

Mass Media: Issues and Impact – An Ethnographic Study in a West Bengal Village^[1]Baishakhi Roy, ^[2]Dr. Abhijit Das^[1]PG Student, Department of Anthropology, West Bengal State University, India^[2]Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, West Bengal State University, India

Abstract. The mass media refers to media technologies that reach a large number of people in many societies via mass communication throughout the world, and has become increasingly important in recent centuries. Communication is a prerequisite for human society. The means of communication that reach a large number of people in a short time are television, newspapers, magazines, radio etc.

Mass media has a prominent role to play in human society. It can bring about radical changes and improve social situation as it influences our social, civil, cultural, political, economic and aesthetic outlook. Mass media influences both society and culture. Different forms of communication, including message in the mass media, give shape and structure to society. Additionally mass media outlets can spread cultural knowledge and artistic works around the globe. Other media such as magazines, radio, television and the internet also have the potential to influence children's eating habits, exercise habits, reading habits and mental health.

The intensive ethnographic study of mass media, its issues and impact, has been conducted in a village namely *Bharati Nagar*, which is situated under the *Kumra Kashipur* Gram Panchayet under Habra-1 Block of Barasat Subdivision of district North 24 Parganas at the state of West Bengal.

The objective of the study was to throw light on the concept of mass media and its patterns in the village and also the impact of mass media among the villagers in different socio-cultural aspect and its change due to modernization as well as globalization.

The study was primarily based on the data collected through the direct intensive observation method along with interview schedule (with open-ended questions) and case studies. The reference books, journals, municipal documents and other sources of secondary information were also utilized for the present study.

Keywords: Culture, Society, Rural, Communication, Mass Media, Entertainment, Modernization, Globalization

Introduction

By its very nature, anthropology is intrinsically linked to communication. Not only do anthropologists observed the daily lives of the people they study, they must also rely on those people reports about what their experience mean to them. Anthropologists must they find words to communicate and understanding of the people experience to other anthropologists. When anthropologists turn to communicating their understanding of social and cultural process to their colleagues and members of the public, they rely on various forms of mass media such as visual anthropology, the mass media and anthropology, anthropology and journalism etc. Although there is a huge academic literature on mass media, it is largely confined to the perspectives of the industrialized world, so that the comparative skills of anthropologists will be in demand in the effort to understand mass media as a global phenomenon. Television, although certain to strengthen its position as dominant medium, depends for its existence on writing and print and also interact with a wider field of marketing, merchandising, and promotion that has an equally worldwide reach. The development of printing made the written word in to a medium for mass communication (Briggs & Copley, 2002).

For many years, mass media were seen as almost a taboo topic for anthropology, too redolent of Western modernity and cultural imperialism for a field identified with tradition, the non-Western, and the vitality of the local. As media are becoming more ubiquitous even in remote locales, an increasing number of anthropologists have recognized not only the necessity of attending to their presence but also their significance. As anthropologists attempt to account for the growing importance of the presence of film, television, video, and radio as part of the everyday life of people throughout the world (Rothenbuhler & Coman, 2005).

The development of electronic media film, telephone, radio, television, and video provide the means form communication over space and time as well as inexpensive and efficient diffusion corate through the same human skills of speech. The electronic media by pass the need for special communication skill such as literacy, thus opening communication to those who, for lack of literacy skills are excluded from communication via printed media. Ordinary people everywhere are capable of receiving communication through the electronic media and increasingly people throughout the world even in the remotest forest, desert, and mounting settlement are regularly receiving radio and television broadcast from multiple sources. They are divers because media broadcast – including series such as soap operas and comedies, films, musical performances, and news and documentaries – travail and are transmitted across cultural boundaries, from one ethnic group to another (Folkerts & Lacy, 2005).

The mass media is one form of communication found in many societies throughout the world, and has become increasingly important in recent centuries. Communication is a prerequisite for human society. Humans are not genetically programmed for one pattern of behavior, but rather have the capacity to learn many different patterns. The term “mass media” is usually understood to encompass broadcasting, film, popular music, Printed newspapers, and magazines. A generous anthropological definition must also include all other technologies of popular communication, such as photography and computing; the techniques of persuasion that have been developed by political propogandists and commercial publicists, including the use of logos and outdoor posters; and the institutional forms that have grown up to organize the use of media and that are sometimes analytically confused with the technologies themselves (Mores, 2000).

Such a recent and rapid transformation in the role of media and digital technologies has prompted researchers to find the right tools to research both new and enduring cultural practices. Understanding how and why people make, use and distribute media, in all their different cultural circumstances, often requires an in-depth exploration of people’s experiences on the ground, and to acknowledge that while media technologies and infrastructures may be global in reach, they are understood by consumers through a filter of local experience (Pertierra, 2018).

Review of Literature: A Brief Outline

Among social cultural anthropologist’s pioneering study of the mass media were of Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd, who wrote on the provincial American press, and W. L. Warner, who studied American newspaper writing as an expression of nonrational folk beliefs.

The most durable product of this early period is probably Hortense Powdermaker’s *Hollywood, the Dream Factory* (1950), an ethnographic study based on a year’s residential fieldwork on 1946-1947. Powdermaker saw the film industry as a squanderer of creative talent and laid bare its economic instability amid dazzling wealth, its rival studios’ appetite for control, and its craven self-censorship.

Sol Worth in the 1960s and Jay Ruby in the 1970s, both in United States universities, but anthropology was generally laggard in making a specific contribution to media studies, which came to be led by other social sciences and by literary theory.

John Fiske's work in the 1980s however, is clearly indebted to anthropology, and the whole movement known as cultural studies has partly filled the vacuum left by anthropology's reluctance to engage, until recently, with this and many other mainstream problems of industrial society.

Aim and Objectives of the Present Study

The present ethnographic study has been conducted in the village *Bharati Nagar* of North 24 Parganas District, Subdivision Barasat, which was dominated by the schedule caste communities.

The primary aim and objectives of present study are:

1. To understand the concepts of mass media and its patterns in the village under study.
2. To understand the Impacts of mass media among the villagers indifferent socio-cultural aspects of their day to day life.
3. To study the multifunctional relations around the mass media among the villagers and its change due to modernization as well as globalization.

Area of Observation: A Brief Profile

The present ethnographic study has been conducted in a village named *Bharati Nagar* in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal.

Geographically, the village is situated on the plain area of West Bengal. Administratively, the village is situated under the *Kumra Kashipur* Gram Panchayet under Habra-1 Block of Barasat Subdivision in the district North 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

Methodology of the Present Study

The present study is qualitative in nature. For this, the ethnographic research designs with traditional anthropological methods and techniques have been applied for the purpose.

Basically the primary and a few secondary sources have been used for the collection of respective informations. The direct intensive observation method along with interview schedule (with open-ended questions), case study, consisting of all sorts of sense perception has been used as the main source of field data. The interview schedule that is the household census data, sub urban area schedule and the material components (of culture) schedule has also been used in respect of rapid collection of data regarding the demographic profile, area and its people and material culture of the people under study. The structured (open-ended) questionnaires were also used while taking interview from the individual informants for the collection of data of different aspects of socio-cultural life.

The books, journals, municipal documents and other sources as secondary data were used for the present study, too. Even the use of photography, where it was needed was done for the collection of the first hand information pertaining to the various aspects of the society and culture of the people of the area under study.

It is also worth mentioning that in order to maintain objectivity all sorts of scientific measurements have been taken in to account and the generalization of the data have been made free from all sorts of prejudices, biases, and pre-conceptions.

Discussion and Interpretation

Regarding the demographic profile of the village *Bharati Nagar*, it was distributed in respect of age & sex, educational status, family size, sex wise educational qualifications and some other aspects. Hence, various statistical data and analysis are done by the help of household census sheet, participant observation, and intensive interview. The tables of this distribution are depicted and analyzed with the help of tabular charts.

Table 1. Sex and age group wise distribution of families under study

Age group in yrs	Male	%	Female	%
Upto 5 yrs	17	6.46	19	8.37
5-10 yrs	15	5.7	10	4.41
10-15 yrs	21	7.99	18	7.93
15-20 yrs	18	6.84	27	11.90
20-25 yrs	30	11.41	20	8.81
25-30 yrs	33	12.55	27	11.90
30-35 yrs	23	8.75	18	7.92
35-40 yrs	26	9.89	30	13.22
40-45 yrs	21	7.99	6	2.64
45-50 yrs	13	4.94	15	6.61
50-55 yrs	7	2.66	9	3.96
55-60 yrs	13	4.94	8	3.52
60-65 yrs	6	2.28	8	3.52
65 above	20	7.6	12	5.29
Total	263	100	227	100

Table 1 depicts pictures observed about the number of male individuals and female individuals of the village population. Beside this the males and females belong to different age groups and their percentage in total population can also be seen.

Table 2. Sex and age group wise distribution of literacy of male population under study

Age group in yrs	Literate	%	Illiterate	%	Total	%
Upto 5 yrs	8	3.14	0	0	8	3.14
5-10 yrs	16	6.3	0	0	16	6.3
10-15 yrs	23	9.05	0	0	23	9.05
15-20 yrs	17	6.7	0	0	17	6.7
20-25 yrs	28	11.02	0	0	28	11.02
25-30 yrs	32	12.6	0	0	32	12.6
30-35 yrs	18	7.08	1	0.39	19	7.47
35-40 yrs	26	10.23	2	0.78	28	11.01
40-45 yrs	20	7.87	0	0	20	7.87
45-50 yrs	13	5.11	1	0.39	14	5.5
50-55 yrs	8	3.14	2	0.78	10	3.92
55-60 yrs	11	4.33	0	0	11	4.33
60-65 yrs	3	1.18	0	0	3	1.18
65 above	22	8.66	3	1.18	25	9.84
Total	245	96.47	9	3.53	254	100

Table 2 shows literacy among male population of the village *Bharati Nagar*. We also find the male individuals who are still illiterate. Information also can be observed from the table on the literacy and illiteracy rate of males of the village of different age groups.

Table 3. Sex and age group wise distribution of literacy of female population under study

Age group in yrs	Literate	%	Illiterate	%	Total	%
Up to 5 yrs	12	5.74	5	2.39	17	8.13
5-10 yrs	9	4.31	0	0	9	4.31
10-15 yrs	12	5.74	1	0.48	13	6.22
15-20 yrs	26	12.44	0	0	26	12.44
20-25 yrs	18	8.61	0	0	18	8.61
25-30 yrs	24	11.48	2	0.96	26	12.44
30-35 yrs	17	8.13	0	0	17	8.13
35-40 yrs	26	12.44	2	0.96	28	13.40
40-45 yrs	6	2.87	1	0.48	7	3.35
45-50 yrs	11	5.26	2	0.96	13	6.22
50-55 yrs	8	3.83	0	0	8	3.83
55-60 yrs	6	2.87	1	0.48	7	3.35
60-65 yrs	4	1.91	5	2.40	9	4.31
65 above	5	2.39	6	2.87	11	5.26
Total	184	88.02	25	11.98	209	100

Table 3 depicts a picture of literacy among female population of the village *Bharati Nagar*. We also find the female individuals who are still illiterate. Information also can be observed from the table on the literacy and illiteracy rate of females of the village of different age groups.

Table 4. Extent of literacy among the population of the village *Bharati Nagar*

Educational levels	Male	%	Female	%
Pre-primary	18	8.03	20	11.24
Primary	17	7.6	15	8.43
Secondary	140	62.5	125	70.22
Higher secondary	25	11.17	10	5.62
Under graduate	18	8.03	5	2.8
Post graduate	6	2.67	3	1.69
Total	224	100	178	100

Table 4 is a statistical explanation of the degree of literacy among the males and females and their percentages. This table helps to understand the educational development of the studied village as it is showing how many males and females are taking pre-primary education,

primary education, secondary, higher secondary education. Who are completing their graduation and who are in post-graduate education. Thus we easily quantify the educational levels of the village *Bharati Nagar*.

Concepts and Types of Mass Media among the Families: Some Observations

The villagers think that mass media mainly is for entertainment purpose and it helps to bring things which are far away to near. They believe that every thing has a good and bad effect, similarly mass media having both good and bad effect. Good effects are that they can easily communicate with the person who is far away from them. Other than that they also get the latest news from the news channel and daily news paper. They entertain themselves watching different programmes in television like sports, news, daily soap, both Bengali and Hindi movie, religious programme, musical programme and many reality shows e.t.c.

The bad effects are children waste their study time by watching television. They listen to music and play games on the mobile. According to the villagers there is a lot of bad effects on today's young generation by mobile phone. Because some days ago two persons of their village lost their life because of talking on mobile phone on the main road. For that villagers believe that media related things are pushing the young generation people toward destruction.

Every house in the village is equipped with different kinds of mass media related things. There are different kinds of printed media such as Bengali newspaper (Ananda Bazar, Bartaman), English newspaper (The Telegraph) and Employment Gazettes. Different magazines like *Desh*, *Anandalok*, etc. and electronic media such as modern Cell Phone, Colour Television, Black & White Television, Radio, Cable and DTH service. On the other hand local panchayet member, sansad supervisors, local club secretary and club members, who communicate with the villagers about the important matters.

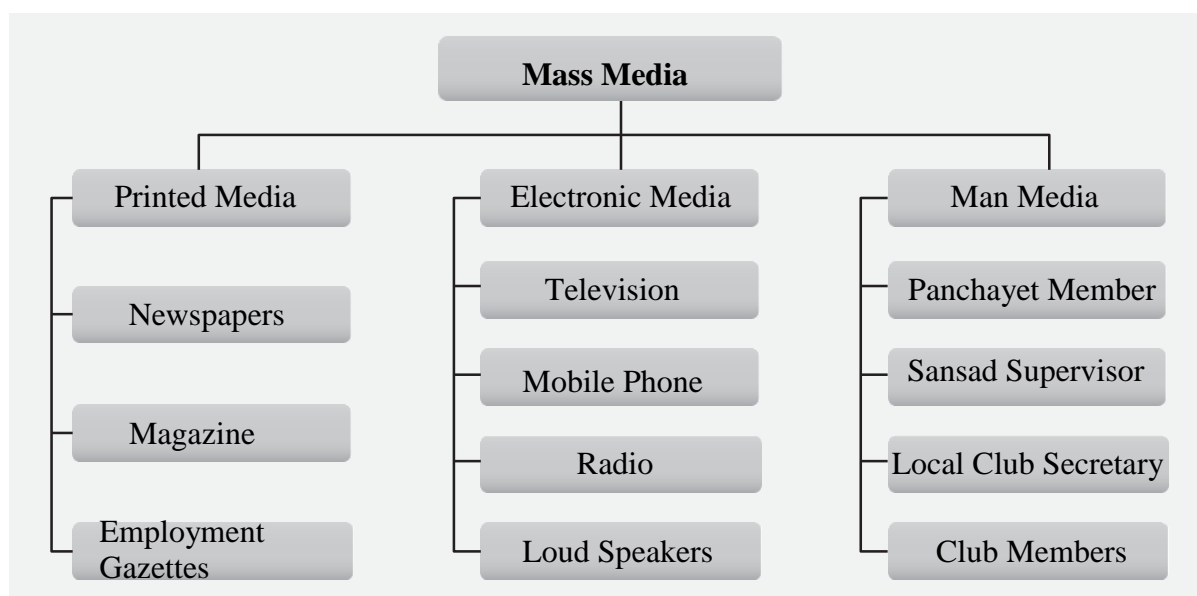
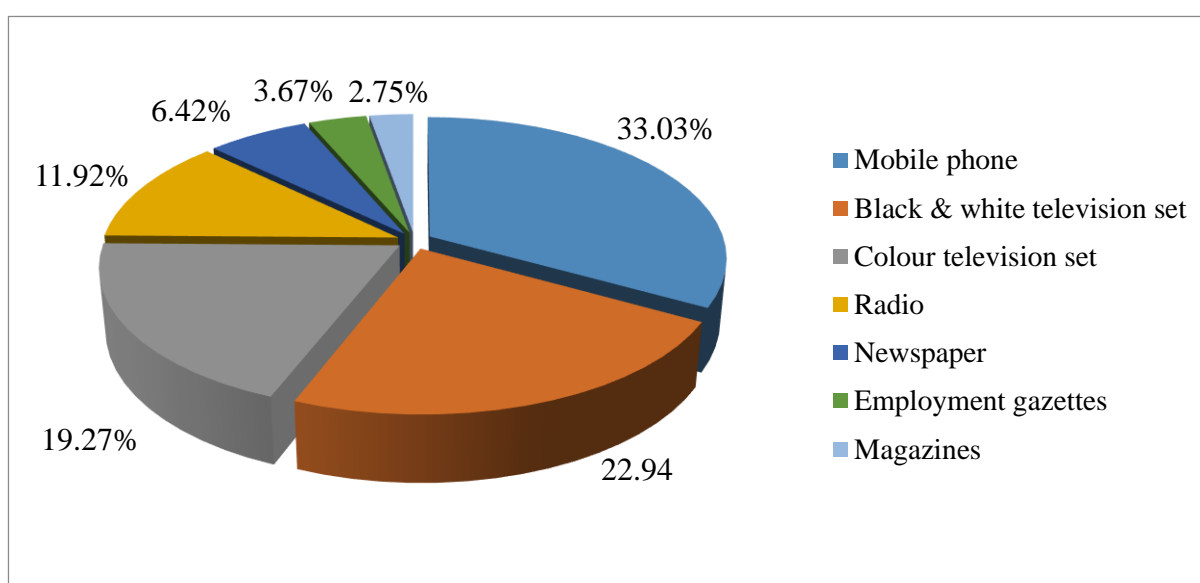


Figure 1. Categories of mass media among the studied village

Table 5. Family wise distribution of possession of categories of mass media

Nature of mass media	Number of family	Percentage
Colour television set	21	19.27
Black & white television set	25	22.94
Mobile phone	36	33.03
Radio	13	11.92
Newspaper	7	6.42
Employment gazettes	4	3.67
Magazines	3	2.75
Total	109	100

**Figure 2. Graphical chart showing the possession of categories of mass media use by the studied families****The Mass Media Professionals: An Overview**

The use of mass media to shape public opinion, disseminate public information, and transform political culture has grown tremendously in developing countries and villages during last two decades. In this respect, they have relied on mass media as a major purveyor of modern influences and as one of the most effective agents of political re-socialization.

Newspaper Supplier: A Case

My informant Babul Kor (59 years, male) told me that he lives in *Koipukur*, at Habra. He supplied newspaper at *Bharati Nagar* on the last eight months. He supplies newspaper by riding bicycle. He told me that he supplies newspaper to seven houses of the village. Out of those houses he supplies employment gazettes and different magazines to two houses of the village. The houses where student are there they take educational magazines. He supplies different kinds of newspaper such as *Bartaman*, *Ananda Bazar*, *The Telegraph*, and magazines like *Desh*, *Anandalok*, and employment gazettes. He also told me that because of this profession he is able to know the different news.

Cable Operator: A Case

My informant Bipul Biswas (30 years, male) lives in *Bayarghata* village. He told me that he supplies cable T.V. network at *Bharati Nagar* from last two years. According to him earlier there were only 15 cable connections are there but now almost the 80% of villagers are having the cable connection. He told me that he is having a co-worker named Anup Mallik (25 years, male) who give cable connection to different houses of the village, and if there is any problems in cable line he repairs that.

TV Technician: A Case

My informant Dhiraj Biswas (32 years, male) lives in *Rudrapur*. He is a T.V., Radio technician. He is having a shop in *Kumra Bazar*. He told me that he is in this profession from the last four year. He told me that earlier he use to go to the house of different people for repairing television sets. But after starting the shop his assistant Prodip Das (26 years, male) goes the houses of different people to trouble shoot the problems of television set. He told me that if any major problem occurred then he takes the television set deposited for two days, and is there is no such serious trouble he repair the television on the same day. He told me that he takes Rs.50 as testing charge, and then he charges for repairing the television set as per requirement.

Variegated Relations around Mass Media

According to the villagers around the mass media they established a good relationship among each others. Those villagers who don't take newspaper daily they take newspaper from nearby houses, and they discuss among each others about the different news all over the world such as different political issues, sports, fashion, criminal activity etc. Those villagers who don't have mobile phone they use to communicate with their neighbours telephones. The villagers love to watch television with each others. In the evening the villagers usually spend their leisure time by watching television in groups and they also discuss about many programmes.

According to the villagers they spend their leisure time to watching television. They mainly watch both Bengali and Hindi movies, sports, soap operas, comedy programmes. Even when they watching those programmes they also discuss about different kind of people, today's world, and their daily life.

Babul kor (39 years, male) is a newspaper seller in the village *Bharati Nagar*, and Bipul Biswas (30 years, male) is a cable operator of the village *Bharati Nagar* has good relationship with all the villagers. Even they also discuss about different matters with the villagers.

The villagers told me that they also well communicate with the local panchayet members, sansad supervisors, local club members, and local club secretary and established a good relationship with them.

Some villagers communicate with their maternal house or relatives with the help of mobile phone. Apart from these according to the villagers mobile phone is also help to communicate themselves for different types of work purpose and serious health conditions for medical purpose.

Young generation also use mobile phone to listening music and playing game purpose. They also communicate with their friends through message and making calls. They discuss many things with each other's by the use of mobile phone.

According to the villagers when their television set have some trouble they went to the nearby market named *Kumra bazaar*, and communicate with the Dhiraj Biswas (32 years, male) and always established a good and friendly relationship with him. In this way the villagers are having a lovely relationship each others around the mass media.

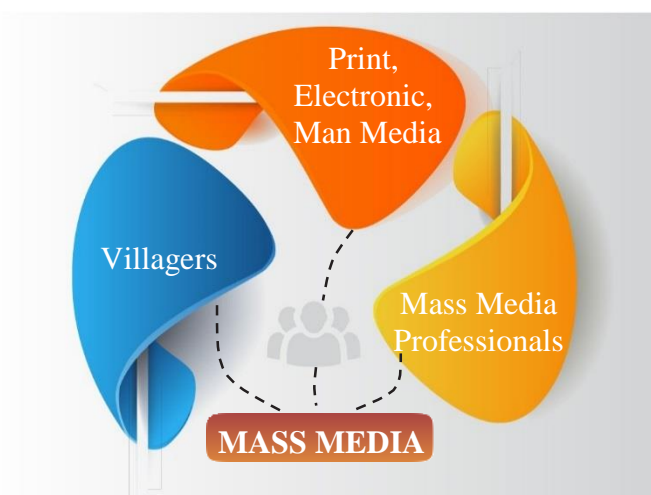


Figure 3. Impact of mass media at a glance

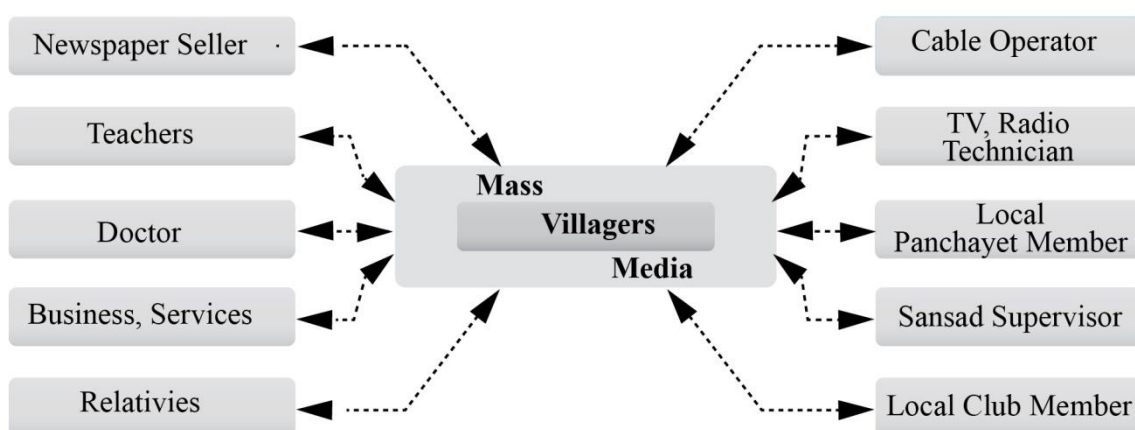


Figure 4. Networks of relations around mass media

Impact of Mass Media in the Techno-Economic and Socio-Religious Life on the Studied Families

The mass media is inexorable, an all-encompassing presence in modern life. In most nations today, the average person spends one third of his life exposed to some forms of mass media, in which it shapes his or her beliefs, behaviors, outlooks and values to some extent.

In a socio-cultural aspect, it can be seen that every form of media is considered as a cultural good. When we consume it, we are also consuming the beliefs, values that the media presents to us. Because of the emergence of media, precious moral values and ideals are increasingly being undervalued as the media desensitize the people, especially the young, in which sophisticated lifestyles, sensational depictions of sex, violence are dished out to the viewers to consume.

Every individual has their own analytical framework of thinking. Regardless of their literacy level, these individuals are likely to make use of their own personal references and sentiments to view various issues.

Joshi 1983 expressed that, “nowadays the media such as newspaper, radio, television have become an integral part of human life. Mass media have been influenced the social, cultural, economic and religious aspect of society. The impact of mass media especially the

television on the society has been compared with the effect of water dripping steadily on a stone imperceptibly eroding old values and attitudes in favour of new ones”.

Entertainment is a way people use media to escape their problems or even every day activities. Watching television/media allows viewers to lose themselves completely into it and forget reality for a while, e.g. the film “The Lord of the Rings”. In developing and understanding personal identity, people use media to analyze and come to terms with emotions, thoughts, and attitudes. For example, everyone has favorite songs that express how they feel about another person or life itself. Decision making with media information occurs when an individual consults the internet, television, newspaper, or magazines to help him or her to clear up a specific problem.

There is no doubt that people often use mass media for entertainment, but gestations as to why people select media and other forms of entertainment have yet to be adequately explained.

Young people have more influence of popular music in their social interactions than adults. Young adults’ consumer media at high levels. They listen to radio on average two hours a day, they read text books and magazines, and they watch television on average six hours a day. Many spend hours on the internet in chat groups or use various forms of e-mail. They also read newspaper and magazines. Music, talk shows, soap operas, situation comedies, and intellectual shows are popular.

Changing Aspects

Before the advent of the mass media, communication already existed, but it existed only within a limited confine. By the dawn of the 19th century, the mass media began to emerge, the face of communication art of passing or disseminating information on a large number of people simultaneously becomes possible.

These mass media have exerted enormous power and influence on the people, it has become part of their everyday life. Some people prefer to listen to radio, watch television or read newspapers and magazine before laying their hands on anything every morning.

It has increased the importance in the political life of every civil society, especially with the increasing democratisation of nations policy, there is multiplicity of linkage between the mass media, the society and its politics, their activities and influence taking from the pre and post world war period to this present era of communication technology explosion, the media have proven to be veritable instruments for political mobilisation.

The media is creating awareness of both the immediate environment and the outside world. It is worthy to note that the mass media do not only create awareness as well as serving as a means for expression of ideas. But they are a social force to be reckoned with and a vehicle for mobilisation. However the mass media play a watchdog role in any society to keep surveillance on the government. In fact, it is a major tool for good relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Indeed, mass media set agenda for the people. Also they assist in determining political reality.

Mass Media as Changing Agent: A Case

According to my Informant, Shamtala Adhikari (23 years, female) got married at the age of 18. At that time there were no such devices like television, mobile in her in laws house. After completing house hold works she did not having anything to do. At that time she uses to read different type of story books and listening F.M and radio for her entertainment. She tells me that two years ago her husband bought a mobile phone. Before that she use to communicate to her maternal relatives through letters, but now she can communicate with them by the mobile phone. Apart from these according to her mobile phone is also help to communicate her husband for different types of work purpose.

My Informant told me that few month ago they perches a colour television on installment from *Kashipur* Market. She also tells me that at present during her leisure time she entertainment herself to watches different programmes in television like sports, news, daily soap, both Bengali and Hindi movie, religious programme, musical programme and many reality shows. According to my informant whenever she watches television her neighbours also comes to watch television at her home. Together they watch different programmes in television and talk with each other in different matter. In this way her life changes with the help of mass media.

Role of Gram Panchayet in the Interpretation of Mass Media

Case-1

Shamoli Biswas (30 years, female) was panchayet prodhan (Head of the Panchayet) of *Kashipur* Gram Panchayet, told me that they informed people about the forth coming Sansad meeting, Panchayet meetings and other important information by the help of loud speakers.

She also told me that every Sansad has eight members and one supervisor, even they also communicate with the villagers about the important matters of panchayet.

The development works done by the Panchayet through posters, hoardings. After seeing those developmental advertisements the villagers also take part in those development works of panchayet.

Case-2

Suzauddin Mohammed (27 years, male) is a member of *Kashipur* Panchayet, he told me that he supervises different NRGs projects, and he also told me that they informed villagers about the 100 days work skims with the help of loud speakers. Even the supervisors are also informed villagers by going there home.

He told me that the villagers who have 100 days job cards only they can take part on those developmental projects such as *pukur khanon* (pond digging), *rasta meramot* (road repairing) etc.

Concluding Observations

The term “mass media” is usually understood to encompass broadcasting, film, popular music, printed newspapers, and magazines. The mass media is one form of communication found in many societies throughout the world. During investigation, it has been observed that the villagers are gradually willing to accept modern education. Most of the families of the village are equipped with mass media related things. There is modern cell phone in every house of the village except two or three house. The maximum numbers of houses are having colour television. The families of weak economic condition generally having black and white television. The maximum number of houses are having cable connections. Some of the houses are having DTH connection and very least number of houses having antenna. Some of the houses of the village take daily newspaper (*Ananda Bazar*, *Bartaman*) and employment gazzets.

In my studied area I observed there is a good impact of mass media. The villagers think that mass media mainly is for entertainment purpose and it helps to brings things which are far away to near. They believe that every things have a good and bad effect, similarly mass media having both good and bad effect. Good effects are, they can easily communicate with the person who is far away from them. Other than that they also get the latest news from the news channel and daily news paper. They entertainment themselves to watching different programmes in television like sports, news, daily soap, both Bengali and Hindi movie, religious programme, musical programme and many reality shows e.t.c.

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today's young generation by mobile phone. Because some days ago two person of their village lost their life because of talking on mobile phone on the main road. For that villagers believe that media related things are pushing the young generation people toward destruction.

A good number of rituals, festivals are performed by the villagers with the use of music boxes, loud speakers etc.

A varied type of mass media available in the families under study. Most of the families uses mobile phone. The percentage of mobile user is 33.02.

Panchayet plays an important role in interpretation of mass media. They informed villagers about the forth coming panchayet meetings with the help of loud speakers. Panchayet members and Sansad supervisor are also informed villagers about the important matters of panchayet.

Development has been defined as a moment designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and on the initiative taken by the community. When I survived the *Bharati Nagar* area I observed the villagers culturally and economically are relating to hygienic status develops to some extent.

From the discussion it has been found that in the village *Bharati Nagar* there is a good impact of mass media, and they have both the bad and good concept about the mass media. It seems that they are succeeding gradually.

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