CONTRIBUTION OF PRINT MEDIA TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

It has been observed in the earlier chapter that newspaper readers in Habra and Balarampur Block used five small newspapers - Chhotjagat, Paschimbanga, Basundhara and Kalantar and Ganasakti. It is important question if rural clients support to these newspapers is justified in the sense they have newsprints which are dominated by and which is suitable for the social and economic development. This chapter provides a review of the important news items of these newspapers during a given period from January 1986 to June 1986. This review is necessary and useful because the same will help us work for the broad contents of information which rural population got interested in.

Such a lag in communication network having a centraifugal force is bound to create desirable cultural ties on the rural folks.

IMPACT OF PRINT MEDIA ON POPULATION - A CASE STUOY OF SOME NEWS MEDIA

Comment on the role of print media on people's need.

A separate observation is deemed necessary to discuss the role of the print media on the need of a given population. In this connection, print media obviously refers to daily newspapers, weekly, fortnightly monthly periodicals and other print media like books literatures on agricultural and industry.
Primarily, it is inferred that incidents having links with a particular need of a given population creates an opportunity for focusing the issue in either one or number of dailies and weeklies.

This viewpoint has been largely followed by media people as has been indicated by binding of eyes of several persons in eye camps or deaths occurring to many individuals after taking illicit liquor. Having a cue from incidents, newspapers either write editorials or special features by specialist journalists. In fact, such outbursts in columns have no doubt an element of topicality which is a much sought after phenomena.

At the same time, some of the languages on English weeklies and fortnighlies publish detailed reports of such incidents in later periods. Such reports, somehow keeps the tenor of people's grievance for a short spell.

This trend in media shows one of the greatest weaknesses of the Indian media. Ideally, a print media is supposed to collect information on various aspects of a given population's needs on a regular way so as to create a sustained public opinion for those in the Government. Such roles of the print media can go a long way to materialise the dictum that newspapers are unrepresented legislators of the society.

The positive role of the print media to create public opinion should not be underrated if a desired economic development for a given population is to be achieved. As we have earlier noted that economic development in both micro and macro levels need a precedent in public opinion, it is the media to take up this challenge even when the current media ideology does not endorse such a view.

Side by side, media, the daily newspapers in general and the periodicals in particular have shown a tendency of arm-chair journalism on political issues which have no base. But such write-ups, either in the form of editorials and special reports are readily accepted by a majority number of daily readers to form their own political understanding of the country. In fact, such political reports while rousing the level of political consciousness of readers create an idea that print media has to survive only on political events and gossips in the corridor of power. This idea has already permitted a somewhat bizarre attitude to newspaper reading.

It is true to certain extent that political reports and editorials do have a place in print media but this view should not be given priority by the media planner when
the readers have a low profile of literacy which in turn affects those who have a still lower level of literacy. Literacy as such, as we all know, removes preconceived ideas on a situation created by so-called political public opinion.

This media reality needs to be further elaborated in view of the economic reality which, in most cases, depicts the truest picture of the livelihood of the people in our country where 30 per cent of the population is living under the poverty line. Given such circumstances, the role of print media to publish reports on needs of the people consistently, without waiting for a flash of incident can make an awareness with appropriate public and private authorities. Only in such an environment, the legitimacy to do something for meeting the demands of the needs could be met and perhaps, there is no alternative to the above publishing programme of the print media.

CHHOTI JAGAT

During the investigation, it has come to the knowledge of the researcher that print media could play positive role in promotion of education for the rural masses in all aspects of life including those relating to generalised economic development. This was indicated by a fortnightly tabloid newspaper, under the name and style of 'Chhati Jagat', published by the Bengal Social Service League, Calcutta, which has been taken for the response of analysis.

This paper aims at reaching the neo-literatures and those having limited reading ability and was found among the village people at Balarampur Block at Purulia but was conspicuously absent at Habra block No. 1.

A detailed study of the contents of this paper from January 1986 to June 1986 shows an editorial policy, encompassing topics on national interests, tribals, science, education, proverbs, children, household tips, information on agricultural practices, medicinal plants etc. Now, the investigator records discussion on some of the above topics for ascertaining their impact with a feedback arrived at after talking to readers.

In January 1st issue of 1986 a discussion on child labour was written which tried to create an impression that one should ponder of the future of such labourers who for many reasons start earning at a tender age. In the same issue, discussions on various rabi crop, pests and jute pests were included.
15th January Issue - Discussion on village market, fertilizer, cultivation of wheat, sunflower and sugarcane. 1st February Issue - tribal population, social ethics, mosquito-water, medicinal use of grass, cultivation of nut, sericulture, opportunities for women entrepreneurs, birthday celebrations of Netaji and Michael Madhusudan Dutta, irrigation.

15th February issue - editorial on nuclear holocaust, story on meghmela (haat), tribal festivals in West Bengal, cultivation news on paddy, wheat, sesame, pulse and legumes, animals as carriers of Hindu deities, benefits of having a small family and social ethics.

1st March issue - purification of the Ganges through scientific methods, discussions on camel, environment and diseases, scabies, lice, tribals, story on womenfolk, news on cultivation of wheat, and propagation of seed.

15th March issue - editorial on child education, horse, nuclear power, sugarcane cultivation, story on women, narration of villages in Jalpaiguri district, utilities of bad, fast, how to keep teeth well, what to do when fire breaks out, tips on rice cooking for mothers.

1st and 15th April issues (in one volume) - discourse on science, village travelogue, story on women, utilities of eating pulses, tips for mothers, hyacinth, merits of potato, role of village libraries, snakes, tribals, elephant, book review on poultry, what to do when scorpion bites, emergency treatment for brain diseases and how to make water filter at lower cost.

1st May issue - editorial on the role of students, facts of May Day, tribals, story of a brave man, Rabindranath Tagore and village development, and necessity for adult education.

15th May issue - editorial on the relationship between students and mass literacy, calligraphy in Egypt, messages from the Prime Minister of India, appeal of Mr. Narasimha Rao, Union Minister for Human Resources Development, food problem, tribals, equal rights for men and woman, habit of book reading and a story on parrot.

1st June issue - editorial on moral issues, origin of the world, a story on Rabindranath Tagore, environment for living, why should we love trees, utilities of garlic and
Ashoka plants in human diseases, news on womenfolk and news on cultivation on paddy, jute, pulses.

15th June issue - editorial on national unity, origin of the world, story on Gargi (one of most educated ancient ladies in India), tips on cooking and story on women.

Most of the discourses in Chhati Jagat were meant for educating the rural people as has been indicated in the contents enumerated above. Some of them were generalised while others were specified to rural set-up. According to readers who were found to have a regular habit in reading the tabloid, the generalised topics gave them an ideas about life and reality in the surroundings we live while specific issues aroused in them an awareness.

After discussion with the readers, the investigator has found that there has been a positive response in them for the paper. This is one of the remarkable features in the profile of print media in general in view of high frequency of listening by the people concerned to radio and TV programmes. Moreover, this type of paper meets a specific demands of them since it identifies neo-literates and those having limited reading ability as its readers. This very impression automatically creates an awareness in them to read the paper which has been incidentally priced at only 25 paise.

However, the investigator has found certain limitations of the paper for which a desired level for reaching more such people could not take place. It was found that exposure of this paper was maximum at the gram panchayat offices and libraries while a few people prefer to purchase it for personal knowledge and benefits.

One of the formidable weakness of the paper is that there is no regular classification of the contents. The absence of it fails to create a conscious attachment to the paper by the readers. Such a lapse may not make stronger impact to read the paper.

Another limitation is that non-political issues were not categorized which invariably made a negative response in readers to think positively these issues and take action or mould their behaviour in relation to other human beings.

These limitations apart, the paper has tried to include certain topics found to be exceptionally beneficial to readers. For example, topics on agricultural and farming practices in their entity in most of the issues concerned, not only educated them
out also provided guidance to resort to such practices which could be implemented without any foreign help.

Perhaps, the household tips, cultivation of medicinal plants and those related to womenfolk have a far-flung effects. Such steps would no doubt help the villagefolk to attend some of the household maladies with a challenge. In this regard the investigator found an inner strength of the print media as it lends a permanent status on the remedies which may occur at any time.

A survey of the local population at Balarampur revealed that they wanted some sort of improvement in the editorial contents of the newspaper and there is likelihood of a further inroad of the paper to the majority of them.

BASUNDHARA

The January, 1986 issue of Basundhara, a monthly magazine has been picked up by the investigator to show the role of print media towards development of rural economy in West Bengal, after a thoughtful examination of some of the articles published in the magazine. This magazine is published by the Department of Agriculture of the Government of West Bengal in Bengali.

In page 29 of the above mentioned journal a discussion on duck rearing was included to augment economic benefit to villagers.

The discussion primarily communicated the fact that duck rearing was much more economical in comparison to poultry farming.

The reason of such advantage was established by the fact that the cost of rearing for ducker is lower in view of the fact that ducks generally eat various types of oysters, algae and other water borne insects, which are available in plenty in villages. However, food concentrate has been suggested with green algae for increase in productivity and good health in ducks.

Another advantage, the article said was that the eggs of ducks are bigger in size, and have higher weight compared to those of hens. In addition, the shell of this egg, being harder, there is lower incidence of breakage during transportation.

As we know the countryside of West Bengal has a large number of fallow waterlands where nothing can be grown. Hence, the article suggested that small and marginal
farmers can definitely gain by rearing duck, on such marshy land. Accordingly, it was shown that 300 ducks can be accommodated in one acre of marshy land.

Among other things, the article has suggested duck rearing as profession and for this purpose it has outlined a number of measure to increase the productivity of ducks with lower incidence of mortality.

On enquiry, the investigator was informed by the Agriculture Development Officer of Habra Bloc(I) that as much as 20 enquiries were made by the local agricultural population when they read about the article in the month of May, 1986. Accordingly, the A.D.O. has briefed these persons about the prospects of duck rearing of them in general and he provided a scheme of Rs. 7511 to 11 persons who expressed their willingness to do such farming scientifically.

The investigator has come to know that already such firms have been started by local people with bank finance and these under the Government unemployment schemes.

Now, the investigator has reasons to believe that print media can do something tangible in terms of raising the income level of a given population.

The article also included a valuable discussion on wheat crop cultivation in West Bengal by Dr. Saktipada Sarkar, Additional Director of Agriculture, Government of West Bengal.

The discussion pointed out that wheat cultivation in the state has declined to about 3 lakh hactares during 1983-84 from 5.65 lakh hactares in 1975-76. The reason for this decline was attributed to the fact that no alternative seed to 'Sonalika' was not made available to growers during the intervening period. There was a dearth of certified wheat seeds, delayed sowing of wheat after cultivating long duration indegenous paddy crop, absence of technological aids to delayed planting and other specific factors.

The author of this article has cautioned growers that sowing of wheat seeds is very important and accordingly only those days in a year are suitable for such sowing when the temperature of days and nights is more or less the same.

Among other things, the author discussed in details on the required fertilizer, pesticides, irrigation to attain a production of over 20 quintal a hactare which can provide extra and sustained financial gains to growers. In this regard, it was pointed
out that water required for 1 hectare of boro paddy cultivation would facilitate raising of wheat in 4 hectares of land.

The importance of the above discussion on what cultivation was found to have reached the willing growers since it was written by a person involved in agricultural development of the state. Moreover, it gave a comparative study on the paddy cultivation, which was found to have satisfied the growers in Habra bloc 1 to many questions, associated with the cultivation of both wheat and paddy, which normally go unanswered.

**PASCHIMBANGA**

The influence of print media through the vernacular language is found to have a deeper penetration in a given population. In this regard, the investigator has found a Bengali weekly, namely Paschimbanga, published by the Information and Cultural Affairs Department of the Government of West Bengal. During its long history since early fifteens, a large cross-section of people living in urban and rural areas have read the weekly as they found most of the information, be it political or otherwise, highly valuable for reference.

According to official sources, the Paschimbanga has circulation over 40,000 a week of which 5000 copies are regularly purchased by the readers. This weekly is circulated free to various panchayat bodies (including Zilla Parishads and bloc offices), Government office and public and private libraries. The purchasers of this magazine mostly reside in urban and semi urban areas. But the readership pattern of the weekly shows that it has an exposure to 1920,000 persons each week.

A glance at the weekly reveals that it contains policy announcements on major issues by the State Government, cultural news, reports of rural West Bengal, miscellaneous reports, news on youth, students and women and number of pictures. At this point, researcher takes liberty to discuss certain subjects published in the weekly for finding out the role of information through print media in relation to the readers in the districts and relevant points, required under the present study.

In the April 4, 1984 issue of Paschimbanga, readers come across an announcement by Mr. Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of West Bengal on various issues, arising out of the activities of the anti-social elements in the state after the infamous incident at Garden Reach near Calcutta where Mr. Benod Mehta, Deputy Commissioner

( 56 )
(Port) and his security grand were killed by such anti-social forces in the third week of March, 1984. The story writes that the CM has appealed to the people to rise against such bad elements in society for which the State Government would give full support to destroy the bad elements.

Although, this story has little relevance to the rural people in the state, yet publication of its, has profound valus in so far as it gives an official announcement on the problem and solution of social problems that do not spare even the state police force. Similar appeals by the State Chief Minister on the incident were carried out in different English and vernacular newspapers in the state, but longevity of such news-item here had little effect to sustain the value of the official policy. But the weekly played a great role to educate the readers from time to time in future and draw conclusions on what should he done when such incident occurs.

Perhaps, the deepest impact of the reports of the weekly has been found with official announcements on agriculture, industry and other minor subjects. This is so because of the occurrence of the rural population to the extent of over 4 crores in the state, who are directly attended by agriculture and agrobased industries. Moreover, the number of scheduled castes and tribes and that of the adivasis has been around 1.5 crores who also depend on agricultural practices and forests in the regions.

Given this situation the investigator found a valuable speech of Mr. Kamal Guha, State Agriculture Minister during the budget session for the year 1984-85. The report in the weekly dealt in details about the programmes of the State Government, and problems and solutions to overcome difficulties for implementing programmes in the given year.

The report says that the Government had fixed various targets to increase agricultural produces for which various measures would be undertaken during the year concerned. Some of the important areas of the report are given below :-

that 170 minor irrigation projects were completed;

that supply of seeds from within the state would save Rs. 34 crores;

that supply of cetified seeds of jute, paddy, wheat, pulses oilseeds etc have increased to a large extent during 1983-84,
that 17,75,720 minikits were supplied to farmers in the above year and similar programme would continue during 1984-85;

that efforts had been undertaken to let the chemical composition of 10,000 sample of soil would be known through testing laboratories in Tollygunge (in Calcutta) Burdwan and Berhampur (Murshidabad) to know the qualitatives aspects of chemical fertilizers;

that similar tests for pesticides would be available at the laboratory set up at Midnapur (not yet completed at the time of publication of the news item), which were normally had to be collected from laboratories, situated at Faridabad (UP), Hyderabad (Karnataka) and Bombay;

That the target for utilization of chemical fertilizers in 1984-85 was fixed at - Nitrogen - 2.50 lakh tonnes, Phosphate - one lakh tonnes, and Potash - 0.75 lakh tonne;

That supply of fertilizers had been ensured to inaccessible areas like the Sundarbans and hilly tracts of Darjeeling district in 13 blocs and 8 blocs respectively;

That the State Government has recommended use of chemical fertilizers by small and marginal far in the State;

That compost fertilizer had been given an important place in agricultural development while various profitable competitions among villagers were introduced for increasing the volume of such manure;

That the State Government has decided to provide ‘Sarala’ diaphragm pump for irrigation water management to small and marginal farmers with a 50 per cent subsidy of Rs 440 which would be supplied by the West Bengal Agro Industries Development Corporation;

That the State Government prefers multicrop propagation for the economic benefit of the farmers which would also contribute higher regional and national yield of various crops;

That establishment of one agricultural training centre has been recommended in each 17 agricultural districts in the state. Already 76,225 farmers and cultivators have been trained in improved agricultural practices though 2,607 programmes so far.
That different varieties of high yielding seeds have been found through ‘adaptive research’. Some of these strains were Sunal (c-15310) for hilly tract cultivation, Biraj (c-N-M 539) for plains, Suresh (C-N 540), Khitish (I-I-T 4094) and Kunti (I-E-T 6141), all for paddy cultivation, ‘Ravi’ arhar (23/105) and Ranjan (B-256) for musur pulse cultivation and Tilottama (B-67) for til cultivation.

That various kind of new fruit cultivation has been encouraged in accordance with the soil conditions of the districts for which regular exhibitions have been arranged for the knowledge of the intending growers.

Other details included different agricultural measures for the benefits of the farmers and cultivators in the budget speech of the minister.

Moreover, mention of development plan for 1984-85 for the tribal population is necessary. Since this paper has one such area of discussion - namely - the Balarampur bloc, wholly inhabited by the tribal population, in Purulia district. The above speech of the minister said that Rs 15 lakhs were disbursed for the block for forest development, lac crop raising and other economic activities to provide sustained benefit to the population.

In the May 23, 1986 issue of Paschimbanga, a very important announcement made by Mr. Benoy Chowdhury Land and Law Reforms Minister of the State in connection with the approval of the President of India for the Land Reform (Second Amendment) Act of 1981. Among other things, it has stated that a cooperative can be now formed by the patadars and bargadars, holding landmass up to one acre to avail themselves of various loans on easy terms for various implements of cultivation. This facility would remove the greatest obstacle for the pattadars and bargadars who can not obtain any financial loan from the banks and other similar organizations under the existing rules and regulations.

An important discussion was given in the August 1, 1986 of the weekly regarding cultivation of bamboo with improved methods. In rural areas bamboo cultivation can generate enough finance for survival of poor families. In view of this potential the said discussion assumes much importance.

The report gave in details of propagation method for new bamboo sticks with the help of shoots born on older bamboos. The instructions were given in lucid Bengali which is worth mentioning. The new method will remove the disadvantage of getting...
quality bamboo seeds and as such can provide a readymade formula to do so to intending villagers. The demand of Bamboos has been increasing tremendously with each year for its various uses, like paper manufacture etc. But the existing supply of it has waned, following widespread depletion in West Bengal and the neighbouring states. In fact, Assam Government has banned transportation of bamboo from the state which has already affected the working of the paper mills in West Bengal.

Given this situation, the new method, enumerated in the discussion can encourage villagers in the state to raise bamboo plantation which not only provides higher remuneration to them but also helps bamboo dependent industries in the State.

A new item in the August 29, 1986 issue of the Paschimbanga attracted the notice of the investigator in regard to a social, insurance scheme, introduced on August 15, 1985 and implemented by the National Insurance Corporation. In a camp, held on July 21, 1986 at Midnapore, the regional manager of the corporation said that the social insurance scheme has been envisaged by the Government to provide financial assistance to poor people in the districts in case of death of an earning member of a rural family. It is learnt that anyone between the age of 10 and 55 and having an annual family income not exceeding Rs 5000 would be entitled to get a claim of Rs 3000 in case of such death. For this purpose, the Bloc Development Officers would receive applications from the claimants for the same within six months of the occurrence of such death.

Although, the premium rate for availing of the insurance facility by the poorer section was not mentioned in the new item, such information has much importance in so far it provides financial benefit to the next kin of deceased. In most of the cases, rural people, having an annual income of Rs 5000 and below can be benefited immensely with the claim money as it has been found that such families perish for want of adequate finance in time in absence of this steady flow of income. Such a facility could rehabilitate the recepients in terms of regenerated economic activities.

An official announcement in the February 28, 1986 issue of the weekly said that a new singular hawler machine for rice husking machine was developed to provide multifarious benefits to farmers in the districts. Accordingly, this machine would reduce the incidence of the volume broken rice between two and 10 per cent
instead of a production of 20 percent broken rice with existing machines. Moreover, pure husk will be produced and 3 kilogrammes of this husk can replace one kilogramme of coal in terms of heat generation. In addition to the above, the polished fragments can be utilized for sale at higher rates between Rs. 1.20 and 2.00 according quality and this fragments can be used for the production of rice bran oil.

The news further said that the existing hawler machines can be modernised for which the State Government would provide a strait grant of 5000 at the time.

The value of the above news item lies in the fact that the information contained in it can be cashed on by villagers with an incentive to do so. Modernization itself can go a long way to provide a remunerative financial return to rural people.

As we have been that poor people in rural areas are very often victimized for want of adequate advice on legal matters, the June 27, 1986 issue of the weekly has informed such people that a movement has been started by the Government of West Bengal to ameliorate distress on account of the above problem. The weekly carried out a text of the speech of Mr. Syed Mansur Habibullah, Minister of Law of the State Government, outlining facilities under the movement.

The speech of the minister said that the movement aimed at propargating about the legal rights for the weaker sections of the community. Already, the Law Department has directed the district legal aid committees to hold legal aid camp in villages. During such camps, legal aid officers would be available to advice the poorer section while the former would also being pleaders from courts to attend such camps. Of course, members of the local panchayat bodies, local school teachers or popular persons must be present during the such meetings. If no arbitration in the dispute fails to arrive then the legal aid committee for the district would spend money for the expenses of the litigation in a higher courts on behalf of the weaker section.

The mention of this important official policy in the weekly would no doubt enlighten the poorer people to fight against injustice, mostly found in land disputes which obviously drag the ongoing or proposed economic activities of the rural segment of the population.
Ganasakti, Kalantar

As the present investigation has a purpose to reveal trends in social dynamics, created by the print media, the investigator has found widespread influence of a group of vernacular newspapers among the inhabitants of Habra and Balarampur bloc. These newspapers are, the Ganasakti, published by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Kalantar published by the Communist Party of India and The Satyajug, published by a pro-Leftist publisher.

All these papers are motivated primarily to reach their readers who have similar political affiliations although persons belonging to different political parties do read them with a view to knowing the official policy on various issues concerning them including those relating to development process. Persons interviewed said that they find these political papers much more valuable since they are available regularly through the community centres, adult education centres and gram panchayat offices and moreover, they need not have to pay price for the papers.

Although no reliable data on readership was available, the investigator thinks it proper to assess the extent of readership through the velocity of circulation, keeping in view the definite exposure of much papers. Accordingly, the Ganasakti has the highest extent of readership to the extent of 160 times a paper, followed by Kalantar at 70 times a paper and Satyajug at 35 times a paper.

On enquiry, it was found that these political papers have been giving polarized versions of international as well as national events, leading to certain political conclusions akin to those of the political parties they belong to. However, regular news and news features on agriculture and industry along with advertisements from banks and other official agencies enlighten the readers in different ways which are seldom published in other political vernacular newspapers.

It is true that these papers do have a primary role to educate the readers politically and win their hearts to capture political power in the State Assembly, yet, these papers are versatile vehicle for the message of development. Sometimes, it is felt that the three papers despite having political undertones have identified themselves with the weal and woes of the vast populace living in the above mentioned areas.

As the communication process eventually involves hard facts for dissemination purposes, it can be said that such facts generate ideas on both centripetal and centrifugal
bases. As a result, ideas thus formed give rise to expectations while having a consolidated awareness. This awareness further leads to a mental attitude to do something tangible so that certain level in economic activities do arrive.

In this background, the role of these political papers, compared to local newspapers and apolitical metropolitan newspapers, have to be taken as an important factor to understand the basic theme that information is an essential input for development.