



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Dalit women in Media: A Dalit Feminist Approach

Dr. Pradeep Meshram,
PG Department of Sociology,
J.M. Patel College, Bhandara-441904

This paper studies the representation of Dalit women in audiovisual media especially on television with the analytical approach of Dalit feminism in India. It is based on 500 individual interviews of Dalit educated middle class women, from Nagpur city, 15 core-group interviews and content analysis of secondary data. It is found that the Dalit woman is missing in news, advertisement as well as in daily soap operas and reality shows in Marathi and Hindi channels. Dominant media through its brahminical, high caste & class lances misrepresent and misinterpret her culture. She depicted as dirty, untidy, physically weak, rape victim, highly superstitious, immoral and easily available prey for sex, saleable or criminal. Mainly she showed in the role of house maiden, Zaduwalli or labor. Media ignored her 'day to day' struggle for livelihood, for physical security, struggle for basic needs, and her participation in political movement as she is the part of all Dalit movements including Naxalite movement. She successfully struggled for gender rights within and outside her community as well as she strongly participated in labor movement in non-organized sectors and political arena as labor. But, this struggling image never becomes the part of any news, soap-operas or documentary on Medias. Dalit women enjoyed more freedom than other women as Dalit society has comparatively weak patriarchy where women worked inside and outside the home throughout the age, she has all social right and enjoyed family head-ship and because of that she has misinterpreted by dominant media after evaluated by the scale of brahmanical values. On these issues, Dalit women refuted media as the part of their life and accepted it as mere means of entertainment that represented 'others'. They are not adopting media as motivational factor, inspirational instrument or the art of depiction of agony of their life, but they found alienated and alien to them.

Keywords: Dalit feminism, Brahminical values, hegemonic culture, ideology, Untouchability, Dalit women, occupation, cultural imperialism, representation, violence, structuralism, women in media, subculture, etc.

Media the medium of globalizing culture

Satellite communication¹ is the fundamental process of Globalization, which intensified the social relationship and interdependence. Widening of scope of satellite communication through mass media played a vital role in cultural, political, and economical dimensions. Whatever the claims of Globalization the truth lies in the fact that global world is all about the dominance of few and subordination of many. In reality, in the age of globalization, monopoly of mass media played a dominant role to retain the power of elites over the subordinates. It has been possible through Transnational Media Corporations, which has ultimately led to the increase in the process of cultural imperialism. One of the most important and influential form of mass communication is television, which played crucial role in the process of cultural

imperialism. It is the process related with local as well as global localities. Generally we think on national and trans-national level but in that we simply forget about the nations within nations and also culturally distinguish communities within nation. In case of countries like India language and caste communities have their distinct culture but in the process of cultural imperialism. Hindi – Hindu and socio-cultural dominant caste's got control over the media. Therefore the Hindi popular culture is the popular culture of all other groups, whether they belong to any language, region, religion or caste of India. The family soups shown through different Hindi and Marathi Channels has been able to grasp huge number of audience with a short period of time and thus present a case of sanskritisation² and Hinduisation which was harmful to the country like India where heterogeneous communities based on religious faith, region, castes, languages and culture with their own culture form love-hate relationship with the soups and their characters. Whatever the psychological impact of watching daily family soups on the audience, sociologically they are the only viewers, nonparticipant performers and so they are the part of it, on the same hand communities like Muslim or *Dalit* or tribal did not found any matter related with their socio-economic and cultural situation in these soups and so on the other hand they start hating their these soups and sometimes shifting their viewership towards reality show. Television is not only a source of entertainment, but also a powerful medium of socialization and genderisation which teaches us about the culture, about the norms and values which get transmitted through it and having their own rules and conceptions. These programs constitute their own values and ideologies that cheat the masses by taking their potentials to be different and make them one dimensional. Most of the global channels like star plus, Zee TV etc localizing their Indian channels and so the software they transmit through channels were not the tool of development and education as was hoped, but instead of it, it was a tool for extending co modification and consumption and thus re-enforcing the patriarchal values very often related with dominant Hindu Ideology.

Women and the Media

In a study of 'centre of advocacy and research', it can be mentioned that, "We can say without fear of contradiction that television is essentially a female bastion. One of the main offshoots of the phenomenal growth of satellite TV has been the media focus women- both as a key target audience that need to be delivered to the advertiser and as the main protagonist. Together, television and advertisers target women viewers, aggressively and with reasons. The rating of some of the more recent prime-soups indicates a very high percentage of women viewers. It has also been found that the women are more regular in TV viewing, and that they are heavier consumer of cable television than men, which means that the modern story lines of soup operas are playing to very full female houses! Thus, 70% of TV ad revenue target women directly, and prime time television is dominated by women oriented family soups"³ (184-185). This quotation clearly

shows that why women are in the centre of TV shows, especially in advertisement and soap operas. If the above view was correct that means the media audience relationship was a passive one.

Dalit feminism⁴ stands on three pillars of caste, class and patriarchic exploitation of *Dalit* women. It shows the multiplicity of problems before *Dalit* women. For *Dalit* women caste means, exclusion, deprivation, atrocity, rape, caste violence, killing – cooling, teasing, discrimination in the process of development - apart from reservation, discrimination in provision of basic needs etc. caste violence against *Dalit* women spread in the length and breadth of India and in all types of societies whether they are urban or rural, the only case is that, in rural societies identification of such type of violence is relatively simple as compared to urban. Class is the other relative factor of caste violence, lower class *Dalit* women is more vulnerable as compared to upper class *Dalit* women. It is difficult to find out upper class in *Dalit*, hardly they belong to middle class, majority of them living in slums or slum like localities or because of *Dalit* localities – they slowly and steadily get converted into slums – specially when administration recognized any locality as *Dalit* one, slowly and steadily they convert that locality into slum without facilities. Patriarchic structure provides values, norms, beliefs for the exploitation of women in family, class and caste structure.⁵ *Dalit* feminism stands against all three and so scope of *Dalit* feminism is wider as compared to any type of feminism even black feminism. Another important issue *Dalit* feminism had handling was, they are culturally different than the dominant Hindu hegemonic culture. Traditionally *Dalit*- tribal women had all social rights given by the constitution; they actively participate in all type of economic activities except hunting, many a times they had all or most of the religious rights – active participants and performers of religious rites, rituals and even priestly positions. In fact they are equal to men in almost all walks of life.

Methodology

In this present study, for penetrating up to the facts, descriptive-innovative research design is operated in which as the tool of primary data collection structured interviews as well as core group discussions are involved. Near about 500 interviews of *Dalit* women from various economic as well as educational strata are conducted from the city of Nagpur which place in the heart of India and known as the center of *Dalit* movement from the time of Dr. Ambedkar. 34% HSC educated 28 % degree holders, 24% post degree holders and 14% SSC educated respondents are participated in these interviews and core group discussions. All respondents are from the 25 to 35 years age groups in which 86% are married and rest of 14% are unmarried. 62% respondents are related to less than 10000 Rs per month income group, whereas 36% respondents are fall in the category of 10,000 – 20,000 Rs per month income group and only 2% respondents are from higher income group. 64% respondents invest their 1-2 hours in watching television, whereas 24% respondents are engage their more than four hours time for the cause of watching television mainly.

Views of *Dalit* women towards soap operas

78% respondents are accepted that the home which is depicted in these soap operas are not resemble with the home of *Dalit* families or middle class families. Even though, 70% respondents denied these characters as the representative of common women in terms of physical as well as cultural character. Only 22% respondents partially accept them as common women due to some characters, like Lali. 88% respondents refuted the behavioural patterns of women characters like regular make-up or new dressings in regular life as it is impossible for any *Dalit* or low class women as it shown in soap operas. 42% respondents observed that due to lack of money and time it is not possible to them to do so, whereas 36% respondents told that time factor is not permit to apply make up regularly. And for 14% women, the issue of cost of those gadgets is key- cause. In short, the behavioural pattern of these characters is out of reach to them. In core group interviews, these *Dalit* women complained that through these media, high-caste or high-class groups place the burden of their culture on the shoulder of *Dalit*, tribal or labour class. They propagate their patriarchal culture and this 'greater culture' is responsible for the sanskritization of these *Dalit*, tribal or labour class women.

84 % women are rejected that their life is resemble with the women character of soap operas as 54.5% women observed it as an imaginary acts to these characters and 45.5% women denied them because there is lot of difference between imagination and reality. 72% women find the somewhat differences in their language and the language of the characters of soap operas. Even though 6% women observed that the characters used sophisticated language or the language of high-caste or high-class women which is not used by *Dalit* or lower classes (even though character of soap opera would be related to lower class or caste). Only 22% respondents from higher and middle classes are find resemblance with these characters in terms of their language. It is interesting that 30% women love to these characters due to their struggle, 28% women find their image in these characters as the women who scarifies her-self for their family and 20% love them due to their determination for some cause. Whereas, 6% women denied these characters as they does not found any reason to accept them.

74% women respondents are accept that they are learn something from these soaps, but at the same time they reject them as tool of social change and told that these family dramas are related to individuality only. 26% women are rejected these soap operas as the instrument for learning some morals as these soap operas are mere imaginative and far from socio-cultural reality. 76% women accepted that they are habituated for these serials and that why they are watching them regularly, while 18% watched it for the sake of entertainment and 6% watched it for passing their time. 78% women rejected the notion that any soap opera is based on *Dalit* or lower class' life. 22% women answered that they feel that these soap operas have some resemblance with their life, but they are unable to give the reason for that resemblance. Means, they are confused about their opinions.

Views of *Dalit* women towards News

48 % *Dalit* women are quite interested in watching news on television, whereas 44% watching it sometime. Only 8% are attended it regularly. 64% *Dalit* women felt that in content of news women related news does not get any place. As well as they complaints that the issues related *Dalit*, tribal or labour women are missing from it. In core group discussions they expresses that the rape or murder of high caste or class women are focussed but the same issues are black outed by media. For 32 % women, the honour killing is the recent burning issue which is related with women. But again they felt that though this issue is focus due to its high caste connections. Suicide of model or other issues are the issues which rose in media, are not of much interest, for these *Dalit* women. 62% women said that they are not seen any news in regular news channel which focused to atrocities on women. Even though 84% women denied seeing any news regarding caste atrocity on tribal or *Dalit* women after they read or heard or know the regular cases against *Dalit* or tribal women. Thus, they felt that the *Dalit* or tribal women is not the part of this society because this cultured or civilised (?) society does not take cognisance of their issues.

They expressed their views about the complexity of women life in their core group discussions. However, 82 % women observed that this complexity could not be observed in regular news items on media. Therefore 78% women deny to observed resemblance with the women in news. *Dalit* women felt that various aspects of women life are missing from these news items. 80% women observed that the issues of women's development is missing, 28% women accept that women education related issues are missing, while 30% women felt that women's health related issues are missing from these news items. According to 68% women sexual harassment is the major issue in news, while 60% women told that the dowry death is main issue for media. These issues are not related to the *Dalit* women life. It is learned that in Maharashtra (particularly Vidarbha region) dowry sytem is absent in *Dalit* community. But, the atrocities on *Dalit* women is nowhere in these news.

Image of *Dalit* women in media

96% respondents told that *Dalit* women is not found in media, even though, 36% women are accepted that the *Dalit* women is not seen in advertisement also. 42% respondents accept that *Dalit* women are missing in soap operas and 22% respondents told that she is not found in reality shows also. And wherever she comes in picture, 60% interviewers are told that they depicted as physically weak and 52% interviewers accepted that it depict as rape victim. 30% respondents said that she depicted as dirty and clumsy. 26% respondents said that she depicted as believer on superstitious and immoral.

Basically, wherever *Dalit* women see, she is seen in the role of house maiden or labour (60% respondent accept) and sweeper (32% respondents told). It means *Dalit* women show as the labour who related to dirty jobs. However, her struggle for livelihood or for basic need cannot become the issue of any soap opera, as 54% respondents are observed. As well as 50% interviewers observed that *Dalit* women's struggle for her physical insecurity cannot become the matter of any story. *Dalit* women participated in

various movements, like political, labour, *Dalit* or women's movement. But, as 74% respondents are observed, this issue cannot be pasteurised in any documentary or soap opera on media.

Though, *Dalit* women get more independence than other high-caste women, but, as 88% respondents are observed, it cannot show on media. 52% *Dalit* women respondents are partially agree and 44% strongly agree with the statement that *Dalit* women live in loose patriarchy in comparison to high-caste or high-class women, because they work in and out-side the home. 66% respondents are agree that the *Dalit* women have more social independence as she has less religious influence with comparison to high-caste women. Even though, 26% women respondents are partially agree and 26% strongly agree with the statement that *Dalit* women have more social rights. 56% women respondents are accept that they have headship of their family or have equal rights as her husband have. But, this culture is not become the subject matter of any story or news or soap opera.

Conclusion

Through this study it was found that soap-opera create and reinforce the traditional 'low caste' image of *Dalit* women. It means that media rebuild the traditional caste system through the soap opera or news. Thus, media is become the victim of *brahminical* values, which does not positive contribution of *Dalit* women but depict the caste-biased image of that women. The issues and culture of social dominant groups are focused as the issues and culture of whole Indian women-folk and thus this propagandist view misinterprets the *Dalit* or tribal culture or the issues of labour class. Media become the vehicle of culture of social dominant group through which they rebuild the *brahminical* patriarchal social structure as the 'Greater Culture' of India; and comparatively weak-patriarchal culture, which termed as 'Lower Culture' becomes invisible. Media re-enforcing and sanskritising the *Dalit* women, teaching them traditional caste, class and patriarchal norms and values and curtailing their liberty, which they got traditionally, instead of social, political, economical and cultural enrichment and empowerment in modern ways. *Dalit*, tribal or labour issues cannot get any place in news or any other program and thus deny the citizenship of these social groups indirectly. Media tries to these issues cannot be focused or cannot be come at forefront as national issues. Thus, media become the instrument for hiding out the real issues in democratic India and replacing it by pseudo-issues. It creates false-consciousness within the people. Because of this *Dalit* and especially Buddhist (*Dalit* Mahar embraced Buddhism in 1956) women of Nagpur city show their response negatively towards the soap operas.

Notes and References:

1. Gurang, Smriti , 2008, Transnational popularity of Ekta Kapoor family soup: A view from Nepal , in Uma Chakravarti (ed), Exploring The Popular: texts, identities and politics, Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Center, University of Pune, pp. 99-113.
2. Shrinivas, M.N., (2002), Social Change In Modern India, Orient Longman Pvt.Ltd. Delhi, India, pp. 1-44.
3. Centre for Advocacy and Research, 2007,"Packaging the Contemporary Women in Television Fiction: Deconstructing the role of 'Commerce' and 'Tradition'", in Ghadlally, Rehana (ed), Urban Women In Contemporary India : A Reader, Sage India, pp. 184-185.
4. Pardasi, Pratima et. el. (1999), 'Jati Vevesta ani Stree Mukti' (Marathi), Krantisinha Nanasahab patil Academy, Maharashtra .
5. Kaul, Shashi and Sahni, Shradha (2010), 'Portrayal of Women In Television (TV) Serials' in Stud home Comm Sci,4(1), Kamal Raj, Delhi, pp. 15-20.

