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## Socio-economic and personal characteristics of the farmers of Assam using traditional folk media for agriculture

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### Abstract

To study the socio-economic and personal characteristics of the farmers of different ethnic groups using traditional folk media for agriculture, a study with descriptive research design was conducted in the Dhemaji district of Assam. An interview schedule was developed and data were collected through personal interview technique by employing random sampling procedure, from the selected 100 respondents belonging to the ethnic groups of Ahom, Kachari, Mising and Deori in Dhemaji district of the state. The findings of the study reveals that majority of the respondents (53%) were middle age group (36-55), ST categories (75%), engaged in farming (35%), education up to secondary level (31%), small sized land holding (46%), having medium annual income (60%), mixed type house (48%), farming as the sources of income (44%) and a medium level of exposure to mass media where Television (64%) was frequently assessed for farm information was found among the farmers.

**Keywords:** Folk media, ethnic groups, socio-economic, indigenous communication, agriculture

### Introduction

Traditional Folk Media is a term used to denote “People’s Performances” and describes folk dance, rural drama and musical variety of the village people. This term speaks of those performing arts which are cultural symbols of people. Some channels and forms of communication are deeply rooted in the culture and preserved traditionally from generation to generation. Such channels are called as Indigenous/Traditional Folk Media. Folk Media serve various social needs of community. The oral tradition and the performing arts appear to be the main mode of communication in the rural scene from generation to generation (Kodavath, 2015) <sup>[14]</sup>. Folk media, especially in rural areas can play an important role in interacting with and among the people. They can be powerful mass media in preventing the illiterate tribals’ from being exploited indefinitely as they do not understand or comprehend the modern communication language (Gupta, 2015) <sup>[10]</sup>. They are inextricably linked to grassroots culture and social activities, which arose from the needs of different castes, societies, linguistic and ethnic groups. When people are given information in their own conventional ways, the message is more powerful because they find it easier to understand and as a result, embrace it more easily (Hmar, 2018) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Traditional media have innumerable influences on all sections of people. They are direct, face to face and linked with emotions and values of people. They are cheap and do not require external resources. They often appeared as one of the viable ways of solving present problems in development. Local or traditional communication channels such as puppet show, folk drama, storytelling, community tea house, open market, and village meetings are available to all and enjoyed by person of different age groups, generally at a very low cost (Mishra and Sah, 2008) <sup>[17]</sup>.

Folk media are the tools of a special nature. Their special nature is derived from the fact that they have no grammars or literature, yet they are nurtured through oral and functional source. They can overcome the difficulty of languages, speech, words and other barriers of communication, like interest, understanding, interpretation, attitude, perception and mood. Folk media are the organic media which strengthen the culture, tradition, beliefs, ethos, attitude and social framework of rural people and does not play on cost of it (Kashyap and Kumar, 2006) <sup>[15]</sup>. The modes and methods of communication have become more specialized today as science and technology have progressed.

When new means of communication, such as radio, television, newspapers, and films, become available, knowledge spreads rapidly and inspires people to learn new things. However, the use of these media is limited largely to the urban population and upper segment of society. Due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the outside world tribes are still isolated from the rest of society. Traditional media is the most effective means of achieving the development target (Namdeo and Mishra, 2005)<sup>[18]</sup>. There is a requirement of close collaboration between development agents and traditional and new rural communicators to improve the traditional communication mechanism in order to make the best use of its interactive capacity to promote people's involvement in agriculture for long-term sustainability (Chiovoloni *et al.* 2004)<sup>[11]</sup>.

India has a rich heritage of traditional folk art forms. Every Indian region has its own distinct approach and style and it is appropriate to see the folk arts in its natural settings in order to comprehend India's vibrant diversity and unity (Gargi, 1964)<sup>[6]</sup>. Indian Tribal Culture speaks volumes about the diversity of the country. Ethnicity and cultural identity have emerged as significant social issues for these groups in contemporary India. The region of North East India is the land of traditional art because of the settlement of large tribal population. The region is not only bio diversely affected by flora and fauna, but also by traditional folk media. The rich cultural legacy of this area is still preserved and portrayed by folklore, folk songs and local paintings etc. even in the era of digital media. Every region of India has its unique folk arts that are extremely popular and significant in that region, and Assam is no exception. Folk Media has a key part in the construction of the identity of various ethnic communities in Assam and also bears the socio-political consequences. Folk Media has a key part in the construction of the identity of various ethnic communities in Assam and also bears the socio-political consequences. Folk media and various styles of folk songs sung in Assam represent the overall picture of Indian society. The performance of folk arts is mainly confined to the farming community of the rural areas, therefore an effort was made to study the Socio-economic and Personal characteristics of the Farmers of Assam using Traditional Folk Media for Agriculture.

### Methodology

In this type of study, the researcher must be familiar with the local language, history, values, and attitudes. Therefore, Dhemaji district of Assam was purposively selected, as the researcher was familiar with the area, local language, history, values, and attitudes. Out of the 5 blocks in Dhemaji district two blocks *viz.* "Machkhowa" and "Bordoloni" block was selected based on cultural diversities. The two selected blocks comprises 51 and 201 in habitat villages respectively and only two villages were chosen from each of the two blocks resulting in 4 villages total. The selected villages with ethnic groups are *viz.* Gohain Bilotia (Ahoms), Begenegora (Misings), Borbam Deori ½ (Deoris) and Borbam Gaon (Sonowal Kacharis). A list of farmers was compiled from each village based on farming and usage of folk media. Every list had 25 respondents including both male and female, resulting in a total sample size of 100 for the study. Since, some traditional folk media are done solely by women so both male and female respondents were chosen for the study.

The research was descriptive in nature, so the information was collected using a standardized interview schedule and a camera to capture and evaluate content, style, and form in relation to the study's goals. The quantitative data was analyzed by using statistical technique like frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient.

## Results and Discussion

### Age

The majority of the respondents (53%) were from middle age group (36-55 years) followed by (28%) were old age group (above 56 years) and the remaining (19%) were young age group (less than 35 years). This may be due to the fact that the middle aged farmers are having higher mobility of resources and scope required for folk media usage. In correlation analysis it was found positively correlated with the use of traditional folk media and significant at 1%. With the increase of age the usage of folk media increases as folk media are confined mainly to the middle and old age group.

### Gender

Fifty per cent of the respondents were male while fifty per cent of the respondents were female. In correlation analysis Gender was found negatively non-significant with the use of folk media for agriculture which indicates that folk media usage do not rely on gender perspective. The usage is common between both male and female.

### Caste

The majority of respondents were from Scheduled Tribe (75%). Out of which (35%) were male and (40%) were female. It was followed by Other Backward Class (25%) respondents in which (15%) were male and (10%) were female. In correlation analysis it was found that caste was negatively non-significant with the use of folk media for agriculture. It indicates that usage of folk media is independent of Caste.

### Occupation

The respondents had diverse occupational background. The majority of the respondents (35%) had farming as main occupation followed by farming and service occupation (27%) and service alone (19%). However, (12%) and (7%) respondents had only business and labour as occupation respectively. In correlation analysis it was found that occupation was positively non-significant with use of traditional folk media for agriculture which indicates that folk media is used by all people having no difference in diverse occupational background.

### Education

The majority of respondents had education up to secondary level (31%) of which 16% male and 15% female. It was followed by high school (27%) of which 15% male and 12% female. It was followed by primary level (16%) of which 6% male and 10% female respondents. It was followed by graduation (14%) of which 9% were male and 14% female. However, 12 per cent of the respondents were illiterate comprising 4% male and 8% female respondents. In correlation analysis it was found that education was positively non-significant with use of traditional folk media for agriculture.

### Size of Land Holding

The maximum numbers of respondents (46%) were small farmers followed by marginal farmers (28%), semi-medium farmers (23%) and medium farmers (3%). However, there were no large farmers. In correlation analysis it was found that size of land holding was positively non-significant with use of traditional folk media for agriculture.

### Type of House

The majority of respondents (48%) had mixed type house followed by kaccha house (28%) and pakka house (24%). In correlation analysis it was found that type of house was positively non-significant with use of traditional folk media for agriculture.

### Actual Family Income

The maximum number of respondents (60%) had medium annual income followed by high (24%) and low annual income (16%). In correlation analysis it was found that actual family income was positively non-significant with use of traditional folk media for agriculture.

### Sources of Income

The majority of the respondents (44%) had farming as their main source of income followed by service (27%), business (12%), livestock (10%) and labourer (7%). In correlation analysis it was found that sources of income was positively non-significant with use of traditional folk media for agriculture.

**Table 1:** Distribution of respondents based on their Socio-economic and personal characteristics. (N=100)

Sl. No.	Independent Variable	Frequency		Total (%)
1.	<b>Age</b>			
	Young age group (less than 35)	11 M	8 F	19
	Middle age group (between 36-55)	24 M	29 F	53
	Old age group (56 and above)	15 M	13 F	28
2.	<b>Gender</b>			
	Male	50		50
	Female	50		50
3.	<b>Caste</b>			
	OBC	15 M	10 F	25
	ST	35 M	40 F	75
4.	<b>Occupation</b>			
	Farming	35		35
	Service	19		19
	Farming + Service	27		27
	Labour	7		7
	Business	12		12
5.	<b>Education</b>			
	Illiterate	4 M	8 F	12
	Primary Education	6 M	10 F	16
	Secondary Education	16 M	15 F	31
	High Secondary School	15 M	12 F	27
	Graduate	9 M	5 F	14
6.	<b>Size of Land Holding</b>			
	Marginal (<1 ha.)	28		28
	Small farmers (1-2 ha.)	46		46
	Semi-medium farmers (2-4ha.)	23		23
	Medium farmers (4-10 ha.)	03		03
7.	<b>Type of House</b>			
	Kaccha	28		28
	Mixed	48		48
	Pakka	24		24
8.	<b>Annual Income</b>			
	Low (< Rs. 107034)	16		16
	Medium (Rs. 107035-190585)	60		60
	High (> Rs. 190586)	24		24
9.	<b>Sources of Income</b>			
	Labourer	7		7
	Farming	44		44
	Livestock	10		10
	Allied (Business)	12		12
	Service	27		27

### Mass Media Exposure

Radio was regularly used by 24 per cent of male and 18 per cent of female respondents respectively, while 32 per cent of male and 18 per cent of female respondents used radio occasionally to determine farm-related information. Television was regularly used by majority of male respondents (64%) and female respondents (54%), while it

was used occasionally by 30 per cent of female and 26 per cent of male respondents respectively. Mobile phones were regularly used by 44 per cent of the male respondents and 12 per cent of the female respondents, whereas 40 per cent of the male respondents and 22 per cent of the female respondents used mobile occasionally. Computer with internet was occasionally used by 24 per cent of male and 10 per cent of

female respondents while only 14 per cent of the male respondents and 6 per cent of the female respondents used it regularly. Newspaper was read on a regular basis by majority of male respondents (52%) and 26 per cent of the female respondents read newspaper occasionally. In correlation analysis it was found that mass media exposure was positively

correlated with the use of traditional folk media and significant at 1%. It indicates that with the use of mass media the usage of folk media increases. This may be due to the fact that the farmers get good scope for their folk performance and able to telecast their folk culture across the country.

**Table 2:** Distribution of respondents based on Mass media exposure (N=100)

Mass Media	Frequency					
	Regularly		Occasionally		Never	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Radio	12 (24)	09 (18)	16 (32)	12 (24)	22 (44)	29 (58)
T.V.	32 (64)	27 (54)	13 (26)	15 (30)	05 (10)	08 (16)
Mobile Phones	22 (44)	06 (12)	20 (40)	11 (22)	08 (16)	33 (66)
Fix Phone	-	-	-	-	50 (100)	50 (100)
Computer with Internet	07 (14)	03 (6)	12 (24)	05 (10)	31 (62)	42 (84)
Newspaper	26 (52)	09 (18)	17 (34)	13 (26)	7 (14)	28 (56)

\*Values in parenthesis are percentage of respective score.

Relationship of selected socio-economic and personal characteristics with Use of Indigenous Media

**Table 3:** Correlation among the independent variables and use of indigenous media

Sl. No.	Independent variables	Correlation coefficient (r)
1.	Age	0.253*
2.	Gender	-0.172
3.	Caste	-0.171
4.	Occupation	0.039
5.	Education	0.155
6.	Size of Land Holding	0.131
7.	Type of House	0.110
8.	Actual family Income	0.011
9.	Sources of Income	0.079
10.	Mass Media Exposure	0.333**

**Note:**

\*\* = Significant at the 0.01 level probability (1%)

\* = Significant at the 0.05 level probability (5%)

It is clear from the above table that age and mass media exposure are positively correlated with the use of traditional folk media and significant at 5% and 1% respectively. It was found that occupation, education, size of land holding, type of house, actual family income and source of income were positively non-significant while gender and caste were negatively non-significant.

**Conclusion**

It may be concluded that overall average age of the respondents was 44 years having education up to secondary level. Majority of the respondents was from Scheduled Caste having farming as their main occupation. Maximum number of respondents was small farmers owing land 2-3 ha. Majority of the respondents had mixed type of house having medium annual income and farming as their main source of income. Among the utilization of mass media it was found that television was very much assessed by the respondents. Apart from the Television the use of radio, Mobile phones and Newspaper was found popular among the respondents. In correlation analysis it was found that age and mass media exposure are positively correlated with the use of traditional folk media and significant at 5% and 1% respectively. It was found that occupation, education, size of land holding, type of house, actual family income and source of income were positively non-significant while gender and caste were negatively non-significant.

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