. The Nooka Doras are traditionally regarded as one of the primitive hill tribes, but their customs at the present day exhibit a great deal of low-country influence. The Kotiyas are more orthodox and religion bounded people in the agency area. The Malis are the vegetable growers in the area. The Konda Kammara is the blacksmith community and the Telugu speaking hill tribe of Andhra Pradesh. The Muliya is a Oriya speaking hill tribe. They are migrated into the agency area long back from Orissa state.

The tribal settlements are sparsely distributed in the entire agency area. Each settlement is surrounded by the hills and forest. Most of the primitive tribes settlements are found on the top of the hill and hill slopes. The tribal economy is Agro-forest based one. They are mostly depending on settled cultivation, shifting cultivation (*Podu*) and minor forest produce collection. Their economy is still largely considered to be subsistence economy. Majority of its population stand below poverty line. They are facing the major economic problems like food insecurity, illiteracy, indebtedness and land alienation. They are exploited by the non-tribal moneylenders and traders in numerous ways because of their innocence, ignorance and illiteracy. The tribal ecology is largely prone to malnutrition in Visakha agency area. The incidence of malaria and other water borne diseases are more in the area. Most of the tribal settlements in the area lack of proper transportation communication facilities. The interior tribal people used to walk miles together to reach the road point to catch the bus. Shandi (*Santha*), the weekly market is the main centre for buying and selling goods. And also it is the centre for social gathering and communication.

Food Habits: The staple food of the tribal people is *Ambali* (Gruel), made up of with ragi flour. The consumption of rice among the tribals is very less. Almost all the tribes are non-vegetarians. A few tribes like Valmiki, Kondh and Porja eat beef. Tribal people in the area usually gather edible fruits, roots and tubers in the forest mainly for their subsistence. Occasionally they participate in small hunting games in which they catch wild fowls, pigs, hares and some birds for their own consumption purpose. Oil is rarely used as cooking medium. They collect the cotyledon

of the mango to prepare the gruel out of it after a process. This gruel is taken as food during the seasons when other sources of food is not easily available within the area. Both men and women smoke cigars and chew tobacco. Almost all men and women take alcoholic beverages like Arrack (*Sara*), Sago palm toddy (*Jeelugu Kallu*), and rice beer (*Maddi*). Alcoholism among the tribals is too much. Most of their earnings they spent for this purpose.

Dress and Ornaments: The dressing pattern of the tribal people is very simple. The elderly men usually cover their lower part with *Pancha* (Doti) or *Gochi* (a piece of line cloth around the waist) and left their upper part bareness. The youth wear trouser and banian or shirt. The young women wear saree and blouse, but the older generation among them still wear the saree only to cover the lower part and breast. Hence, shoulders left uncovered. The tribal women folk are not fond of gold jewellery, the jewellery which they wear are mostly made up with silver and copper. They wear glass bangles and beads. Some of the tribal women wear necklaces which are made with 25 paise and 50 paise coins. The nasal septum and both the nasal wings are punctured along with ear lobes and these bear silver studs.

Language: Language is the most essential medium for communication. Majority of the tribal population speak the regional language 'Telugu'. Apart from the regional language, some tribes have their own dialects. The Valmiki speak Kupia whereas the Konda Doras have the mother tongue Kubi or Konda Bhasha. The Kotiya, Muliya and Khond tribes speak the corrupted form of Oriya. The Savaras of Srikakulam district speak the Savara language. The Konda language belongs to the Gadaba group of the Dravidian family. It is spoken by some of the tribals in Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam districts of Andhra Pradesh and Khoraput district of Orissa. The total number of Konda speakers according to 1981 census is 15,651.

Large majority of their households are thatched huts. In recent time the government has provided the tiled houses to some of the tribal families in the area. They use both clay pots and aluminium utensils for cooking purpose. Most of the tribals use the dried bottle gourds as spoons, *Abake* (a vessel to transfer liquids) for carrying food and water.

Social divisions like clan, lineage and family

are common in any tribal group. A tribal group is divided into clans, each clan is further divided into lineages and each lineage consists of several families. For instance the Konda Doras have the totem (clan) divisions like Naga, Surya, and Korra, and also they have the *intiperlu* (surnames) like Nandula, Somula, Janni, Boyina, Badmani, Deesara, Chittam, Tamala, Gammela, Pangi and Jami. Nuclear type of families are more in number among all the tribes. The tribes in the area are following the patriarchal system. Monogamy is the preferential form of marriage even though, polygamy is permitted. Number of polygamous marriages are very less because of economic reasons. The marriage by capture, elopement and service are also in practice, but number of such cases are very less. Widow remarriage is permitted, both levirate and sororate are in practice among them. Divorce is also permitted with the concern of the tribal head. The marital bonds are very weak among the tribal people. Extra marital relations are common among them.

The tribals still having the superstitious beliefs. They worship nature. The local Guruvu is the religious head and priest who officiates the rituals. *Etikela* Panduga is the most important festival to all the tribes of Visakha ageancy area. Besides this they also celebrate the Hindu festivals like Sankranti, Deepavali and Sivaratri. *Modukondamma* thirunallu is the important fair, organized collectively at Paderu in every year during the month of May, which is attended by large majority of the tribal people in the area. Some of the tribal people in the area visit the pilgrimage place Simhachalam once in every year. Two decades back a few tribal people were converted into Christianity and they attend the Sunday mass in their respective churches. The Christian orphanage attracted them to made conversion into Christianity. The Christian communication is also in operation in the agency area.

Each tribal village has its own traditional panchayat under the leadership of a tribal head. The tribal head position is hereditary in nature. Generally the tribal head owns large extent of land when compared to others in a village locality. The tribal council or head usually deal the cases like divorce, adultery, elopement, thefts, family and property disputes. The tribal council or head is the supreme political body to take decisions on village matter. The tribal head acts as a opinion leader and spokesman to the entire tribal community of a locality. The tribals interaction

with the political system of the state or nation is very limited. It begins with election campaign and ends with voting. The tribal people in the area actively participate only in the local panchayat elections.

Communication System: The tribal people in the area usually receive information from outside through inter-personnel or oral communication and mass communication. They receive the messages through certain channels like (1) Persons visiting their place, (2) Local people going out of the area and coming back as either migrants or commuters or from visiting towns and other places for marketing and for other business. (3) Government officials and extension agents who visits the area frequently on official purpose. (4) Postal and telegraphic communication (5) Mass media. The large majority of the tribal people are access to inter-personnel or oral communication which is much effective when compared with that of mass media devices.

In a tribal settlement the *Gossiping Centres* and the public meeting places are the main information providing centres. In such places the information flows from the word of mouth (oral). Within a tribal village the information spreads through public announcements, intra and inter-group communication. The traditional media of public announcements or tum-tums are the most effective communication, locally called *Dondora* or *Chattimpu*. In this process the traditional village *vetti* or *Barika* is paid a nominal fee to go around the village, beat the Tum-Tum and announcing the news pertaining to public meetings, officials visit to the village or area, village deities festivals etc. Generally the Socio-ceremonial messages are carried by themselves and inform to their close kith and kin. In recent times some of the literate elite among them are using the printing media also to communicate the messages relating to wedding ceremony.

The shandy place (weekly market) is considered to be the most effective communication channel to the tribal people in the agency area. It is the main marketing, social gathering place and news disseminating centre for the tribals. Each shandy covers atleast a distance of 10 kilometers radius. In the study area, Dubriguda, Ananthagiri and Chintapalle are the centres for weekly markets. The weekly markets usually held on every Thursday at Dumbriguda, on Wednesday at Chintapalle, and on every Monday at Ananthagiri. On the shandy day, all the

members of a tribal family visit such place to buy certain essential commodities and to sell surplus produce, and to meet close kith and kin who also attend it. There they usually exchange their ideas and provide information to one another pertaining to socio-ceremonial and family matters. The tribal unmarried youth show much interest to attend the shandy with a view to choose their marital partners. In certain extent leads to marriage by elopement and capture. The informants said that the shandy place is most convenient to them for marriage negotiation. The government extension agents also quite often visit such place to disseminate information to the tribals about their activities. It is also the place for culture contact. The tribal people used to interact with the non-tribal traders of the plain area who attend it on their business purpose.

The mass media is classified into (1) Folk media and (2) Modern media. Among these, the folk media items are more access to the tribals of the area, when compared with that of modern media items. Folk media items are very much popular in the area even today. The main forms of folk media are drama, folk songs, story telling (*Burra Katha*) and dance. Occasionally the tribal council of a particular village organize the dramas of both traditional and modern types collectively by raising contributions. The playlets are performed by different dramatic groups of non-tribals who are the residents of S. Kota, Narsipatnam and Vizianagaram. A few tribals are efficient in singing the folk songs. The folk songs are sung either by single person or a group of persons. These are mostly sung by tribal folk while they are engaged in the agricultural activities or during socio-ceremonial occasions. Folk singing largely confined to the tribal women folk.

Dimsa is the most popular and famous tribal dance in the area in which both men and women participates irrespective of age and sex. This is performed in each and every social, ceremonial and religious festival occasions. They consider it as an entertainment and they express their happiness by participating in it. It includes both singing and dancing accompanied with the music (drums beating and fluit). The tribal folk songs illustrates the tribal mythology, beliefs and nature in which they are dwelling.

Katha or folk tale is presented by a single man or three people, one in the lead and the two in support (*Burra Katha*). This form of folk tale is

occasionally arranged by the public relations department of ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency) Paderu, in different tribal settlements. One such event took place at Dumbriguda during our field trip. It was attended by large number of tribals of Dumbriguda area. The *Burra Katha* item is performed by the non-tribal persons of S.Kota and Vizianagaram who are efficient in it. The public relations department specially brought them to perform *Burra Katha* at Dumbriguda with a view to explain the objectives of the Tribal Development Programmes in this form to the tribal people. On some occasions the tribals themselves arrange it to know the stories of epics and other historical events or stories of the region. They mostly treat it as entertainment and recreation. Table 2 explains the respondents exposure to folk media. From the table it is noticed that 83.84% respondents were seen the folk media items during study period.

Table 2: Respondents exposure to folk media

S.No.	No. of folk media items seen	No. of respondents	% to total
1	Nil	32	16.16
2	1-2	53	26.17
3	3 - 5	61	30.81
4	6 - 8	22	11.11
5	9 - 10	19	9.60
6	11 + above	11	5.55
Total		198	100

Tribal People's Exposure to Modern Media Items: The modern media of mass communication to which the tribal people of the area are exposed to that significant are films, radio and newspaper. The Table 3 explains the respondents exposure to film media. Out of the total sample, 98 (49.49%) of them seen 1-5 films, 37 (18.69%) seen 6-10 films, 12 (6.06%) seen 11-15 and another 12 seen 16-20 films and 3 (1.52%) of them seen more than 20 films, the rest 36 (18.18%) respondents have not

Table 3: Respondents exposure to films

S.No.	No. of folk media items seen	No. of respondents	% to total
1	Nil	36	18.18
2	1 - 5	98	49.49
3	6 - 10	37	18.69
4	11 - 15	12	6.06
5	16 - 20	12	6.06
6	21 + above	3	1.52
Total		198	100

seen a single film during the study period. From the table it is noticed that 81.82% of the respondents are exposure to film media. The tribal people treat this media as an entertainment. Majority of them cannot understand the themes of several films they have seen. In general the tribal youth are much more exposure to film media. Even the tribal women folk are also access to this media.

The Table 4 shows the number of radio owning families, radio listeners and non-listeners among the respondents. Out of the total 198 sample households, only 34 (17.16%) families are owning the radio sets. A total of 112 (56.57%) respondents are the radio listeners and the rest (43.43%) are non-listeners. Among the total radio listeners, 78 (39.41%) of them do not own radio sets, but they listen a few radio programmes from their neighbours who own the radios. It is clear that 56.47% of the respondents are exposure to radio media.

In general a lot of tribal people do not hear radio even during their leisure time. They do not show any interest to sit down and listen to it. Only the head of the household and a few other members of a particular family listen some of the radio programmes, from which that particular household owns the radio set. Most of the radio listeners give much importance to the programmes like songs and dramas which are broadcasted at

a particular time. Only a few of them listen the current news events and agricultural, health and education programmes. In the field villages even a considerable number of illiterates are also access to film and radio media.

Table 5 shows the number of newspaper subscribers and newspaper readers among the sample respondents. Only two respondents are newspaper subscribers. Both are salaried employees, natives of Dumbriguda. They are subscribing the regional Telugu language daily newspaper *Eenadu*. These two are the regular newspaper readers among the selected respondents. However, a total of 26 (13.14%) respondents stated that they read the newspaper occasionally whenever they visit the libraries which are situated at the mandal headquarters. Among the occasional newspaper readers, 18 of them are the natives of Dumbriguda. They read it in the local library. The news paper readers usually passes some messages to others (non-readers) in their concerned villages through the process of inter-personal communication. Even most of the literate tribals are not access to the newspaper media. In general tribal people are very less exposure to this media. Almost all the respondents in the sample are not exposure to Television (TV), such facility is not available to them. Moreover, this facility is not extended to the tribal settlements of the agency area.

Table 4: Respondents exposure to radio

S.No.	Name of the village	No. of radio owning households	% to total	Radio listeners	% to total	Non-listeners	% to total
1	Vanthala Chintala	2	1.01	12	6.06	2	1.01
2	Balluguda	4	2.01	14	7.07	21	10.51
3	Dumbriguda	13	6.56	44	22.22	17	8.58
4	Vamugedda Kothuru	9	4.54	25	12.63	19	9.59
5	Lakshmipuram	6	8.03	17	8.59	27	13.64
Total		34	17.16	112	56.57	86	43.43

Table 5: Respondents exposure to newspaper

S.No.	Name of the village	Respondents who							
		Subscribe newspaper	% to total	Don't subscribe	% to total	Read newspaper occasionally	% to total	Can't read	% to total
1	Vanthala Chintala	-	-	14	7.07	1	0.51	13	6.57
2	Balluguda	-	-	35	17.68	4	2.02	31	15.66
3	Dumbriguda	2	1.01	59	29.80	18	9.09	41	20.20
4	Vamugedda Kothuru	-	-	44	22.22	2	1.01	42	21.21
5	Lakshmipuram	-	-	44	22.22	1	0.51	43	21.72
Total		2	1.01	196	98.99	26	13.14	170	86.86

CONCLUSION

The study reveals the role of mass media on the lives of the tribals of five selected settlements in specific and in the Visakha agency area in general. The road side villages have certain infrastructural and transport communication facilities when compared with that of interior villages. The residents of the road side villages are more exposed to outside when compared with that of the interior tribals.

The extension of road transport communication facilities to the interior tribals definitely bring them to the main stream, when they come into contact with the advanced communities of the plain area, they try to change their life styles in the direction of the most civilized communities.

The villages which are situated nearer to the mandal headquarters are showing some progress in the fields of agriculture and education. The tribal people who are residing in the mandal head quarters and near by villages are more exposure to modern media devices like film and radio when compared with that of interior tribals. Only a few educated elite among Valmiki and Bagata tribes are access to newspaper media.

The role of media in the Tribal Development process has been very low. The extension agents, the village leaders, the political leaders have to take up this challenging task in order to elevate them into the equals than being to kept aside. The interior tribals should be brought into the mainstream instead of keeping them in isolation. Majority of the tribals are still ignorant about the government development programmes because

lack of information and proper motivation. Education media can help a lot for the Tribal Development and change. Television facility should be extended to the tribal areas and also the felt need of setting community TV centres. They treat the folk media items, film and radio media as entertainment. The film media has much effect on the life of the tribal people when compared to other modern media items. It brought certain change in the dressing pattern of the tribal people. The government public relations department need to pay much attention to organize audio-visual programmes regularly in the tribal areas. This kind of media can also create awareness and make them to participate fully in the ongoing development programmes and in turn they get the opportunity to contribute for nation development.

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