



Role of mass media in the process of political socialisation of Tribals: A case study of Dhenkanal district in Odisha

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Abstract: Political socialization is the process through which, on the one hand, an individual acquires information, attitude and orientations concerning political phenomena and, on the other hand, society transmits political norms and beliefs both from one generation to the next and to immigrant newcomers. These two aspects may be in contradiction where an individual apparently acquires deviant attitudes and orientations" The political socialization of the tribals has not so far been a serious concern among scholars till today. Political socialization among the tribals of Dhenkanal is still in the primary level. The traditional leader and his modern political roles, the important agencies of political socialization, functioning of various organizations etc., are important points to study. The agencies of political socialization include the family, peer groups, educational institutions and organisation both political and non political. Let us review the traditional leadership first.

Key words: Political socialization, Party Politics Tribal People

Introduction

Now there is substantial change in the nature of the roles, functions and powers of the traditional leader, obviously due to the changed set up. Headship as an institution continues with limited roles and functions and acts as the contact point for non-tribals to mediate with the tribals. ^[5]

Modern Politics and Traditional Headmen:

The tribal headship is in the process of political transformation as a result of the growing modernization of tribal life. Now the headmen are puppets in the hands of the seasoned politicians and the local rich who, to a great extent, succeed in manipulating tribal votes. ^[6] The young generation support their leader, whereas in some other families (nuclear family) there exists a different attitude. Father and children follow

different parties. Secondly, young generation hardly follows the principles of old ones regarding political matters.

Party Politics and Tribal People

As regards the political parties, the tribals seem to be at different levels of awareness. Most of them just know the names of the major political parties, primarily the Congress, Jharkhand, Biju Janata Dal, Bharatiya Janata Party and the Communist parties.^[7] Most of them believe either of these parties. The old people recognize their party in terms of symbols rather than in terms of names i.e. 'Lotus' for BJP, 'conch' for BJD, 'Palm' denote for Congress etc and 'Sickle, 'hammer and star' for the Communists or Maoists. Many of them do not know anything more than the symbols which signify the hopes and expectations for them. It is very easy to manipulate the tribals by offering alcohol. This has helped the political



parties either to get maximum votes from the tribals or to get maximum invalid votes of liquor addicts. Many of them think that voting is the act of pleasing the sarkar for their wants. They do not know anything about the politics of election and the making of the Government etc. Even when they believe that it is the party of the downtrodden, they do not seem to be aware of anything more than that in terms of ideology.^[8]

Politics and the Tribal Youth

The elders of the tribes have no control over their people on political matters. This is particularly true about the political behaviour of the young generation. The party workers have started approaching the youngsters for help in election campaigns. As soon as these political upstarts get somewhat established, they keep a distance from their people. Many of the informants belonging to the tribes complained against the sense of superiority of their leaders. There are two reasons for this. One is that they consider them as different from their fellow members. The other reason is that they see their fellow members through the eyes of outsiders.

Agencies of Political Socialization

The agencies of Political Socialization include the family, peer groups, educational institutions and organizations, both political (such as parties) and non political (such as Churches and clubs).^[9] The process of political socialization may either be manifest or latent. Manifest political socialization is a direct process. These agencies of political socialization are divided mainly into two categories: formal and informal.

The formal denotes the formally constituted institutions and organizations specifically meant for the development of tribal political consciousness. *Educational institutions, governmental organizations, university, welfare organizations and other organized bodies are examples. Similarly the informal denotes personages, groups, institutions and bodies* inadvertently facilitating the process of political socialization. The cinema, the press, the public meetings, the day-to-day socio-political events and the variety of stimuli of contemporary social life are examples. Cultural programmes in connection with party works and election propaganda, religious as well as social secular gatherings with some stimuli for public agitations, strikes, political movements, protests, minor skirmishes; the states action against them and the people's response to them, etc. come under the informal agents of political socialization.^[10]

The formal is further divided into two: the individualistic enterprises and organizational institutional enterprises. The political socialization activities of the committed individual with or without affiliation to organized politics or instituted welfare organization are examples of the first type. The political socialization activities through organized party political and established welfare organization departments exemplify the second.^[11]

Education

As already shown the tribal education of Dhenkanal even after total literacy campaign is in primary level. Many of the primary schools are single teacher schools where neither teachers nor pupils are regular in their



attendance.^[12] Most of the tribal children join school. But majority of them become drop outs soon due to several reasons. The problem of language is a serious block.^[13] They fail to reach out with others in their studies because of the language which is strange for them. The parents are not in a position to encourage their children since the family level socialization is incapable of realizing it.

Cinema

Cinema which is the most irresistible attraction for the tribals today may be regarded as a major socializing agency. Cinema is a complex source of cultural communication. It is enormously powerful in transforming people. The cinema has played a very crucial role in the culture shift of the tribals. Normally they do not see cinemas on ideal political set up and higher social values. Even when they see such cinemas their low level political sensibility seldom relates them to their own surroundings.

News Paper

The newspapers could bring some awareness to the literate among them though the kind of awareness which the news papers bring hardly helps them. They get to know what the local, national and world affairs are. All are keen to discuss about the specific issues about the Dhenkanal Districts and *adivasis*, appearing in the news papers. The news papers are supposed to play a major role in keeping people informed of the merits and demerits of the rule in a democracy.

Public Meetings

Public meetings do act as a socializing agent with respect to the development of political self-awareness. The public meetings discuss matters of

contemporary social and political importance often directly related to the tribals. When the tribals attend such meetings they might carry new ideas accelerating the process of political socialization. The most notable public meeting of recent times was *Adivasi Mela*, a joint convention of the various tribals.^[14]

Cult of New Sensibility

The Primordial cults of any tribe would be part of its ecological niche of existence. It is to the natural unity and differences within the tribal habitat that their cults are organically linked up as exemplified by the totems and taboo.^[15] The cult is the most vital integrator of a tribal community. Its communitarian sense of unity is based on the cult. In this sense the tribal cult has a political role.

The Organizational Politics

Organizational politics is the most directly related site of political socialization. Apart from an armed struggle tribal communities throughout India have sought greater control over their natural resources through political movements. In some cases, the tribal communities have allied themselves with communist insurgency groups (Naxalites) to better empower their struggle. But such political attempts of community mobilization have not acquired a comparable dimension in Dhenkanal. The politics of organization entered the tribal domain extraneously through various actors. The most notable factor was the influence of the voluntary organizations by non-tribals for the welfare of tribals.

Youth dormitory system: best way for communicating each other

The tribal people express their cultural identity and



distinctiveness in their social organisation, language, rituals and festivals and also in their dress, ornament, art and craft. The Juangs call it *Majang and Darbar*, the Kondhs call it *Dindaghar*, call it *Dhangarabasa* and among the Bondos it goes by the name Ingersin. Of all the tribes the dormitory system is well organized among the Juang. Conspicuous in the village, the Mandaghar is the largest hut. The elders of the village assemble at the dormitory house every day for every important event in their corporate life. Here they discuss matters concerning the welfare of the village, settle the distribution of swidden and fix date and time for celebration of the village festivals, etc. In these respects the dormitory may be considered as the centre of social, economic and religious life of the village.

Socialization through Imitation of Hindu tradition and customs:

With the advent of time, traces of borrowing from Hindu Pantheon and religious ceremonies are noticed among the tribes of Odisha. They have started

worshipping Siva, Parbati and Lord Jagannath. Hindu festivals like Raja, Laxmipuja, Dasahara and Gamha are also becoming popular among them day by day.

The Sangathan

Adivasi Kranti Sangathan, a people’s organisation, since 1996, has been organizing the tribals to emerge as a collective force for securing their dignity and self-respect. At its inception the sangathan started with only one panchayat, Maruabili panchayat.

Utilization of Interpersonal Communication (IPC)

Interpersonal communication is strong, friendly and persuasive in nature and takes place in close proximity with a purpose to share very delicate and sensitive issues. It is helpful in taking decisions while mass communication is helpful in creating awareness among people as quick as possible. Of course mass communication is very cost effective.

Table 1: Use of interpersonal communication and reasons for opting it by tribals

	Response	Easy to Access	Cheaper	Time to Listen	Others
Yes	113 (62.8)	135 (75)	71 (39.4)	19 (10.6)	5 (2.8)
No	49 (27.2)	45 (25)	109 (60.6)	161 (89.4)	175 (97.2)
Can't Say	18 (10)	-	-	-	-

Table 1 shows that 113 out of 180 respondents depended upon interpersonal communication for getting information on health and family welfare programmes. This confirms the fact that even in the modern era of communication; tribals tend to believe in

interpersonal communication as they have a limited access to mass media which are also formal and one-way. According to the respondents, at any time in case of need, they share their personal problems with their friends/relatives and health functionaries. Hence, personal



relation among them and interpersonal communication among them have always been crucial.

Preference for Various Channels and Percolation of Message

Table 2: Preference for various channels by tribals and percolation of messages among them

IPC	131 (72.8)
Radio	18 (10)
Television	7 (3.9)
Print Media	10 (5.6)
Traditional Methods	14 (7.8)
Fairs/Festivals/Melas	56 (31.1)
Meeting Friends/Neighbours/ Relatives in Weekly Markets	131 (72.2)
Marriage	4 (2.2)

As we have seen in previous table, the findings presented in Table 2 confirm that the respondents believe in interpersonal communication (72.8%) as compared to radio (10%), television (3.9%), print media (5.6%) and traditional media (7.8%). This is probably due to the fact that as they live in an inaccessible areas since their birth, they have no other means of communication except talking to their friends, neighbours, relatives and health workers and therefore, they prefer IPC as number one choice.

Meeting friends, neighbours and relatives in weekly markets) followed by fairs/festivals/Melas (31.1%) is another important method for getting information. It has also been seen that weekly market serves as a common

platform for tribals where members of a particular family wait for other members, for example, daughter, son, son-in-laws, etc. or their other relatives from nearby villages. This gives them an opportunity to sort out their personal problems, including their health, whenever they have.

Utilization of Mass Media and Traditional Media

Possession of Communication Media by the Tribals and Their Access

Tribals have been living in isolation for centuries. Modern media of communications have no meaning to them because whether they are in a position to afford or use them for getting any information.



Table 3: Media possessed by the respondents and their accessibility to media

	Radio		Television		Print Media		Traditional Media	
Media Possessed								
Yes	63	(35)	23	(12.8)	7	(3.9)	-	
No	117	(65)	157	(87.2)	173	(96.1)	-	
Access to Media								
Yes	97	(53.9)	56	(31.1)	18	(10)	38	(21.1)
No	83	(46.1)	124	(68.9)	162	(90)	142	(78.9)

Table 3 reveals that most of the people in the study area do not have mass media like radio, television and newspapers in their houses. However, some people have radio (35%), television (12.8%) and newspapers/print materials (3.9%). The non-availability of mass media with the tribals could be attributed

to their extreme poverty. To some extent, they believe in traditional media of communication (21.1%). Even if a person is not having a radio or Television in his house, he has privilege to listen to radio in his either friend's house or neighbour's house.

Combination of Media

Table 4: choice of combinations of multi-media preferred by tribals

Sl. No.	Choice of Combinations	Preference
1	IPC followed by T.V.	25 (13.9)
2	IPC followed by Radio	53 (29.4)
3	IPC followed by Traditional Media	62 (34.4)
4	IPC+Radio+T.V.+Traditional Media	23 (12.8)
5	Don't Know	17 (9.4)
	Total	180 (100)

IPC in tribal localities was supplemented by different mass media like television and radio. Because mass media alone are generally inadequate they use in combination with other methods. Table 4 reveals the unpopularity of television and radio among the tribals. Among the various

combinations of media tried, IPC followed by traditional media stood first (34.4%). The traditional folk media are personal forms of communication of entertainment. They preferred traditional media as one of the combinations of media along with interpersonal communication.



Utilization of Printed Materials expressed to have read some printed materials in the study area. Though the literacy level of the respondents was low, a few of them

Table 5: Kinds of printed materials read by the respondents

Sl. No.	Material	Yes	No
1	Newspapers	22 (12.2)	158 (87.8)
2	Magazines	11 (6.1)	169 (93.9)
3	Posters/Charts	15 (8.3)	165 (91.7)
4	Pamphlets/Folders	7 (3.9)	173 (96.1)

Among the printed materials, newspaper like magazines, posters/charts and pamphlets/folders have not been seen by most of the respondents probably due to their non-availability as well as their illiteracy. Of course, this is also not an encouraging picture. The other materials

Table 6: Other printed materials seen by the tribals

Sl. No.	Sources	Yes	No
1	Posters	104 (57.8)	76 (42.2)
2	Banners	55 (30.6)	125 (69.4)
3	Hoardings	10 (5.6)	170 (94.4)
4	Billboards	9 (5)	171 (95)

In spite of high illiteracy in the tribal area, tribals still consider posters (57.8%) as one of the sources for getting information on health and family welfare, (Table 6). The other sources like banners accounted for 30.6 per cent and hoardings and billboards have been ranked very low, 5.6 per cent and 5.0 per cent, respectively. The findings suggest that to educate the tribal people we may use posters as one of the potential sources of information.

Information Seeking Behaviour

Opinion of the Tribals about Health Programmes on Different Media



Table 7: Awareness and opinion of the tribals about programmes given by various media

Sl. No.	Queries	Response	
		Yes	No
1	Awareness of the Programmes Broadcast by radio and telecast by television regularly	37 (20.6)	143 (79.4)
2	Time of Broadcast/Telecast suitable to you	34 (18.9)	146 (81.1)
3	Satisfaction with Frequency of programmes	35 (19.4)	145 (80.5)
4	Understandability of language	36 (20)	144 (80)
5	Understandability of messages	37 (20.6)	143 (79.4)
6	Reading of Printed Materials	32 (17.8)	148 (82.2)

The awareness of various programmes put up by radio as well as by television on health and family welfare among the respondents is very poor (20.6%). Again as far as the time of broadcast/telecast is concerned, around 81.1 per cent said that the time is not suitable to them. This supports the fact that tribals tend to believe in interpersonal communication and traditional media of communication.

Similarly, around 80.5 per cent said the frequency of the programmes given by radio as well as by television is poor. As far as the understandability of language and messages is concerned, around 80.00 per cent of the respondents were not comfortable. Watching television, listening to radio and reading printed materials are casual in nature among tribals in Dhenkanal district.

Table 8: Frequency of watching television, listening to radio and reading printed materials for getting information

Sl. No.	Frequency	Listening to Radio	Watching T.V.	Printed Material
1	Everyday	132 (24.4)	57 (10.6)	15 (2.8)
2	Weekly	36 (6.7)	12 (2.2)	36 (6.7)
3	Fortnightly	3 (0.6)	3 (0.6)	12 (2.2)
4	Monthly	3 (0.6)	-	3 (0.6)
5	Occasionally	81 (15)	51 (9.4)	42 (7.8)
6	Not at all	285 (52.8)	417 (77.2)	432 (80)
	Total	540 (100)	540 (100)	540 (100)



Table 8. Data reflect that only 44 out of 180 respondents listen to radio, 19 out of 180 watch television and five out of 180 read printed materials in general. This adds to the problems of non-availability of media as well as the time with the tribals, besides illiteracy. 95 out of 180, 139 out of 180 and 144 out of 180 respondents stated that they not at all listen to radio, watch television and read printed materials, respectively. The media are only occasionally used by them for getting information on health and family welfare, radio (15%), television (9.4%) and printed material (7.8%). Like availability of radio, here also people tend to listen to radio as compared to watching television and reading printed material.

Positive Impact of Media on Tribals

Media provide news and information on tribal people and their culture. Media an important role in educating the tribals. Media helps a democracy function effectively. They inform the tribals about government policies and programmes and how these programmes can be useful to them. This helps the people voice their feelings and helps the government to make necessary changes in their policies or programmes. Media can entertain the tribal people. Media can act as an agent of change in development. Media has brought tribal people of the world closer to each other. Media promote tribal productions for trade and industry through advertisements. Media can bring in positive social changes among the tribals

Negative Impact of Media on Tribals

The traditional culture of tribals is adversely affected by mass media. Entertainment has become the main

component of mass media for tribals. This affects the primary objectives of media to inform and educate the people. Media promote violence. Studies have proved that violence shown on television and cinemas have negative effects on children. Mass media promote the desire in tribals to buy and own products that are advertised through the media but which may not be essential for them.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the availability of electronic media such as radio and television is very limited with the tribals. The study further concludes that the tribals tend to believe in interpersonal communication as well as in traditional media of communication. Therefore, the authors suggest that a combination of interpersonal communication and traditional media may be adopted to deliver health care messages to the tribals in Mandla District of Madhya Pradesh. This is in line with National Population Policy (2000) which also emphasis on communicating clear and focussed health care messages to the people in the remotest corners of the country in local dialects through local artists, singers, folk-dance groups, comedians, actors, drummers, popular film stars, etc.⁵

References:

1. Geoffery Roberts and Alistair Edwards, *A new Dictionary of Political Analysis*, *Op.cit*, p. 105.
2. *Op.cit* p. 105.
3. *ibid*.
4. *ibid*.
5. *Ibid*



6. Many tribals who actively participated in election campaign were interviewed during the Panchayat Election.
7. Geoffery Roberts and Alistair Edwards, *Op.cit* p. 105.
8. Ibid
9. Durrng the time of data collection many tribal political leaders belonging to Gond, Ho, Juang, Khaira, Koya, Lodha, Munda, santal and so on were interviewed at length.
10. Geoffery Roberts and Alistair Edwards (*Op.cit*. p. 105.
11. Herbert H, Hyman, *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behaviour*, New Delhi, 1972. Also see Dennis Jack, *Socialization of Politics*, 1973.
12. Charles C Lemert (ed), *Intellectual and Politics : Social Theory in a Changing World*, 1991.
13. In the lower primary school no transportation service is available in this route. Since there was no proper accommodation facility for them, they were attending the school once or twice a week.
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