



# Reaction to World News Events and the Influence of Mass Media in an Indian Village

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**UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN CENTER FOR  
SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES**

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by

**Thomas Poffenberger  
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Our appreciation goes to Mrs. Amita Verma, Chairman of the Department of Child Development, who encouraged us in our study of village life and cooperated, especially in the development of a research staff; she appointed Miss Vidya Dave of their staff to collect data on school children some of which are reported here, and she facilitated the formation of a group of experienced interviewers whose enthusiastic and sustained years of participation in the collection of data enabled us to acquire a variety of information and a depth of insight about village life which would not have been possible with a less dedicated and able team. This staff included Bihari Pandya, Field Director, and Manubhai Patel who were responsible for the collection of all the male interviews as well as for reports on village institutions and events, and four young women--Rupa Patel, Smita Patel, Taru Parikh, and Katy Mohta--who so persistently interviewed the village women and recorded their observations of the dynamics of family life and prepared reports on village institutions and events related to female activities.

Finally, we wish to express our deepest gratitude to the many villagers whom we came to know as friends--the leaders who accepted our proposal that we study various aspects of village life and who impressed upon the members of their respective groups that they should cooperate with our interviewers--and the many villagers who gave so much of their time answering what must have seemed to be an endless series of questions regarding all aspects of their lives.

The preliminary draft of the report was prepared while the senior author was at the Institute of Advanced Projects, East-West Center, Honolulu, during the year 1968-69; the final report was completed at the Center for Population Planning, University of Michigan, 1970.



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Our major research interest in the village under study was in the area of socialization practices, social change and variables related to fertility behavior. We had not planned a study of the diffusion of news events and villagers' reactions to them. However, the Indian Government was considering the use of media for a major mass communication program, to propagate the idea of having small families through the use of family planning methods, and we believed it would be of value to examine any data that might be helpful in getting at least some feeling about what villagers read in the papers and what they heard on the radio, as well as their understanding of the information and their attitudes toward it. We subsequently asked questions about the use of mass media.

In his work on the impact of communication in developing societies, Rogers (1969) remarks on the shortage of studies of the diffusion of and reactions to news. He points out that Greenberg and Parker (1965) in their review of the literature for their report on social communication of the Kennedy assassination in the United States were unable to find a single investigation of news diffusion regarding the assassination anywhere else in the world. He goes on to say, "In fact, we have almost no research on the diffusion of news events of any kind outside the United States (one exception is found in Hamuy and others, 1958), in spite of the fact that news diffusion has been one of the most popular topics in mass communication research in the past five years." <sup>1</sup>

Occasionally, those conducting village studies over a period of time have an opportunity to observe a spontaneous event that is worth recording even though it is not a planned part of the research. The following report presents some findings of this kind. We will first report on the results of the survey and then, because of the unquestioned potential importance of mass media as an aid to developing countries in reaching their objectives, we will discuss the implication that we believe our village findings may have.

## The Village and Its People

From 1963 to 1970, the investigators collected data on various aspects of behavior in a village in Gujarat State.<sup>2</sup> The village was located two miles from a major city and was undergoing change from a traditional agricultural economy to one which was becoming more dependent on urban jobs and industrial employment in the numerous factories which were being developed in the rural area adjacent to the city.

The total village population, including hamlets, was 894 males and 796 females at the time of the village census conducted by the research staff in December 1963. The villagers were members of 24 castes and community groups--all that were needed to perform traditional roles and services.<sup>3</sup> Of these, there were four major groups who were sampled and studied throughout the period of the investigation: Patidars, Barias, Bhils and Vankers. The Patidars were high caste farm owners who for generations had maintained effective village political and social control. The Barias were numerically the largest caste but had a middle status level which related to their traditional land tenancy and small land holdings. The Bhils, descendants of tribal people, had originally been brought by Patidar families to serve as farm guards and laborers and were for the most part still employed as farm laborers which caused them to be ranked near the bottom of the social hierarchy. The Vankers, traditionally weavers and for some time forced to serve as collectors of dead cattle, had long been referred to as "untouchables" although in recent years they had stopped collecting carcasses and had been some of the first villagers to seek factory employment and urban jobs.

The village census data indicated the growing trend for unskilled laborers to seek factory employment; only 17 percent of the productive adult males reported that they were farm laborers while 20 percent reported that they served as unskilled workers in various institutions outside the village especially in the factories which were in commuting distance by bicycle.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the unskilled workers employed outside the village, a number of artisans who had traditionally served landowning families had recently found part-time or full-time jobs outside the village. An additional five percent of village adult males held clerical or administrative positions in urban institutions. Less than half the productive adult males residing in the village con-



tinued to be directly engaged in agricultural work, including managerial level farmer-landowners, tenant farmers and farm laborers, yet the traditional cultural value of land ownership was still an important status factor and many families attempted to farm small holdings with the help of women and children and/or hired help while the head of the household or at least one male member of the family served as a factory worker to assure the family at least some basic cash income.

The data collected on the 344 ever-married males and 338 ever-married females who were residing in the village in December 1963, indicated that the majority of the men and women in the higher status Patidar caste had achieved considerably higher educational levels than the majority of the same sex members of the other three castes and communities studied. The differential educational expectations and achievements of the sexes was also indicated, however, in the records of this high status group whose responses indicated that 60 percent of the males had attended school beyond fourth standard but only 21 percent of the females had done so.<sup>5</sup>

Reports from the adults in the three relatively lower status groups--Baria, Bhil and Vanker--indicated that men in the lowest of these (Vanker) tended to have a somewhat higher educational level (25 percent above fourth standard) than did men of the middle status Baria group whose records indicated that only 18 percent had attended beyond fourth standard. None of the men from the tribal (Bhil) group had attended school beyond the primary level. With the exception of the Patidar women (21 percent) who had attended school beyond primary level, virtually none of the women in the other three major groups had done so, and the majority of the women in the Baria, Bhil and Vanker groups (ranging from 66 to 84 percent) reported that they had never attended school.

## Availability and Usage of Mass Media

When the research staff took the household census in 1963, there were 19 radios recorded for the 332 village homes. However, when members of the staff interviewed family members to gather census data, it was often the first time they had met and before any rapport had been developed. We later found that some of our census data were not accurate, particularly in terms of indications of family wealth and it seems likely we had an under reporting of radios. A year later we found that in an intensive study of 24 families from different castes and socio-economic levels that 30 percent had a radio in the house. Many people said they listened to a neighbor's radio even though they didn't have one of their own. Nearly 70 percent of the men and 56 percent of the women said they listened to the radio. Village homes were small and built wall-to-wall and it was often noticed by the investigators that a radio in one house could be heard in front of houses some distance up and down the street. Music, particularly, was often played loudly so that neighbors might hear it. The panchayat (village council) had a radio connected to a loud speaker provided by the Government which was centrally located in the village so radio news and other programs could generally be heard. However, the panchayat radio was out of order and was never used during the years we worked in the village.

At the time of the survey concerning response to news events the cost of a radio set was high in terms of the average family's income. A radio set was usually considered to be so expensive that most owners kept them locked in a special cabinet. As a result, in some families, the use of the set was limited to the male head or other senior male member of the family. However, the subsequent manufacture of Indian transistor sets resulted in a significant decline in the cost of a radio and by the end of the decade these sets were being purchased in larger numbers, particularly by male youths who liked to walk about or carry them on their bicycles, playing music as they commuted to urban jobs or to educational institutions in the city.

Newscasts could be heard five times a day on local stations and since radios were often played throughout the day for the music programs, it was possible for villagers in nearly every area to hear the news if they wished. If they did not hear the newscasts at home, they might hear them at tea stands, since

many village males made a daily habit of stopping for tea after returning from work.

In terms of listening habits, the most popular programs were music. However, of our 24 intensive case study families, 17 or over 70 percent of the fathers listened to the news while five (20 percent) of the mothers listened to newscasts. It was obvious that the news they paid attention to was that which was of interest to them. Farmers, for example, tended to listen to market prices while factory workers listened to news of union activities.

Twenty families reported that they received one or more daily newspapers by subscription. Four different papers which were delivered to the village were published in the regional language, Gujarati, and originated in the nearby city and a larger metropolitan center about 60 miles to the north. The daily news was spread more widely than the 20 subscriptions would indicate, however, since adult males had the habit of sitting and discussing the news with friends and neighbors in their homes as well as in public places such as tea stands. As a result, those who were illiterate or who had developed vision problems could at least be somewhat informed of events outside the village if they chose to be. There were half a dozen local tea stands and tobacco shops in and near the village which also subscribed to local newspapers for their customers to read. The manager or one of the customers would read and discuss the news with those who were present.

The village school also had a small library which contained a number of periodicals put out by government information services, including a U.S. and a Soviet publication as well as Indian government periodicals and a daily newspaper which were available to adults and students. In practice, however, few persons availed themselves of the resources of the library, according to the teacher who served as librarian.

Some villagers, mostly males, attended the urban cinema which showed Indian newsreels and documentaries just before the featured film.<sup>6</sup> These were generally in Hindi--the official language--and revealed information pertinent to such prolonged events as the border conflict with China, the development of public sector projects such as dams, hydro-electric and atomic power and other significant endeavors of the Indian government.

During the investigation of influences of mass media on villagers, the 54-year-old village headman was asked about the extent of film showings that had been offered in the village to the present. Since he had been a leader and member of the panchayat for a number of years he was a reliable source of such information. He said that many films had been shown in the village on agriculture, health, sanitation, smallpox, the panchayat and village cooperation but that no films had yet been shown on family planning.

As part of an interview schedule on social change, a sample of village men and women were asked what they thought were the benefits and disadvantages of newspapers, radio and cinema in relation to village life. Remarks ranged from highly favorable to unfavorable and both extremes were sometimes combined in the expression of one person.

Favorable remarks about mass media by males were indicated by a Harijan factory worker who said, "Every day I read the newspaper. I own a radio and listen to news and other programs such as stories and songs. Radio has helped our people to progress."

A low income Baria farmer remarked, "Sometimes I do read a newspaper. Through the paper we can know the prices of food grains. A radio is good but to own one requires a job with a good cash income."

Another low income Baria said, "Radio is a good recreational instrument. I don't have one but I hear the songs and news every day on my neighbor's."

A Harijan father said, "I can't read but sometimes my children or someone else reads the newspaper for me while I listen. There are many advantages of a newspaper. We can learn about our country."

Another illiterate Baria male remarked, "I am not influenced by the newspapers because I do not know how to read. I am not interested in city news but I am interested in the employment notices."

An older Patidar farmer commented, "Cinema has advantages and disadvantages. One I saw showed how to work hard and save money but I have not seen a film in four years."

A 28-year-old Baria farmer remarked, "The cinema has had a favorable influence on village life. It gives people good recreation. I like movies with a social theme the most."

But some of the men indicated that cinema had a disruptive effect on village culture. A young Bhil husband (farm laborer) said, "Cinema has increased the conflict in villagers' family lives. Villagers go to a romantic film and then they want to have a romantic life themselves. Women from the village see a cinema hero and then they expect their husbands to be like that--to go for walks with them and have a love affair."

A 36-year-old Harijan male said, "People are spoiled by the cinema. Children fall in love with each other at a very young age because they see romantic films."

The women's remarks also indicated varied interest and acceptance toward radio and films although few of them indicated that they had much opportunity to listen to radio or to attend films.

A 24-year-old Bhil woman said, "Before I had children I went with my husband to see entertainment films. I have not gone to see any films since I have had the children but now we go shopping for clothes in the city from time to time."

A 38-year-old Baria woman said her family did not have a radio and that she was not interested in listening to the radio. A 27-year-old Patidar woman commented similarly, saying, "I hardly ever listen to the radio. Sometimes if someone else plays it I hear songs but I don't really listen as I have to attend to my work. The disadvantage of having a radio is that it sometimes disturbs my sleep and when the children damage it we have to spend money to have it repaired. So I don't think there is any advantage in having a radio."

A 33-year-old Baria woman said that they had no radio in their house but that they listened to the radio which belonged to a Patidar neighbor. She commented, "We can hear songs when they play the radio. It gives good entertainment."

A middle-aged Patidar woman was also favorable toward radio and cinema, saying, "I enjoy the radio. Radios are good. Villagers learn new things from the radio. I also like the cinema."

Sometimes when a picture comes about a god or goddess I go to see it. I don't feel bad or shy about seeing such films because they give us good thoughts."

A 33-year-old Harijan woman commented on the benefits of radio and cinema which had been experienced by persons in her community. She said, "The influence of radio and cinema has been good. Radio is good because we can hear what is going on. The children are learning how to speak properly by listening to the radio and there are many good entertainment and documentary films which teach us about life." She also referred to an annual film showing about the life of Jesus Christ put on in their street by Christian missionaries.

A Harijan mother commented favorably on both films and radio, saying, "If you go to see good films then there is nothing to feel guilty about. I don't go to tea stands or restaurants but I enjoy the radio."

A 23-year-old Harijan woman and her husband were regular attendants at the cinema. She remarked, "The influence of the cinema on village people has been good. We come to know so many things. People learn a lot. The last picture I saw was Bahu-beti which had a good moral. It teaches parents how to help their daughters-in-law to take life's hardships with a smiling face. Young daughters-in-law think they have a lot of trouble in their in-laws' family so this film has a message which is helpful. I like to see social and religious films."

She went on to say, "I like the Hindi films and my husband likes the English films so he goes with a friend and I take our son [6-7 years old] every few weeks."

## The News Events

In mid October 1964, just before data were collected on villagers' opinions and use of mass media, three international news events took place which were commented upon in radio newscasts and in the newspapers. It was indicated editorially that two of these events might cause serious trouble for India. The third event was interpreted as being of lesser significance but one which might have some effect on internal politics in India. On October 16, the papers carried headline stories of Khrushchev's removal from office in Russia. On the following day, the papers carried a headline story about China's first successful atom bomb test. Then, the weekend papers reported the Labour Party victory of Harold Wilson in the United Kingdom. All of the three events were featured stories in local papers on Sunday, October 18. Editorials and radio commentaries pointed out that India had feared for some time that China would eventually develop into a nuclear power, especially since the Chinese attack on the Indian border areas two years previously. Comments also associated the removal from office of the Russian leader with the India-China conflict.<sup>7</sup> Speculation by the press and radio centered on reasons for Khrushchev's fall from power and to what extent this might have been motivated by a desire on the part of the Russian power structure to improve relations with China. The comments tended to indicate that an improvement in Russian-Chinese relations would be very unfavorable to India. The extensive news coverage of these events seemed to warrant an assessment of the villagers' reactions.



### The Survey

On Sunday morning, October 18, 1964, while reading the newspapers, we wondered how the villagers were reacting to the international news. The field director was called and a few short questions were written for the field staff of four women and two men to use the following day. We believed that there had been ample exposure to the two major items relating to Russia and China over the weekend and that the news emphasis on these events would decrease the first of the week. We therefore decided to simply question as many men and women as we could the following two days. We had been working in the village for nearly two years and the village residents regarded the investigating staff as friends. They seldom hesitated to answer questions frankly. We were confident that the villagers told us what they knew and what they thought about it. We had also been working in the village school with teachers and students so that we decided to determine what the students understood of the events after the newspaper was read in class Monday. Since the interviewers were asking questions related to social change at the time, including items about the use of radio and the villagers' evaluation of its usefulness, the interviewers were asked to question the villagers informally and collect additional information and attitudes pertinent to news and political situations. A few villagers, therefore, were asked if they knew who the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Minister of Gujarat State were. Some were also asked their opinions about India's relationships with Russia, China and the U.K. especially if they seemed to have some awareness of recent political events and/or if they appeared to be interested in commenting.

In two days, the two male and four female interviewers were able to interview 17 men and 28 women, as many people as they could in the time they had. In spite of this, those interviewed seemed reasonably representative of the village: three of the men were Patidars, seven were Barias, three were Bhils and four were Harijans. A similar caste distribution was found among the 28 women.

## The Men's Interviews

The seventeen men's interviews are presented here to indicate the relative extent of information and the general nature of their reactions to questions on the three major news events and in a few cases their responses to other questions which probed their level of awareness to events outside the village.

The responses were judged by the investigators to represent three levels of awareness and interest in news events:

- (1) informed and able to give pertinent answers and/or interpretations,
- (2) evidence of a limited knowledge of national/international events,
- (3) uninformed about and uninterested in news events.

Two village males' interviews were judged to be representative of the first classification, nine of the second classification and six of the third classification as indicated in the following three sections:

### 1. Responses of men who were informed:

Respondent "A": Patidar, politician and "headman", 54 years old, tenth standard education, owner of a radio and subscriber to several newspapers and magazines. In addition, he regularly read several publications which came to the village library which was located in the school. The interview follows:

Q: What has just happened in Russia?

A: Khrushchev has resigned as Prime Minister. I heard about it yesterday. I do not know the details but there must be a difference of opinion in the Communist Party of Russia.

Q: What effect will this have?

A: It can affect all the countries in the world because of the power of Russia. The effect on India may be that the Indian Communists may not get active support from Russia.

Q: What do you think of Russia?

A: Russia is the friend of India. Both countries are peace-loving, so relations are warm. We must have good relations with Russia because she is one of the major

powers in the world. Russia helped India with industrialization and when the Chinese attacked, Russia gave help.

Q: What has happened in China?

A: I read in the newspaper that China has exploded an atom bomb so it has become a major power in the world.

Q: What effect will this have?

A: Fear has been created in India. Now who knows, China may use the bomb on us.

Q: What do you think of China?

A: The relationship between China and India is not good. Both are enemies. In the past the relationship was friendly and there was an agreement that neither nation would attack the other. But China broke the promise and in 1962 attacked India to destroy democracy. China wants to expand into Indian territory and spread Communism in Asia.

Q: What happened in the U.K.?

A: The Labour Party has taken over the government and Mr. Wilson is the new Prime Minister.

Q: What effect will this have?

A: It may give the labor forces in India some increased stimulation and power. The trade unions may be more conscious of the Labour Party in India and they may unite to play a more active part in Indian politics. The Communist Party may become more active.

Q: What do you think of the U.K.?

A: The relationship between the U.K. and India is good and both are friends. The U.K. stays friendly with India because she once ruled India and might be thinking about ruling India again.

Q: How many persons do you discuss the news with?

A: I talk to about 25 people. We talk at the tea stand and at the home of one Baria. I read the paper to about 15 or 20 people every day.

Respondent "B": Patidar, 33 years old, elected head of the panchayat, 1964, tenth standard education, subscriber to a newspaper and owner of a radio, manager of a large farm. "B" was questioned as follows:

Q: What has happened in Russia ?

A: Khrushchev has resigned.

Q: What effect will this have ?

A: I don't know international politics but it may be like what will happen when your project [the village research] ends--we will lose a great friend and well-wisher for India. I don't know what effect Khrushchev's resignation will have.

Q: What do you think of Russia ?

A: The relationship between India and Russia is good. They have given us loans and Russia is interested in developing an oil refinery here [Gujarat]. Russia has trained Indian technicians and engineers.

Q: What has happened in China ?

A: China has exploded an atomic bomb.

Q: What effect will this have ?

A: China may drop it on India and India will be destroyed.

Q: What do you think of China ?

A: Outwardly our relations are good but not at heart. China occupied Indian territory by force.

Q: What has happened in the U.K. ?

A: I am not very concerned about the U.K. I read about it but I don't recall what happened. I don't read much about foreign countries but I believe the Labour Party has come into power in the U.K.

Q: What effect will this have ?

A: The Labour Party in India may get an inspiration from this and the Swatantra Party may also gain power in India. All the opposition parties may gain momentum in India.

Q: What do you think of the U.K. ?

A: It is a good country.

Q: What publications do you read ?

A: Soviet Land, Panchayati Raj, Bhoomi Patri, Wande Gujro, Swami Narayan Patrika, Baljivan, Filmfare and the Loksatta newspaper.

## 2. Responses of men who had limited knowledge and interest:

The following interviews were conducted with nine men who had some primary school (3-4 standards) education; some of these interviews were with factory or mill workers; other interviews were with persons who had agricultural labor jobs. These men tended to have rather low cash incomes which were inadequate considering the cost of living. Both agricultural workers and those in mills and factories were concerned about the high cost of family food supplies as well as about the prices of local crops. So news which interested these "average" villagers tended to be related to things which were close to their lives: advertisements of "vacant posts" (jobs), market prices, news of strikes and labor relations, especially. From a recreational standpoint they liked to read and talk about dramatic news such as that of robberies, kidnapping, or extramarital affairs. According to the age of the listener, they were habituated to listening to recorded film music and/or to programs of religious music and stories. Questions addressed to such persons were sometimes met with a retort such as, "Why should laborers be interested?" followed by a remark which indicated the person was too concerned about his own economic problems to be interested in any news but that of labor relations or strikes or that his education was so limited that he did not even know where the foreign country was. Some men pointed out that the newspaper served a utilitarian purpose--to discover what films were being shown in the city theaters or to be advised of available employment. Others pointed out that most of the time they lacked the opportunity to read because agricultural work took all of their time during the growing season.

Respondent "C": Baria factory worker, 32 years of age, fourth standard primary education, owner of a radio. The interviewer met "C" on the road near the tea stand. Both men sat down and ordered tea. The interviewer asked the tea stand manager for the newspaper and started to look at it after which he began to question the worker:

Q: Do you read the paper?

A: I usually only read the headlines.

Q: What were the important events the past few days?

A: Something was reported about Britain but I don't know the details.

Q: What about Russia?

A: I don't know.

Q: [The interviewer then showed him the headlines.]

Here it says what happened. Did you know about this?

A: Oh, drop those matters. Why should we bother about other countries? We should worry about our own work.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes. I listen to news and religious songs and stories. I generally tune to Radio Ceylon because of the film music which is played on that station.

Q: What do you think is the importance of radio?

A: The music gives recreation and release from tension when you come back from work.

Q: What do you think of Chinese-Indian relations?

A: They are not good. China attacked our country last year and I think that China is still attacking.

Respondent "D": retired Baria milk shop owner, 55 years of age, fourth standard primary education. "D" said that he read newspapers regularly and that he planned to get his own subscription after the Diwali holiday, about a month later. He remarked that he was interested in reading about the prices of food grains but that he also read national and international news. He indicated that he had recently purchased a portable transistor radio in addition to the other radio set the family owned.

Q: What happened in Russia in the past few days?

A: I don't know about anything that has happened recently. I have been sick so I have not gone out of the house.

Q: What do you think of Russian-Indian relations?

A: India has been friendly to Russia but Russia has not been friendly to India. We do not like Russia because Russia is a brother to China. Russia has given help to India but this may be in order to conquer India by making her obligated for the aid.

Q: What has happened in China?

A: I do not know what happened there either.

Q: What do you think of Chinese-Indian relations?

A: China is our enemy. I think she may want to conquer Gujarat. I don't know but it seems that she is also thinking of conquering other parts of India.

Q: What just happened in the U.K. ?

A: I don't know.

Q: What do you think of U.K. -Indian relations ?

A: They are very good. India was a part of the U.K. so there is an exchange of goods. How could Indian factories work if the U.K. did not send materials? The U.K. also helps India by giving aid.

Respondent "E": Baria, a member of the panchayat, 42 years of age, fourth standard primary education. "E" said he had read the papers regularly for the past 20 years and that he also listens to the radio but not regularly. He said that he did not subscribe to a newspaper but read one at a local tea stand or in the home of a neighbor.

Q: What has just happened in Russia ?

A: I don't know. I have been sick the past few days so I have not read the papers or listened to the radio.

Q: What do you think of Russia ?

A: India has friendly relations with Russia. Russia may need some Indian goods and that is why they help India but I do not know what help they give us. Two years ago a Russian leader visited India and some parts of Gujarat.

Q: Do you know what happened in China recently ?

A: I don't know. I have been sick but I think that China may be thinking about invading India again.

Q: Tell me what do you think about China ?

A: China may want to conquer India. China does not want to join anyone in the name of friendship. China has cheated India.

Q: Do you know what has happened in the U.K. ?

A: The U.K. helps India because the U.K. once ruled India and because both nations are members of the U.N.

Respondent "F": Harijan factory worker, 42 years of age, fourth standard primary education. "F" had worked in an urban textile mill for many years. He said he had read the newspaper regularly for twenty years--the market news and matters of general interest.

Q: What has happened in Russia in the past few days ?

A: Three men have been sent into space but I don't know anything that has happened recently.



- Q: What has happened in China in the past few days?  
 A: I don't know but China and India are enemies. China wants to rob India and gain India's wealth.
- Q: What has happened in the U.K. in the past few days?  
 A: I don't know but the U.K. gives aid to India because India needs it.

Respondent "G": Baria, agricultural laborer, 50 years of age, fourth standard primary education. "G" was sitting on his otla (wide front step made of dry mud) when the interviewer approached. He said he read the newspapers whenever he had time--at the nearby tea stand.

- Q: Do you know what has just happened in Russia?  
 A: I have not read a paper for the last five days because I have been too busy with my agricultural work. An agricultural worker doesn't have time to read these days.
- Q: Do you know what has happened in China?  
 A: I don't have much interest in the politics of any other country. I don't even know where those countries are located because I did not study this in school. We were given some knowledge of India and its history. Without knowledge of a country's location it is of no use to know any news about it.
- Q: How many days in a month do you look at a newspaper?  
 A: I don't have any regularity; it depends on my free time. In the free season [between crops] I read daily but in the working season hardly one day a week.
- Q: Do you have a radio?  
 A: No. I don't like to listen to the radio because only songs of the cinema are played.
- Q: Do you know who the Chief Minister of this state is?  
 A: I don't know. I only know that the Congress Party is ruling the country and that the political leaders come only at the time of election. After we vote they disappear. When it is election time, they again come to the village to seek our votes. Today we have acute shortages of sugar, cooking oil and grain but who is interested? Prices are going up.

Respondent "H": Harijan, factory laborer, 30 years of age, fourth standard primary education. "H" said he was a shift work-

er so he didn't have enough time to read the paper daily, especially because he didn't subscribe and had to rely on seeing a copy at a tea stand. He indicated that he sometimes heard the radio when a neighbor turned his on in the morning.

Q: Do you know what has happened in Russia?

A: I know the local news but not the foreign news.

Q: You did not read it?

A: No, I am not very interested in the foreign news.

Q: What kinds of things do you read in the paper?

A: I look for the notices of the cinema and local news of Baroda City and District.

Q: Do you know about China?

A: Yes, they attacked India and some funds were collected but I do not know which place they attacked.

Q: What has happened recently in China?

A: I don't have any idea.

Respondent "I": Harijan, textile mill worker, 45 years of age, second standard primary education. "I" said that he had worked for 20 years in a local textile mill; he held a seat on the village panchayat. When asked if he read newspapers he remarked, "For the past 15 years I have had the habit of reading the newspaper but I have had to stop the past five years because of the weakness of my eyes. I cannot get eye-glasses because I require the last number and I even find difficulty signing a paper. I don't have a radio but I sometimes go and listen at my brother's house nearby."

Q: Do you know what has happened in Russia?

A: I have been told that the head of the Russian Government has resigned. The relationship between India and Russia will be strained now without Khrushchev; he was a great friend of India so now we may not get sympathy from Russia. Russia may support China.

Q: Have you heard what has just happened in China?

A: I haven't heard any recent news about China. China is our enemy.

Q: Do you know any news about the U.K.?

A: Someone told me that in the U.K. there is a revolution with agitation and people protesting against the rulers.

Respondent "J": Bhil laborer, 45 years of age, illiterate. When questioned about the news events, "J" remarked, "I don't know reading and writing so I don't have much interest in papers. Sometimes I listen when other persons read the newspaper." He said that he listened daily to news [broadcast over a local station] by stopping at a tea stand for an hour when he got home from work [6:50 p.m.].

Q: What do you listen to?

A: To the market prices of vegetables and the all-India news.

Q: Do you know what has happened in any other countries?

A: No, I don't because it is difficult to remember news about other countries.

Q: How about news of India?

A: I know only about strikes and the other mills' affairs. I am interested in hearing news about labor problems and the solution--whether a larger bonus will be given or not and whether there will be a decrease in the prices of cooking oil, grain and other things.

Q: Do you hear any news at your mill?

A: Yes, there are three or four men who discuss the daily news in the local newspaper.

Q: What kinds of news do they discuss?

A: The local news of Baroda City, and about husbands and wives who ran away, murders, assaults, etc.

Q: Do these men ever discuss world events?

A: They don't generally discuss such things but when the Chinese aggression happened, they were discussing its effects.

Q: What do you think about India's relations with China?

A: The Chinese are not good. They are very aggressive and are expert in fighting so our country should develop strength to defend itself.

Q: Do you know any recent news about China?

A: No. I haven't heard any news lately. Why should laborers bother about such news? Our problems are not solved. There are strikes in the mills everywhere; we are given Majoor Patrika [labor newspaper] in our mill so we come to know about all the strikes. [This is published fortnightly and given to workers to read.]

Q: What about radio? Do you hear any news on the radio?

A: I don't listen to radio news in the village because I don't have much free time and I don't like to sit in the group that listens.

Respondent "K": Harijan factory worker, 35 years of age, third standard primary education. When the interviewer entered the Harijan street he heard a radio playing a religious song. As he came to "K's" house [6:00 p.m.] he saw that three other Harijans were listening with him. "K" explained, "We listen to the radio daily. It is a good form of recreation."

Q: Do you listen to the news also?

A: Yes, daily at 7:30 p.m.

Q: Do you read a newspaper?

A: Yes, daily because I subscribe.

Q: What is the present relationship between Russia and India?

A: I have no clear idea in my mind but I know that Russia is the country which is helpful in oil matters [development of a refinery in an area a few miles from the village]. I don't know the details but I know that some Russians are working here.

Q: Do you know what has happened in Russia?

A: Yes, it was announced on the radio that someone has resigned. I don't know who. I read the local newspaper but only the headlines not the details. The main reason that I subscribe to a paper is to know the local news and to see the advertisements.

Q: Are you looking for a job or do you let someone else know about vacant posts?

A: I share the news in my street so someone can apply for such jobs.

Q: Do you have an opinion on the present relationship between China and India?

A: I don't think that relations are good at present because the Chinese attacked our country. I haven't heard any recent news of China.

Q: Have you heard any news about the U.K. in the past few days?

A: No.

Q: What do you listen to on the radio?

A: Sometimes we listen to religious songs or a nice story or a play. We get news about the activities of laborers. We are interested in discussion programs for laborers.

[Then one of the Harijans pointed out, "Yes, we sometimes hear programs for the upliftment of the 'backward classes'. This is important for us so that is why radio is an important instrument. Our problems are ignored by some leaders and by newspapers but we can find out about our rights and special privileges by listening to radio news and commentaries." ]

K: Yes, he is right. The radio gives us information about our rights and special privileges. It also gives us recreation. We can hear religious songs and turn our minds toward God.

### 3. Responses of generally uninformed, uninterested males:

The respondents who were least informed included a Patidar landowner as well as persons from the lower status Baria and Bhil communities. (There were no Harijans among the least informed group.) Except for the village medical practitioner (some higher education) who happened to enter an interview situation, all of these men had little or no education and they served as manual laborers. Only one of them said he listened to a radio; it was indicated that most of them were functionally illiterate and relied on others to tell them any high interest value local news such as that of crimes, sexual adventures, etc. Most of them indicated that they could not comment on either national or international news events. The interviews were briefly summarized as follows:

Respondent "L": Bhil factory worker, 56 years of age, limited education, if any. He said he had worked in the textile industry for the past 18 years and that he commuted to the city daily. When asked if he read the newspaper he said that he looked at the newspaper but that he just turned the pages. He remarked that only one Bhil in their street--the leader--read the details of the newspaper from the first to the last page. When asked about radio listening, he remarked that his son had just purchased a transistor ten days previously. He did not know anything about the news events.

Respondent "M": Bhil leader, a panchayat member and farmer with some land of his own who became a shop owner (late 1960's) and Surpanch (1970). "M" had had two years of primary school education and was judged to be the "best reader" in the Bhil street according to Respondent "L". When asked about the recent news events he remarked, "It is not possible for me to understand national or international politics. I read the news about dacoity (robbery), romance, police cases, etc." He knew that someone had replaced Prime Minister Nehru but said that he didn't know anything about him.

As "M" was being questioned, an ayurvedic (traditional medicine) practitioner interrupted the conversation telling the interviewer that since he did not know about national and international politics how should the villagers know such things. At this point, the Bhil leader retorted, "Yes, why should we know about politics when some educated persons do not know about such things?"

Respondent "N": Patidar farmer-landowner, 52 years of age, fourth standard primary education. When interviewed he remarked that he did not read the newspaper but sometimes listened to radio news, especially to that of crop prices. When asked about China he answered that the relationship between India and China had improved but that "China wants to conquer India because India is a land of rich farms where there is no famine." When questioned further he replied, "Only one who reads the newspaper and listens to radio programs regularly can understand about national or international politics. I don't know about Russia because our people have not gone there. I only know that Russia helps our country a lot."

Respondent "O": Baria factory worker, 24 years of age, fourth standard primary education. The respondent said he did not read the newspaper and did not own a radio. He was working at a factory near the village. He commented that he could not answer the questions, that he only knew that sometimes there was a report of a war between two countries.

Respondent "P": Baria factory worker, 30 years of age, fourth standard primary education. This respondent indicated that he had recently started working in a rubber factory but before that he had worked as a doorkeeper in a cinema theater for several years. He said that he didn't know any world news, but

that he read the newspaper because he was interested in robbery and kidnapping cases. He indicated that he thought China might conquer India but could not say anything about the present political situation. He was uninformed about world news events.

Respondent "R": Baria textile mill worker and shop keeper, 32 years of age, third standard primary education. The respondent said that he had worked in a textile mill for three years and had also had a small shop near the Bhil residential area located near the village panchayat office. When asked about his interest in news events, he remarked that he subscribed to a newspaper at the shop for his customers but that he wasn't able to read; he said that he had not heard about any recent political events.



### The Women's Interviews

The four female interviewers called on 28 women they knew in the main castes/communities. The interviews were brief since most women said frankly that they didn't know anything about the news events and that it was not their habit to discuss such things. Most of them indicated that they didn't know how to read and that they didn't have time to discuss world news events even if they might hear about them. Only one high caste, 24-year-old woman who was a secondary school graduate said that she and her husband sometimes talked about news of other countries. She mentioned as an example the border conflict with China. The interviewers reported that this was the only woman they talked to who indicated she knew the name of another country. The following were typical comments:

"I don't read the newspapers and I would not know anything about politics. We don't discuss these things."  
(Baria woman, age 25 years)

"I don't know anything about it. We do not have time to talk about such things." (Baria woman, age 40 years)

"We don't read newspapers. We are uneducated so we just do the housework and sit quietly."  
(Baria woman, age 50 years)

"We women are not educated so how can I know anything about it?" (Gosai woman, age 50 years)

"When I don't know how to count money, how am I to know all these things?" laughed a tribal woman.  
(Bhil woman, age 30 years)

A Harijan woman, age 25 years, was asked if she knew any news of foreign countries. She answered, "When I go to my masonry job I hear some of the men talking so I have heard that India was fighting China and that America helped." Her mother-in-law interrupted, saying, somewhat defensively, "You literate people can tell all about these things. We are illiterate so when we don't even know how to read, how can we tell about it?"

## The Students' Interviews

In the school year 1964-65, there were 164 boys and 55 girls enrolled in standards one through seven of the village school. The random sample of 14 boys and girls (ages 11 through 14) who were interviewed represented about half the students enrolled in the three highest class levels (fifth through seventh standards) and those who were in attendance following the weekend news. Of the fourteen students questioned, seven came from Patidar families, four from Baria families, two from Vanker families and one from a Brahmin (highest caste) family. (There was no Bhil student enrolled in any class beyond fourth standard.) Six of the boys were in seventh standard, three boys and one girl in sixth standard and two boys and two girls in fifth standard.<sup>8</sup> The caste and sex ratio of the sample tended to be fairly characteristic of school enrollment in this regional area, i.e., higher caste male children tended to be disproportionately represented in classes beyond primary level.

Every morning, current events were read from the newspaper to the students in the fifth, sixth and seventh standards. In addition, selected news items were written on a blackboard which was located on the school veranda. The news events were read aloud to the class by students in the sixth standard and news items were put on the blackboard by selected students in the seventh standard. The English translation was:

1. "Khrushchev resigns--surprise to the world"
2. "Labour election victory in U.K."
3. "China tests atom bomb--world concerned"
4. "Shortage of ground-nut oil--prices rise"

Following the reading of the news on Monday, October 19, the students were sent one at a time to an adjoining room where each was asked by a female interviewer what he had heard in the morning news. The same procedure was followed on Tuesday with the remaining sample of students. The field worker who had been doing a study of the school and working with some of the students attempted to determine what they had learned from the reading of the current events and the items on the blackboard. If the student couldn't recall what had been read in the classroom, she then asked him to go over to the

blackboard and tell her what was written there. In general, the responses indicated that the children had little basic knowledge to which they could relate the events in the three countries. Most of them had heard about the war with China, and when the name of the country was mentioned, they responded with some comment. In general, the seventh standard students did better than those in the lower standards. Two students reported that China had tested an atom bomb. One mentioned the election in the U.K. The majority of the 14 students, however, were not able to report what had been in the news, nor were they able to say what was on the blackboard, except for the item on the ground-nut oil.

A number of possible reasons for the seemingly poor performance can be given. The news was seldom discussed in the homes and any knowledge gained had, in most cases, to come from the school. Teachers were busy with other duties and students had to read the current events. Since the teachers were usually out of the room at such times, the students did not pay attention. There was often so much noise that those in the back of the room could not hear if they listened. The student reading the news may not have understood all the words and may not have always read it correctly. There was no discussion following the reading of the news to explain its significance and to relate it to other information the students had learned in the past.

Even though the students knew the female interviewer, they tended to be shy and may not have done as well as they could have. The interviews follow:

S-1: Patidar male, 14 years of age, attending seventh standard of the village school.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes, to songs and news.

Q: What things have been in the news?

A: Things about India.

Q: Can you tell me what happened in Russia?

A: Russia is our neighbor.

Q: Can you tell me what happened in China?

A: We do not have good relations with China because China attacked our border.

Q: Can you tell me what happened in the U. K. ?

A: I don't know.

Q: What news items were read in class today ?

A: I don't know.

Q: Please go to the blackboard and tell me what is written there.

A: [The student went and returned.] It says there is an oil crisis.

S-2: Baria male, 14 years of age, attending seventh standard of the village school.

Q: What do you listen to on the radio ?

A: I listen to garba [folk music] and news but only occasionally. We do not have a radio.

Q: What news is being reported today ?

A: About the ground-nut oil and its high price.

Q: What was read in the newspaper in class today ?

A: I was sweeping the room so I didn't hear.

Q: Did you read the news ?

A: Sometimes I read it in school but I can only understand once in a while.

Q: What have you heard about Russia ?

A: Russia is a country. India has good relations with Russia.

Q: Have you heard anything about China ?

A: India had to fight China.

Q: Please go and read the headlines on the blackboard and tell me what is written there.

A: [The student went and returned.] There is a scarcity of oil in India.

S-3: Patidar male, 13 years of age, attending seventh standard of the village school. (The student who wrote the headlines on the blackboard.)

Q: What do you listen to on the radio ?

A: To stations from Ceylon, Bombay and Pakistan. We hear songs, prayers, drama and news.

Q: What have you heard recently?

A: About anything that happened. The railway had an accident. There is an oil shortage.

Q: Have you heard anything about Russia?

A: [No response.]

Q: What about China?

A: China wants to take away Assam. Our relations are bad at present. China has experimented with an atom bomb.

Q: What about the U.K.?

A: India has very good relations with the U.K.

Q: What do you learn in geography?

A: About India, minerals, farming.

Q: Please go and read and report what is on the board.

A: England is having an election.

S-4: Patidar male, 13 years of age, attending seventh standard of the village school.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes--to garba and drama.

Q: Do you know what is in the news?

A: I don't remember.

Q: What about China?

A: China has attacked our country, but now we have better relations.

Q: What was read during the news period in class?

A: About the oil shortage.

Q: Anything else?

A: I do not remember.

Q: What is written on the blackboard?

A: Mafat wrote it.

Q: Have you read it?

A: No.

Q: Please go and read it and then report what is on the board.

A: [He returned and tried to report but became confused.]  
There was a resignation in the Soviet country and there is an oil problem.

Q: What have you been learning in geography lately?

A: About longitude and latitude and the parts of India.

S-5: Patidar male, 13 years of age, attending seventh standard of the village school.

Q: What do you listen to on the radio?

A: We hear songs, prayers, drama and news. Sometimes we hear Radio Ceylon, Bombay and Pakistan stations.

Q: What news have you heard lately?

A: There was a railway accident and ground-nut oil is not available.

Q: What was read in class today?

A: About China testing an atom bomb.

Q: What do you think of Chinese-Indian relations?

A: They are very bad at present. China wants to take away Assam from India.

Q: What do you think of Russian-Indian relations?

A: I don't know.

Q: Please read what is on the blackboard and tell me about it.

A: [The student went and returned.] England had an election.

Q: What do you learn in geography?

A: About India, minerals and farming.

S-6: Patidar male, 13 years of age, attending sixth standard of the village school.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes, to drama and news.

Q: What news have you heard lately?

A: I can't remember.

Q: What are you learning in geography?

A: About cities.

Q: What is written on the board today?

A: Mafat writes on the board. Sometimes other persons write.

Q: How is the news reported in your school?

A: The students in standard six read the news and the students in standard seven write it on the board.

Q: Does anyone in your family listen to the radio news?

A: No, my father never does.

Q: Please go and look at the board and report what is written there.

A: [The student went and returned.] There was a conference of leaders and an oil problem and a vow to take a procession.

S-7: Patidar male, 13 years of age, attending sixth standard of the village school.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes. I listen to the Ceylon station and to Indian variety entertainment programs. There are plays, songs and jokes. There is also news from Ahmedabad and Baroda [Gujarat cities].

Q: What news have you heard lately?

A: I do not remember.

Q: Do you read the newspaper?

A: We read it in school.

Q: What was read in the newspaper today?

A: I don't remember.

Q: What has just happened in China?

A: China had a fight with us. It was cold and the Chinese ran away. Some of our soldiers also died.

Q: Please go to the board and tell me what is written there.

A: It mentions an experiment with a bomb.

Q: Anything else?

A: I don't know.

Q: What do you learn in geography?

A: About Ceylon and Pakistan.

S-8: Baria male, 13 years of age, attending seventh standard of the village school.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes, there is a radio at our neighbor's place.

Q: What do you listen to?

A: To drama, songs, prayers and news.

Q: What news?

A: Both times--morning and evening.

Q: What is being reported now?

A: About India. But for the last two days the radio has not been working properly.

Q: Do you know what the situation is in China?

A: India has bad relations with China. China is trying to rule the border. Now relations have improved but the Chinese have not retreated.

Q: What about the U.K.?

A: We have peaceful relations with the U.K.

Q: What is written on the blackboard today?

A: I don't know. Mafat's handwriting is bad and he makes mistakes.

Q: What did you read in the newspaper?

A: We read the newspaper daily but we cannot remember what happened.

S-9: Harijan female, 12 years of age, attending sixth standard of the village school.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes. By listening to the radio we learn many things.

Q: What do you learn?

A: About the gram panchayat [village council] and the mill workers [labor relations news]. There are also dramas and garba.

Q: Do you also listen to newscasts?

A: I heard about the price of grain. They also tell about people who die and about quarrels. I do not listen to all the news. I sit at one side of the room while my father, mother and brother sit near the radio and listen.

Q: What has happened in China?

A: We had a quarrel with China.

Q: What was read in the news yesterday and today?

A: I don't know. I came to school late.



Q: Please go to the board and tell me what is written there.

A: [The student went and returned.] There are oil problems.

Q: What do you learn about in geography?

A: About maps and rivers and the Himalaya mountains.

S-10: Baria male, 12 years of age, attending sixth standard of the village school.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes, but we do not have one in our home. We listen to the news more than to music.

Q: What do you listen to?

A: Whatever happens and is reported.

Q: What was reported yesterday?

A: I don't know.

Q: What was reported today in school?

A: Those who are poor readers read the news to the class to improve their skill. I don't know what was read.

Q: What is the recent news of China?

A: China has attacked our country.

Q: What about news of Russia?

A: I have heard something about Russia but I forgot what it was.

Q: What about the U.K.?

A: I have not been in school the past three days so I don't know about the news.

Q: Please go and read what is on the board and tell me what it is in the news.

A: [He went to the board and returned.] There is an oil problem. I don't remember anything else.

S-11: Baria female, 12 years of age, attending fifth standard of the village school.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes. In the morning and evening but the radio is playing the whole day.

Q: What do you listen to?

A: Songs, prayers and news.

Q: What news do you hear?

A: About the prices of crops--prices for farmers.

Q: What has happened in China?

A: I don't know.

Q: Do you know what has happened in Russia?

A: I don't know.

Q: What about news of the U.K.?

A: I don't know.

Q: What news was read in school today?

A: The students of standard six read the news--about oil, fights, accidents and injuries.

Q: Please go to the board and tell me the news that is written there.

[The student went and returned. She couldn't remember or tell about any item except the oil problem.]

S-12: Patidar male, 12 years of age, attending seventh standard of the village school.

Q: Do you listen to the radio?

A: Yes, to songs, news and reports about quarrels.

Q: What was read in the news in school today?

A: I don't remember.

Q: What about news of China?

A: China attacked India and there was a fight.

Q: What do you learn in geography?

A: About farming, longitude and latitude, climate and time zones.

Q: Does anyone in your home read the newspaper?

A: No. My father does not read.

Q: What have you heard about Russia?

A: It is a country. I don't know anything more.

S-13: Patidar female, 11 years of age, attending fifth standard of the village school.

Q: What news did you hear today?

A: I do not remember.

- Q: Please go to the board and read what it says.  
[She went and returned but could not report anything except the news of the oil shortage]
- Q: Do you know about Russia?  
A: No.
- Q: What are you learning about in geography?  
A: About different countries and the people's occupations, about different regions in India and the languages spoken there.
- Q: What do you know about China?  
A: China is quarreling with India. To make our country free people are going to fight China.
- Q: Do you listen to the radio?  
A: Yes, to drama, songs and garba. Sometimes there are panchayat reports and talks about children.

S-14: Harijan male, age not reported, attending fifth standard of the village school.

- Q: Do you listen to the radio?  
A: Yes, we have a radio at our place.
- Q: Does anyone in your home listen to the news on the radio?  
A: My father listens to the news, and we all listen to the radio in the evening.
- Q: What do you listen to?  
A: The programs for villagers: drama, garba, songs, devotional songs and katha [mythological stories combined with ballads] on Monday.
- Q: What have you heard in the news about China?  
A: There is a fight between India and China.
- Q: What about Russia?  
A: Russia is a country.
- Q: What news was reported about Russia?  
A: I don't know.
- Q: Please go and read what is written on the board and tell me.  
[He tried but could not remember.]

## Summary and Discussion

There have been few studies of the diffusion of news events in rural India. This October 1964 survey attempted to determine the reaction of villagers to three events outside of India which were of direct concern to national well-being. These were the removal of Khrushchev from power in Russia, the first successful atomic bomb test by the Chinese, and the Labour Party coming into power in the U.K. All of these events had been given wide coverage by radio and the press. Since there were radios in the village and many of the village men read the local newspapers, the news entered the village in several different ways. In the village school, the news was read to students in upper classes and important headlines were placed on a blackboard outside the schoolroom where all students could see them.

After the events had been in the news several days, 17 men and 28 women were interviewed regarding their knowledge and attitudes toward what had occurred. In addition, 14 students eleven to fourteen years of age were asked about the news events which had been read to them in their classroom as well as their listening habits at home.

The responses of the village women indicated that they knew nothing about what had occurred recently regardless of caste or education. They were unanimous in pointing out that the role of women did not include paying attention to events that were not of immediate concern to them.

Among the men, the only well informed person was the village headman, a traditional leader. His detailed responses indicated that the news had reached the village and the reports were understood by at least one person. The head of the panchayat (village council) also had some awareness of the news events but his responses did not show the depth of understanding shown in the responses of the headman. The difference in intelligence and ability of the two men was considerable and the closeness of their acquaintance was such that it appeared that the elected leader had gained his information as a result of talking with the headman who was known to be a source of information in the village. The others' responses indicated that they neither knew nor cared about news if it did not have some understood relationship to their lives. Their concerns, understandably, had

to do with news about price fluctuations in cooking oils and food grains which affected their purchases and sales of crops. As with people everywhere, their newspaper reading and radio listening was selective. It was obvious that international news events which were of considerable concern to the national government had little or no meaning for all but a few village men and women.

In the school, all of the students questioned had been in classes where the news events were read. Of the 14 students who were questioned, two of the seventh standard boys were able to report one of the international news items--that China had tested an atom bomb. The rest, however, were unable to report what had been read in class and were not able to tell the interviewer what was written on the blackboard. It was indicated that their inability to respond was related to the fact that the words which were read and which appeared on the blackboard had little meaning. Words such as "Russia," "Khrushchev," and "atom bomb" seemed to be nonsense syllables for many of the children. News events which occurred outside the village were seldom discussed at home and so any knowledge of such things had to come from the classroom. The traditional nature of classroom discipline was such that students did not ask when they did not understand something. Teachers questioned students but a student would not dare to ask a teacher to explain a point. Even though one upper class instructor was interested in developing the school and creating a learning situation which was more imaginative than that found in most rural schools, he was overburdened with work such as that of taking care of the village library and the postal service. The curriculum lacked flexibility and the school lacked the funds to provide visual aids such as maps or illustrated educational materials which would enable students to have a better understanding of the world outside the village. The reading of current events allowed the instructor to take care of the morning postal duties while a student attempted to hold the attention of the class for a few minutes. Since there was no subsequent discussion of news by the instructor and the news was not related to past learning, few of the students learned from this exposure to news events.

It is obvious that the small survey reported here allows for few generalities in regard to the effectiveness of mass media in modernization. Still, we would like to make a few comments based on our general knowledge of the village and its people as

well as on the data reported. In spite of the importance of the mass media in developing countries such as India, it is our belief that we still have little understanding of the role they may play. It is usually assumed that the modernization process will be materially speeded through newer communication techniques. Rogers says, "Historically, physical mobility was the only means of making contact with the rest of the world, now the mass media provides a route of imaginative access to faraway places. The isolation caused by inadequate roads and means of transportation is easily overcome by radio and to a lesser degree by newspapers, magazines, books, which put individuals in contact with new places, new situations, and new ways of approaching old problems [see Note 1, Rogers, p. 206]."

Schramm (1964) puts it this way:

The traditional villager has lived in a world that he could encompass with his feet and his senses. Now he is shown a world that he has to depend on others to tell him about. He has lived in a stream of information about dangers and opportunities that were geographically, physically local. Now he is presented a stream of information in which he recognizes nonlocal events as dangers and opportunities. It must be a strange experience indeed to be brought into a world in which the blockade of a distant island, fighting on high mountains near the heart of Asia, or stern words spoken by the ambassador of one foreign nation to the ambassador of another foreign nation in a glass-walled building on the banks of the East River in New York would come to be regarded as dangers to an individual in a village; and in which a man in orbit around the earth, the discovery of invisible bacterial life in a foreign laboratory, or the finding of a thing called a 'DNA code', supposed to govern one's physical inheritance from his parents, should be interpreted as an opportunity. These changes amount to a redefinition of 'localness.' Many things that are physically distant are now seen to be trivial, and many things that are physically distant are seen to be local in their import. Fighting in the Himalayas had a local meaning to villagers in the heart of India. Discovery of a treatment for yaws had a local meaning to villagers in the heart of Africa." <sup>9</sup>

Some of our interviews with villagers would seem to support such statements. One of our fathers who was a member of a

caste regarded as having middle level status, pointed to the advantage of radio, saying, "Even uneducated people can become clever by listening to the radio." Another father in the same caste said, "The radio is good. We get outside news. Formerly we did not get such news. We come to know what is happening in Africa and America."

This kind of response to survey type questions was encouraging but it was also misleading. More intensive interviewing resulted in findings that were less encouraging. We found that neither the village adults nor the older school children had much information of the world outside their own region. Although they may have said they read the newspaper and listened to radio news, when asked about specific events they would say they were really not interested or they gave some excuse for not knowing about it. If they gave some indication of having heard about an event, their depth of understanding was very limited or the facts as presented in the mass media were distorted. The comment of one of the men indicated the problem of making news items meaningful with a limited cognitive framework related to the event. He said, "I don't have much interest in the politics of any country. I don't even know where those countries are located. Without some knowledge of the country it is of no use to know any news about it."

Perhaps most discouraging was the lack of information the students in the school had. As one of the village students said, "We read the newspapers daily but we can't remember what happened." In our study of the school we examined the curriculum and wrote a series of questions related to the specific material being taught--regarding geography, history and well-known Indian figures. The results indicated an almost complete lack of any knowledge on the part of the students.

Our data then would seem to question that making contact with the rest of the world is "easily overcome by radio" or that the villager "is presented with a stream of information in which he recognizes nonlocal events..." Certainly we know more about the learning process than to assume that just because a village man, woman or youngster hears or reads about the U.N. or the discovery of a laboratory finding or even the invasion of his own country, that he will necessarily understand what it means in either an abstract or a real sense. The learning process and its

problems in developing countries would seem to be too little understood at present to assume that the world outside the village could be opened so easily.

However, for a balanced picture several points should be made. First, it should not be assumed that the village was without knowledge of the outside world before modern mass communication. As with so many beliefs held by Westerners about India, as Dube puts it, the fabled isolation of the village is a myth.<sup>10</sup> A good case could probably be made for showing that India had an extensive network of communication extending through large sections of the subcontinent when Western Europe was in the tribal stage. Dube has shown that in present-day village India, news of interest to the people can diffuse rapidly. Shortly after the 1962 Chinese aggression, a national survey of a sample of over 3,000 was taken from nearly 200 villages throughout India. The study found that over 80 percent of persons interviewed knew of the aggression. While it was found that the radio and newspapers accounted for a significant first source of information, the traditional media, involving face-to-face oral communication was responsible for the major dissemination of the information. We also found that our villagers were aware of that event. The personal meaning it had for them, however, was less clear. Their responses to the later events which indirectly seemed to threaten the country indicated that whatever concern there may have been over China was probably marginal from the beginning. The difference between awareness of an event or having a piece of information and relating this in some meaningful way to the cognitive process of the individual is shown in the studies of adoption of innovations. In a summary of several studies, Dube says, "Although through communication the village people may acquire additional bits of information, they may not be able to relate them to any of their felt needs [see Note 10, p. 154]."

Schramm recognizes the fact that the traditional communication system can be effective in diffusing information such as that of the death of Gandhi or the fighting in the Himalayas but points out that the communication of interpretive, explanatory, technical and persuasive material is "hopelessly distorted" if carried by the "grapevine" (see Note 9, p. 77). However, mass communication can also present distorted concepts and person-to-person communication can be very effective in communicating correct and meaningful concepts because of the personal relationship involved and the opportunity to clarify misunderstanding through



discussion. It was our feeling that the information given by the village headman was generally correct and that the opinions he expressed were usually logical when local realities were considered. Information from mass media must be understood and evaluated. It cannot always be assumed to be right. There are many examples in peasant societies where agricultural practices have been recommended but rejected. In such situations the failure of the program may have been attributed to the backwardness of the people. Lack of adoption of some agricultural innovation, however, might relate instead to the fact that an intelligent farmer-leader has judged the method to be inadequate for the purpose and explained to others why it should not be used.

The evaluation of the peasant as uninformed, conservative and superstitious is due in part to his lack of information of the outside world and to the fact that he is often resistant to the adoption of government-sponsored innovations. However, as Srinivas points out, this is hardly the entire picture.<sup>11</sup> In referring to a study by McKim Marriott:

He shows that the technology of the peasant is not the simple thing that it is popularly believed to be, but really a complex and inter-related whole, and a change in any single item of it produces repercussions in the entire system. The technological system is closely related to the economic, social and religious systems, and this partly explains the peasant's opposition to change. Change is much more serious and pervasive in small and stable societies where the same people are involved with each other in a number of relationships, than in huge, industrial societies where the different aspects of social life do not form as closely-knit a whole, and where relationships between individuals are specialized and disparate [see Note 11, pp. 126-127]."

It is clear that any new information inputs must enter a value-attitude belief system of considerable complexity and that the dynamics of acceptance or rejection can be understood only in terms of this system. Again Srinivas says,

The peasant uses cowdung as fuel not because he does not know that it is valuable manure, but because he is desperately short of fuel. His plough is wooden and light because his bullocks are small, and often, he has

to grow his crop on a few inches of top-soil above hard rock. He spends money at weddings and funerals because if he does not do so he loses face with relatives, friends and neighbors. It is not fair to hold him responsible for institutions which have existed for several centuries. He can only be blamed for not having the courage to break them, and going against custom is much more difficult in the small, face-to-face and stable village community than in the heterogeneous and huge city. His poverty and inability make him dependent on others and this in turn forces him to conform [see Note 11, p. 127]."

Anyone who understands the implications of the above statement cannot help but have serious reservations about the effectiveness of the mass media to bring about rapid social change. It may also be important to consider group differences that exist in peasant societies. Rather than mass media causing modernization, it may be more likely that creativity and innovation have to do with basic socialization practices and that groups with these characteristics are more likely to take advantage of any new sources of information. It puts the senior author in mind of a graduate student who conducted a study in a certain advanced area of Gujarat State. He had concluded that the people there were more advanced because there were more schools in the area. Had he studied the history of the caste group he was discussing, he would have found a long tradition of innovation and achievement, of "modernization" that moved the community from a serf caste to a high caste category over a period of several centuries. The caste was not achievement oriented because of the schools and colleges in the area, but had built them because of their achievement orientation.

Statements regarding the positive impact of mass communication are often based on studies showing generally low correlations between such variables as empathy, innovativeness, political knowledge, achievement motivation and educational and occupational aspirations. However, there is no indication whether these indices of modernity are a result of the mass media or that those who are oriented toward modernity are more likely to use the mass media. In a study of six villages in Colombia, Rogers found positive correlations between achievement motivation scores and mass media exposure in five villages and a negative correlation in the sixth. Only two correlations were significant at the .01 level, yet he concluded, "It is our belief

that exposure to communication sources and channels (such as city, mass media, or change agents) that reflect a more modern way of life will permit peasants to achieve a higher level of living." Again, "Exposure to such media content should instill higher levels of achievement motivation [see Note 1, Rogers, p. 256]." Yet what do these correlations actually tell us which may help agents of change to be more effective? One of the difficulties is the way in which mass media exposure has been measured. "The indicator of degree of exposure to each medium was in terms of the number of radio shows listened to per week, newspapers read per week, films seen per year, and so on [see Note 1, Rogers, p. 52]." Again, "Nor does our measure of exposure consider the specific nature of the messages received from the mass media--whether musical, news or technical content [see Note 1, Rogers, p. 101]."

It seems obvious that exposure to mass media is not enough. A determinant variable that seems missing from the mass communication literature is relevancy of content. Our interviews would indicate that the villagers are interested only in those items in the mass media that have personal meaning. They enjoy music because it is relaxing. They are interested in news items having to do with fluctuating crop prices, political events of local concern and human interest stories that they enjoy talking about in the village. But this still tells us little about what motivates villagers to achieve and move from what are regarded as traditional beliefs to the adoption of modern attitudes and concepts. For this we must move to an understanding of the kinds of forces that determine the value-attitude system of the villager. If we can understand the goals villagers try to attain and how these goals may be changing as a result of the changes that are taking place in their environment, it may be possible to design mass media programs which have meaning for them, and which as a result are more likely to influence attitude change. An individual in a culture is selective in his reading and listening and what he chooses to pay attention to needs study. What may be called centrality or the importance of the focal object to the person would seem to be a significant dependent variable for analysis.<sup>12</sup> Whether we wish to bring about changes in practices having to do with agriculture or with family planning, it would seem that such research will be necessary before the mass media can play the role they have so optimistically been assigned.

## Notes

1. Rogers, E.M. Modernization among peasants. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1969. Page 1, cites B. S. Greenberg and E.B. Parker, eds. The Kennedy assassination and the American public: Social communication crises. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965; and Eduardo Hamuy, et al. El primer satellite artificial: Sus efectos en la opinion publica. Santiago, Chile: Instituto de Sociologia.
2. Background data regarding the characteristics of the village have been described elsewhere: T. Poffenberger. "Motivational aspects of resistance to family planning in an Indian village," Demography, 5, 1968, pp. 757-766. Also: T. Poffenberger. Husband-wife communication and motivational aspects of population control in an Indian village. Central Family Planning Institute monograph series, number 10, New Delhi, 1969. A report: "Social change and perception of change in child rearing practices in a suburban Indian village" was prepared by the authors. In press, M.S. University of Baroda Press, Baroda, India.
3. The main resident castes/communities in order of ranking by villagers: Brahmin (priest); Bania (merchant); Patidar (farm owner); Vishvakarma (craftsman); Gosai (temple caretaker); Suthar (carpenter); Kacchia (grocer); Baria-- including 3 subcastes: Chauhan, Chavda, Solanki (tenant farmer); Luhar (blacksmith); Kumhar (potter); Tamboli (vegetable grower); Valand (barber); Bharwad (shepherd); Bhil (tribal farm laborer); Garasia (oil crusher); Wagri (animal husbandry); Vanker (weaver); Khalpa (cobbler); and Bhangi (sweeper).
4. It was indicated that the first villager to become a factory worker started as an unskilled laborer in a cotton mill in 1938.
5. The 1961 Gujarat District Handbook number 14, Baroda District, pp. 30-31, indicates that 62.2 percent of the village males were literate and only 25.1 percent of the females.

6. Investigation of influences of modernization indicated that there were 11 cinema theaters within eight miles of the village.
7. See discussions in the Encyclopedia Americana Yearbook, 1963, pp. 322-3, and International Edition, 1964, "India" p. 28j: Beginning in 1959, there were frequent border clashes as Chinese troops moved into disputed areas south of the McMahon line frontier between Assam and Tibet. On October 20, 1962, the Chinese launched a major offensive along the Indian border. After driving the Indian forces back they announced a unilateral cease-fire, November 21, and withdrew in some areas; meanwhile they continued to threaten India in the hope of obtaining recognition of their territorial claims.
8. A comparison of enrollment by surnames with confirmation of caste or community affiliation and attendance by a cooperative village school teacher revealed that a higher proportion of Vanker (Harijan) children attended school regularly than did children of other castes/communities except those of the high status Brahmin and Patidar castes. Attendance of children from Baria and Bhil (middle and low status) families tended to be generally limited to that of male children who were not usually regular in attendance. Few girls attended school longer than 1-3 years (primary) because of social prohibitions and prejudice against girls' education in the rural area.
9. Schramm, W. Mass media and national development: The role of information in developing countries. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964, pp. 79-80.
10. Dube, S.C. Communication, innovation, and planned change in India. In Wilbur Schramm and Daniel Lerner, Communication and change in developing countries. Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967, p. 129.
11. Srinivas, M.N. Caste in modern India. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962, pp. 126-127.
12. See: D. Kretch and R.S. Crutchfield. Theory and problems in social psychology. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948, passim.