

AWARENESS ABOUT AGRICULTURAL PUBLICATIONS VIS-À-VIS NEWSPAPER READING HABIT OF RURAL PEOPLE

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India is a country with a population of more than one billion, sixtysix per cent of which live in the rural areas. Since agriculture is the main stay for the rural people, national development largely means rural development. Among the different forms of mass media, the newspapers are the most effective in reaching the rural areas. The rural press has become an effective instrument for the dissemination of agricultural science and technology (Gan, 1983).

During the last few years the press in India has considerably improved, both qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The vernacular press especially has recorded a spectacular upsurge in growth in terms of both the newspapers and their combined circulation. The number of vernacular newspapers registered with the Registrar of Newspapers of India (RNI) has increased by 67.94 per cent during the period between 1990 to 1999 from 23,714 to 39,825 respectively (S.A.I., 1997 and Anonymous, 2001). The rapid growth of the vernacular press is probably due to the increasing level of literacy rate and the print medium being considered as one of the most credible source of information.

According to Kalpper (1966), print alone among the media, allows the readers to control the occasion, the pace and directions of his exposure and permits him re-exposure more easily than other media. A reader can read newspapers at his leisure and can also keep it for future reference. People, who can read a newspaper, enjoy certain status in their village (Dikle et al., 1991).

Keeping all these things in mind, a study was undertaken with the objective to find out the awareness about the agricultural news published in the dailies and the newspapers reading habit of the rural people in West Bengal.

METHODOLOGY

(i) Selection of village :

At the first stage of sampling, two districts namely Birbhum and Nadia were selected by random sampling process from 18 districts in West Bengal. Then from each district one block was selected at the second stage of sampling by random method. These were Bolpur-Sriniketan Block in Birbhum district and Shantipur Block in Nadia district. Again, at the third stage, two villages from each block were randomly selected to have a total number of four villages for the study. Binuria and Surul villages were selected from Bolpur-Sriniketan block and Bogulpur and Bathangachi villages were selected from Shantipur block. Thus, four villages were selected from two blocks of two districts.

(ii) Selection of respondents :

To select the respondents, a separate list of adult villagers in each village was made and then from each list, 25 respondents were selected randomly. Thus, a total of 100 villagers were selected.

To find out the newspaper reading habit of the villagers and their awareness about agricultural news published in them, a well-structured schedule after pretesting was prepared keeping in view the objective of the study. The schedule was constructed in Bengali language and the data were collected personally through interviewing technique. Finally, the data were analysed by making frequency distribution and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS :

The findings of the study are given under the following sub-headings :

(i) **Age of villagers and newspaper reading habit :**

The Table-1 evinces the age-wise distribution of respondents and information regarding their reading habit.

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Table 1. Distribution of respondents on the basis of age and their newspaper reading habit

Aspects	Age group (years)				Total
	20-30	30-40	40-50	60-60	
60 & above					
<u>Reading newspapers</u>					
Yes	9 (81.82)	23(71.87)	19(59.37)	10(71.43)	7(63.64)
No	2(18.18)	9(28.13)	13(40.63)	4(28.57)	4(36.36)
Total	11(100.00)	32(100.00)	32(100.00)	14(100.00)	11(100.00)
					68
Aware of agricultural publications					
Respondents	3	8	5	2	-
					18
					(26.47)
<u>Periodicity of reading</u>					
Regular	5	9	13	7	4
Sometimes	4	12	5	2	3
Casually	-	2	1	1	-
Total	9	23	19	10	7
					68

(Figures in parenthesis are percentages)

The above table reveals that newspaper reading habit was highest (81.82%) among the young (20-30 years) age group followed by the age groups of 30-40 years and 50-60 years having around 71 per cent newspaper readers. The findings are in tune with Bhati (1980) who reported that among the readers majority consists of young people. Bajka (1969) also reported that the interest in reading decreases with the increase in age of the readers. Regarding awareness about agricultural publications, it can again be observed that the young followed by 30 to 40 years age group were more aware of the agricultural news in the Bengali dailies while, newspaper readers of 60 and above age group were not at all aware of the same.

It was also evident from the table that proportion of regular readers was more or less high among all age groups and people at the age group of 40-50 years are more regular in reading newspapers.

(ii) Education of villagers and newspaper reading habit :

At the beginning, six educational levels viz. Illiterate, can sign only, primary school, medium school, matric and higher secondary and graduate and above were formulated. Then the data collected from the respondents were distributed into these categories and their newspaper reading habit was assessed as presented in Table-2.

Table 2. Distribution of respondent on the basis of education and their newspaper reading habit

Aspects	Education						Total
	Illiterate	Can sign only	Primary school	Medium school	Matric & H.S.	Graduate & above	
Reading newspapers							
Yes	-	-	10 (47.62)	15 (71.43)	34 (94.44)	9 (100.00)	68
No	7 (100.00)	6 (100.00)	11 (52.38)	6 (28.57)	2 (5.56)	-	32
Total	7 (100.00)	6 (100.00)	21 (100.00)	21 (100.00)	36 (100.00)	9 (100.00)	100
Aware of agricultural publications							
Respondents	-	-	1	2	7	8	18 (26.47)
Periodicity of reading							
Regular	-	-	3	9	20	6	38
Sometimes	-	-	5	4	14	3	26
Casually	-	-	2	2	-	-	4
Total	-	-	10	15	34	9	68

(Figures in parenthesis are percentages)

It was found that the proportion of newspaper readers increased with the increase in education and thus, it can be asserted that newspaper reading varies directly with education. The findings are in consonance with the findings of Rai (1965), Bajka (1969), Bhati (1980) and Karande and Riswadkar (1987) who had reported similarly in their respective studies. The table also evinces that readers who were atleast graduates were quite well aware about the agricultural publications in newspapers. It can be seen that awareness about agricultural publications also increased with the increase in level of education.

Further, the analysis also showed that the highly educated farmers were more regular in reading newspapers. Therefore, it can be concluded that education plays a significant role on newspaper reading habit of an individual.

(iii) Size of holding of villagers and newspaper reading habit :

On the basis of size of holding, the farmers were classified into marginal, small, semi-medium, medium and large farmer categories, as delineated in Agricultural Statistics at a Glance (1997). Accordingly, the Table-3 presents the distribution of respondents into these categories and their newspaper reading habit.

Table 3. Distribution of respondent on the basis of size of holding and their newspaper reading habit.

Aspects	Land holding (ha)					Total
	Marginal (1 ha)	Small, (1-2 ha)	Semi-medium (2-4 ha)	Medium (4-10 ha)	Large (10 ha)	
<u>Reading newspapers</u>						
Yes	18 (48.65)	29 (78.38)	12 (80.00)	9 (81.82)	-	68
No	19 (51.35)	8 (21.62)	3 (20.00)	2 (18.18)	-	32
Total	37 (100.00)	37 (100.00)	15 (100.00)	11 (100.00)	-	100
<u>Aware of agricultural publications</u>						
Respondents	-	4	8	6	-	18 (26.47)
<u>Periodicity of reading</u>						
Regular	9	14	9	6	-	38
Sometimes	8	13	2	3	-	26
Casually	1	2	1	-	-	4
Total	18	29	12	9	-	68

(Figures in parenthesis are percentages)

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The Table reveals that newspaper readers among marginal farmers were very low, while their number in higher groups (small, semi-medium and medium farmers) was comparatively quite satisfactory (around 80%). Bhati (1980) also reported similar type of results who had reported that the number of farmers of higher economic status among newspaper readers were comparatively much more than farmers having small holdings. In case of awareness about agricultural news in the newspapers it was found that the semi-medium group of farmers were more (75%) aware while, the marginal farmers were not aware of these publications.

Further, the farmers with higher economic status were found to be more regular readers of newspapers than those belonging to lower status. This observation is also in tune with that of Bhati (1980).

(iv) Place of reading newspaper :

Table-4 presents the data regarding the place of reading of newspapers by the respondents. During the time of study, the researchers found that a person reads newspaper at several places and

therefore it was decided to take into account all the places a villager goes to read newspaper.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents on the basis of their place of reading newspaper

Place of reading	Number of respondents	Percentage
1. Own home (subscribes)	27	27.84
2. Party office	6	6.19
3. Club	10	10.31
4. Tea stall	24	24.74
5. Shop	26	26.80
6. Any other	4	4.12
Total	97	100.00

It is evident from the above table that a good number of respondents' (27) subscribed to at least one of the dailies. It can also be observed that around 50 per cent of the villagers read newspapers either at village tea stall or at the shops (chemical and fertilizer shops, grocery shops, barber shops, etc.). Others, especially the young prefer to go to the clubs (10.31%) and party offices (6.19%) for reading newspapers.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that about two-thirds of the villagers read newspapers. The newspaper reading habit was high among the youngsters (20-30 years). They were also quite aware of the agricultural news published in the newspapers. The proportion of newspaper readers as well as awareness about the agricultural publications were also high among higher educated as well as among high socio-economic group. Besides, the percentage of regular readers was high among the 40-60 years age group, higher educated and high socio-economic class in the village. Further, it was also found that majority of the respondents read newspapers at tea stalls and shops. A good number of respondents also subscribed newspapers at their homes.

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