

## Media as a Tool for Sensitizing Dalit & Women Issues

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**Abstract:** Society creates women and Dalit issues. They are reflected in the media and in turn they are projected to society. Media has access even in the remotest village. They tremendously sensitise the women and Dalit issues be it social, political, economical, and psychological or health related. The problems of atrocities on Dalits; Dalit-child abuses, gang-rapes with Dalit women, caste-based discrimination, exploitation and oppression, unequal wage for equal labour, the importance of education, consuming toxic elements are some issues dealt seriously by the print and electronic media. Besides this, the emerging social networking sites have proved a boon in dealing with the Dalit issues which have brought their problems to the international platform. Thus, Society, Media, Dalit and Women issues are interdependent to each other.

**Keywords:** Media, Dalit atrocities, Caste-based discrimination, Women empowerment, Democracy.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Media gives voice to the common mass, their sentiments and legitimate aspirations and their grievances. It is the most powerful means of communication today. It exerts long lasting effects on the minds of the common people. It provides factual insight, a point of view of social problems. Media helps to organise people and gives them a new direction to their problems. The person in the remote village is even getting the news of the world. It satisfies the mental hunger of the people. Media aids to uphold an idealistic view of the universe. It commands the much larger population with much less trouble. The principle of induction, involving as a primary process, the patient accumulating facts, may be seen through media. The modern media, like a scientist, traces things, marks the gradual development, generalises from the data collected and understands the psychology of the people to give a possible solution.

In a democracy, Media is the fourth strongest pillar to bring mass awareness on social, political and economic issues. We have two forms of Media. First is Electronic Media that has not only changed the life and thoughts of the people but has been a tool to make an ordinary man a superhero. The second is Print-Media that has a broader scope and also has a wide impact on society due to its far reachedness. Its scope depends upon the literacy rate of the country. The literacy rate of our total population is 74.04 percent (as per 2011 Census) with 82.14 per cent males and 65.46 percent of females literate. This condition is quite astonishing in the case of Dalits. The literacy rate of Dalits is 66.07 percent as per census 2011. Thus Print Media has certain limitations with reference to access to all. Whereas Electronic Media i.e. Radio, Television, Dish TV, Cinema has greatly influenced the mind and soul of the Indians.

Dr. Bheem Rao Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution of India, who is generally called as Messiah of the downtrodden, also used media as a tool to free the people of his community from the clutches of untouchability, oppression, segregation and humiliation. He himself empowered his people by running newspapers like *Mooknayak* & *Bahishkrit Bharat*. In his opinion;

“A newspaper in a modern democratic system is the fundamental basis of good government. It is the one means of educating people. Therefore, we in India belong to the Scheduled Castes whose misfortunes are the worst, for which there is no comparison and for which we are also anxious to get rid of, can never succeed unless the crores of Untouchables are politically educated.” (DBAWS:Vol-17-III, 2003)

## **2. DALIT, WOMEN ISSUES & MEDIA:**

Society creates women and Dalit issues. They are reflected in the media and in turn they are projected to society. Media has access even in the remotest village. They tremendously sensitise the women and Dalit issues be it social, political, economical, and psychological or health related. The problems of atrocities on Dalits; Dalit-child abuses, gang-rapes with Dalit women, caste-based discrimination, exploitation and oppression, unequal wage for equal labour, the importance of education, consuming toxic elements are some issues dealt seriously by the print and electronic media. Besides this, the emerging social networking sites have proved a boon in dealing with the Dalit issues which have brought their problems to the international platform. Thus, Society, Media, Dalit and Women issues are interdependent to each other.

Print and Electronic Media vehemently highlight the atrocities and violence on Dalits in different parts of the country. A few headlines show that no place is safe for Dalits in society whether male or female. The very recent news headlines that appeared are:-

Dalit men forced to consume human excreta(Hindustan Times: Shivpuri,MP:July 7,2023); Dalit youth assaulted in Vadodara (The Indian Express: December23,2022); Why Hathras verdict smells so strongly of injustice (ToI: September 19,2020); Una Flogging case:Accused thought dalits skinng dead were minorities (Deccan Herald: July17,2017), Police high-handedness towards Dalits deplored (The Hindu: Trindivanam: February 1, 2015); Caste court wants rape victim's nose cut off (Hindustan Times: Dec 24, 2014); Allegedly assaulted a seven-year-old Dalit boy at a temple in Nelamangala (The Hindu: Bangalore: October 23, 2014); Six Dalit women gang-raped in Bhojpur village, 3 held (The Times of India: Oct 10, 2014); Dalit tortured, forced to eat human excreta (The Times of India: Sep 19, 2014); UP shamed by rape cases: Dalit cousins' hanging sparks outrage, another victim's mother thrashed (Hindustan Times: May 31, 2014); 22 SC, ST atrocity cases filed: Deputy Commissioner (The Hindu: Chitradurga: June 14, 2013); 3 Dalit colonies face mob fury in Dharmapuri (The Hindu: Dharmapuri: November 8, 2012); Dalit woman paraded naked in Chavan's hometown (The Hindu: Pune: January 11, 2012); 15 convicted, 82 acquitted in Mirchpur Dalit murder case (The Hindu: September 24, 2011); Denial of entry for NCSC chief into temple decried (The Hindu: Ongole : June 27, 2011); Fear haunts Khairlanji Dalits (The Hindu: September 29, 2007).

These are a few cases brought before the common public, where the headlines itself narrate the complete story behind it. The people now have better access to Media and thus various Dalit issues are seen to be discussed on the social networking sites.

Now the question arises as to what is the reaction of the common people to such relevant issues raised by the media. According to police, Dalits are becoming empowered and aware about their rights. They are not ready to compromise with their honour and dignity. To teach them a lesson is the main motive behind such cases of atrocities. If we go into the depth of these cases of atrocities against Dalits, we find to what Smita Narula quotes:

“Dalits who dare to challenge social order have been subjected to abuses by their higher-caste neighbours. Dalit villages are collectively penalised for individual ‘transgressions’ through social boycotts, including loss of employment and excess to water, grazing lands, and ration shops. For most Dalits in rural India who earn less than a subsistence living as agricultural labourers, a social boycott may mean destitution and starvation...in Bihar one of the most prominent militias, the Ranveer Sena has been responsible for the massacre of more than four hundred Dalit villages in Bihar between 1995-1999. In one of the largest of such massacres, on the night of December 1, 1997, the Ranveer Sena sought dead sixteen children, twenty seven women and 18 men in the village of Laxmanpur-Bathe, Jehanabad. Five teen age girls were raped and mutilated before being sought in the chest...when asked why the Sena killed children and women, one member responded, “we kill children because they will grow to become Naxalites. We kill women because they will give birth to Naxalites.” (BP:CAIU, 1999)

Caste-based discrimination issue was raised at the 2001 World Conference against racism in Durban. On January 15, 2014 “The Declaration of Empathy” to end the oppression of Dalits in India was signed by the African-Americans who were commemorating King Luther Jr’s 85<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary, at a public meeting on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C.. To compound the problem, a study says,

“...untouchability is practised in 80 per cent of Indian villages. Crimes against SCs – ranging from humiliating verbal abuses to rape and murder – are also widespread. There were 203,576 registered cases of crimes committed against SCs by non-SCs in India between 2003 and 2009; 106,522 of these cases were tried in courts. In this context, this post asks

why special laws to protect SCs have not been as effective as desired, even though they have had a considerable deterrent effect. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, the total number of registered crimes committed against SCs is increasing: 14,318 crimes were committed against SCs in 1981; the number increased to 17,646 in 1991, 33,501 in 2001, and with some variations in the intervening years, remained high at 33,594 in 2009. The total number of reported cases of SCs being murdered by the non-SCs also rose from 493 in 1981 to 624 in 2009. A similar rising trend is evident with regard to rape cases as well.” (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/indiaatlse/2013>)

Government has been making efforts to curb such cases. Probe guidelines have been made public as for example Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, the SCs & STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, Child Labour Act, 1986, Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill, 2012 etc. The National Commission for SC & ST has been set up under Article 338 of the Constitution of India to safeguard the rights of the Dalits. Media can act as a tool to spread awareness regarding these Constitutional Acts and bodies. Amnesty International, a global rights organization has demanded for a law neutral in gender on sexual violence which shall apply equally to the victims irrespective of age, sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or appearance.

### 3. MEDIA AS A TOOL:

Media is also raising or infact sensitising the masses on health issues like safe and pure drinking water, population control; vaccination to mother and children. *Swachhya Bharat Abhiyan* is in a way spreading awareness about cleanliness. The Dalit girl Priyanka, who refused to go to her in-laws house after her marriage only because there was no toilet, has become an emblem with actress Vidya Balan on the *Swachha Bharat Abhiyan*. The drawbacks of consuming liquors and their close connection with Dalit atrocities and also the reason behind their backwardness are the issues raised by the Media.

The serious task of the Media is also to highlight the economic issues which have equal scope for the rural and urban Dalits. The small saving schemes in villages have made Dalit women empowered and they are able to bring up their children in a better way. The Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DICCI) formed by a group of Dalits, an example of their economic independence, is praised and celebrated in Media. Milind Kamble and Chandrabhan, the founder of DICCI say, “Capitalism is changing the caste system much faster than any other human being. Dalits should take capitalism as a crusader against caste.” (The Indian Express: June 11, 2013)

On the political front, the various political leaders of the deprived community, too, are a source of inspiration for Dalits. Their social status, their statement against Dalit atrocities, and visits to the places of incidents are highlighted by the Media. Ms. Mayawati the four time Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh has been an emblem of strength and dignity for Dalits.

### 4. UNBALANCED APPROACH OF MEDIA:

Besides this there are challenges faced by the media in sensitising the people. Media adopts an unbalanced approach. Some issues are too much added with the flavour of sensation and drama just to create curiosity amongst the viewers. Fictional details are added as special effects. These should be avoided. At times it becomes too much centred over various issues or persons or places and thus avoids the periphery. At the cricket matches, it appears as if there is no issue left before the media to be discussed and only there is cricket fair on the screen. The marriage of cricketers, film stars, their personal life issues are so seriously presented that it becomes utmost different for oneself to save himself from watching and discussing such unimportant issues.

The issue of child labour is not efficiently dealt by the Media. As domestic workers, in factories, in tea shops on the brickfields, we find the children engaged. Such practices must be stopped. Media should show the case in light of violation of fundamental rights to the people.

We also have the cases of honour-killing declared by the *Khap-Panchayats* which is a serious threat to our democracy. The role of Media here becomes more poignant as such cases can only be stopped if Media takes up the role of a torchbearer and presents it sensitively. In the absence of effective presentation, people lose interest and thus the mission to make India powerful and crime free fails.

Media even gives importance to the news items that give force to disbelief and superstitions. Media should have shown the other side of the news also where so many are denied social justice and are under the clutches of disbelief. Several women are tortured, sometimes to death in the name of superstition but it does not attract much attention from the Media.

Media also callously deals with certain sensitive issues and therefore the major problems of the mass and of Dalits are marginalised or handled in a lackadaisical manner. Here the news of a Dalit girl may be cited who was raped by 17 men that lead to mental loss to the victim. This matter was not highlighted by the media and therefore the victim has been denied justice. In another case two Dalit girls were hanged to death in Badaun (UP) and Media presented the matter in the light of honour-killing. Later when police made a probe it was found that the two girls were raped and hanged by the victimizers.

A few Dalits have managed to overcome the adverse conditions they faced in their life and have become a source of inspiration for others. But the Media did not highlight such emerging and inspirational personalities of Dalit empowerment. Society is replete with the cases of atrocities on Dalits but the Media highlights only those issues where the public comes to agitate. In certain cases, an ineffective method of presentation ruins the process of sensitising. Since the Media is under the hold of the upper castes Hindus, it is ignorant towards the issues of Dalits. Their views are systematically suppressed. Dr. Ambedkar gives the reason behind such ignorance,

“We have no press. The cruellest of tyrannies and oppressions, to which our people are subjected, day in and day out all over India, are never reported by the Press. Even our views on social and political questions are systematically suppressed by an organised conspiracy on the part of the Press. (DBAWS:Vol-1,1979)

...the Associated Press in India, which is the main news distributing agency in India is entirely drawn from the Madras Brahmins-Indeed the whole of the Press in India, is in their hands and they for well-known reasons, are entirely Pro-Congress and will not allow any news hostile to the Congress to get publicity. (DBAWS:Vol-9, 1990)

The game of TRP also plays a vital role in bringing to light the various issues of Dalits and common people but the Media becomes indifferent in raising their cases. The TRP determines as to what news will be focused upon and what will go out.

The media should take the middle-path. However the common public has now better access to news through various other modes of communication. Facebook, Whatsapp, Messenger, Twitter and other sites are open to all and thus no issue can be sidelined today. People’s awareness has created a pressure on the media to raise the issues or it goes viral on social networking sites.

## **5. CONCLUSION:**

Media should also act as a reformer. The function of Media is not confined to expression of thoughts only, but the discharge of duty extends to its giving direction to the people also. It must highlight the prevalent disparity, thankless social ego in society and thereby develop a strong will for developing a new society filled with self appraisal and a new culture. It must remember that there is no end to the miseries, sufferings and agonies of the exploited and depressed class. So Media must be made sometimes aware of its past glory and the contemporary conditions and thereby to arouse a sense of self-recognition and self-pride to reveal the truth of society. Dr. Ambedkar has completed this challenging task through his journalism. The functioning of the Media should be based on morality. It was his observation. So while revealing the truth he felt no fear or hesitation instead, he countered his rivals like hardcore Garrison and launched a new social revolution:

“Journalism in India was once a profession. It has now become a trade. It has no more moral function than the manufacture of soap. It does not regard itself as the responsible adviser of the public. To give the news uncoloured by any motive, to present a certain view of public policy which it believes to be for the good of the community, to correct and chastise without fear all those, no matter how high, who have chosen a wrong or a barren path is not regarded by journalism in India its first or foremost duty. To accept a hero and worship him has become its principal duty. Under it, news gives place to sensation, reasoned opinion to unreasoning passion, appeal to the minds of responsible people to appeal to the emotions of the irresponsible. Lord Salisbury spoke of the Northcliff journalism as written by the office – boys. Indian journalism is all that plus something more. It is written by drum-boys to glorify their heroes. Never has the interest of the country been sacrificed so senselessly for the propagation of hero worship. Never has hero worship become so blind as we see it in India today.” (DBAWS:Vol-1,1979)

Media can play a significant role in solving the issues pertaining to Dalits, women and the common man. The Constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women. Media is the only mode that can sensitise the masses on Dalit issues on a large scale and to inform the society that Dalit need no privileges, no reservation but equal rights. These people want only what is theirs, their very own right to equality.

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