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## The Role of Caste in Reporting Women Issues in Mass Media

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**Abstract:** Caste has been playing a very dominant, deliberating role in our society since long. Also mass media play a major role in informing, educating and entertaining the people. Besides, they are used to bring about certain desirable changes among the people , as media and society influence each other. The discrimination of certain groups in the society is followed in terms of the media coverage too. Media can serve as an important instrument in achieving social justice by educating, raising awareness and questioning caste discrimination. But unfortunately the, Mass media or the mainstream media is not in a position to report the violence on Dalith Women. This media deliberately excluding issues of these sections of women to report and to discuss. Dalith women in Indian society are triply exploited on the basis of caste, class & Gender. But these are not taken as headlines in News papers or Top Debates in Television channels. This paper discusses how caste playing main role in reporting women issues in mainstream media by comparing two (2) incidents in Telangana State, Disha & Samatha. It also concludes that media should have moral responsibility and gives suggestions to the down trodden communities to have their own media to address their problems.

**Key Words:** Caste, Mass media, Discrimination

### I. INTRODUCTION:

The Mass media, or the mainstream media as it is called, which could play such an important role in addressing issues concerning casteism, women issues, is unfortunately not doing so. Truthful and sensitive investigation of social issues and challenges is a key responsibility of media. Journalism is called the fourth pillar of democracy and media should always raise a vociferous debate on the caste cauldron in society. Ideally media system suitable for democracy ought to provide its readers with some coherent sense of the broader social forces that affect conditions of their everyday lives but that is the hardly the case.

Whenever Daliths are mentioned in the news papers the main subject is almost never Daliths and their situation in society. These subjects often have a connection to sensation. The media which reports violence and attacks on Daliths has rarely questioned the system of caste which is the basis for such incidents and exposed the state policies on protecting Daliths and women. Accesses to all the facilities for a good life, for a decent human existence are overwhelming skewed in favor of the wealthy and upper castes in India. But the media never bothers to question it, neither is it interested in reporting those who have the courage to question.

The problem is not only with the inclusion or exclusion of news on dalith issues. How are those issues being represented in the media is also a very pertinent question. Indian Mass media is inherently prejudiced and biased, reflecting the caste based divisions of the society at large. This paper discusses how this bias is happening in our Telangana main stream media by comparing Disha and Samatha rape and murder cases.

Disha, a veterinary doctor from Reddy community and she was a fair looking, un married women and she was from urban background. Whereas Samatha, from Dalith community, a street vendor and from rural background, married women and she had children also. These two incidents happened in a span of one week in Telangana state. But these two incidents got different importance in mass media. Disha incident got more importance than Samatha even though Samatha incident happened three days before the Disha incident. Because of this reason these two incidents taken for my research.

### II. OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the role of caste in reporting women issues in Mass Media.
2. To recognize the reason for exclusion of Dalith issues in mass media.

### III. METHODOLOGY:

The Methodology employed in this paper is comparative case study method. The two rape cases happened in the span of one week in Telangana State. One is Disha rape case and another one is Samatha rape and murder. These two cases can be studied comparatively to know about the caste discrimination in the context of reporting in mass media.

### IV. CASE OF DISHA RAPE AND MURDER:

On 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2019, a veterinary doctor, Disha (Priyanka Reddy, 26 year old) was gang raped and murdered brutally by four men. Her body was found in Shad nagar on 28<sup>th</sup> November. The four suspects were arrested, according to the Cyberabad metropolitan police, confessed to having raped and killed the doctor.

The Telangana Police department stated that the victim had parked her scooter near a toll plaza, which caught the attention of two Lorry drivers and their assistants. According to police, the deflated her scooter tyre, pretended to help her, and pushed her into nearby bushes, where they raped and smoothed her. Then they allegedly loaded her corpse onto a lorry and dropped it under a bridge and burnt it with petrol.

The police arrested four men based on the evidence gathered from CCTV cameras and from the victim's mobile phone. The Telangana Chief Minister ordered formation of a fast-track court to try the accused for their alleged crime. The Minister of Home Affairs criticized the Telangana Police and stated that the government intended to amend the Indian Penal code and Code of Criminal Procedure to introduce laws for quicker punishment by fast-track courts.

This incident has become sensation in two Telugu states. Almost all the Telugu media channels took it as their top debates. Majority news papers gave this incident as banner heads upto the day of fake encounter of the accused. Minute to minute update was given in all the Channels. Media houses organized rally's against the incident in their own and demanded severe punishment like hanging and encounter. The media channels gave mikes to the public and asked them to demand severe punishment. Because of this temptation majority people demanded instant and severe punishment to the accused. N TV organized rally in the name of "JUSTICE FOR DISHA" across two Telugu states.

Telangana Governor Tamilisai visited Disha's home and gave solidary to Disha's parents. Many political leaders visited Disha's home. An outrage came all over India. Telugu Film Industry raised their voice against this incident. This incident created a political war between state and central governments.

All the four accused in the kidnap, rape and murder of Disha were killed in an alleged 'encounter' early on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 morning near Shadnagar, where they committed the part in this encounter. Media channels also celebrated this encounter.

### V. CASE OF SAMATHA RAPE AND MURDER:

On 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 just before the Disha rape and murder in Hyderabad, Samatha (Tekula Lakshmi), who sold utensils and balloons for a living, was gang raped at an isolated place in Yellapatar village of Asifabad district by three men of her village. They later slit her throat and brutally killed her. It was a heinous rape and brutal murder. She was from a poor dalith family and from a remote village. No media channel or news paper took it as their banner headline. After so many agitations taken by Dalith organizations and people's organizations it was taken as serious issue. After 15 days the state government announced the setting up of a fast-track court in the Adilabad district and session's court to try the Samatha case on Dec, 11, 2019. Subsequently, the Kumrambheem Asifabad district police filed a charge sheet in the case on Dec, 14, 2019. After trials on January 30, court awarded death penalty to three rapists.

### VI. DISCUSSION:

The rape and murder case of Disha in Hyderabad created ripples across the nation and witnessed many protests for justice. Meanwhile, few political party leaders and Telanganites are raised questions that why Telangana government not taken it as that much serious as Disha.

If we compare the two cases, Disha was from upper caste and Samatha was from downtrodden community. Disha was from elite section, but Samatha was from poor section. So, because of these differences the media responded differently between these two incidents. Why media biased in this issue that Majority of the media houses under the hands of upper caste. One survey showed that around 96% is the proportion of upper castes in Telugu Media.

In Marxist media analysis, media institutions are regarded as being locked into the power structure and consequently as acting largely in tandem to with the dominant institutions in the society. The media thus reproduced view points of dominant institutions not as one among a member of alternative perspectives, but as the central and obvious or natural perspective (Curran et al.1982:21). The Indian newspapers and TV Channels too reproduced the viewpoints of the upper caste. They are locked into the Caste hierarchy.

For example owner of EENADU PAPER AND TV is from Chowdhary community.

ABN TV AND ANDHRAJYOTY owner is from Kamma community. Namaste Telangana and T News owner is from Velma community. SAKSHI PAPER AND TV CHANNEL Owner is a Reddy. NTV owner is from Chowdhary community. TV9 CHANNEL Owner is from Velma community. These are the major media houses in Telangana state and are under the hands of upper caste.

### VII. Key findings:

1. India's media lacks social diversion; it has not reflected the country's social profile. Hindu upper caste men dominate the media. They are about 10% of India's population but among the key decision makers of media; their share is as high as 85%.
2. Gender bias rules: only 17% of the key decision makers are women. Their representation is better in the English Electronic Media (32%)
3. Daliths and Adivasis are cons pious by their absence among decision makers.
4. There are no women among the few OBC decision makers.

### VIII. Conclusions:

All this discussion is not intended to demand a gesture of charity towards Daliths. The intention is to argue for changing the prevailing mindsets of media bosses. As Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has written, "It is usual to hear all those who feel moved by the Deplorable condition of the Untouchables unburden themselves by uttering the cry, 'We must do something for the Untouchables.' One seldom hears any of the persons interested in the problem saying, 'Let us do something to change the Touchable Hindu'. The need of the hour is to include media in the demand for equal access, just as there are movements today demanding equal access to common ponds, lakes, burial grounds, funds, basic facilities in the neighborhoods.

Along with recruiting journalists from dalits and other backward castes, it is imperative that all journalists are 'sensitized' about caste and gender – about the Discrimination, exploitation and oppression carried out through this institution. They should be sensitized that this is part of the social responsibility of the Media. Young journalists with their skills, talents, and energy can do a lot to investigate these issues and help place them on the public agenda. And more importantly, they need to be encouraged by the editorial bosses to bring out such stories of the struggle for survival, for leading a dignified life by the majority of Indians. This can only happen when editors show spine to challenge the interference from the owners and the business houses that control them. At least a small beginning can be made!

The media instead of being a vehicle for advancing freedom and democracy, with globalization and economic liberalization, started becoming more and more a means of making money and propaganda for the new and powerful classes. One powerful tactic employed by the media today is to ignore the protests and movements, with a belief that such a blacking out will kill the Protest or movement. This haughtiness of the media stems from the fact that in the recent past some of the movements thrived more in the media than among the people. This gave a beefed up over-confidence to the media houses that it '**can make or break leaders**'. This spirit has to be broken. And it can be done by building more vibrant movements that can be ignored only at their peril, just as they were forced to concede space to dalith writers as was stated earlier.

Another important way is to have our own alternative channels for the dissemination of information and news. This, however, in no way, implies to shun the mainstream media. Rather, the argument is for using the mainstream media to whatever extent we can, but not entirely depending on it. There is a trend to get demoralized when there is a news blackout from the mainstream media. This should not be allowed to affect our morale. This is possible only when we develop 'our' media. Owning a channel, a newspaper is one aspect. The other and most important aspect is putting into use alternatives. Social media is developing today as a powerful tool for the dissemination of news and information. The increase in the owners of mobile phones, with their technological convergence is an advantage that we need to consider for our purposes. This experiment was successfully used by many social movements in Latin American countries to keep in touch with their mass base and also as a tool for mobilization.

The second point is the usage of Internet. Many dalith movements and activists are already putting the internet to good use. They opened blogs, websites to post their comments and react on policies. The Face book and other networking sites too are in use. Though the reach of internet is as yet small, its future cannot be questioned. These options too should be added to our armory.

Creating alternative media systems is not easy. It needs sustained effort and interest. But, once it is achieved we could create a public sphere in real sense, where people-centric, decentralized and democratized media will become true voices of people, community and the nation. The experiments taking place in other parts of the world as in Latin America, should serve as models to us. It should not be forgotten that media never was a great friend of the underprivileged. In spite of it, great revolutions were won.

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