

## **Mass Media and Social Change: A Study of Three Scheduled Caste Villages in Sivasagar District of Assam.**

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*Mass media refers to communication system. Communication system may be written, broadcasted or spoken that reaches a larger audience. In the present society, mass media is becoming very powerful. In various ways communication and mass media accelerate the pace of social change. It provides people an opportunity to receive something new to any society. The basic objective of the present paper is to examine the impact of mass media among the Scheduled Caste with special emphasis on the Kaibartta Community. The study is based on three Kaibartta Villages in Sivasagar District of Assam. Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. The respondents of the study were selected randomly by using sequential list method. Due to influence of mass media, the Kaibarttas under studied open their eyes of mind towards their children education and new occupational avenues, which influence in changing their family status and social structure in general.*

**[Key Words:** *Mass Media, Social Change, Scheduled Castes, Kaibarttas.]*

### **Introduction**

Man as a social being cannot communicate directly with others. One has to exchange his or her ideas and experiences, feelings and emotions with near and dear ones through one or more senses – sight, sound, touch, taste or smell. The modern society is too complex that it is eventually difficult in doing direct communication between one individual and other. Hence, most of our important messages must reach many people at a time in order to be effective and meaningful. Mass media may be defined as any means, agency or instrument through which ideas, attitudes, impressions or images are communicated simultaneously to a large number of people. So, mass media includes printed and electronic material (Bhatia 1995:136).

Mass media refers communication system. Communication system may be written; broadcast or spoken that reaches a larger audience. This includes television, radio, advertising, movies, the internet, newspapers, magazines and so forth. All of these sources help and shape the belief of what social life,

culture, religion, or politics should be in the mind of people, basically younger generation. The mass media is very helpful relatively quick way to gain knowledge and insight as to what is going on the world, but when there are positive effects, the negative will soon follow. Mass media is a significant force in modern culture, Sociologists refer to this as a "mediated culture" (<http://www.et....>), which means culture creates due to the forces of reflections of media. In present society, mass media is becoming very powerful. It may be even beyond the point of sole entertainment, when it comes to the younger generations (<http://www.stud.....>).

The very term social change refers to a process in which modification or alterations occur in structural and functional patterns of a social system because of the forces either endogenous or exogenous or both (Jena et. al 1993:7). Kingsley Davis defines social changes as "any alterations as occur in social organization that is structure and functions of society." Social change is a process in itself. Though change brings about modification and alterations it is never a "break point" between old and new. Rather, the process of change is the inter-mediatory continuity between the old social order and the new social order. Through the process of change, the old structure only gets transformed to suit the new condition of living (ibid).

In various ways, communications and mass media may accelerate the pace of social change. Mass media provides people an opportunity to receive something new to any society by replacing the traditional values of the society. Mass media brings to the society new ideas, fashion, dress, dietary system, housing pattern, new kind of recreation, political belief etc. With regard to influence of the mass media on people Kuppaswamy (1976:13) remarks that mass media helps the ordinary people to acquire knowledge beyond their own experiences. This is how the mass media transforms the fabric of popular culture to a new form.

In the light of above discussion, the present paper attempts to study the impact of mass media on the Kaibarttas (Scheduled Caste community) for understanding changing attitude towards their family life.

Scheduled Castes:

It is worthwhile to mention the term scheduled castes and who are the scheduled castes of Assam. The scheduled caste is a politico-legal term. It was first coined by the Simon Commission and then Government of India Act 1935 (Prakash 1989:3). In accordance with this enactment, some of the undefined depressed castes were singled in 1936 and listed in a schedule in order to ensure their social development in social hierarchy. Their names had been shown in the "Scheduled" and they have come to be known as Scheduled Castes. The term "Scheduled Caste" was used by Dr. Ambedkar while drafting the constitution of our country, but it was not defined anywhere in the constitution. If referred to those categories that were poor, exploited socially and ritually or religiously degraded. The article 366(2) and 24 of the constitution reads "Scheduled Castes means such castes, races or tribes as

deemed under Article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purpose of constitution (Naido 2004:11).

There are sixteen Scheduled Castes Communities in Assam as records available. These are –Kaibartta, Namasudra, Hira, Bania, Mehtor, Lalbegi, Bansphor, Bhujmali or Mali, Dhupi-Dhubi, Dugla-Dholi, Thelo-Malo, Mahara, Muchi, Patni, Jalkeot (Jalia) and Sutradhar.

### The Kaibarttas

The Kaibarttas are one of the sixteen Scheduled Castes communities in the state as per constitution (Scheduled Castes) order of 1950. The Kaibarttas are the aboriginal inhabitants of Assam (Bordoloi et. al 1994:1, Das and Hazarika 2008:6, Sharma Thakur 2008:62-63, Sarma 2010:13). The Kaibarttas of Assam are of Dravidian origin. The dictionary meaning as stated in the "Hemkosh," the word Kaibartta is derived from the two words i.e. "Koi" means water and "Brit" means "to live" (Boruah 2006:6). It signifies that the Kaibartta is that community who lives in river line areas and earns livelihood by merchandizing through river. They are the disciples of religious institutions (Satras), which trace its origin to Mahapurush Sankardeva, the 15th Century Saint and Socio-Religious reformer of Assam. Besides, a good number of Kaibartta of upper Assam are the disciple of "Mayamora Satra" originated by Sri. Aniruddha Deva, a Vaishnava guru.

The Kaibartta constitutes 31.07% Scheduled Castes populations of Assam (Census 2011). The Kaibarttas of Assam used to live on the bank of the rivers mainly for their fishing professions as fishing is the traditional occupation of the Kaibarttas (Bordoloi et. al. 1994:38). Besides traditional occupations, Kaibarttas are nowadays engaged in other income sources also. They are an important segment of greater Assamese society for whose socio-economic upliftment; various measures have been adopted under Scheduled Castes component plan.

According to population structure, Kaibarttas are the largest group among the sixteen Scheduled Castes of Assam. The population structure of the Kaibarttas of Assam and Sivasagar district are shown in the following table 1 and 2 respectively.

**Table:1-** Population Structure of the Kaibarttas of Assam

	Total	Rural	Urban
Persons	6,93,219 (100%)	5,68,569 (82.02%)	1,24,650 (17.98%)
Male	3,53,177 (100%)	2,90,443 (82.24%)	62,734 (17.78%)
Female	3,40,042 (100%)	2,78,126 (81.79%)	61,916 (18.21)

**Source:**A-10 State Primary Census Abstract for individual Scheduled Castes-2011

**Table:2-** Population Structure of the Kaibarttas of Sivasagar District

	Total	Rural	Urban
Persons	29,011 (100%)	23,982 (82.67%)	5029 (17.33%)
Male	14,667 (100%)	12,128 (83.19%)	2539 (16.81%)
Female	14,344 (100%)	11,854 (82.69%)	2490 (17.31%)

**Source:**A-10 State Primary Census Abstract for individual Scheduled Castes PCA

### **Objective of the Study**

The basic objective of the present paper is to examine the impact of mass media among the Kaibarttas under study.

### **Methodology**

The field of study: The field of present study has been confined in three Kaibartta villages of Sivasagar District of Assam. The villages are Rajabari, Kamar Phadia-Jugunia and Moupuria Village. The Rajabari Village is situated under the jurisdiction of Sivasagar revenue circle and Kheluwa development block. The village is located on the northern bank of river Darika under Disangpur Gaon Panchayat. The Kumar Phadia-Jugunia Village is situated on the northern bank of the river Dikhow under Nagar Mahal Gaon Panchayat area of Kheluwa Development block and Sivasagar revenue circle. The Moupuria village is situated under RongpurGaonPanchayat of Gaurisagar development block within the jurisdiction of Sivasagar revenue circle. This village is located on the southern bank or the river Dikhow.

### **Respondents**

There are 529 families in three studied villages. Out of 529 families, 257 families in Rajabari village, 143 families in KamarPhadia-Jugunia village and 129 families in Moupuria village. We have randomly selected 212 families (40% from each village) by applying sequential list method i.e. serialization of families of each village. The villages are exclusively inhabited by the Kaibartta (Scheduled Castes) people. The head of the family were the respondents in this study. Out of 212 respondents 197 (92.92%) were male and 15 (7.08%) were female respondents in the present study.

### **Collection of data**

Both primary and secondary data were collected in the present study. The primary data collected from the respondents with the help of interview, self-structured interview scheduled and observation. The secondary data are collected from various books and journals, internet website and government offices concerned.

### **Findings and Analysis**

There is close relationship between all the forms of mass media. Mass media are influenced by socio-economic and political environments in which they function. Through mass media we can improve everything for our live world. Mass media are channels to do, discover something new. Mass media influences on our life and gives direction to our life changes. So, it may be stated that mass media gives expressions to our ideas, attitudes, desires, interest etc.

In this context, for understanding changing attitude of the Kaibarttas under studied towards their family life, researcher put forward two questions to the respondents. The first question researchers put to know whether they have communications media like TV, radio, computer-internet and subscribe newspaper. The following table depicts the respondents' opinion.

**Table 3: Respondents' Access to Mass Media**

Communication Media	Responses		Total
	Yes	No	
TV	190 (89.62%)	22 (10.38%)	212
Radio	18 (8.49%)	194 (91.51%)	212
Computer	49 (23.11%)	163 (76.89%)	212
Subscribe Newspaper	48 (22.64)	164 (77.36%)	212

**Source:** Field data

In perusal of the above table 3, it has been seen that majority of the respondents i.e. 190 (82.62%) have televisions for their family consumption and rest 22 respondents i.e. 10.38% have no televisions. This group of respondents is economically backward and unable to purchase a television, they are still in the subsistence level. The very conspicuous fact is found from the table that out of 212 respondents only 18, i.e. 8.49% have radio, whereas majority of the respondents i.e. 194 (91.51%) have no radio. In this context, they expressed that the value of radio is gradually decreasing at present which is occupied by the television, because both audio and video are possible in television. The table shows that number of respondents 49 i.e. 23.11% have computer-internet facility in their family, whereas highest number of respondents i.e. 193 (76.89%) have no computer internet facility which is an important communication media in the society today. On the other hand, 48 respondents i.e.22.64% have subscribed newspaper but majority of the respondents i.e. 164 (77.36%) have not subscribed newspaper. It is fact that the respondents who have not subscribed newspaper, they do not feel importance of newspaper in the present society. They do not interested in reading newspaper and they would not like to spend their money for purchasing newspaper.

However, these mass media communication not only provided recreation to the people, but also educated them in the field of education, economy, health and hygiene and so forth. It seems that these communications media have been playing a conspicuous role in eradicating the evils of traditional society. General awareness of the people, increasing political participation, technological innovation in the field of economy, raising personal income and standard of living are some of the major effects or diffusion of these mass media communication is society.

In this context, for the groups of respondents who have availed these communication media, researchers put another question to know their opinion regarding impact of these communication media in changing their family life style. The following table shows respondents' opinion in this state of being.

Table 4s

Communication media	Response		Row total
	Yes	No	
TV	161	29	190
	84.74%	15.26%	100%
	63.64%	55.77%	62.29%
Radio	12	06	18
	66.67%	33.33%	100%
	4.74%	11.54%	5.90%
Computer-Internet	41	08	49
	83.67%	16.33%	100%
	16.20%	15.38%	16.07%
Subscribed Newspaper	39	09	48
	81.25%	18.75%	100%
	15.42%	17.31%	15.74%
Total	253	52	305
	82.95%	17.05%	100%
	100%	100%	100%

**Source:** Field data

It can be inferred from the above table that out of 190 respondents i.e. 161 (84.74%), have provided positive opinion to the query. They opined that viewing various programmes in different channels of television highly impact in changing their family life. By viewing different programmes in television, they acquire knowledge about various programmes relating to education, economy, politics, art and culture, games and sports and different social issues from the different parts of the country. In this respect, 29 respondents i.e. 15.26% had provided negative opinion; they think that viewing television cannot impact in their family life. In most of the time, it is wastage of time for school and college going children and also other members of the family. In case of radio, out of the 18 respondents i.e. 12 (66.67%), opined that listening radio impacts their family life. According to this group of respondents by listening to radio news they can earn knowledge of education, culture, economy polity, games and sports and other social issues. In this state, only 6 respondents i.e. 33.33%, had opined that listening radio cannot impact in changing their family life. Regarding computer internet, out of 49 respondents, 41 i.e. 83.67%, had provided positive opinion that computer internet facilities highly impact on their children education etc. and simultaneously impact in changing their family status. In this respect of 8 respondents i.e. 16.33% provided negative opinion, they think that computer and internet facilities cannot impact on their family life. In case of newspaper, out of 48 respondents, 39, i.e. 81.25% expressed their positive views that reading newspaper directly or indirectly impact on their family. As newspaper focusses various information regarding day to day happenings in society, various functions and programmes of government, activities of different institutions and organization and various issues relating to social development which impact in their family life. On the other hand, a

respondent, i.e.18.75% does not think in that way for which they provided negative view in this state of being.

Overall, it has been found that majority, i.e. 82.95% respondents provided positive views to the query, they think that these communication media highly influence in changing their family lifestyle and family status as well. Rest 17.05% respondents have provided negative views. They do not think that these communication media impact in changing their family life style.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that the mass media highly impact among the Kaibarttas. The study reflects that due to impact of mass media, the present generation of the Kaibarttas acquire new knowledge of modern education, economy, politics, art and culture, games and sports and different societal issues happenings throughout the country. The Kaibarttas of studied area think that communication media impact in changing their family status too. The forces of mass media open the minds of the Kaibarttas towards their children education and new occupational avenues, which impact in changing their social structure. Besides traditional occupation they are nowadays engaged in variety of income generating occupation including private and public sector services.

It may also be stated that some of the Kaibartta population are still unaware in regard to need and impact of these communications media. In this context, various Govt. and Non-govt. organizations, institutions and Scheduled Caste development council should play vital role for building awareness among this fast changing generation of the community for their all-round development, which can help in the formation better developed Assamese Society and can involve themselves in the nation building process in a better way.

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