

WOMEN IN SOCIAL MEDIA:A FOCUS ON DALIT AND NON-DALIT WOMEN ISSUES IN INDIA

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Abstract

Constitution of India guarantees gender equality and grants special favors to women through articles 14, 15(3) and 16. Despite the constitutional support, women are victimized and are facing severe discrimination in society, even at home. Indeed the intolerance against women in India is not a new phenomenon, it varies between the castes and its religious believes. This feature can only be observed in India, where the Indian society has adopted near about 33 million gods and goddess worshipped by 3000 castes and 25000 sub-caste groups in India. The inter-community, Dining, Marital Alliances, and social functions between the castes are highly restricted based on each community customary objectives and regulations.

Dalits in India, are considered as the menial out caste and subjugated all sorts of livelihood resources by the dominant castes for several centuries and drained with all sorts of socio-economic opportunities. As like the caste and class, the division and discrimination of women is also varied according to their social status. The woman from the upper caste has several advantages despite their discrimination confined towards the gender, but the Dalit women has multiple disadvantages towards their identity, which based on caste, class and gender.

The vulnerability of Dalit women can be observed in their participation in education, economic field, social participation, empowerment, domestic violence, political invisibility, and sexual

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oppression. On an average, about 1000 sexual exploitation cases on Dalit women have reported annually and in the year 2016 alone, 40,801 cases (All India) were reported (NCRB, 2016) against the reported cases around 38,670 in the year 2015.

Media is considered as the fourth estate of the Indian democracy with unbiased nature of representing the issues of the society and the nation. Unfortunately it is face-off in representing the issues of common people especially the issues with regard to marginalized communities. The social media which is a modern times tool, has a very crucial role in execute the messages to the nook and corner of the country is also playing a bigotry role in the passing of message.

The Dalit women Issues and Atrocities are on par with media and not reported with priority. There are several unreported issues and cases about Dalits in general and dalit women in particular left behind with the squinted eye of the public. By keeping in view of the above, the present study is focused on the politicised portrayal of the atrocities against women in general and also about the dalit women and the social media coverage and representation of the issues in the contemporary India.

Keywords: Social Media, women, Dalit.

1. Introduction

India, is known for its rich heritage and culture and perhaps its culture is unique in nature and the inherited features of it could not be seen in many countries of the world. The Indian society is deep-rooted with the popular Hindu culture, where the structural and patriarchal values have embedded in the culture of the society. Patriarchal values such as moral authority, social privilege and the control of property proved more powerful and were strongly depicted through specific cultural metaphors. The patriarchal values have created a thick border of rules and regulations where the women is being kept away from many participatory activities and even denied the equal rights on par with men. But the more “subtle expression of patriarchy was through symbolism, directions by highlighting the self-sacrifices of the historical characters who subordinated women to men and also through the ritual practices which emphasized the woman as a faithful wife and devout mother.” (P K Meena, 2008)

In general, women in India for several centuries remained as silent spectator and she was given a limited role in the family affairs and made confined to the kitchen and home. A woman was made as an object for the exploitation by the patriarchal values. Today, there are many protective measures are being initiated by the government at various stages but still, many atrocities and crimes are committed against the women. A thoughtful expressions given by Kumari A, as *“It has been observed that women issues generally do not get a chance to come up on the front page unless they are rape cases, crime, and sexual harassment, abuse of women or other atrocities. Even in news on issues related to women in news is widely covered on some specific days like mother’s day, women’s day etc. On others, day’s news related to women generally occupied with sensational stories of glamour, sex, domestic violence and other forms of violence”* (Kumari, A., & Joshi, H. 2015) In order to over come from all these problems the media had played a vital role for the empowerment of women as well as emancipation of patriarchal values. The role of media in the development of women is two-fold.

Firstly, the development through exposure to media, by way of programs and printed material. Today the media is completely depended upon the participation of women in all aspects of promotion. Women become the most attractive element for the propagation of both goods and services or to sell the idea. This is a consumer-oriented function where women will get more chances in the media to attract the buyers in the product market and for the economic development.

Secondly, the development through the active participation of women in the production of media messages by contributing in the decision making process regarding program content, policies and the projection of a balanced image of women.”. In this stage women has elevated to the level of an administrative body and raise herself to the decision making process.

Access to media plays an important role in promoting women rights and awareness among them. A free media will permit women to acquire information relating to rights which in turn can lead to inclusive policy making, creating greater equality and participatory policymaking.

Media plays an important role in promoting transparency by acting as an intermediary between government and the masses. Afore an important free press is, therefore, an important precursor, to the access of information, as it enhances transparency, making a government more accountable to the public.

Social Media and Women

The social media for women will work as two-way process. On one hand it is in the favour of women issues as it passes the idea of feminism through ‘social media’, reaches to the people in a lightning speed, during the post-modern era. Social media had played a vital role in highlighting the justice for women in many atrocities across the country, especially the online campaigns and Hashtags, have given the woman around the world a voice. There are many more incidents across the world, a revolution was being carried away by the social media and pressurized the government to act upon it. For example ‘# *bringbackourgirls*’ in Bocco Haram abducted schoolgirls in Nigeria to pressurize for the release of their girl child. There was also an online campaign like ‘# *justiceforjisha*’, which was started by the nine friends of murdered Dalit girl Jisha of Kerala to promote the justice for Jisha resulted in the Death sentence of the accused. Recently # Me Too online campaign have created a huge movement across the country over the issue of sexual exploitation on women at workplace. Other hand, the social media has also become the platform to undermine the justice and self respect of women with means of patriarchal hierarchy. The social media has become the stage to portray women as a object of sex. There were attempts to silence the voice of women through the abuse language, threatening and targeting the active members who are in favor of women and their justice. Indeed, both media and social media have proven the strong carriers of women issues to the main stream society but the issues of women especially Dalit women have getting a least importance in circulating either atrocities or issues. Here by the media in general and social media in particular are showing their biased nature which has its roots in the caste system of Indian society as the all most all the media sector controlled by the upper caste communities.

2. Review of literature

Sonia Bathla (1998) critically explores the media’s coverage of women’s issues and the women movement within the Indian context. In this, the study lays in political theory which argues that

the democratic foundations have been gender biased and suffer from many discrepancies that prevent the participation of women from the public sphere and limit their role as political citizens. A major disadvantage in democratic political thought is according to feminist, lies in its rigid establishment and gendering of private and public spheres. In The modern technologies, Media has become important for the functioning of democratic society. In solving the issues of the society the media is playing a vital role. Mainly in public spheres, the media is taking a forward step in representing the issues of the citizens.

The media is largely male-dominated and has not enough women professionals in the administrative side of the industry. This might be a valid reason for the under-representation of the women and her marginality in all aspects by the media. It may also be included that, because of the cultural hegemony of the Indian society which is deep-rooted patriarchal structure, it defines and decides the women's role and position in the society and keeps them at the margin, even after the 70 years of independence. In the democratic policy, the media has left many women's issues and concerns in its squint eye with its dominant nature and bigotry approach towards the women in general and Dalit women in particular. The insensitivity of the media is reflected in the nature of coverage of women issues, organizations of women's news and in the opinion and attitudes of journalists. The media Monitoring project in 2000 suggested that no significant change can be observed in media representation of women over the years as the media did not project the struggles, suffering, exploitation, and strengths of women. And the newsmakers were mostly politician and male or men.

Uma Singh- *New Women and Mass Media-* This book explores the betterment of the communication of people and dissemination of knowledge which is important for overall development of the nation and for that media is playing an important role. It is a greasy fact that Women are undergoing with large scale of discrimination facing in the patriarchal society and for the development of women media is play a vital role as it is responsible for the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes. It is again the media which propels the women's movement forward.

“Traditionally, the media world has been male-dominated, globally as well as nationally. Men design and define media policies, priorities and agenda including how women are portrayed and presented. It is the most often men who make decisions about hiring staff. The ratio of male-female workers in the media heavily imbalanced in favor of men. It is no wonder, then, the media is biased against women in many areas. This bias effects image of women in the media, and in turn has a negative effect on women’s development in a society. Gender construction in the media is directly connected with various issues: these include sexism and under-representation in the media and raising the number of women in the newsrooms.” (Rana, 2005)

10th December 1983 a programme was organised to introduce to the participants how the different forms of media can be used to awareness about the women problems. The films and street plays are used as alternate media to address the women issues. First films were screened by Yunganthar production. It is a non-profit making and distribution organisation it is an alternate media resource for universities and organisations working for social change all the films were dealt with women problems/ oppression at the workplace as well as home. The first movie screened is Idhi Katha Matramena in theTelugu language, the second movie is the domestic workers struggle in Poona (Marathi), the third ThambakoochakiloOob Ali (Marathi), fourth is a street play that is Mulgi Zhali Ho (A girl is Born) in Marathi. These are some of the plays that taken initiation to bring out the women problems.

The media research is done/emerged from various social movement – Feminist, Gay, Lesbian, social justice postcolonial and Dalit in 1970’s.

The two aspects of media are:

“The role of media in reinforcing unequal status quo relationships

The capability of media to generate new ideas and where charges and liberation from the grids of hierarchy” (Ganihar, N. N., & Begum, S. 2007).

Cultural feminist’s critics deploy Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony to examine the subtle ways in which media manufactures consent for male dominance.

Every woman has to enjoy her rights; woman organizations are fighting for the justice for the Dalit and Marginalised sections of the society. Awareness is an important thing. So a woman should speak up and fight for the equal rights. Now a day's internet has become alternative media for Dalits, "Kanshiram says not to trust upper caste media and encouraged for Dalit voice in the media. From there Dalits stated their own media industry. But there were so many obstacles to run the media industry. One of the reasons why the Dalit media is not able to perpetuate its existence is the domination of the upper caste media most of the Indian broad caste media are owned by business houses who hail from the upper caste. So there is nothing to surprise to note that they gave the least preference to Dalit issues or recruited Dalits as journalists in the media." In Rao's work "Dalits and the Fourth estate Dalit voice in the media has resulted in the perpetration of stereotypes of Dalits and the frequent denial of their legitimate claims". B.N Uniyalal titled "In search of Dalit journalist" he concluded "that in all 30 years I had worked as journalist I had never met a fellow journalist who was Dalit."

"First and foremost thing in media is the responsibility of non-Dalit journalists to be casteless and fight for the equality in the country. Every time there is a caste, class, gender difference in the mainstream media.

"A Dalit woman or a Dalit they are discriminated, tortured, raped killed, the phenomena take every two hours, then and it is taken as an exclusive and it is telecasted, the faces sometimes masked and sometimes not because she hails from the lower or Dalit community."(Kumar, C. S., & Subramani, R. 2014).

"By and large the media scene in India is that media does not address serious issues about exploitation and in equal treatment to women in different spheres but It is keen in reporting sex-related incidents by way of sensationalization news of atrocities on women. Thus instead of highlighting the exploitation of women they end up becoming one of the reasons in increase of violence as their coverage more than not tend to glorify the crime against women it is true that media has brought to light as never before certain misdemeanors against women but in a very subtle manner it also perpetuated the stereotyped image of woman as a householder and an inconsequential entity in the traditional value system. Generally, women's problems never figure

on the front page of a newspaper unless it is a gruesome murder or a rape case. Newspapers even on women's page does not usually address relevant issues for women empowerment but reporting is concerned with beauty tips recipes, fashion syndrome etc.”

3. Some selected atrocities on woman in India: An overview

Nirbhaya of Delhi

December 16th of 2012, the day can be remembered as an attack on the law and order as well as security of woman in the Indian capital region. It was the day a 23-year-old- physiotherapy intern, Jyothi Singh (popularly known as Nirbhaya) was beaten, gang-raped and tortured in a private bus by the six members including a driver. Later she was thrown away from the bus and her friend who was traveling with her was also beaten. In a critical situation, she has been taken to the healthcare and she was also taken to Singapore for the emergency medical assistance, however, she died two days later. Incidents which happen during the post-death of Nirbhaya experienced the major developments in the judicial system as well as the awareness towards the security issues of women in India. The incident posed a question to the law and order system regarding a security of the common people in India, especially the female. The police have arrested six persons including a juvenile within 24 hours. It had also experienced the great mobilization of the masses across the country by staging hundreds of protests across the country for the demanding justice for Nirbhaya. A documentary of BBC titled “An India's Daughter” was broadcasted In the United Kingdom on 4 March 2015. However, the documentary was banned in India because the documentary may lead to a threat to the legal system and the accused person words may hurt the women in the society. (G N Ray, 2009)

The media played a vital role in Nirbhaya case, especially the print and television including the social media. The print media has broadcasted the even the minute information from time to time. In no time the news acquired the national and international importance and there were lots of discussions and debates took place in almost all the news channels irrespective of native languages. In social media there was a huge online campaign for the justice for Nirbhaya, as a result, there was huge public protest took place in New Delhi on 21st December 2012 at India Gate and Raisina Hills (In Front of president Bhavan) there were also many protests took place across the nation. With all these efforts the honorable Supreme Court has found guilty with the

verdict of death sentence to the four convicts who have charged in the murder. The incident and after effects are also given a momentum to take severe steps to ensure the safety of woman in the country, for example, the government of Karnataka had launched the 24/7 helpline to be operated by the state police to register sexual abuse complaints from women. The Tamil Nadu government had listed the 13- point programme to ensure the safety of women in the state. The major result of these protest was the criminal law (Amendment) Act, 2013 was passed by the Lok Sabha on 19th March 2013 and by Rajya Sabha on 21st March 2013, which provides for amendment for Indian Penal Code, Indian Evidence Act, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 on laws related to the sexual offences. The bill received the president's assent on 2nd April 2013 and came into effect from 3 April 2013 and it was named after the Nirbhaya as "Nirbhaya Act."

Baduan Incident.

The incident famously known as "Baduan" gang-rape, on 27th May 2014, the two girls were found hanged to the tree in Katra village of Budaun district of Uttar Pradesh. They are gang-raped and murdered. Initially, it was portrayed and also the post-mortem reports were revealed it as the victims were gang-raped and murdered, but the CBI investigation has reported that there was no gang-rape on them and consequently, the suspects were released. In this case, the two girls were gone on missing and when the parents supposed to file a case, police refused to file an FIR. It can be clearly observed that no police have taken action and they even went to the extent that in their report they notified that these families did not belong to the Dalit community. The FIR was filed after the intervention of a local leader.

Though the above cases are gruesome sexual exploitation of a family who belongs to Dalit community and another girl who belongs to Non-Dalit community the focus on the same issue is different. In the case of Nirbhaya, the social media played a vital role including print and television media whereas in the case of Badaun Case media is reluctant to portray the issue in mainstream media. Only some activists took initiation and they brought up the case in local media

Khairlanji

In the state of Maharashtra, Surekha Bhotmange a Dalit woman belongs to an untouchable Caste was cooking meal on 29 September 2006. A group of upper caste men surrounded her home. Surekha her daughter Priyanka 17 years old and her two sons Roshan 23 years, Sudhir 21 years, were dragged out of the house. The two women were stripped, beaten and paraded through the village. The two young guys were beaten badly their faces were disfigured. All four died. This incident was taken place in Kharlanji village. All the villagers witnessed the incident, but nobody stopped it.

The khairlanji massacre was taken because of the previous activism. The upper caste people were using bhotmange's land as a throughway for their tractors. The family resisted. Siddharth Gajbhai a Dalit rights Activist. Ghajbhai was beaten up by the upper caste people, for that surekha was a witness, identifying twelve perpetrators, they were arrested, that day the Bhotmange family was attacked, and all twelve released on bail and they took ghastly revenge on Bhotmange family.

This khairlanji incident in a month, photographs of the brutality circulated among Dalit rights activists. The incident barely registered in the national press. A protest was organized by Dalit activists and erupted into violence. Police teams were stoned, cars set ablaze. Eventually the riot police were called in, some politicians rushed to the area to promise justice. Several policemen were suspended for dereliction of duty, and the doctors who failed to file proper autopsy reports. At last, in the month of December, the central bureau of investigation finally filed charges against the accused.

The khairlanji incident showed that it is often only when marginalized people turn to violence that there is any hope of getting the attention of politicians and the authorities.

Banwari Devi of Rajasthan

Bhanwari Devi who is a social activist from Bhatari, Rajasthan she was a brave woman hails from the Kumhar, the potter community. In the year 1992, she has been gang-raped by the upper caste men angered by her efforts to prevent a child marriage in one of their family. She was

brutally raped in front of her husband and her subsequent treatment by the police and the court acquittal of the accused, attracted widespread national and international media attention and became a landmark episode in India's women rights movement. Interestingly the judgment was delivered on the basis "No upper caste men will not touch a lower caste woman".

Jisha of Kerala

Jisha a 30-year-old law college student raped and murdered at her home in Kerala on 28 April 2016. It was one of the barbaric incidents against a woman. Mohammed Amerul Islam found guilty in this case. Like Nirbhaya at Delhi, Jisha was also raped and murdered. Her intestines had been pulled out. She has sustained at least 30 stab wounds to her head, on her chest, chin, and neck. The incident came to know after five days of her death. The accused has been arrested after the 50 days of the incident. The justice for Jisha would have been a different way if the fellow law college student hadn't taken such initiation where they launched the campaign in the social media with a hashtag #justiceforjisha created a great push on the government to act over this incident. Finally, on December 2017, the accused has been sentenced to hang till death. Kerala is a most forwarding state in education but when it comes to gender discrimination no exception especially Dalit women.

Odisha Kunduli case

A 14-year-old tribal girl, who had charged "*Four men in Uniform*" with rape in Odisha Koraput district. On October 10, 2017, The girl was raped by four security personnel in uniform at the Lanjiguda forest, while she was returning to her school at Sorosopadar from Kunduli. During her treatment, she had accused the police of harassing and putting pressure on her to change her statement. She had also accused the DGP of offering money to secure her signature on a blank sheet paper. Later when the incident became public, the many organisations and political parties are staged protest including Bandh. There was also a judicial probe ordered by the state government. Despite this, she allegedly hanged herself when her family members were not at home. She was later rushed to a local community health center in an unconscious state. She was declared "Received Dead" at the health center by doctors. She took the extreme step out of the frustration at not getting justice.

#MeToo Movement

After many social movements and their deliberations the Indian women has started to indulge themselves to be a part in the economic development .today the percentage of working women have been increasing gradually especially in the urban areas however the work places are becoming the major exploitation centres over women. Since many years the women remain silent and tolerated the exploitation and abuses because they were absentia with the means of the technology. However, the social media have given the opportunity to express their grievances .

A Me Too movement is springs up around the world in the late 2017 and it is the movement against sexual harassment and assaults which revealed the magnitude of woman issues especially the sexual harassment at work places. Since then women across the world came up with their experienced harassment or discrimination at work places. The movement has started in USA, Tarana Burke , a social activist and community organiser , who used the phrase Me Too on my space social network. Initially it was her attempt as a part of campaign to promote ‘empowerment through empathy’ among women of colour who has experienced sexual abuse within underprivileged communities. Later, but the campaign was encouraged spreading the #Me Too by an American actress Alyssa Milano on October 15, 2017. Now it has been an attempt to draw the attention to sexual assault and harassment of women at work places.

Today this hash tag movement has trended in at least ninety countries of the world and India is playing a vital role in promoting in #Me Too movement . however this movement has confined its boundaries to the entertainment industry only. The movement gained its importance in India in late September 2017, after actress Tanusree Dutta accused NanaPatekar inappropriate behaviour on the sets of film that they were shooting in the year 2008. Since then the hashtag movement got its momentum and women from various professional backgrounds have come out with their #Me Too movement.

The alligations so far has reached many famous personalities such as M.J .Akbar a former union minister v/s a woman journalist. Another person Rahul Johri BCCI CEO v/s unnamed person in June 2016. Bhushan Kumar a chairman of T-series versus an unnamed actress and latest Arjun Sarja a south Indian actor versus an actress and many more. Even today the hash tag movement has reached millions of followers in facebook and reported the hundreds of complaints of sexual

harassment in India. The international organisations such as New York Women foundation and CBS corporation has announced its financial support , to support the survivals of sexual violence in total # MeToo movement is becoming the one of the powerful movement in addressing the issues of sexual harassment against women but in other hand the movement has confined its wings to the only few sections of the society because the reason of Indian social structure.

Conclusion

With all the above incidents, it can be evident that the media, (especially print and audio-visual) is playing a role like stepmother in addressing the women's issues in general and the women from the marginalized sections in particular. According to the writings of renowned scholar, Hillary silver in her work on "*social exclusion and social solidarity: Three paradigms*" expressed, the process of exclusion is a consequence of the formation of group monopolies. In society, Powerful groups often display distinctive cultural identities and institutions, restrict access by outsiders by valued resources through a process of 'social closure'.(www.gsdrc.org) The above expression of social exclusion is rightly fit into the argument of the participation of woman in media and the approach of social media towards the woman is more discriminatory in nature.

In the initial stage, media was managed exclusively by men and projected the image of a woman in the media as men's preference. The woman representation in the field of mass media was also less. Though, the numbers of woman representation in the media gradually increasing, the autonomy of taking decisions and reporting the issues are ultimately always under the control of men. When it comes to the women from the marginalized communities, their participation and appearance have never been in the realm of media. Nowadays, media has become the tool of propaganda in favor towards certain dominant communities who utilizes the services for their popularity and growth.

There are many more drawbacks in connection to the media representation of the transmission of the information in favor to the special cases not for the common cause. When it comes to the Dalit woman issues, the social media is also playing a discriminatory role, by taking up the marginal communities with least concerned and many times neglected.

For example #MeToo campaign have created a vast knowledge and awareness in the women community but the awareness level haven't reached the women from lower strata and the reason behind this is India caste system where a women from lower caste remained unrepresented and voiceless and their problems were un heard for centuries. The traditional media has given the least importance either the portrayal of assault on women or to give a platform to address their problems. However, the social media is the only major platform to represent the problems of first generation learners of Dalit community.

Hence the social media should become the popular platform to represent the voices of the voiceless because media is the major pillar to support the social justice which is called as an fourth estate after the three estates of the Legislature, Executive and The Judiciary.

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