

INFORMATION NEEDS AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF A TRIBAL COMMUNITY-A STUDY ON SELECTED BLOCKS IN WEST BENGAL

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Information is the basic need of life and without it the development of any community is not possible. The present study tries to investigate the information needs of a tribal community, the Lodha community at Senna and Chandana mouza in the Keshiary block and Khamar and Kattara mouza in the Binpur II block in the Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal. The said study reveals that the information need and use of information sources differ from place to place. The Lodha people in the said places do not have same type of information need and also, they do not use same type of information resources to satisfy their needs. Though these people have information need they are ignorant about the fact from where they will satisfy their information needs. So, their needs remain as it is and their condition in the society remains the same. After even seventy-four years of independence these people remained illiterate enough and therefore have not experienced the taste of development. The only positive thing is that at least a few people in the community residing in these areas have identified the sources of information and are trying to satisfy their information needs through the sources.

Keywords: Community Information Service, Lodha Community, Schedule Tribe, West Bengal, Information need, Information sources.

INTRODUCTION

Information is a valuable resource for individual growth and survival. It is the main substance which is used in knowing something, making decision, taking action, thinking and learning. Right information at the right time helps in overall development of the society. It also helps the people to solve their problems and clear their uncertainty. It is very difficult to survive without proper information for an instant. Exponential growth of information has divided our society into two groups “information haves” meaning information rich and “information have nots” meaning information poor. Mainly the rural communities come under “have not” group as such communities do not get their needed information easily to solve their queries. The advancement of a country cannot take place without proper

development of its rural community. The Community Information Service (CIS) provide the related information to the specific community according to the information need of that community which can help them to solve their day to day problems and it also ameliorate the community which can ensure the overall development of the society. But it is the first priority to point out the information needs of such communities so that one can understand what type of information they want before serving information. "Lodha" is a tribal community in India which urges to acquire information for sustainable development of their livelihood. The study would focus on the importance of information for the healthy living of the members of the disadvantaged community and likewise other disadvantaged groups and how they meet up their information needs through limited resources available to them. The need for this type of study is to highlight the situation of the disadvantaged community, their information demands and seeking patterns which will give an idea about the so called 'information have-nots' and also give an idea to develop some resource centres for providing information to these type of people in the society so that they do not remain backward due to lack of information. In this context, the study tries to reveal the information needs of that particular tribal community residing at Paschim Medinipur district in the state of West Bengal in India.

RELATED STUDIES

Chakrabarti (2001) in his study revealed that the Toto community members want various kind of information such as non – traditional, housing,

non – conventional dresses, pure drinking water, sanitation, natural products and animal husbandry. This study also found that the said community members are illiterate. They like to live in isolate areas and do not want to communicate with the outside world. Most of the members are very poor and disadvantaged in all aspect. They want different socio – economic activities to upgrade their lifestyle.

Chakrabarti et al. (2011a) investigated that a small number of Mech tribal community changes their old tribal culture. As a result of lower economical status they are not able to transform their old tradition totally. Greater numbers of people are illiterate, whereas, few have higher education. But the study found that they want more information in career development mainly for young generation. Many schemes are provided by the government for improvement of the area but only few members have taken the advantage of such schemes. Another study highlighted the information need of Mech community of Jalpaiguri district. The authors found that some members of that community gradually ameliorate their social life pattern with advancement of the society. But rest of them are undeveloped and recognized as disadvantaged community (Chakrabarti et al., 2011b). A study on Dhimel community found that most of the people are illiterate and female number is higher. They are unaware about health and hygiene. They believe in their traditional treatment system. Though they are members of Schedule Tribe community they don't have adequate knowledge about their benefits and facilities. The recent study highlighted that there is a crisis of proper

information. Only a well-designed information service facility may elevate their life pattern and their socio - economic condition (Chakrabarti et al., 2009).

A study reveals that the information need and the seeking behaviour mainly depends on educational background of the user. The author agreed that the poverty, illiteracy, diseases, ignorance are the influential factors which control the information need process of a user. The study also found that most of the people use informal information networks instead of extension workers and library system. They believe that the collected information from the informal networks is very reliable and authentic. The information seekers mainly use printed materials and updated digital resources. Due to lack of proper training and knowledge they are not able to use digital resources. Overall it is clearly recognized that the information needs and seeking behaviour of the users are largely influenced by their educational background (Dutta, 2009). Another study focused that information is very essential for improvement of any community. They discussed about the information needs of Patial community at Coochbehar district. They identified that this community is facing different problems with the speedy evolution of the society. The authors highlighted that this community has an information gap. Educational and financial information is needed by this community for proper development (Biswas et al., 2013).

A case study shows that the farmers are mainly small scale farmers and most of them are illiterate. The study found that they mainly want information on seeds, crop production and on

insecticides, loan facility, harvesting methods etc. It is also recorded that the farmers follow fellow farmers to gather information. They do not use radio as an information source. The said study shows that most of them are illiterate. Due to high illiteracy rate, inadequate contact of extension officials, negative attitude of the Govt. officials, unavailability of information centres, the farmers are not able to access agricultural information to satisfy their need (Jalaja & Kala, 2015). An article recorded the health seeking behaviour of the tribal women in Villupuram district. The authors pointed out that the tribal women are the most disadvantaged people in health status. They cannot get appropriate health information and adequate, reasonable health services. The main reason of health related problems are inadequate nutrition and speedy increase of population. Communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS spread easily and it is the cause of mortality and morbidity among the children. They have low immunity to diseases than the adults. The maternal mortality is high due to toxemia, placental disorder, mal presentation and haemorrhage. They do not have sufficient water supply. Garbage disposal and sanitation are also responsible for illness and mal health (Jayaprakash & Saravanan, 2015).

Kamila (2012) in another study stated that illiteracy and ignorance is the main hindrance to express the information needs of Santals. Sometimes they wanted more information which fulfils their needs properly. They are living in isolated areas. They demanded information to spend their lives in better way. But the massive numbers of community members are under privilege. They belong to the economically

backward community. They needed various type of information to raise their quality of living and also to develop socio - economic condition. Mahapatra highlighted the information need and seeking behaviour of farmers in Odisha. The farmers of the said region want modern techniques to improve their farming and agricultural process. They also want various kind of information related to agriculture such as weed control, soil erosion and fertilization, labour shortage, farm credit, agricultural loans, Govt. schemes etc. Greater numbers of farmers want to acquire agricultural knowledge. They are interested to collect information from printed sources, television and forum. But sometimes they do not identify what are their actual needs which create a problematic situation in information dissemination point of view. They also want a village library with rich collection of agricultural resources which satisfy their needs (Mahapatra, 2016).

RESEARCH GAP

The above studies mostly concentrated on the information needs and information seeking behaviour of different communities. The studies by Chakrabarti, Dutta, Biswas et al, Kamila and Mahapatra mainly focused on the information needs while Dutta, Jalaja and Kala determined to find out the sources from where they can satisfy their information needs. Also some studies like Chakrabarti et al, 2011 a & b highlighted the socio-economic status of some disadvantaged community. Another study by Jayaprakash and Saravanan concentrated on the health related problems of tribal women and the reasons behind

those problems. The present study identifies the information needs, the information sources to meet up those needs as well as also performs the satisfaction study to find out how the community members are responding and how much convinced are they after obtaining the required information and basically which information source satisfies their information needs mostly. So, this study tries to find out not only the information needs or the information seeking pattern but also the most helpful and satisfying sources of information for the disadvantaged community which is not found in other studies.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are to achieve the following goals:

1. Identify the information needs of the people of a disadvantaged community called the Lodha community residing at selected blocks in the district of Paschim Medinipur in the state of West Bengal, India.
2. Identify the sources of information and locate the differences between the use patterns of information sources in these villages.
3. Discover the barriers to access and utilise information by the community.
4. Identify the differences, if any, that can be reflected in the information needs of the Lodha community according to their place of living.

METHODOLOGY

Senna and Chandana mouza of Keshiary block and Khamar and Kattara mouza of Binpur II block are chosen for this comparative study to reveal if

there is any difference in information need according to the place of living of Lodha community in these blocks. Senna and Chandana are situated near the town of Medinipur where as the other mouzas, Khamar and Kattara are located in the remote areas. The adult population from the said villages have been selected for the study. All the related primary data has been collected from the studied area through field survey by using interview method. Important data has also been collected from the Gram Panchayat office and block offices. Needs on agriculture, education, health, economy, housing, legal, employment, political and government has been identified from the study. Collected qualitative data has been analysed and represented in respective tables.

HISTORY OF LODHA COMMUNITY

In 1947, during India's independence, thirteen million people and 127 communities were declared as criminal tribes on the basis of Criminal Tribes Act VI of 1924. According to the British Government, the Lodha community is known as one of the criminal tribes (Sing, 1994). The Government of India changed the previous Act in 1952 and re-designated the criminal tribes by denotified communities. Lodha and 19 other communities came under the denotified and nomadic tribes ("Indian folklore," n.d.). Lodha community is identified as Primitive Tribal Group (PGT) since 1971 (Verma, 1990). Originally, Lodhas reside at the hilly area covered by the jungle. Lodhas in India are one of the primitive tribes living mainly in the forest covered border district of Medinipur (West Bengal), Mayurbhanj (Odisha) and Singhbhum (Jharkhand). Their

population in Odisha is about five thousand and they are living mainly in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha and majority traced in Morada block (about 400 Families) and Suliapada block (about 200 families) of this district. Their mother-tongue is Lodha, which is close to Savara, an Austro-Asiatic language. Traditionally they are forest dwellers. But now they are involved in cultivation, hunting, fishing to sustain their lives. They strongly follow Hinduism - and they believe in spirits and nature (Mandal et al., 2002). They are generally found leading semi-nomadic life. The stigma of criminality is so much deep rooted in this community that they are cut off from other community in the society. Till today, they are regarded as degenerated human group requiring economic, social, and educational rehabilitation. The Lodhas still live undernourished, half-fed lives, which normally people cannot believe that in the age of science such community can ever exist in the society.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Information needs of the Community

Lodha community is a "Schedule Tribe" community in West Bengal. According to the population census of West Bengal in 2001 total population of Lodha community was 84,966, among which 43,121 were males and 41,845 were females (Ghosh, 2014). In comparison to the previous census report 2011 census shows 28 % growth of the Lodha community in West Bengal ("Census of India," 2011). The current population of Lodha community in Senna, Chandana, Khamar and Kattara mouza are as follows:

Table 1: Total population

Mouza	Senna	Chandana	Khamar	Kattara
Total population	142	277	53	29
Male	67	137	29	13
Female	75	140	24	16

Table 2: Total adult population

Mouza	Senna	Chandana	Khamar	Kattara
Total adult population	90	174	34	16
Male	44	84	20	6
Female	46	90	14	10

Information needs in the different Mouzas

Depiction of population distribution in the other studies like Chakrabarti et al, Kamila, Jalaja and Kala, Ghosh, Mahapatra has been observed. In any such study on community this is shown to know the total population of the area studied. The information needs of the people of this community in these four villages are not same. They want different types of information which mainly deal with their daily life activities. Mainly they need information to solve their problems. The information need varies from man to man and it is framed on the basis of background,

motivation, professional orientation and individual characteristics of the user. Information need of the members of Lodha community particularly in these four villages is broadly categorized as agricultural, health, educational, economical, housing, employment, legal, political, Government and survival. The numbers of individuals in the Lodha community who have different information needs are shown in the Table 3 which varies according to their place of living. The percentage of each information need is calculated with respect to the total adult population in each area. This is clearly reflected in the following table:

Table 3: Information needs in the different Mouzas

Information need	Senna (%) Total adult population= 90	Chandana (%) Total adult population=174	Khamar (%) Total adult population= 34	Kattara (%) Total adult population= 16
Agricultural	44 (48.89)	57 (32.76)	00 (-)	08 (50)
Health	39 (43.33)	84 (48.28)	24 (70.59)	12 (75)
Educational	23 (25.56)	48 (27.59)	14 (41.18)	02 (12.5)
Economical	45 (50)	77 (44.25)	10 (29.41)	12 (75)
Housing	19 (21.11)	51 (29.31)	02 (5.88)	04 (25)
Employment	29 (32.22)	49 (28.16)	05 (14.71)	02 (12.5)
Legal	19 (21.11)	44 (25.29)	02 (5.88)	00 (-)
Political and Government	20 (22.22)	37 (21.26)	03 (8.82)	00 (-)
Survival	65 (72.22)	142 (81.61)	15 (44.12)	11 (68.75)

From the table 3 the information need pattern of the Lodha people residing at the said mouzas is clearly reflected. The study by Kamila showed some fourteen types of information need of the Santal Community which has been clubbed here under nine types of need for easier and concrete understanding. Mahapatra, Jalaja and Kala concentrated on agricultural information needs. Chakrabarti et al in their paper on 'Information need of the Mech community' identified nine types of information need. Among other needs information about library is sought among the community which is found missing in the present study. In Chakrabarti et al 2009, the tables on information awareness has been separately depicted and discussed one by one. Here the age wise distribution about the information awareness has been shown on caste system, government testimonials, political system, judicial system, family planning, addiction etc. which are in different angles of measurement than this study. In the present study the highest agricultural need is identified among the people of Senna (44.89 %). The highest health information need is identified among the people of Khamar (70.59 %). The highest i.e 41.18 % educational information need exists in Khamar and the highest

economical information need exists in Kattara i.e. 75%. In case of housing information need it is higher in Chandana and the percentage is 29.31%. The highest employment related need (32.22 %) exists in Senna. The highest percentage of legal information need appears in Chandana and the percentage is 25.29%. The highest (22.22%) political and government related information need is in Senna and survival information need is highest (81.61 %) in Chandana. Among the information needs Lodhas of every village have remarkable survival information need.

Dependence on Information sources

To satisfy the information needs these people depend on formal sources such as radio and television news, newspapers, Government offices and public library, semi- formal sources like NGOs and informal sources like people from their own community and people from other communities. Dependence on the information sources for satisfying their information needs also vary between the Lodhas of the four mouzas where the present study has been conducted. The percentage of dependence on the information sources is calculated with respect to the total adult population in each area. This is depicted in the Table 4 given below:

Table 4: Dependence on Information sources

Mouza	Senna (%)	Chandana (%)	Khamar (%)	Kattara (%)
Information sources				
Own Community	14 (15.56)	25 (14.37)	5 (14.71)	0 (0.00)
Other Communities	20 (22.22)	11 (6.32)	07 (20.59)	02 (12.50)
Government Offices	35 (38.89)	52 (29.89)	08 (23.53)	0(0.00)
Public Library	3 (3.33)	5 (2.87)	04 (11.76)	01 (6.25)
Radio	05 (5.56)	10 (5.75)	03 (8.82)	0(0.00)
Television News	10 (11.11)	14 (8.05)	02 (5.88)	0 (0.00)
News Paper	03 (3.33)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
NGOs	11 (12.22)	25 (14.37)	13 (38.24)	10 (62.5)

The above table depicts the different sources of information where from the Lodhas in the above mentioned mouzas collect information to satisfy their information needs. In Senna, maximum (38.89 %) adult population and Chandana (29.89%) adult population depends on Government offices to collect their required information. In Khamar and Kattara the most important sources of information is NGOs. In these areas newspaper is the most neglected information source. This may be due to the high level of illiteracy in these areas. A peculiarity has been noticed in Kattara. Here none of the adult people depend on radio, television, government offices, newspapers and even own community for satisfying their information needs. This specifies that Kattara, an underdeveloped area has very limited resources. Kamila in his study ranked two most used information sources for each information need while Jalaja and Kala identified the information sources to satisfy the agricultural information needs only. In Chakrabarti et al. article on Mech community different information sources from where information is collected is shown according to age-wise distribution. Own

community members or other community members are not used as information sources. Instead tourists are one source of information.

Satisfaction of information needs with that of information sources

The table 5 depicts that the maximum agricultural, educational, employment, legal, political and government needs of the Lodhas in these areas are satisfied by the Government offices like that of the Block Development offices. Health needs are mostly satisfied from the Government offices as well as NGOs. Economical and Survival needs are also satisfied in maximum cases by the NGOs. Most of the Housing needs are only satisfied by the information gathered from own community. If we compare the table 3 i.e. Information needs in the different mouzas with that of the Table 5 i.e. Satisfaction of the information needs with that of information sources, a very peculiar feature has been noticed. Information needs in each of the sectors seen collectively in the mouzas are much higher than their satisfaction from the different sources. It is revealed that though the

Table 5: Satisfaction of information needs with that of information sources

Needs	Own Community	Other Communities	Government Offices	Public Library	Radio	Television News	News Paper	NGOs
Agriculture	8 (2.55)	6 (1.91)	16 (5.10)	0 (0.00)	4 (1.27)	3 (0.96)	0 (0.00)	4 (1.27)
Health	4 (1.27)	3 (0.96)	7 (2.23)	1 (0.32)	5 (1.59)	2 (0.64)	1 (0.32)	7 (2.23)
Educational	5 (1.59)	0 (0.00)	10 (3.18)	4 (1.27)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.64)	0 (0.00)	3 (0.96)
Economical	5 (1.59)	5 (1.59)	7 (2.23)	2 (0.64)	4 (1.27)	3 (0.96)	0 (0.00)	10 (3.18)
Housing	9 (2.87)	3 (0.96)	8 (2.55)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (1.27)	0 (0.00)	7 (2.23)
Employment	0 (0.00)	7 (2.23)	14 (4.46)	3 (0.96)	3 (0.96)	2 (0.64)	1 (0.32)	8 (2.55)
Legal	2 (0.64)	2 (0.64)	10 (3.18)	1 (0.32)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.64)	0 (0.00)	5 (1.59)
Political and Government	3 (0.96)	10 (3.18)	15 (4.78)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.64)	3 (0.96)	1 (0.32)	0 (0.00)
Survival	8 (2.55)	4 (1.27)	8 (2.55)	2 (0.64)	0 (0.00)	5 (1.59)	0 (0.00)	15 (4.78)

Lodha people in these mouzas have information needs they are unaware or reluctant to satisfy them by using one or the other source of information. Also, they are ignorant of the fact that from where they can satisfy their needs. Due to their illiteracy and shy nature they keep themselves away from the outside society in most of the cases. Therefore, their information needs remain as it is and is never satisfied.

Challenges in access and utilisation of information

The study reveals that there are some barriers which create an obstacle in the process of access and utilization of information by the members of this community. These are identified during the field survey. The main causes for these challenges are:

- High rate of illiteracy.
- Lack of proper information delivery system.
- Ignorance by others.
- Lack of proper identification of information need.
- Attitude of Government workers in community extension and development service.
- Poor infrastructure.
- Lack of awareness.
- Language problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To minimise the gap between “information haves” and “information have nots” it is very much essential to provide right information to the right user at the right time to satisfy their queries. It is most vital to take some initiatives so that the members of rural indigenous community can easily access and utilize the information to sustain

their lives as well as to uplift and ameliorate the community. For that reason some important recommendation are suggested which are:

1. First and foremost, identifying what type of information they want and accordingly design a good effective information mechanism which can be easily communicated with the seeker.
2. Develop the rural libraries and spread out the literacy throughout the entire society through formal and informal channels of education.
3. Establish strong Community Information Service through which information needs can be satisfied and the development of the community can be done at its extreme level.
4. Government must take active initiative by providing different opportunities and declare various programs for those communities.
5. Government should ensure the basic infrastructure so that every person of any community can lead their life happily.
6. Library should take care of the needs of the disadvantaged sections of the society.
7. The relationship between library personnel and community members should be increased so that information should be scattered in every corner of the society.
8. Non-Government Organization should go to the interior of the remote villages rigorously to communicate with every member of the indigenous community of the society.

CONCLUSION

Every developed country reaches its highest peak of development together with its urban and rural community. Without the proper development

of rural part of the society a country cannot fulfil its proper development. Presently, the Government of India declares “Digital India” and many different programs for bridging the gap between “haves” and “have nots” and spread out the literacy within the entire society. But till now there are many rural and remote areas in India where the people are unprivileged, uneducated and unemployed. There are no provisions of electricity, purified water supply, transportation and treatment facilities. Different communities of those places spend their lives without having the basic needs for survival. Now the time has arrived to look forward and do something for our indigenous community otherwise all the development process becomes useless. Under this scenario this study has been conducted on the four villages under two blocks of Paschim Medinipur district in West Bengal.

The said study reveals that the information need and use of information sources differ from place to place. All the Lodha people of the said places do not have same types of information need and also they do not use same types of information sources. It is easily identified that all the villages which come under the said study are backward. Lodha people of the said villages highly demanded survival information followed by economical, health, educational, employment, housing information need. This study also highlighted the different types of information sources what they actually use to solve their queries. In this case the information, collection pattern also varies from place to place. They are not using same types of information sources. Some of the community people frequently use public library, government

offices, television where as some are habituated in collecting information from own community, NGO’s etc. Also it is identified that though many people have information needs but they are ignorant of the places from where they can collect information. So their information needs remains unsatisfied. In a nutshell, the authors conclude that Lodha community of different places have different information need and their use of information sources is also not uniform.

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