

Ethnic Identity and Media Perception: A Study of Gujjar Community in Kashmir

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Abstract: The interplay between media and its audiences creates a wide spectrum of inferences and perceptions in order to understand the self and the world at large from an entirely new perspective. The use of media is influenced by a number of factors including social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Thus different forms of media may be available to different audiences with varying levels of usage. People who are socio-culturally or economically developed have different media needs than of those who are marginalized. This requires constant effort through research to study the audience's negotiations with mass media.

This research paper explores the media usage and its negotiation in the lives of a marginalized group. The group which forms the basis of study is constituted of a tribal community popularly known as Gujjars, located among the hilly terrain areas on the outskirts of Srinagar city and present a perfect universe for study. The study infers how population of Gujjar Community read; respond to the various means and modes of information and communication.

Keywords: Minority audiences, Gujjars, Kashmir, Mass media perception, preferred media, Media Usage, Ethnic identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, media is an important appendage of our life. It would be near impossible to comprehend life without media. Whether we like it or not, want it or not, life just cannot be insulated from the media.

Earlier, word of mouth was the only means and mode of communication, but in the present information age, new forms of media have revolutionised the whole scenario. One of the greatest changes in dissemination of messages happens with the introduction of computers and the Internet in the early 1990s. Since then, various radical changes can be noticed in the communication medium which has significantly affected on the audiences perception of the media.

McQuail & Siune (1998) state that in the last 50 years, technological innovation has changed the face of mass media influence; first there was telegraph, then the radio, newspapers, magazines, television and now the internet.

Today media is considered an integral part of society. Whatever happens in a particular social set-up is reflected by the media. Media have become an all important component of our life, that without it society cannot take off. In fact every signal individual whether male or female of any age group is influenced by mass media in one way or the other, and has a strong social and cultural impact upon society as well as it can play an effective role in bringing change in the society.

But be it large metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai or socio-economically under developed states like Jammu and Kashmir, there are plenty of areas where little or no developmental activities have taken place. It could be because of factors like illiteracy, lack of information, minimal or restricted access to media or various socio-cultural or economic factors. Mohanty and Parhi (2011) state that, the complex social system with different castes, classes, creeds and tribes in

India, there has been an inadequate reach of mass media. Almost 70% of people live in villages there by numbering over 3.5 million under illiterate category. They lack basic parameters of progress and development.

Here mass media can enter in to the calculus of development and play a positive role, particularly among the masses living in far flung areas. Media has the potential to offer great possibilities for effective action through its capability of disseminating technical expertise and useful knowledge among millions of villagers.

2. HOW AUDIENCES PERCEIVE MEDIA

The content producers in media create and design messages in a way which can be easily understood by its audiences. Earlier it was believed that content is produced, disseminated and audiences consume it passively. One of the earliest theories-Hypodermic Needle, suggests that media injects ideas in the minds of audiences and believes power lies with the media itself.

The Effects model proposed by the Frankfurt School, set up in 1923, about the possible effects of mass media is considered to be an inadequate representation of the communication between media and public. It does not take into account audiences as individuals with their own beliefs, opinions, ideals and attitudes.

Yet another approach to the dynamics of audience relationship with media was put forth in Uses and Gratification model. Katz and Lazarsfeld suggest that audiences had specific needs and actively turn towards the media to consume various texts in order to satisfy these needs. In this model audiences were seen as active; as opposed to passive in the Effects model.

However, with the arrival of modern interactive media, reversal of roles has come into play. Media users are now the producers, generators and distributors of content as well. Media no more can make people to think the way it wants; neither can it alter the ideas of audiences.

All forms of mass media that we use and are available in a society, bring forth information and messages that we analyse and interpret, whether consciously or inadvertently. We rarely stop to think about the impact that media have on us.

But the exposure of media users' to media is not alike. Social categories to which people belong and individual differences are more important in predicting certain effects of mass media. Individuals tend to expose themselves relatively more to those forms of communication that were consonant with their beliefs, ideas, values etc. Regardless of exposure to communication, an individual's perception and retention of a certain issue, person or place can be influenced by his or her latent beliefs, attitudes, wants, needs or moods, perceptions etc. Two persons exposed to the same messages can have diametrically different perceptions about it.

Likewise, there are some communities which lack proper access to mass media channels and thus are less exposed to the various modes of communication and development. Gujjars, a tribal community of Jammu and Kashmir is one among them. It is among few communities who have limited access to the mass media because of their humble education background and modest earning.

3. NEED OF THE STUDY

Different media attract audiences which consist of a mix of people who form audiences of other media. There are different schools of thought which look at the media audience relationship in terms of what media do to audiences and how audiences respond to media content. By focusing on audience; researchers are able to study the meaning made by the audience as in response to a media text, as no audience member will interpret the media message in the same way.

On the basis of socio-cultural situations people choose media content with which they try to identify themselves. People prefer different media to gratify their needs. Exposure to particular mass media channel is also attributed to affect individual way of behaviour, opinion, attitude and perceptions as well.

The nature of audiences varies from medium to medium. Newspaper readers and radio listeners are two types of audience, but some newspaper readers will also be part of the radio audience. People who watch one type of program on television will also watch another type of program, and will be part of another audience.

So this paper is to be seen in the context of audience research, in which Gujjar audience is the central concept. The researcher's in this paper has attempted to examine how audiences hailing from this community negotiate with mass media

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different people select different media content and interpret it in different ways as per their own individual understanding of mass media and thereby influence their needs, interests, attitudes and common values on a varied pattern. The findings of a study done by Ilse Devroe in his study entitled 'This is not who we are': Ethnic minority audiences and their perceptions of the media' (2004), reveals that, the participants differed in their identification with the racial group they belonged to and could clearly be seen after linguistic analysis of the focus group conversations. In the way participants were using the 'us' and 'them' groups, when referring to ethnic minority groups represented in the media, showing most dissatisfaction with these portrayals. Other respondents were mostly children from mixed couples, spoke about 'they' and 'them', and were unhappy, but more nuanced in their views, about the representation of ethnic minorities in the media content.

Phuntsho Raptan (2001), in his research entitled 'Mass Media: its consumption and impact on residents of Thimphu and Rural Areas' to identify the role of mass media in the rural and urban areas of Bhutan. The findings of the study revealed that due to the difference in distribution and consumption, the impact of media differs between rural and urban areas. Since villagers are mostly illiterate, radio is the only medium by means of which they are being informed, both about the nation and the world at large. The author further more recommended that, had there have been television instead of radio in the rural area, the impact would have been different. Because of its visual elements, it has enabled urban residents to have access to different sources of news and entertainment. People can express opinions and participate in public discourse and see beyond their traditional borders to outside world therefore, broaden their perceptions and ideas.

Manashi Mohanty and Pritishri Parhi after studying the three coastal districts in Orissa for his title 'Folk and Traditional Media: A Powerful Tool for Rural Development' (2011), reveals that majority of the respondents feel that folk media is used quite significantly in rural development for its cultural aspect, but in the era of information and communication technology it is losing its significance.

In contemporary world, mass communication has emerged as a new frontier in international relations, be it economic, political or cultural. It provides enormous opportunities of knowing more of the best the world over as it has been rightly pointed out by Norizan Abdul Razzaq & Jalaluddin Abdul Malek in their study 'Bridging Digital Divide In Malaysia: Cyber Learning for the Marginalized Communities' (2008), reveal that marginalized communities living as fringe communities or in remote areas which are geographically and socially inaccessible terrains with low income groups will be able to play a more active role in the e-inclusion activities if given the ICT facilities and infrastructure. The study further more suggests that marginalized groups should be focused at the grassroots' level in order to produce learning materials which are relevant and useful for them.

Communication is a key component for sustainable development. Pertaining to marginalized population, mobilizing of community members for community development purpose is very much important but; members of communities can only be mobilized when communication process is effective. In order to find out the extent to which communication can help in the development of rural communities, Mary Olufunke Adedokun, Comfort Wuraola Adeyemo and Edith Oluwafunmilola Olorunsola conducted a study entitled 'The Impact of Communication on Community Development (2010). The study revealed that effective communication is essential in fostering community development and with good communication strategies the members of the community will be able to participate actively in the process of community development with various development initiatives in their hands. The authors have recommended that members of each community should be made to realize the importance of communication in the process of community development and for this purpose community leaders or community development agents should ensure effective circulation of information among different participants by using appropriate channels.

As far as the studies pertaining to the Gujjars are concerned, not much work has been conducted in this area. In one such research article entitled 'Demography, Social and Cultural Characteristics of the Gujjars and Bakarwals, A Case Study of Jammu and Kashmir' conducted by Dr. Tufail (2014), the researchers has studied the origin, culture, demography,

settlement and linguistic variations of Gujjars. The study suggests that Gujjars and Bakarwals are the third largest community in Jammu & Kashmir state and their population is highest in the Jammu region followed by the Kashmir. It is believed that Gujjars have migrated to Jammu and Kashmir from Gujarat (via Rajasthan) and the Hazara district of North Western Frontier Province. The author further point that changes are found in all aspects of their life and as country is progressing towards modernization. Gujjars and Bakarwals are also influenced by it and changes are witnessed in their everyday life, ranging from social, political, cultural and economic spheres.

There are many research studies about the development of marginalized communities but pertaining to the Gujjars, readings are only focused on their history, cultural and linguistic identity. Very little amount of work has been done viz a viz Gujjars and their mass media usage. So this paper needs to be looked upon with the keen interest as it is first of its kind focused on the Gujjar community in terms of their media negotiations.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To study the channels of mass media available to the community.
- To study the nature, extent and pattern of their media usage and preferences of the community under study.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A study of this nature, which seeks to explore the mass media preferences of a particular community, requires a substantial sample to be adopted. Thus the survey is an ideal research tool in this regard, as the researchers had to collect the data on phenomena that cannot be directly observed.

For this study, Gujjar community based in Srinagar was divided into the four constituents, on the basis of their residence in the four villages i.e. (a) Mulnar (b) Astan-Marg (c) Fakir-Gujari and (d) Dard-Khour. A sample of 50 respondents each was chosen from the above stated four constituents of Gujjar community. In this method Equal Size Stratified Sampling was done, as equal numbers of cases have been selected from each stratum. So overall a sample of 200 respondents was taken into consideration.

The researchers opted sample survey to ascertain the opinions, attitudes and perceptions of respondents regarding media usage. The information was collected by means of Interview method, using a structured interview schedule. Furthermore the samples within the group were selected on the basis Purposive sampling. It is here pertinent to mention that, the researchers once went into the field for data collection conducted interviews, discussions randomly. But later on only those respondents were included into the study which understands the importance of the research topic under study. The researchers using purposive sampling do not select respondents randomly from each group, as stratified sampling includes random sampling at its core.

MEDIA USAGE OF GUJJAR COMMUNITY:

This study pertains to a community popularly known as Gujjars. Primarily this research attempts to look at the media usage pattern among the audiences of this community. It also tries to focus on the perception that Gujjars carry in relation to their negotiations with mass media.

Table No.1 Media Access

S. No.	Mediums	Number	Percentage (%)
01	Television	60	30
02	Radio	84	42
03	Print media	0	0
04	Both Radio/TV	30	15
05	Internet	26	13
Total		200	100

The data on the media access of respondents reveals that 30 percent of respondents are having the availability of Television, whereas 42 percent of them consists of radios sets. The study further reveals that, 15 percent comprises of both Radio and Television and the remaining 13 percent of respondents have availability of internet. It reveals the non-availability of print media sources like newspapers, magazines etc.

Table No.2 Media Preferences

S. No.	Medium Preferred	Number	Percentage (%)
01	Television	52	26
02	Radio	78	39
03	Print media	0	0
04	Both Radio/TV	46	23
05	Others	24	12
Total		200	100

When the respondents were asked about their media preference's it was revealed that 26, percent of them prefer Television, whereas Radio is preferred by 39 percent. Moreover the study consists of 23 percent of respondents who were multiple media users of both Radio and Television. Interestingly 12 percent of the respondents reveal their preferences for other sources of information which includes mobile phones. These were literally mobile addicts and consist mostly of youth population giving preference to cell phones over any other media sources for their information and entertainment purposes.

Table No.03 Frequency of watching Television

S. No.	Viewing pattern	Numbers	Percentage (%)
01	Daily	24	12
02	Occasionally	40	20
03	Alternate days	30	15
04	Do not watch	106	53
Total		200	100

The data pertaining to the television habits and its frequency of watching revealed that, 47 percent of respondents prefer to watch TV and the remaining 53 percent don't watch. Furthermore out of total forty seven percent of respondents, who watch television, there were only 12 percent who prefer to watch it on daily basis, 15 percent among them comprises of those who watch it after alternate days, whereas majority of respondents 20 percent watch Television occasionally

Table No.04 Data pertaining to Television usage

S. No.	Watch for	Numbers	Percentage (%)
01	Information	22	11
02	Entertainment	34	17
03	Awareness/Education	26	13
04	Time pass	12	06
05	Don't watch	106	53
Total		200	100

With regard to the respondent's preferences of television usage, the data revealed that majority of them 17 percent watch TV for the entertainment purpose only. Whereas 11 and 13 percent of audiences use TV respectively for information and awareness purposes and the remaining 6 percent comprises of those who watch TV only, to spend their time.

Moreover the placement of Television was in a common room. Due to this reason, in all the homes, the viewership of TV was a family activity. The programmes thought appropriate and preferred for family viewing were most favoured with entertainment based serials and dramas dominating.

As on date, 2015 cable and dish TV's are mostly available in every part of Srinagar city. But in case of Gujjar Community, their access to Television is limited. It was observed that; a good number of respondents have access to Television by using antennas and dish TV based viewership is only available to those households who are economically well placed. Furthermore it reveals the unavailability of the cable connection in the said community.

Table No.05 Frequency of Listening to Radio

S. No.	Listening pattern	Numbers	Percentage (%)
01	Daily	70	35
02	Occasionally	22	11
03	Alternate days	30	15
04	Don't listen	78	39
Total		200	100

The data pertaining to radio listenership reveals that, majority of the respondents 61 percent listen to radio and the remaining 39 percent don't prefer to listen radio. With regard to the frequency of listening, 35 percent of the respondents prefer to listen daily, whereas 15 percent on alternate days and the rest 11 percent comprise of those who listen to radio on occasionally basis.

Radio is considered as the most popular medium among Gujjars. A major factor contributing to its popularity and preferences among the Gujjars is the erratic supply of electricity. Apart from the power supply, it was also observed that its popularity among the community is mainly because of its portability, low cost and diverse content.

Table No.06 Data pertaining to Radio usage

S. No.	Listen for	Numbers	Percentage (%)
01	Information	24	12
02	Entertainment	32	16
03	Both Info/Ent.	38	19
04	Others	28	14
05	Don't listen	78	39
Total		200	100

Moreover when the respondents were asked why they listen to radio, majority of them i.e., 19 percent were of the opinion that, they use radio for the information and entertainment purpose. Whereas 16 & 12 percent of sample use radio respectively for entertainment and information purposes only. Interestingly 14 percent of the respondents reveal their preferences for other sources which include awareness and education and consist of mostly youth.

Table No.07 Choices regarding Internet usage

S. No.	Internet Access	Numbers	Percentage (%)
01	Yes	26	13
02	No	174	87
Total		200	100

New media is becoming an increasingly popular medium among youth through its access and usage. But in case of Gujjar community, majority of the respondents, i.e. 87 percent were of the view that, they do not use internet, as only 13 percent of respondent's access internet. Pertaining to the internet usage, it was revealed that mobile phones were used as the main and lone source of internet access. With regard to the frequency of usage the study inferred that, most of them make use of internet occasionally and only for the entertainment purposes.

Table No.08 Frequency of print media usage

S. No.	Reading pattern	Numbers	Percentage (%)
01	Daily	0	0
02	Occasionally	14	07
03	Alternate days	06	03
04	Don't read	180	90
Total		200	100

Although the data on the print media availability and preferences revealed earlier that none of the print media forms is available to the community under study, and is also not preferred by any of the respondents. But once researcher further intervened about the choices pertaining to the print media usage, only 10 percent of the respondents out of the total sample of 200 were of the view that they read print media sources.

Out of the total ten percent, 7 percent of respondents prefer to read newspaper occasionally and 3 percent after alternate days. Interestingly none of the respondents expressed, that they use print media sources on daily basis. With regard to the print media preferences, newspapers came as lone source among the respondents and no other print media like magazines, pamphlets is used by them. Furthermore, newspapers like Aftab and Kashmir Uzma were considered as the most preferred source of information and awareness. They were more of the view that the mentioned newspapers are reliable because of their popularity, large distribution and wide range of coverage of Kashmir issue.

AUDIENCES SATISFACTION:

Table No.09 Audience level of satisfaction pertaining to different sources of information

S. No.	Information satisfaction	Numbers	Percentage (%)
01	Fully satisfied	12	06
02	Partially satisfied	32	16
03	To some extent	46	23
04	Not always	26	13
05	Not at all	84	42
Total		200	100

With regard to the degree of satisfaction from different informational sources that were discussed earlier (media profile of community). Majority of the respondents 42 percent reveal that they were not satisfied at all, whereas the other major part 23 percent were gratified to some extent only. The data further more informed that, 16 percent of respondents were partially satisfied and 13 percent were occasionally gratified. Out of the total sample of 200 respondents there were only 6 percent of respondents who were of the view that they were fully pleased with the different sources of information on hand

MASS MEDIA USAGE :

Although there are varied numbers of channels available on radio and television, but popular among Gujjars are *Radio Kashmir* and *FM radio*. And In case of television, most of the people prefer to watch *Doordarshan* and *Kashir Channel* because of its easy availability. They say they easily relate themselves to these radio and television channels. Generally, older generation's choice prevails in the programme selection on television. Moreover, they are least oriented towards the other national and international channels.

Gujjars usually prefer to listen to radio at any time. They like it mostly because radio is portable and inexpensive. They were of the view that, their work does not get hampered while listening to the radio. Programs like *Gami Bhai Hind Khitre*, Daily news bulletin, *Gojari* programs, *Sharbeen*, *Tuhinz Farmish*, *Payam- e-subha* and various other cultural and entertainment programs are the most popular among gujjars. With regard to television most favourite programs among Gujjars were *Karvaan*, *Pavitri Bandhan* and *Tu Tota Mai Maina*. Daily news bulletin usually telecast in the evening hours is also considered as a reliable source of information.

6. CONCLUSION

Mass media are of great significance in contemporary times. It has tremendous potential to contribute towards social equity, empowerment and improvement in the quality of daily life. It can play an effective role to bring a positive change because of its inherent ability to reach larger publics. It is widely used to convey messages to build up public opinion and awareness. There are several socio-political, cultural and developmental issues in the public domain, where media have played a pivotal role by making people realize about the need to adopt new practices.

This study is an attempt to examine how people of Gujjar community negotiate with mass media. For this purpose a sample of 200 respondents was drawn using an interview schedule in order to understand how marginalized communities

of society incorporate media into their daily lives. After a thorough and exhaustive study, following conclusion were drawn

- **Radio as a main source of information:** It has come to fore that radio is a key source of information among the Gujjar Community. Majority of gujjars spend considerable time listening to radio. They usually prefer to listen to radio for a wide range of activities like information, awareness and entertainment. Many studies pertaining to radio suggest that it is generally used as a background medium. But in case of Gujjar Community, it is considered to be the most preferred medium. Most of the respondents own radios and listened to it regularly. Moreover, existence of television and other means of information have not affected their radio listening habits. To a greater extent it is attributed to its portability, their modest earning and erratic supply of electricity.
- **Television as a medium of change:** Television is gaining popularity among the community. Presently, forty seven percent of sample under study prefer to watch television. The community members especially the youth are of an opinion that there have been various positive changes among the community which can be attributed to television. With the exposure of television numerous change are visible among the community like the build-up of their homes, their dress up, their behaviour and their communication patterns. Furthermore, it was also observed that the frequency of television watching is directly related to the electricity supply to the area. As they have no alternate source of electricity, there were only twelve percent of respondents who prefer to watch TV on daily basis.
- **Print media, scarcely available:** The Gujjar population is not exposed to print media, magazine or journal etc. Just ten percent of the respondents expressed that they prefer to read newspapers when they move out of their area for studies or work. This is attributed to low literacy as well as non-accessibility of newspapers. The closest newspapers stand is at a distance of about 30 kms almost around Dalgate, Srinagar.

It would be appropriate if community radio stations can be established in Kashmir at various rural locations, so that a particular section of society, like Gujjars, Bakarwals, Fishermen, Sheikh, Pahari and various other indigenous communities can be targeted. Radio and Television channels should give more coverage to various developmental issues. This will give them a chance to understand the importance of development more.

Further media needs to be socially responsible. A separate time slot should be dedicated to the tribal communities, so that issues pertaining to them can be reported. Programmes related to the various social, cultural developments, home management, formal and non-formal education should be introduced. Because of the introvert nature of marginalized communities, information needs to be disseminated in a various forms like animation, songs, radio, posters & charts. These approaches can surely provide a chance to accelerate the course of change among tribal communities of Kashmir and world at large.

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