

Impact of Television on Political Awareness of Rural Masses in Anand District of Gujarat

Ramesh H. Makwana

The speed of technological developments in the field of communication has no doubt changed the face of media and society in the past two to three decades. These developments are so fast that social scientists and researchers are finding it difficult to assess, assimilate, understand and interpret their impact on different communities and social groups. The diffusion of new information technologies is making such the road into Indian societies that their multiple applications are giving birth to more and more cynicism. The media is a helpless victim of this phenomenon. After the conversion of the whole world into a global village the new information technologies which have brought video, sound, graphics, and text to gather at a great speed and skills, are aiming at creating an information society which, very soon, will widen the gap between the information rich and the information poor. The unequal pace of technological development between the urban and rural areas, where both producers and beneficiaries of technology, has increased inequities between urban centers and the rural periphery. The antennas on the rooftops are increasing day by day all over the world. The 20th-century creation of the technological revolution, the great instrument of persuasion and the most powerful weapon for social change, the unique combination of commercial, political, academic, and cultural programs is the main characteristic feature of TV. The scope of TV Programmes can be broadly visualized from three angles, i.e. information, education, and entertainment with communication satellites the task of realizing its basic functions has become much easier and the purpose more effective. Many advanced countries in the world have tried to fully utilize the potentialities of TV for their political and Socio-economic development. Extensive research has been conducted to assess the impact of TV on the minds of the people. In light of these studies, many developing countries have realized the need for a sophisticated technology like TV which could bring revolutionary changes, especially among illiterate masses. Considering these possibilities a worldwide satellite Television experiment called SITE (satellite Instructional Television Experiment) was initiated for the upliftment of rural masses (Sharda P. V. 1992: 1-2).

The social benefit of satellite television was expected to break all barriers between nations and also to help promote understanding among them. There is a relationship between economic development and Social change in a country. Communication plays an important role in bringing

Ramesh H. Makwana is Associate Professor, P.G. Dept of Sociology, Sardar Patel University/, Vallabh Vidyanagar (Gujarat); Email: drrhmakwanaspu@yahoo.com

social change Hence a country that needs to develop itself requires the assistance of a communication system. India is a developing country. Therefore, the significance of mass media in this country needs no exaggeration It can have a great impact. The Government of India has been taking several steps to educate the masses and bring awareness through modern media. A majority of our population is living in rural areas. Despite tremendous strides in urbanization, industrialization, and mechanization India is still far behind in many aspects. It is as to compete with other countries of the world in economic development and overall progress, India has to start from the village level in its nation-building program. The backwardness of our rural folk chiefly lies in their poverty, innocence, ignorance, literacy, and inhibitions. The planners desire to give them higher aspirations, with the intention of individual self-development that ultimately leads to national development. The existing formal education system is not able to cater to the needs of the present situation, hence a medium like television should be made thoroughly extensive in its use for mass educational programmers. (Narayan Menon.1976)

Here it can be said that the audio and visual combination of T.V.S is a capable medium if the programmes of rural mass education are to be meaningful. The broadcast media provides an opportunity for rural participation in their programs. The kind of individual participation that brings the media to the masses may be a more interesting way of presentation than the monotony of listening to routine talks and lectures. Basic knowledge about politics becomes imperative when it comes to the people choosing a leader. The right understanding of body politics helps without any pressure and influence. Political education teaches between democracy and utilitarianism. The rights and principles of democratic citizens and also the purpose of national policies.

Considering the role of T.V. in political affairs, especially in a developing country where the rural population is more, the present article attempts to know the influence of T.V. on villagers concerning their level of political awareness. To convert the ignorant village folk into intelligent-thinking citizens the first step should be to provide them an atmosphere of social and political awareness. Especially in a democracy where the policies of the government are the needs of the people, a basic knowledge of this system becomes necessary. Given the effectiveness of T.V. when compared to other media in shaping public opinion it was intended to study the impact of television on the rural masses and the role it plays in creating political consciousness among them. Four villages of Anand District in Gujarat have been selected as the sample and the political programmers telecast over Ahmedabad TV were taken to study the impact. The study was conducted during the period between the village panchayat election and December 2005.

Media Scenario

Media Scenario comprises TV, reach radio, reach newspapers, advertising, other print media forms, attempts at social marketing, and net newspapers or cyber journalism. Various forms of traditional media are integrated into one social system. These forms are not merely entertainment-based. They are essential means of education on various aspects of life. They also form part of a larger media scenario. Yet independent news media -print, electronic, or even cyber remains the most important media for its capacity to scrutinize public affairs without fear or favor and hold us accountable to our jobs and responsibilities. Its good health and the right attitude are, therefore, very important to all of us In the all-important task of national integration the importance of independent

news media can not be over-emphasised. We can understand the media reach in the Indian scenario by having an idea of the total number of newspapers, journals, and periodicals as well as the number of radio stations, TV channels, satellite links, and media-related websites. In recent years there has been a steady trend towards what we can describe as micro media the media of small newspapers, limited circulation journals, and community radio.

Basic Formulations

- It is difficult to delineate the total range and impact of this vast organized and at times unorganized media scenario.
- No section of India's population is media-starved.
- Going by the modern idiom of information haves and information have-nots. The only thing you can perhaps question is the type and quality of information the vast sections of India's population get.
- The Indian press, which was at the forefront of India's struggle for freedom from the British and has evolved with the evolution of Indian consciousness and entry of India into the modern world, therefore, still cares more about tradition, history, and content. India's national radio network All India Radio has 100 regional stations. There are over 200 local broadcasting radio stations, all government-owned (AIR), throughout India. Though a lot many private channels have come in the field of TV the national network Doordarshan is still the biggest telecaster with its three regular channels with terrestrial rights.
- India has 70 million homes with TV; of which 25 million homes have cable & satellite.
- Perpetration
- The installed base of PCs in Indian homes however around 3-4 million
- Cable TV subscribers -30.08 million in 2000 increased by about 79%to 53.88 million by 2005
- According to a study.
- According to an Indian readership survey, the press reaches about 33% of India's population, while TV reaches 47%.
- India is expected to have 25m Internet users by the end of the year 2005, up from three million in 2000 and 5.5 million in 2001 beginning.
- According to RNI - (press highlights in 2000) UP produced the largest no. (8,750) followed by Delhi (6,543) and Maharashtra (5,610). • The largest number of periodicals and newspapers -are brought out in Hindi (19,685) followed by English (7,175). • The total number of registered newspapers has risen from 49,145 as of Dec 31, 2000, to 51,900 as of December 31, 2004

But to know how best media can help promote the climate of development, especially in rural areas we must know how our changing society is influenced by media. As we know the change is brought about more through a process of internalization of certain ideas than by any modification in the external environment. In simple words, one's idea is perceived and corrected by learning through interaction or any other process that is more responsible for a change in individual and group behavior than concrete structures that may be built around an individual or group. The media seeks to consolidate the process of internalization.

Objectives and Methodology

1. To determine the level of political awareness;
2. How TV contributes to political awareness; and
3. To study the positive relationship between the degree of exposure to television programs and the political awareness of rural masses.

This study was conducted as an empirical research. This study has been conducted primarily with the help of the interview schedule. An interview schedule has been selected because the sample chosen constitutes the rural population, who are illiterate or semi ducted and hence unable to read. The study was carried out in the context of 4 villages of Anand District of Gujarat State. In the present study, 50 respondents from each village were selected by purposive sample method. Out of 200 respondents, 100 men and 100 women were selected as a sample; the observation method, in-depth interviews, and participation observation were used to collect the data. The interview schedule was constructed and tested as a major tool of data collection. Variables used for this study have been classified as independent and dependent variables.

(a) **Independent Variables:** To study the impact of TV on the political awareness of rural masses, the following variables were used as independent variables. 1) Education, 2) Caste, 3) Religion, 4) Age, 5) Occupation.

(b) **Dependent Variables:** Political awareness and its dimensions (Political Participation, Political Interest, and Political Responsibility) have been considered as the dependent variables.

Profile of Study Area

The state of Gujarat was formed on 1st May 1960. The first capital of Gujarat was Ahmedabad; the capital was moved to Gandhinagar in 1970. Anand District is an administrative district of Gujarat state in western India. It was carved out of the Kheda district in 1997. Anand is the administrative headquarters of the district. It is bounded by Kheda District to the north, Vadodara District to the east, Ahmedabad District to the west, and the Gulf of Cambay to the south. The area of the study is the district of Anand in the state of Gujarat. Anand is famous for Amul Dairy all over the world and as a milk city. Anand city is situated between 22-23 north latitudes and 72-73 east longitudes. The district extends an area of 2951.10 is 59 k.m. There are 10 Talukas, 366 villages, and 10 towns. According to the 2001 census, the total population of the district was 18, 56872 consisting of males 9,72000 and 8, 84872 females. The rural population of the district is 1348901 and the urban population is 50791. The density of the population per square k.m. is 631.4 per 1000 men the number of women is 910. The total literacy of this district was 74%. Among them, 86% were males and 61% were females. According to the census, 9.70% were farmers, 17.78% were farm workers. The total size of the land is 295690 hectares. There are many medical and health facilities in this district. For education, there are many primary and secondary schools and colleges and two universities. It has 6 industrial assets, 355 milk co-operative societies, 5740 registered small industrial units, and 73 large and medium units.

Political Awareness

Political awareness assumes greater importance in a democratic system which indeed demands it. Political activities are the principal means by which consent is grouted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled. Political activities give the citizens a

sense of dignity and broadness to their political understanding and make the ruler as well as the ruled alert in their sphere of responsibilities and efficiency. Mathews and Porthole have stated that all behavior through which people directly express their political opinions covers conventional activities like voting and discussing politics as well as unconventional activities like demonstrations, dharna, and rallies. Thus political behavior includes three major dimensions: (a) Conventional political behavior such as activities such as talking politics, joining a political party, taking part, taking part in a campaign, helping a candidate for political office, and (b) Communication of protest/support by sending protest or support messages to political leaders. (c) Unconventional political behavior and demonstrating. In our context, an awareness of or even a bare minimum consciousness of politics can be called 'political awareness'. Politics makes a call upon individual knowledge. This in turn necessitates education and political education.

Socio-economic Profile of Respondents

The socio-economic background of respondents is an important element & in the political awareness of rural masses. It is playing a legitimate and active role in the political awareness of rural masses. In this context, an attempt is made to analyse the socio-economic background of the respondents. Especially to find out whether the socio-economic factors related to age, caste, religion, education, occupation, and income, could have any significant impact in determining the impact of TV on political awareness of rural masses of Anand District in Gujarat State.

Age is one of the determining attributes for the political awareness of rural masses. A majority of men respondents were in the age group of 40-50 years (58%) while 35% of respondents belonged to the age group of 30-40 years. Among the women more than half (54%) of the respondents belong to the age group of 40-50 years and about one-third (33%) to the 30-40 years age group. Most (94%) of the respondents belong to the Hindu religion and only a few (6%) of them profess the Christian religion. The majority of respondents (More than 78% men of 68% women) are agricultural laborers, some of the respondents belong to the working class, and only a few of the respondents are businessmen. The important source of leadership is competence, skill, and knowledge acquired from one's occupation. (Murphy and Morris, 1961:390) That significantly influences socio-political values and ideology. A part from being a source of income, the occupation of a person determines the life style and the class study of the person. (Maciver and C.H. Page, 1967:390). Thus occupation and class status are the most important factors for the political awareness of the rural masses.

The economic status of respondents is one of the major factors for the political awareness of rural masses. It has been observed that 25% and 35% of men respondents have an income of Rs. 11,000/- or less, 31,001/- or more than up respectively. Whereas 16% of women respondents have an income of 21,000-30,000. The rest of the women respondents are dependent on their parents or husbands.

In the Indian social system, caste prescribes one's status and a person knows right from birth his position in the society (Singh 1991:51; Bhasker Manu, 1997:14)). The upper caste, OBC, and SC respondents are almost equal in number (38%, 31%, and 27% respectively). Less than half of the respondents have primary education. Among the men, 41% have secondary education. The level of illiteracy is 34% for men and 42% for women. Among the women, 31 % have secondary education.

A majority (68%) of the respondents come from a nuclear family and very few of the respondents come from a joint family. Thus, the majority of the respondents come from the nuclear family, so they have less family responsibility hence they do enjoy through T.V. and other tools of mass media. On the other hand, the respondents who come from a joint family, have more family responsibility and lack freedom and time to watch TV and other tools of mass media.

In both these areas i.e. adjusting the routine engagement and discussing the TV programmes the reply was immediate as if these were quite natural. Here one observation is noticeable that some respondents feel that experience of one-way communication on TV may promote passiveness among viewers if they are for long hours before TV.

Impact of Television on Political Awareness of Rural Masses

In the present study, 76% of the respondents have their own television sets. While 14% of respondents do not have T.V. sets of their own. 69% view television in their own houses whereas 31% watch television in neighboring houses. People who watch TV in community centers constitute 9% only. The respondents who watch TV in others' houses are backward-caste people. Poor respondents watch TV in community centers. The TV sets in community centers may be going out of order quite often; the exposure of poor people groups regularly to various programs may be limited. Some of the respondents have given the impression that community television sets which are provided by the government are not in working condition after one year and also complained about the undue delay in repairing the television sets when they go out of order.

One interesting observation is more than half of the people covered by the sample, view television for one hour a day, those who watch TV for two hours constitute 8.2%. 26 % of the sample spends 2 to 4 hours before TV. Thus, more than half of the people covered by the sample, view television for 1 hour a day, here it may be noticed that there is a wide difference between the second and third range. The persons in the 1 to 2 hours range are those who keep their TV sets tuned from 7 to 10 pm and watch items of their choice. The sample also includes people who watch television for limited periods like 15 minutes, 20 minutes, or even 30 minutes. These people have been categorized in the last range.

More than two-thirds (68%) of the respondents the timings of telecasting of different programs are suitable for their viewing. But, for the remaining respondents (32%) timings are not suitable. This part constituted substitute timing which is convenient to them. Some women felt it would be good if the telecasted commenced still earlier and that the introduction of programs would be convenient for their viewing. Since the suggestion came from a very small fraction of the sample, it may be understood that a large majority are satisfied with the present timing. It may be recalled that the program timing has been designed to keep the rural atmosphere in view. This is the main reason for such a high percentage of suitability.

The majority of the male respondents (78%) discuss the programs with family members, neighbors, friends, etc. Women's share is a little more than men's, though they limit their discussion with family members since most of them are housewives. In these areas i.e. adjusting the routine engagements and discussing the TV programs, the reply was immediate as if these were quite natural. Here one observation is noticeable. Some respondents feel that the experience of one-way communication on TV may promise passiveness among viewers if they sit for long hours before TV.

In news bulletins, TV covers the activities of all important leaders. The respondents were asked whether they had seen the leaders on the TV or outside. The response shows that 63% of the samples have seen these leaders only on TV while only 22% have watched them only at other places. However, 8.5% have seen them both on TV as well as at other places. The familiarity of these leaders through TV among women folk compared to men is very high i.e. 94.28%. This figure shows the capacity of TV to influence women, in other political matters also especially in a society where rural women are mostly illiterate and confined to the household. Places other than TV where these leaders were watched are factories, inaugural, foundations, developmental programs, and party meetings, etc.

Most (60%) of respondents have preferred entertainment programs as their first choice followed by political (21%) and other educational programs (16%). These figures indicate that the majority have preferred entertainment programs to other programs. With respect to women, the preference for recreation is very high (80%), 13% opted for politics, and a negligible 8% preferred other educational programs. These differences between men and women also reveal that TV is not a more entertainment tool but may equally and effectively serve its fundamental purpose of educating the masses.

The majority (56%) of the men respondents coughed TV as their major source of information followed by news paper 20% and Radio (24%), while the majority of women's (70%) information source is TV and the other 18% read news paper for information. These women are educated when 12% of women's source of information is radio. Here one observation is that the majority of the rural women are interested in reading newspapers. A few of them are interested in radio as a source of information. Thus, TV is the major source of information because TV's understanding is more die to visual effects and they can retain the information in their minds for a considerably long period. Though TV's effect is more, the duration of the program is very short as compared to radio. The majority of respondents said that the schedule of the TV programs is not suitable for them. Therefore, some respondents listen radio at their place of work also. TV and radio broadcast programs according to a fixed schedule. One cane go through all kinds of news if one sits with a news paper. And that too when one feels convenient to do so. This is, however, applicable to the literate respondents only.

A significant percentage (44%) mainly consisting of men are interested more in political news, the majority (62%) of women are interested more in different serials, while 26% of women are interested in political news, particularly at election time. These women are educated, working women and interested in public life. The respondents who watch TV during election time, all are aware of political matters like how many candidates are contesting the election, names of the parties, symbols of the parties, social background of political leader, dominant party of their region, information about national leader. Code of conduct of the election, leader of the party at the district level, election process, etc.

Most (72%) of the respondents have said that TV is playing a significant role in familiarizing the national personalities to the villagers. The highest percentage of women folk could see these leaders only because of TV. Familiarity with political personalities may be considered as the first step to political education. Some times this may create interest in knowing further about politics. It

is observed that the regular ten-minute daily news bulletin is not sufficient to impart political education to the rural masses. The study emphasizes the need to start supplementary programs in regional languages in addition to the political information presented through news Talks, interviews, features, discussions, drama, and other programs that contain politics as a subject that may be telecasted to inculcate interest among the viewers and motivate them to receive political education. About one-third (31.50%) of the backward caste respondents claimed TV as their source of information, while 18.50% of respondents referred to the radio as their source of information. 34% of the upper caste respondent's information source is TV. While 16% of respondents' source of information is radio. However, the difference between upper caste and backward castes who selected T.V. and Radio as their source of information is less. It can be concluded that caste as a sub-variable, did not have much influence on the awareness of the respondents. However, the level of understanding that goes along with the caste to some extent can influence awareness in certain aspects. However, the majority of women (57%) and men (43%) preferred TV as their choice of media for information.

When the data was analyzed according to sex, it was found that 43% of men and the majority (57%) of women preferred TV as their choice of media for information but TV has failed to increase political awareness of women. It is seen that women are quite heavy users of TV and they have no choice but to view even political programmes. They do not seem to have any knowledge about the details of political affairs which they view on T.V. But one can hope that in the long run, the women if their present liking for TV continues in the same line, may develop a keen interest in political affairs.

The results show that occupation has a high influence on the political awareness of the villagers. The observed results show that more than academic education the soundness in financial status seems to have a more direct impact on the level of political awareness. The agriculture labor and caste occupation category's majority (73%) respondents showed lesser awareness than service categories. It can be justified by the fact that they spend most of their time in fields and at their work places and cannot concentrate on other things. The observed results show that more than academic education the soundness in financial status seems to have a more direct impact on the level of political awareness. Here it may be mentioned that the villagers themselves said in as many words that they do not get enough time to see all the programs as they spend the entire day earning their daily bread.

Education as an influencing factor has a significant effect on the political awareness of the villagers. In certain critical areas of political awareness like international news, and political parties. Assembly party broadcasts, and political events the difference in awareness was significant. Where functional knowledge would have served the purpose, no difference between educated and uneducated was noticed. However, Graduates and post-graduates preferred news papers equally to T.V. for political awareness.

Age did not show any influence in the levels of political awareness of the villagers, except in understanding the assembly proceedings. Assembly proceedings seem to have more appeal to villagers in the age group of above, whereas 35% of the respondents in the age groups of 21-30 and 31-40 65% mainly stood at first level. As thought earlier, older people with their maturity and experience and younger people with their enthusiasm to participate in politics were expected to have a better understanding of politics.

Conclusion

The study reveals that TV is not just an instrument for the entertainment of the viewers but it also makes them aware of many things provided they can sit before it for longer hours. TV is the major source of information for the majority of the villages, especially women. A significant percentage, mainly consisting of men, is interested more in political news. They have also shown a high score in awareness. TV plays a vital role in familiarizing the national personalities of the villagers. Familiarity with political personalities may be considered as the first step to political education. In spite of high exposure to T.V., women score very low in political awareness than men. The discussion can be concluded that regular exposure to political programs is increasing the levels of political awareness. This shows that TV is certainly giving political education to the rural masses. TV's role in politics may not be the same at all times. Hence, it is suggested that political programs may be presented effectively on TV to raise the levels of political awareness among the rural masses. On the whole, if television would recognize an affirmative obligation to elevate the level of our politics and applied much thought it might play a major role in helping make our democracy more rational and responsible.

References

- Almond G. A. and G. B. Powell, (1976) *Comparative Politics and Development*, New Delhi, Oxford.
- Beteille Andre, (1966) *Caste, Class and Power*, Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- Bhatt, Anil, (1975) *Caste, Class and Politics*, Manohar, Delhi.
- Census Report of India, 2001.
- Gitten Todd, (1998) *Media Sociology "The Domination Paradise"* Encyclopedia Britannica 2001.
- Johnson Krik (1999) *Television and Social Change in Rural India*, New Delhi Sade Publication.
- Kaushik, Bhawna (2003) *Political Awareness among Educated Women*, Tabbu Books, New Delhi.
- Narayan Menon (1976) *The Communications revolution*, National Book Trust, New Delhi.
- Rao B.S.S (1992) *Television for Rural Development*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi.
- United Nations Development (2005), *Human Development Report*, 2005.