

# Asian Resonance

## Description of Dalits in Print Media

### Abstract

Media comes in many different formats, including print media (books, magazines, newspapers), television, movies, video games, music, cell phones, various kinds of software, and the Internet. Newspapers are considered as an important tool to link the whole world. To understand the news coverage, one should understand the social set up in which the newspaper operates. The people who experience discrimination by the society are the 'minorities', 'the subaltern people', 'the indigenous', and 'the aboriginal people'. The social activists and Dalit movements raise their tone against the media for not reflecting inhuman activities faced by them. Dalits have long been ignored by the media similar to the society. The main aim of this paper is to highlight some of the stories highlighted by print media, specifically by The Economic Times, whose prime objective is to cover economy and business around the world.

**Keywords:** Dalits, India, Media, Newspaper, Society.

### Introduction

Media comes in many different formats, including print media (books, magazines, newspapers) television, movies, video games, music, cell phones, various kinds of software, and the Internet. Each type of media involves both content, and also a device or object through which that content is delivered. The term 'print media' is used to describe the traditional or "old-fashioned" print-based media that today's parents grew up with, including newspapers, magazines, books, and comics or graphic novels. Television has been entertaining American families for over fifty years. In the beginning, there were few programs to pick from, but today, there are literally hundreds of general and specialty channels to choose from and thousands upon thousands of programs (Reference 1). The main aim of this paper is to highlight some of the stories highlighted by print media.

### Review of Literature

Singh and Kumari (2015) come across each and every aspect of media intensifying the problems of dalit woman throughout ages giving an exclusive account of media and its sources in building out a historic change in their life. Instances of everyday discrimination are quite ubiquitous, but they are frequently documented with focus and in- depth coverage in India's as well as in other countries' mainstream news media. As a source, it is only media giving a chance to speak. The authors scrutinized how media has made these women an instrument through which the social system replicates itself and systemic inequality is maintained. Violence against Dalit women is systematically utilized to deny their opportunities, choices and freedoms at multiple levels, undermining not only Dalit women's dignity and self-respect, but also their right to development (Reference 2).

Wählstedt (2012) showed that Dalits are mentioned quiet often in the newspapers, but the main subject is almost never Dalits and their situation in society. The most frequent topics were the election, affirmative action, and crime and rape against Dalits. These subjects often have a connection to sensation. The most quoted actors in the articles are the elite and not Dalits. Almost all respondents thought they could empower Dalits if they were reported about. This is a paradox since they almost never interview Dalits. There are no Dalit journalists at the three newspapers, which can be one reason why they are not included in the news. There is little research done on this subject and therefore more research is needed (Reference 3).

### Dalit and Print Media

Newspapers have occupied a significant place in the Indian history. Newspapers are considered as an important tool to link the whole world. Newspaper industry is a booming and flourishing industry in India.



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Newspapers play a vital role in Indian society. To understand the news coverage, one should understand the social set up in which the newspaper operates. Media does not operate in vacuum. We must understand the social context to understand media power. In any multi-cultural society, certain sections experience discrimination, marginalization, prejudice and xenophobia. However, the degree of discrimination might have varied from nation to nation. The people who experience discrimination by the society are the 'minorities', 'the subaltern people', 'the indigenous', and 'the aboriginal people'. The discrimination in the society furthermore gets reflected in the media. The religious minorities, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes are marginalized and discriminated in Indian society (Reference 4).

The constitution of India abolished untouchability and granted equal opportunities and status to the disadvantaged Dalits. However each day the Human rights organisations continues to receive grievances about untouchability and caste violence. The coverage of the Dalit issues get less consideration from the academic circle. The social activists and Dalit movements raise their tone against the media for not reflecting those inhuman activities. The debates on this begin to perceptible piercingly in the media. Dalits have long been ignored by the media similar to the society. Dalits have appeared to be unworthy of coverage except trapped in crisis or conflicts. The available literature and research confirms the exclusion of Dalits from the mainstream media coverage. The coverage of Dalits in the media is inadequate or non existent. Dalits are given least space in Indian media (Reference 4).

Media a fast tracking police van has taken out an excellent step to uplift the social condition of Dalit Woman. Besides broadcasting and penning words on their social and economical condition it has also become a satellite to telecast the physical assault for which they are exploited and drawn out from their community. Singh and Kumari, 2015 (Reference 2) come across each and every aspect of media intensifying the problems of dalit woman throughout ages giving an exclusive account of media and its sources in building out a historic change in their life. Instances of everyday discrimination are quite ubiquitous, but they are frequently documented with focus and in- depth coverage in India's as well as in other countries' mainstream news media. Media has started uploading videos illustrating contributions of the grass-roots level activists and also wrapping various issues concerning the Dalits, Adivasis, Bahuians, Muslims and other minorities etc. As a source, it is only media giving a chance to speak. It has provided an excellent platform to render violence against dalit woman as the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations and widespread exploitation and discrimination in terms of power relations to men in a patriarchal society, as also against their communities based on caste. The study scrutinized how media has made these women an instrument through which the

social system replicates itself and systemic inequality is maintained.

*Kakkoos* is a 2017 Tamil documentary directed by activist Divya Bharathi. The film follows the daily lives of people engaged in manual scavenging, a practice officially abolished since 2013 but which is still a common practice. This practice has its roots deeply embedded in the caste system, which is unique to the Indian context. Common notion has it that the caste system is no longer relevant in India but the film shows compelling evidence about society's conscious efforts to perpetuate caste. The film has received critical acclaim from various quarters. The film was embroiled in controversy from the start. It was denied certification by CBFC (Central Board of Film Certification), India and denied screening, leading to its release in YouTube instead of traditional theatres. Divya has received death threats since the film was released online (Reference 5). Indulekha Aravind in Bengaluru interviewed Divya Bharathi and The Economic Times published the edited excerpts in its magazine interview. Bharathi told to Indulekha that I came to take up the issue of manual scavenging when, in October 2015, two labourers in Madurai died while cleaning a septic tank. Their bodies were left on the mortuary verandah, instead of in a freezer, and I was told no freezers would be available for Dalits (Reference 6). This coverage by the print media spread the issue of Dalits and caste to the general public.

*Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India* is a book by Sujatha Gidla on how India's untouchables (Dalits) struggle to overcome poverty and social ostracism due to the rigid caste system. The book deals with the humiliation and caste-based discrimination which Dalits face in India. Writing in The New York Review of Books, Pankaj Mishra says that the book "significantly enriches the new Dalit literature in English" and that the book is a "devastating critique" of the India's independence leaders and the enchantment that India's upper-caste communist leaders had for Stalin and Mao (Reference 7). Seetharaman, 2017 (Reference 8) wrote about Gidla that she just wanted to record what she knew about religion and caste to understand them better. As a young girl in Andhra Pradesh, she had thought her family was untouchable because they were Christians. Then she happened to watch *Mouna Geetham*, the dubbed Telugu version of a Tamil film, and she was shocked to discover that the protagonist of the film, a Christian like herself, was not only not ostracised but also wealthy.

Hindutva, a term popularised by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923, is the predominant form of Hindu nationalism in India. Koregaon Bhima is a panchayat village and census town in the state of Maharashtra, on the left bank of the Bhima River. It is the site of the Battle of Koregaon fought on January 01, 1818. Sambhaji Vinayakrao Bhide, popularly known as Bhide Guruji, is an octogenarian and founder and head of Shiv Pratisthan Hindusthan, a cultural and social organization active in western

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Maharashtra. Ambedkar (Reference 9) covered the story that history was created in the age-old battleground of caste when the socially oppressed Mahars, under the British, defeated the large army of the oppressor Peshwas in Bhima Koregaon on January 01, 1818. Till last year, only Mahars who had converted to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar would gather and pay their respects to the soldiers who fought in the battle of Bhima Koregaon. This year, on the bicentennial of the war, the planning began two months earlier, and the idea was to bring in the families and communities of non-Mahar soldiers as well who took part in the war. Most of the castes within the large community of Alutedar are small in number and, hence, have no voice and choice in the present system. A feeling of neglect, of having been left out of the development process, has crept in them – and this has been particularly strong during the past two years.

## Conclusion

Internet has enormous power to bring social equality to the people neglected in the society. Internet has been widely used by the people living on the margin of the society as an alternative to the mainstream media. In India, Dalits comprise of more than 200 millions. But their socio, political and economic issues noticed by the mainstream media are miniscule in numbers. Thus, there is a need for the educated Dalit population to find an alternative media through which they can express and respond with outside world. In this scenario, internet has proved to be an avenue for educated Dalits (Reference 10). However, people are becoming

aware about dalit problems as it can be seen from the above stories from The Economic Times, a newspaper whose main focus is on business and economy. Surely, appearance of Dalit stories in such newspapers emphasises the role of print media in describing Dalits.

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