



Dr. B.R AMBEDKAR'S PERSPECTIVE ON JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a great leader among dalits and oppressed people. He is fighting against caste system in India through his intellectual ideas and public meetings. Those days media was not publicize Ambedkar's ideology to public. The usage of language and the tone used to describe Ambedkar was undignified and it reveals the humiliation faced by Ambedkar from the media for his struggles. Here the space given to Ambedkar speech was very minimal and hence it is inferred that he was not given due prominence in the newspapers. Ambedkar thinking to start several news papers for his people to elevate the social issues against poor and backward people. In his publications he wrote articles in depth to educate enlighten his people. In this article the researcher chooses what Ambedkar's ideology and argument on Indian media.

Keywords: Ambedkar, Media, caste system.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the press in India is the history of the freedom movement in the country. To a great extent, the Indian National Congress owed its popularity and position to the Indian press (Mazumdar, 1993). The history of the freedom movement is happened to be the history of the congress men. Hence the history of the press in India is the history of the newspapers run by the Congressmen. The history of the oppressed community is being neglected and the history of the upper caste is celebrated in India. The majority which

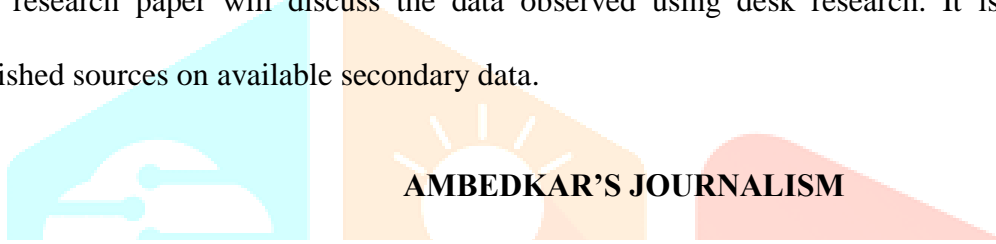
accepts Mahatma Gandhi as a great journalist declines to speak about the journalism of Ambedkar or the newspapers run by Ambedkar. It is important to identify the different interpretation of history of the freedom struggles as well as press in India. This paper will look into the experiences of Ambedkar with media.

Aims and objectives:

1. To explore the newspaper initiatives of Ambedkar
2. To study the representation of Ambedkar in media
3. To recognize his views on media.

Methodology:

This research paper will discuss the data observed using desk research. It is done by summarizing published sources on available secondary data.



Dr. Ambedkar was also a successful journalist. He provided a platform for social revolution through his papers. It is important to note that Gandhi started Harijan in 1933 to propagate the cause of untouchables. He started that only after the Poona pact. The Indian media which admire Gandhi's efforts to start a newspaper for the untouchables never address Ambedkar's labors that are responsible for running four newspapers for his people. While the pro congress media refuse to speak about the oppressed people, Ambedkar's struggles, his ideology, Ambedkar required a media, a mouthpiece. Ambedkar strongly believed that the newspapers could bring about a change in the lives of the millions of the oppressed people. Dr. Ambedkar's Marathi newspapers announced a new politics and ethics and anticipated a just social order (Pandian, 2005). Ambedkar published a series of newspapers namely Mook Nayak(weekly newspaper), Bashiskrit Bharat (half-monthly newspaper), Janta (weekly magazine).

The newspapers actively involved in constructing a nation and mobilizing the mass to participate in freedom movement. Around the same time, B.R. Ambedkar started propagating a different vision of dalithood through his newspaper Janata, which stressed the dalit's difference from the mainstream 'nation'. Ambedkar demanded a separate dalit-space, rather than a submersion of the dalit cause in the

Gandhian agenda of building a coherent, homogeneous nation-space (Narayanan, 2005). The editor of the weekly Janata was Bhaskarrao Kadrekar.

Ambedkar started Mook Nayak on January 32, 1920, a fortnightly paper with the help of Maharaja of Kolhapur. Although Ambedkar was not its official editor, he was the man behind it and it was his mouthpiece. Kesari newspaper refused to publish the advertisement about Mook Nayak. How violent and unfavourable were the times can be seen from the fact that the Kesari refused even to announce its publication although solicited to do as a paid advertisement. And this happened when Tilak was yet alive! (Keer,1954). Not only touching the oppressed people was considered untouchability, publishing the advertisement about their newspaper in their paper was also considered untouchability. The media history of American Black's and the oppressed people of India have many similarities.

Moreover Ambedkar stayed and studied in America for a few years, he was aware of the Media industry. As he was conscious that Indian mass media would reflect the Caste Hindus ideology, he chose a separate newspaper for the oppressed people and so he started publishing newspapers.

The names chosen by Ambedkar for his newspapers very evidently confirmed the aim of his newspapers. Mook Nayak (The leader of the dumb), The Janata (The People), Bahiskrit Bharat (Excluded India) were directly related to the oppressed people. The oppressed people marched to Chowdar tank in Mahad led by Ambedkar asserted their right to water by drinking water from that tank in March, 1927. For doing that, the caste hindu groups attacked the unarmed people. That was the first big, open depressed classes conference. This topic became an important news-item all over India. In Maharashtra newspapers arrayed themselves in two camps. Some denounced this bold step on the part of the Depressed Classes, some took shelter under the law, a few shed crocodile tears saying what took place in the city at the end of the conference was not good and others congratulated the Untouchable Hindus on their courageous act in vindicating their right(Keer,1954). Ambedkar had to face now a flood of criticism. So he felt the need for a mouthpiece as never before. So Ambedkar started his fortnightly Marathi paper, Bahishkrit Bharat, on April 3, 1927, in Bombay. Explaining the aim of the journal, he observed that he had taken to the profession of a lawyer because he felt that one's attempt at conducting a newspaper for the welfare of the people should always be backed up by an independent profession for one's personal livelihood (Keer, 1954).

REPRESENTATION OF AMBEDKAR IN INDIAN MEDIA

Ambedkar is a national leader. But he is projected as a dalit leader (Venkatesh, 2006). The media plays a major role in the formation of social identity. Ambedkar is always identified as a leader of the dalits and nothing else. Right from his struggle towards social justice and till now after his 100th birth anniversary, Ambedkar receives less attention from the Indian media. Ambedkar felt that his views were marginalized in the Indian media.

The Indian media, too, takes its cues from the temple of Brahminism before it projects somebody as an acceptable man or woman for the highest position. The Indian media used to hate Ambedkar. (Ilaiyah, 2000)

We can identify the ideology, the bias, the partiality of the newspaper towards any issue, by observing the placement, the space and the usage of language of that content. If we investigate the news about Ambedkar by using the above variables, those newspapers had not given importance to him.

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 considerable reporting of a Black person involved in a minor criminal offence (Wilson & Guteirrez, 1985).

At that time, the newspapers in no way stand beside Ambedkar's struggles. They didn't cover his struggles honestly and objectively. When Ambedkar was arguing for the political rights for his people in the round table conference, the newspapers portrayed him as a trait. They didn't correlate this with the problems of the oppressed people. They refused to analyze this issue with the oppressed people's perspective. The news was determined from the upper caste perspective. It explicitly reflected the caste Hindu attitude. This reminds us of the coverage of civil war in America. The Kerner commission on the civil disorders in America, while filing its report in 1967, condemned that the press "has too long basked in a white world, looking out of it, if at all, with White men's eyes and a white perspective".

The vernacular press imitated the English Press in dealing Ambedkar. When Ambedkar succeeded in receiving separate electorates and double vote for the depressed classes, the congress, the Press and the patriots condemned Ambedkar. The Tamil press condemned Ambedkar's role in the round table conference. An editorial in Vikatan cursed Ambedkar. It accused Ambedkar that he was responsible for spoiling the round table conference. It also added that Ambedkar betrayed the majority. It also criticized Ambedkar for propagating that Gandhi was the biggest enemy for the untouchables (Jeganathan, 2006).

In the same issue, an article titled "Kadhambam" written by Sethjammawal was published. It commented that Ambedkar was digging a new well for the untouchables. It was not for getting water, but for sinking the untouchables upside down. The name of that well is separate electorate (Jeganathan, 2006).

Ambedkar was called a monster, a traitor and a hireling. The main object of the Award, in the words of the Bombay Chronicle, was to turn the national majority of the Hindus into a minority. They echoed Mahatma Gandhi's view. B.G.Horniman wrote a furious article in the Bombay Chronicle on the eve of the Bombay conference, saying that the Doctor had to reckon with his countrymen and should not therefore stick up to his superior aloofness as though he were in a position to dictate to the country (Keer, 1954).

When Gandhi supported temple entry movement soon after the Poona pact, Ambedkar opposed it. Ambedkar in his statement said that the Untouchables were not inclined to support it because the Bill was based on the principle of majority and did not regard untouchability as a sin. Ambedkar argued that even though the majority accepts untouchability, it should be abolished without any concern. Gandhi replied that he cannot be in his camp because he believes Varnashram to be an integral part of Hinduism. "What was the reaction of the Press to Ambedkar's statement? Infuriated at the statement of bitter facts made by Ambedkar, the whole hierarchy of the national press relapsed into a campaign of hatred against Ambedkar, and some of them described him as Bhimasur, a devil. A Bombay Marathi daily painted him as a Brahmadvashtra" (Keer, 1954).

A Study of the Scheduled Castes Federation and Dalit Politics in U.P., 1946-48 reveals that in 1946 when the nation is looking ahead to partition, Ambedkar wants the scheduled castes to form a third nation. Ambedkar supported the separate nation demand of Muslim League. The newspapers in U.P dismissed

Ambedkar's speech. The editorial in *Vartman* described Ambedkar's speech as 'reactionary and against the ideals of Indian nationalism.

For the press, the Congress symbolised nationalism and national unity, and editors were clear about what constituted nationalism, and consequently, 'Indian' politics, and what was 'anti national' or 'communal' politics. Ambedkar was described as potential Qaid-e-Azam, and this despite the fact that he did not raise the SCF's demand for a separate electorate, always the bane of Ambedkarite politics for the nationalist. Ambedkar recommended Satyagraha for Scheduled Caste Federation. The very same newspapers which admired Satyagraha of Gandhi criticized Ambedkar's Satyagraha. *Vartman* (Hindi daily). 22 July, 1946. It was argued, in the editorial of *Vartman* (Hindi daily) that the Gandhian Satyagraha was used to legitimize a political farce and to satisfy the personal ambitions of Dr Ambedkar (Rawat,). They never accepted Ambedkar's non-violent protests as Satyagraha. The Mahad struggle and the Nasik temple entry movement which are led by Ambedkar were not considered as Satyagraha by the mainstream.

The media has not changed even after his 50th death anniversary. The man who drafted the constitution of India still faces discrimination in the media. The one who fought for all forms of discrimination and the prime motto is to achieve equality and social justice yet to receive justice from the media.

AMBEDKAR'S OBSERVATIONS ON MEDIA

Ambedkar cited about the newspapers in his works. He observed that the oppressed people were under represented in the newspapers. He also exposed that the newspapers were silencing his and his people's views.

"It was depressing that we don't have enough resources with us. We don't have money; don't have newspapers; Through out India, each day our people are suffering under authoritarian with no consideration and discrimination; those are not covered in the newspapers. By a planned conspiracy the newspapers are involved full fledged in silencing our views on socio political problems" (Ambedkar, 1993).

No news about the oppressed people was published in the newspapers. Ambedkar exposed to the world that the Indian newspapers were not prepared to represent the caste conflicts, the reason for those conflicts and the sufferings of the oppressed people due to untouchability. Dr. Ambedkar in his 17th volume said that

everyday in each village there is conflict between Hindus and Dalits. But nobody knows that. The media are not ready to focus those issues.

Furthermore Ambedkar found the reasons for the under representation and the discrimination of the oppressed people in the media. He notified that “The untouchables have no press. The congress press is closed to them and is determined not to give them the slightest publicity. They can not have their own press and for obvious reasons. No paper can survive without advertisement revenue” (Ambedkar, 1993).

According to Ambedkar one of the reasons for the conspiracy of the news about the oppressed people in the media was the less number of oppressed people in the media. He was aware of the ownership phenomenon which plays a major role in determining the news. Ambedkar was very thoughtful about the media ownership which plays a pivotal role in determining the newspaper’s objectives, politics, principle, ideology.

Ambedkar understood that another source for discrimination in the media was due to the upper caste domination. He said that the staff of the Associated Press of India, which is the main news distributing agency in India, is entirely drawn from Madras Brahmins – indeed the whole of the press in their hands and, who for well known reasons for entirely pro-congress and will not allow any news hostile to the congress to get publicity. These are reasons beyond the control of the untouchables (Ambedkar, 1993).

INTERPRETATION

The newspapers of that time were not ready to publish about the oppressed people or the leaders who are striving hard for that people. The oppressed people, who were excluded, segregated, oppressed from the society experience the same from the media. Ambedkar, who tried to abolish the untouchability, was portrayed as bhimasur against the Indian society. The space, the placement, the usage of language and the tone in the news about Ambedkar proved that he was given less attention, less prominence and negative representation.

Ambedkar was aware about the media ownership and the social composition of the media. Most of the newspapers during the freedom movement were under the ownership of congressmen and caste Hindus. So obviously they were against any views which oppose Hinduism and Congress party. The very same newspapers which represented Dhandi yatra of Gandhi as a satyagraha refused to accept Ambedkar’s

Mahad struggle as a satyagraha. Moreover, they derided that struggle as a betrayal. As it was not possible to rely on the pro congress mass media to publish his news and views, Ambedkar decided to run newspapers.

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

It is also inferred that Indian media did not identify the oppressed people who were the minorities in the Hindu society. Indian media observe only the congress movement, correlate with the freedom struggle and gave importance to that only. They were not interested about the living standards of the oppressed people, the untouchability brutality imposed upon them or Ambedkar who was being the voice of the voiceless.

The social composition of the media at present was the same of the Ambedkar period. Recently a survey jointly conducted by Yogendra Yadav (CSDS), Anil Chamaria, and Jitendra Kumar reveal that India's 'national media' lacks social diversity and does not reflect the country's social profile. It also noted 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."

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