

CASTEIST MEDIA AND DALIT ISSUES

(A Socio-Political Study of Indian National Media)

SHASHANK MISHRA¹

¹ SRF, Department of Political Science, D.D.U. Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur, U.P. India

ABSTRACT

The larger society and mass media ignores or distort their struggle for their own risk. On the other hand media should introspect and ask what they can do to make society as a whole more inclusive. Encouraging conversation and not hectoring is one way. But another is surely to diversity the news-rooms by consciously bringing in those sections of society who have hitherto been excluded. Unless and until the process of democratization of mass media/ national media takes place, Dalits have to wait for balanced news reporting in national media. There are millions stories out there waiting to be told. If only we allow the story tellers to do the telling. Media would like to play safe over Dalit matters.

One of the more confusing mysteries of India is its caste system. The caste system, which has existed already for more than 3000 years, has been developed by the Brahmins (priests) in order to maintain their superiority. Eventually, the caste system became formalized into 4 distinct classes (Varnas). At the top are the Brahmins, the priests and arbiters of what is right and wrong in matters of religion and society. Next come the Kshatriyas, who are soldiers and administrators. The Vaisyas are artisan and commercial class and finally, the Sudras are the farmers and the peasant class. These four castes are said to have come from Brahma's mouth (Brahmin), arms (Kshatriyas), thighs (Vaisyas) and feet (Sudras).

Beneath the four main castes is a fifth group, the Scheduled Caste. They literally have no caste. They are the untouchables, the Dalits, which means oppressed, downtrodden and exploited social group.

The Dalits perform the most menial and degrading jobs. Sometimes Dalits perform important jobs, but this is mostly not socially recognized. Dalits are seen as polluting for higher caste people. Just few years ago if a higher caste Hindu is touched by an untouchable or even had a Dalit's shadow across them they consider themselves to be polluted and have to go through a rigorous series of rituals to be cleansed.

In general one can say that being a Brahmin means that you are more privileged. This can imply having a good education and accordingly, a more powerful position in the society. Being born as a Dalit you will be less off and because of less education you will have a less good job. In daily life there are a lot of consequences of being a Dalit.

Dalits are poor, deprived and socially backward. Poor means that they do not have access to enough food, health care, housing and/or clothing (which means that their physiological and safety needs are not fulfilled). They also do not have

access to education and employment. With deprived we would like to underline the injustice they face in every days life. Officially, everybody in India has the same rights and duties, but the practice- is different. Social backwardness, lack of access to food, education and health care keep them in bondage of the upper castes.(Kotlar & Armstrong,p156)

Perhaps we need to look at the etymology of the term 'dalit'. Raj Kumar in his paper writes that the root word 'dal' in dalit has been borrowed into Sanskrit from Hebrew. It has two components 'dal' and 'anti'. Dal in Hebrew has been used in two senses: it refers either to physical weakness or to a lowly, insignificant position in society. When 'dal' is used in combination with another Hebrew root-word 'anti' it describes an economic relationship. As clearly indicated by Harvey L. Perkins, "Dal is derived from a verbal root which recognizes that poverty is a process of being emptied, becoming unequal, being impoverished,dried up, made thin..... so there is social frailty (and those suffering from it) are easily crushed and have not the means to recover". Om Prakash Valmiki pointed out that 'the meaning of the term has a more inclusive meaning' (Dalit Literature in the Eyes of Dalits').

Thus a prostitute is as much a dalit as is the spouse of an upper caste patriarch who is ill-treated, as are the victims of ethnocide and communalism irrespective of whether they are Hindus, Christians, Muslims or Sikhs. Nanddita Bajaj's paper discusses the emergence of a nascent dalit woman's alliance which transcends regional boundaries, a consciousness share with similar intensity against an exploitation they face alone (Dalit Women's Writings : A Sense of Struggle').

Generally, the Dalits are associated with Hindu faith, Imtiaz Ahmad drew attention to fact that this is not so. "Islam's orientation is remarkably hierarchical... in a wide variety of fields. First, the relation of the believers with non-believers is conceived in strictly hierarchical terms with the

believer, the dhimmi and the kafir constituting a clear hierarchy. Second, the relation of Allah to the believer is conceived in hierarchical terms. It is a relation of subordination and subservience... The relation of the husband to her wife is clearly conceived in hierarchical terms even if the text does not distinguish between them in terms of religious duties enjoined upon them... (Can There be a Category Called Dalit Muslims).

The roots of caste system in Islam lie not in the fact that low caste Hindu converts carried with them aspects of the caste system. The notion of hierarch is internal to the history of Islam. Y. Sikand highlighted the fact that, "in order to provide suitable legitimacy to their claims of social superiority, medieval Indian Ashraf scholars wrote numerous texts that sought to interpret the Qu'ran to suit their purpose, thus effectively denying the Qur'an's message of radical equality. Pre-Islamic Persian notions of divine right of the kings and the nobility, as opposed to the actual practice of the prophet and the early Muslim community, seems to have exercised a powerful influence on these writers...." (Savyasachi,p34).

DALIT POLITICS IN INDIA

The post-independent India while adopting her constitution put preferential and affirmative action as a part of its objective to alleviate the miseries of the so-called untouchables, other backward castes and the adivasis. The castes eligible for preferential treatment were identified and included in the schedule for quotas and reservation in education and employment. These castes came to be known as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the tribes so identified as the Scheduled tribes (STs). The other eligible castes for reservation and quotas came to be known as Other Backward Castes (OBCs).

Mahatma Jotirao Phule was the first modern thinker to characterize the productive castes of India as 'Sudras and Ati-Sudras'. Those castes other than Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaisyas were called by him as Sudras. Ati-Sudras are the untouchables and Phule sees them as the ones who predate the Varna scheme. But now many of the Sudras castes have been elevated into neo- Kshatriya category. Hence to denote the people who still languish in the drudgery of caste system had to have a word to rally all men and women from these castes and fight for their emancipation.

B.R. Ambedkar, the great leader of the productive castes of pre and post- independent India started using the term Dalit, a concept that is rooted in Marathi language to refer to the so-called lower caste people. The word Dalit means suppressed and exploited people. The concept has emerged from the people's usage in Maharashtra. Dalit has come to mean things or persons who are cut, split, broken or torn asunder, scattered or crushed and destroyed. The term Dalit became popular after the emergence of Dalit Panthers movement in Maharashtra. Dalit is usually used to denote the SCs. After the emergence of Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh, the use of the term Bahujan to refer the SCs, STs and OBCs gained acceptance. This term was first used by Buddha and then by Phule. The term Bahujan simply means majority and does not qualify the nature of the population. Hence dalit scholar-activists like Kancha Ilaiah use the term Dalitbahujans to refer to so-called untouchables and the Other Backward Castes (OBCs).

In the post-independent phase, the oppressed classes of India- the Dalits- have awakened to assert their space in the economic and political arena. The mightier their assertion, the fiercer the resistance put up by the dominant castes. Hence we have group clashes, burning down of villages, killings, rapes, naked parading and so many other horrendous crimes meted out on the Dalits.

It is in the 1980s that the Dalit parties emerged as a force to reckon with. The Mandal Commission report recommending reservation and quotas for Dalits in a systematic fashion, and the movement for and against it gave an added impetus to the Dalit movement and helped its consolidation. Now all over the country one will find groups working for Dalit liberation and an equal measure of resistance towards it from the dominant castes.

Dravidian political parties have come to power in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu in 1960s and they are there to stay. In northern India, the Dalit parties have emerged as a significant player and have formed ministries in the major states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. But this does not mean that electoral outcomes in India could be predetermined on the basis of caste. No caste in India has a concentration in one constituency to ensure its candidates victory. The maximum concentration of a caste in one constituency would be around 25% of the total voters and hence the role of caste in politics should also be cautiously understated. There is no fixed pattern of voting in most of the constituencies and with the same kind of caste composition a variety of electoral results are possible. It is not possible to correlate BJP's positive performance with either SC population or literacy. This only means that the choices before the electorates are sought to be placed in caste terms, but it is not as if votes are always cast according to this logic.

Inter-caste solidarity, cannot emerge full from the caste system itself. A caste Hindu's affiliation is strongest to his or her jati. Hence caste alliances emanate from secular and political factors and not just from caste loyalties alone. The popular assumption that caste loyalties contribute to caste alliances, which in turn determine voting behaviour, does not work as we presume. Most alliances are forged on secular lines so that the interests that govern the castes during an election would be so powerful to enable them sink their differences and

form alliances. Hence it is caste chemistry and no caste numbers that one should pay attention to. In rural India it is still difficult for poor SCs and STs to politically form independent blocs without arousing the wrath of affluent communities. For this reason to realize the political ambitions of Dalits, it is a long way ahead of struggle and strife to attain freedom.

DALIT ISSUES AND MEDIA

The incredible institution of caste that India developed over the three millennium has become a serious impediment in realizing the social and developmental goals of the nation state. The atrocities against lower castes continue and not a single day passes without a story on caste violence. The lower castes face discrimination in work places, educational institutions, public transport systems, land ownership, and access to water sources and in all perceivable public activity. The lower castes are not expected to drink water from the same pot or well being used by the upper castes and cannot have food in the same vessels and place as the upper castes. In many parts of the country the lower have to wash the vessels they have used and is not allowed to dress and behave as the upper castes. At the same time the lower castes are the most productive castes by involving themselves in life sustaining activities. They are the basic producers of food and involve in many creative trades and crafts as well as daily in-house Labour.(Sharma,p42)

Indian laws, policies and political rhetoric appear to favour the rights of Dalits and other so-called Low-caste community but these do not translate into better life for them. More than a sixth of India's population- approximately 160 million people- live at the bottom of the caste structure : denied access to land, clean water, and education, left out by the recent modernization process and surging economic growth, forced to work in

degrading conditions and routinely abused at the hands of the police as well as higher caste groups. Riots, strikes and public protests are not unknown phenomena in any part of the nation but what has really surprised everyone is the leaderless mob of dalit women and men as well as children seen in parts of Maharastra during the recent Dalit riots. One of the salient features of these riots was the absence of leaders in these mobs. These are primarily constituted by commoners. Most of the leading newspapers portrayed these riots as an attempt by the Republican Party of India to regroup and get back the initiatives which were lost after the Khairlanji killings. According to them, the campaign protesting the Khairlanji massacre was primarily by the left and few NGOs, thus RPI used the vandalizing of Dr. Ambedkar's statue, as an issue to reaffirm their position in the state. But there is a lot more to these riots than this. The first and foremost factor is that the oppression of Dalits is not a thing of bygone eras, it is happening today as well, and every level. Since much of the politics takes place in our mind, it is shaped by our ideas values and assumptions. These ideas are directly affected and manipulated by our mass media of communication. The mass-media of communication too have direct relationship with the social-capital of the society in India. Dalit issues are one of them, to which media deal in order to play a dominant role in the era of information technology. In the Late 1990s villagers are rapidly becoming full participants in the television age and this is dramatically reshaping village life of Dalits too. Television today occupies a central position in the life of Indians. Yet it is predominantly so in the urban areas but it is also becoming more and more true for the rural areas. Newspapers too have dominant role in the shaping of ideas of society and of Dalits for its far and wide circulations and readership.

But there are several problems concerning the reporting of dalit issues and production of news

materials by the media. In recent past there have been several issues in dalit political scenario for example : Khairlanji massacre, post- Khairlanji riots, protestation and anti- protestation of OBCs' reservation bill in higher education. vandalism of Ambedkar's statues, etc. Coverage and reportage of all above dalit- issues are doubtful that somewhat reveals caste- ridden characteristics of Indian national media on contrary to its very transparent image into the society. In a general way, when we point our observation to the reporting of TV news channels and newspapers, it can be easily traced-out that dalit issues for media are of several importance. The reason may be several and they may be seemed as an exact theorem for being fit for practical investigation. But there still need of vast study for media- research in the dalit issues. In relation to this mentioned investigation there are following problems of which the attention is needed for :

- i) Whether national media in India show caste ridden characteristics?
- ii) Whether organization of media is balanced in terms of sociometrical proportion?
- iii) Whether national media are devoid of socio- political significances for dalit politics in India?

DALIT AND MEDIA BIAS

Dalits also live in this country. They do dream, love, romance, dance, marry, make babies, use cell phones, read newspapers, watch television, listen radio and surf internet. They too use television, DVD players, computers, DTH set top boxes and go to halls. They also know the spelling of mass communication and could function as better players in the long run. In fact many affluent Dalits are helping the corporate world boom by burning their brain. And, yet, Dalits could hardly make their presence visible in the national media whenever

some caste atrocities occur. Dalit burnt to death; Dalit women raped and paraded naked; Dalits denied civic rights; Dalit students humiliated and harassed in recent past. Dalits always appear standing passively at the receiving end of development, atrocities or crimes. They are not allowed to break away from this framework.... even in national media. Else they become invisible in national media.

To begin with the most dominant issue of the years, 2006; the OBC reservations in higher studies. For the first time in the history of India, the electronic media co-ordinated and guided a protest movement/ campaign. Small protests of 200-300 students were projected as mass movements and the other cities were encouraged to have a similar protest. All the English news channels be it NDTV, CNN-IBN or TIMES NOW, AJTAK, IBN-7, ZEE NEWS and STAR NEWS had the protests as top stories." The panel discussions did not have any representation from the Dalit community for articulating their requirements and concerns. The tones of the panelists were hostile as if they were talking about the unknown enemies and not there fellow country men. The reason for this zealotry to the cause of the upper castes in the fact that most of the consumers in the business of Media are the cream of the society and just as a politician plays to its vote- bank the media too play to their consumers"(Sengupta,)(Note-1).

For Siddharth Varadarajan (The Hindu), it is the ordinary indulgence the national media showed nearly month-long anti- reservation agitation of doctors and medical students at AIIMS and other colleges. Despite the 24x7 hours presence of TV cameras, the daily protests in favour of reservation by AIIMS doctors and staff under the banner of 'Medicos Forum for Equal Opportunities' were virtually blacked out. One channel showed the counter- protest only when a 'citizen journalist' presented it with footage he had shot". Often, it was impossible to separate the breathless TV reporters

from the anti- reservation doctors they were reporting about. The insensitive and casteist forms of protest some of them adopted- the ‘symbolic’ sweeping of streets, the shining of shoes, the singing of songs warning OBCs and others ‘to remember their place’ (Apni aukat mein rahio’)- were put on air without any comment by the channels. Nobody asked what kinds of doctors these ‘meritorious’ students likely to become if they had such contempt towards more than half of the population of India.... And in a media discourse which routinely reports the protest of the under privileged only as ‘traffic jams” and other disruptions to the ‘normal’ life of the city, the suffering of the poor patients as result of the AIIMS strike figured largely as a foot note to the “heroic” struggle the medical students and junior doctors were waging.

Amidst the hysteria induced by the media coverage, no one cared to point out how indulgent the AIIMS authorities themselves were being towards the anti- reservation strikes. Earlier this year, when a section of doctors concerned about higher user fees being imposed on poor patients sought to protest, they were warned of dire consequences. Under the terms of a higher court order, no protest or demonstration is permitted within the AIIMS campus. Yet nobody demurred when the anti-reservation students occupied the lawns, put up shamianas and coolers and received the ‘solidarity’ of traders, event managers, and IT employees (whose employers usually ban their own staff from ever striking work). Though there were honourable exceptions in some newspapers and news channels.

Another related coverage also exposes the caste-ridden characteristics of media in the Khairlanji carnage of Dalit family by the upper castes people near Nagpur in Maharastra (Note-2) but the all news disappeared in the national media despite of being such a cruel and inhumane carnage. Even when the Dalit community protested openly,

the media ignored the actual happening and manipulated the news. “The public stripping of mother and daughter, the directive to the brothers to have sex with the sister, the mutilation of the genitals of the brothers (one of them blind) when they refused, the rape of mother and daughters and insertion of objects inside the daughter’s vagina, then the dumping of the body in the pond.... The girl was a Std XII merit list ranker. These details are available only on the Net, so its not as if nobody could access it.” (Ganguly,p4) The mother-daughter’s face and name- Surekha and Priyanka Bhotmange- should have become as much part of our consciousness as Jessica Lal’s and Priyadarshini Mattoo’s. The sole survivor, the father Bhaiyalal Bhotmange, should have been on Page 1 for days. The relatives, the other Dalits in the village, the scene of the crime, the opinions of Dalit intellectuals, the local police’s view all these should have been written about to the extent that we could be conscious of these issues. Khairlanji afterall, is just 150 Km. from Nagpur. A whole Dalit family was massacred at Khairlanji, the police did not register a case and the sole surviving member of the Family, Bhaiyalal ran from pillar to post just to file a complaint. The murdered bodies were not even sent for post- mortem. The killing took place on the 29th of September, and not a single mainstream newspaper reported the incident. “The Times of India was busy with Brangelina and so were the most of the other newspapers. The Indian Express did have a story on Dalits in the first week of October, 2006, but that again was sensationalized news of the torture of a women for having an affair with an upper class boy. But nothing on Khairlanji, it was only after the non-governmental organizations started mounting pressure that everybody work up. It needed the riots to get the news on the front page.”

Moreover, another coverage also shows the biasness of media over dalit matters in the 50th

death anniversary (6, Dec. 2006) of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

“Getready for a seige”, follow the guidelines “to escape possible chaos”. Even Dalits are joining the “exodus” and “You thought Tuesday was bad?. It will only get worse today”. There is a “Nightmare”- a threat of violence. And the poor “Mumbai police will have to bear the burnt of it all.” On Dec. 5, a Mumbai paper carried on Page 1, picture of two residents who live near Mumbai’s Shivaji Park ready to leave home with bags packed. They were moving out to avoid the influx of Dalits to Shivaji Park on Dec. 6, 2006, Dr. Ambedkar’s 50th death anniversary.

These were just a few of the headlines (some of them front page, first lead) in the press and on television channels. And they were about the lakhs of the Dalits gathered in Mumbai to observe the 50th death anniversary. There were of course fine exceptions. But mostly, media coverage of the run-up to the event was much like the coverage of post- Khairlanji protests in Maharashtra and a decades-old event was cast in a frame never imposed on other annual festivals. Some of those, like the Ganesh Utsav, go on for 10 days in the city. And have a massive impact on traffic but they do not get covered this way. And the more dismal display has come from the English and Hindi Media. The Marathi Press at least on Dec. 6, did better. There were essays on the man, his legacy, his relevance. But in English media- with rare exceptions- the Ambedkar’s anniversary rated at best as a traffic problem. I can’t talk my evening stroll, nor can I walk my dogs, no one can reach my restaurant/ clinic. These were the scenario of the reporting of the media men.

Apart from these dalit issues’ coverage, there are a lot of another issues which were reported in the mode of manipulation display the caste-bias of Media. But one aspect of this reporting is the organization of Media. Some recent studies shows a

astonishing discoveries of the organization of media.

CASTE DOMINATION IN NEWS ROOM

A report from CSDS reveals : In the first-ever statistical analysis of its kind, a survey of the social profile of more than 300 senior journalists in 37 Hindi and English newspapers and television channels in the capital has found that “Hindu upper caste men”-who form eight per cent of the country’s population- hold 71 per cent of the top jobs in the national media. Women, non upper castes, and Muslims are grossly under- represented in relation to their share in the population.

The survey notes that Dalits and Adivasis “are conspicuous by their absence among the decision- makers. Not even one of the 315 key decision- makers belonged to the Scheduled castes or Scheduled Tribes.”

The survey was designed and executed by Anil Chamaria, freelance journalist, Jitendra Kumar from the Media Study Group and Yogendra Yadav, senior fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS).

If men and women are taken together, the share of upper caste Hindus or ‘dwijas’ in the upper echelons of the media is 85 per cent. These castes account for 16 per cent of the national population.

Brahmins alone, the survey found, hold 49 per cent of the top jobs in national journalism. If non- ‘dwija’ forward castes like Marathas, Patels, Jats and Reddys are added, the total forward caste share stands at 88 per cent.

In contrast, OBCs, who are estimated to constitute around 40 per cent of the population, account for an “abysmally low” four per cent of top media jobs. In the English print media, OBCs account for just one per cent of top jobs and in the Hindi Print media eight per cent. Muslims too, the survey noted, are “severely under- represented in

the national media”, they account for only three per cent among the key decision makers in the national media, compared with 13.4 per cent in the country’s population. The Hindu, June 5, 2006 (Note- 3).

But the worst scenario emerges in the case of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) is that despite constituting around 24 per cent of the total population, their representation in key decisions making across the news spectrum amounts to zilch.” That means there is not a single SC or ST person taking a call on editorial policies in the country’s news arena. But don’t we hear journalists breaking ‘hard’ news stories irrespective of their profiles? Some of the best stories on riots against Muslims were done by Hindus, on women’s oppression by men and on Dalit oppression by so-called higher caste media men and so on. We just want to put this information in the public domain so that there is better awareness of the diversity profile of the newsmakers.” Senior Fellow CSDS Yogendra Yadav says.

There are in fact no official or industry statistics but every journalist is aware of the extent to which forward castes dominate the media. One is not saying the absence of Dalit or OBC journalists in the product of conscious discrimination. Though factor can not be ruled out the reality of their absence is something the media must have the courage to acknowledge.

DALIT MEDIA: IS THERE NEED?

Several times in this course of discussions it emerged that Dalit Literature, social Science studies and Media- should be confined to research and exposition of Dalits’ social situation by the Dalits and for the Dalits. It is the self expression of people whose voice have been suppressed and denied space for articulation for several centuries (Note-4).

“Strength will only come through a Bahujan cultural revolution which can be engineered only through our own media.”- *Dalit Voice*, May 1997. ‘Dalit Voice’ a news papers for dalit issues declared it at the backdrop of a path- breaking decision by Kanshi Ram in the mid 90’s to start his own media centre. What prompted Kashi Ram was the apathy shown by Delhi Journalists towards his political party and ideology. A ruckus between party cadres of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and reporters ended up in unmitigated outcry against BSP in the form of a series of newspaper stories in 1996. “The scene has not changed even in 2006-07. Late Mayavati/ Kashi Ram and BSP are still ‘untouchables’ for the national media. Says Ranjith Thankappan in ‘Invisible Dalits’ (Note-5).

Kanshi Ram is a leader of historical significance. After Baba Saheb Ambedkar he was the only Dalit political leader who could influence and transform Dalit life to a considerable extent. As rightly pointed out by Chandra Bhan Prasad, “he was a university of emancipation. He overturned Brahminism upside down.... In less than two decades, Kanshi Ram made UP Dalits walk with their heads high. Vidya Bhushan Rawat in his “Tribute to Kanshi Ram’ has remarked that ‘India’s politics has grown through a radical change with Dalit becoming a mainstream political force, the one man who made it possible was Kanshi Ram. He worked diligently and religiously to develop a cadre who could bring the party to national mainstream and ultimately to the power in Uttar Pradesh.

A man of Kanshi Ram’s stature is, though, an insignificant presence for national media. His visibility is made invisible by the media gatekeepers and the objective/ factual/ impartial reporting falls into bigotry whenever a Dalit/ Adivasi make their presence felt at the national mainstream. Not only the demise, but also the life and mission of Kanshi Ram was miss-represented.

The nature and density of the biased reporting of the national media had made Kenneth

Cooper, the then Bureau Chief of the Washington Post in India wonder ‘is there no Dalit journalist in this country?’. Kenneth Cooper who witnessed the BSP- Journalists row in Delhi and the ‘unethical journalism’ that spill the venom of casteism thereafter, wrote a piece in The Washington Post (1996) titled, “India’s Majority lower Castes are minor voice in Newspapers’. Only B.N. Uniyal of The Pioneer responded positively to Kenneth’s query and he started searching for Dalit journalists in national media. He wrote : “Suddenly, I realized that in all the thirty years I had worked as a journalist I had never met a fellow journalist who was a Dalit; no not one. And worse still was the thought that... it had never occurred to me that there was something so seriously amiss in the profession.

Yet the Indian Fourth Estate went on with its hegemonic practices that inadvertently tend to stereotype the majority of the population without recourse to historic realities. As witnessed during the Anti- Mandal agitation of 90s and the recent anti- reservation streaks of the metro-centred ‘upper’ caste students of AIIMS, IITs and other professional colleges, national media always showed its true colour at all historic junctures. The national varna/ casteist media never felt it necessary to head to the voice of the majority of the population fighting against the social order determined by Brahminic ideology. On the other hand they take on those who attempt to problematise the hegemonic deeds of the profession. Many among them are self- proclaimed “internationalists” who never want to become “casteist” by talking about Dalits.

The question of representation of Dalits in media has a historical background. Ambedkar has pointed out towards the lack of media support for Dalits and their cause in umpteen numbers of occasions in history. He wrote : “Dalits have no press and the Congress press is closed to them. It is

determined not to give them the slightest publicity. They cannot have their own press.

He contended that with a press in hand, it would have been possible to manufacture great men. And, “as there was no proper media for Dalits, there will not be any ‘press-made’ great men among the Dalits. Right from the beginning of this political struggle against Brahminism, Ambedkar was marginalised to the fringes of political mainstream by the Congress Press. Though, he could come out of the imageries constructed by the press, perhaps because of his mesmerizing presence that could attract masses cutting across regional boundaries. It may be because of this realization that Ambedkar once remarked : “Dalit community is ignorant and simple- minded and yet there is such a large crowd.”

The kind of response Ambedkar received from colonial and post- colonial national media reminds one of the poor coverage that renowned Black American spokesman Booker T. Washington got in the White press. Washington lamented that his successful speeches before large crowds that were normally expected to receive front- page attention would be relegated to the last page and given an inch or so of space. Instead, the front page would invariably be given to considerably reporting of a Black person involved in a minor criminal offence.

Kanshi Ram realized the importance of owning media to compete with the corporatised national media. Though he succeeded in putting Dalit politics on national political map of post-colonial India, attempt to form Dalit Media failed for the simple reason that the caste- bound Indian social system is imagined in such a way that it naturally opposes the emergence of Dalit capitalism. Since post- colonial India has been constructed as a modern extension of Hindu social order wrapped in secular wardrobe, Dalits were imagined within the traditionalist Brahminical frameworks.

CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

As the Dalit voice in organized politics has declined, the number of caste attacks on Dalits in India has increased. Earlier their political strength was their best shield. For decades, they had repelled the worst excesses of landlord cruelty. Untouchability did not vanish. But they (Dalits) fight it stoutly. This culture of resistance rested on strong political movements. Yet, in national media the fight is ON to drag attention though, unfortunately the 'Dalit- India' is invisible in national media. This tendency of 'caste- biasness' is clear and obvious in Indian national media but in transitory stage. In the developing societies like India, the apathy of the mainstream dailies and channels towards Dalit people can be explained. The fact is that they don't comprise their readership/ viewer ship. On the other hand the simmering tension of the Dalits now had reached the threshold level. They realized that all the noises about social empowerment made during the post- Mandal commission era had only one purpose- to use them as vote bank. Plus the media which was supposed to give the subaltern a platform to speak-out had become more 'colonial' in the post-colonial era'. Thus they were left to resort to the only way they would be noticed- "Violence". Perhaps this idea was deeply embedded in the minds of leaderless mobs in the recent dalit protestation. With Dalits, anger is being expressed outwards and openly. The larger society and mass media ignores or distort their struggle for their own risk. On the other hand media should introspect and ask what they can do to make society as a whole more inclusive. Encouraging conversation and not hectoring is one way. But another is surely to diversity the news-rooms by consciously bringing in those sections of society who have hitherto been excluded. Unless and until the process of democratization of mass media/ national media takes place, Dalits have to wait for balanced news reporting in national media. There are millions stories out there waiting to be

told. If only we allow the story tellers to do the telling. Media would like to play safe over Dalit matters.

NOTES

1. "Vijay Dubey of Eenadu TV points out a rift between Thakur and Brahmin journalists and Shrivastava in Gorakhpur over some local issue recently, and other backward caste journalists readily provide specifics of how a journalist belonging to a certain caste would often be assigned the task of covering the leader of that caste. The logic is that caste affinity helps you get a scoop"..... A.P. Dewan of Doordarshan claims that in office he is not given basic facilities like a stenographer or a computer or air- conditioning, which have been given to journalists junior to him. Is he sure this is because of his caste? "Absolutely because of that!" he says, "But this is nothing. In the media in UP Dalits and OBC's face much worse. They are forced to be submissive and have to quietly endure everything." Shivam Vij in 'Caste in the news room' (source : <http://w.w.w.thehoot.org>).
2. "Surekha Bhotmange, a Dalit (or so-called "untouchable") member of the Hindu caste system in Maharashtra, was cooking the family evening meal on 29 September 2006 when a group of upper-caste men surrounded her home. Surekha, her 17 years-old daughter Priyanka, and two sons, 23-year-old Roshan and 21-years-old Sudhir, were dragged out of the hut. The two women were stripped, beaten and paraded through the village. The young men were beaten up so badly their faces were disfigured. All four died. Almost all of Khairlanji village witnessed this spectacle of caste vengeance. No one did much to stop it.

The attack was a retribution for previous activism. The upper-caste farmers from the area were using the Bhotmanges' land as a throughway for their tractors. The family resisted, with the help of a Dalit rights activist. Siddharth Gajbhiye, Gajbhiye himself was beaten up. Surekha Bhotmange was a witness, identifying twelve perpetrators who were then arrested. On the day that the Bhotmange family was attacked, all twelve had been released on bail. They took their ghostly revenge." Sourceone world UK,(<http://Socialjustice.net>).

3. While the caste divide might be news for outsiders, the veteran newsmen have always known the inside story. "Not that a newsroom should represent India's population trend, the fact that you have no Dalit or Scheduled Tribe person is a shocking omission," Deputy Editor The Hindu Siddharth Vardarajan says. So whose news is it anyway? A media that triggers heated debate about the reservation now is in itself divided along caste lines. Looks like it's time to raise the debate within. [Aasim Khan- CNN-IBN. ([w.w.w.news watch.in](http://www.news-watch.in))].

4. Shashi Bhushan Upadhyaya pointed out that "Dalit literature is not a literary movement in ordinary sense of the term. It is, like Black literature, a product of an identity as well as constitutive of that identity.... Dalit literature, therefore, is not the literature written by any body on the Dalits, but only by those who are by birth Dalits. Anyone else, not born as a dalit, even though writing on the socially downtrodden with sympathy or empathy, cannot be considered as a dalit writer nor will his/her literature be taken as dalit literature" (Representing the Underdogs;

Dalits in the Literature of Premchand'). This is perhaps a restricted understanding. Raj Kumar pointed out that non-dalit writers are selective in their portrayal of the dalit situation. For instance, upper caste Hindu writers have not taken into account several important issues. "Even as late as the early part of the 20th century, the untouchables had no access to public facilities such as wells, rivers, roads, schools, markets. The most perverted practice of untouchability was that which, at one time, compelled the untouchables to tie an earthen pot around their neck so that their sputums should not fall to the earth and pollute others. Another practice was compulsion to tie a broom behind them so that their footprints would be erased before others set their eyes on them" (Dalit Literature : A perspective from Below). Dalit Studies : Exploring Criteria for a new Discipline, by Savyasaachi EPW commentary, April 24, 2004.

5. "Kanshi Ram in Chandrabhan's or Rawat's writings are not 'casteist', but emerges as a visible champion for the cause of Dalits. Kanshi Ram as visible in Harish's writing is a brand label of 'casteism' and an accidental political invention. In other words Kanshi Ram's visibility is hegemonically linked with 'caste' and the wrong connotations of it. He is made 'invisible' by the media discourse and the constructed 'visibility' is accrued, which in turn is used to ideologically suppress the Dalit cause." Ranjith Thankappan in 'Invisible Dalits' ([w.w.w.thehoot.org](http://www.thehoot.org)).

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