A critical review of the role of media and communication in social development and addressing issues surrounding scheduled castes/tribes

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ABSTRACT

The media and communication are important tools for the development of people, particularly the marginalised and oppressed segments of society. India's scheduled castes/tribes are such marginalised communities that bear the brunt of the caste system, which is to blame for their backward social and economic status. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that they live in one of the country's most backward and impoverished regions, where development is lacking. This study looks at the role of the media in the development of the Scheduled Caste/Tribe community in India. As professional growth and social status are the indicators of development so these parameters are studied here. The main goal is to understand the various types of media and communication used by Scheduled Caste/Tribe people for occupational needs, as well as which of them is most effective for the purpose. This study also seeks to determine how effective media is in eliminating caste-related discrimination. The study employs an exploratory research design, and it is possible to conclude that media and communication play an important role in professional and social development.

Keywords: *Media, Communication, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Indian Cinema*

SCHEDULED CASTE (DALITS) & TRIBES (ADIVASI): INTRODUCTION

These are some of India's most disadvantaged socioeconomic groups. India's society is divided into four classes based on a unique caste system unique to Indian society known as "varna vavastha." This caste system divided all humans into hierarchical classes, with Shudras occupying the fourth level. Shudras' main occupations were labour and agriculture. For centuries, they have been humiliated for the work they do because it is regarded as menial. Despite the fact that their work was vital to society, they were denied religious rituals, were denied access to the village well, and were forced to live on the outskirts of the human population. To give dignity to this section of society, the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed, which provided reservation to a list (Schedule) of groups/communities/castes that were previously known as the "Depressed" class. Since then, they have been referred to as Scheduled Castes, and they account for 16.2 percent of the Indian population as well as 48 percent of the poor in the country. For many years, Scheduled Caste people were subjected to inequity and a humiliating social structure that denied them the right to participate in India's political system. Politics and state rule were managed by the Kshtriya and Brahmin communities. People from the scheduled castes have been denied political power, and as a result, they are socially marginalised. As a result, real political participation for citizens began after independence, and Scheduled Caste people also increased their political aspirations. The trend of removing higher caste people from governance began in southern India and spread to northern Indian states. Political empowerment inevitably leads to social empowerment. The Article to Abolish Untouchability, the Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, and reservation are assertive programmes that helped not only abolish untouchability but also improve their social status.

The Scheduled Tribes are one of India's most economically disadvantaged and marginalised groups. India has the world's largest tribal population, with a population of over 10.2 crore people. This accounts for 8.6 percent of the country's total population (Census of India, 2011). There is widespread agreement that the health of India's tribal population is deplorable, with inadequate sanitary

conditions, personal hygiene, and health education. Anemia is common among tribal mothers, and girl children receive less than the recommended nutritional intake. Overall, the tribal community suffers from insufficient food intake. The extent of family planning knowledge and practise was also found to be low among the scheduled tribes. The media plays an important role in preserving traditional values and passing them down to future generations. Aside from that, it frequently plays an important role in the communication of new ideas and new social and political orders. Traditional folk media reflects familiar details of everyday culture, validates rituals and institutions, educates nonliterate groups, and maintains conformity to accepted behavioural patterns. The Mass media is the indigenous equivalent of exogenous mass media and facilitates change and progress in tribal societies by communicating socio-economic change. Thus marginalised communities in India (SC/STs) are grouped under a wider Bahujan community.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Media and communication not only transmit information from one person to another, but they also have the power to transform, educate, and change people's lives. It instils education and a change of heart, as well as raises awareness, which leads to changes in a person's habits and performance, as well as the performance of a community and a nation. It has the ability to enlighten, remove ignorance, and serve as a tool of awareness. It aids in the removal of superstitions and increases the common man's confidence in using media as a platform. That is why media is so important in every society, and people try to manipulate media to their advantage. However, this media is also a tool for the development of marginalised groups of people. The media raises awareness in a society or community about the standard of living that is deserving of a human being. The messages conveyed by the media contribute to people feeling good about themselves. Changes in behaviour as a result of media messages can occur in the home, at school, and in social situations. When marginalised people receive media messages, they compare their lives to the images in the media and strive to meet the standards set by the media. They also fight against social norms if they are impeding their progress in creating those images. In a democratic country, the role of the media is more than just disseminating information and entertainment. In a country where there is widespread poverty and unemployment, the responsibilities of the media extend beyond the above two functions to include a role in the overall development of the society. Mass media and communication not only assist people in their jobs and professional lives, but they also raise social awareness about their community.

SC/ST MEDIA IN THE TRADITIONAL & CONTEMPORARY MEDIASCAPE
In India, two media forms coexist, namely traditional and contemporary media. Folk dance, song, storytelling, poetry, plays, and puppet shows are examples of traditional media. They are mostly found in rural and suburban areas and are used for communication and entertainment; they are frequently used to convey messages about current socio-political issues. Along with traditional forms of communication, contemporary media forms such as print media, audio-visual media (film, radio and TV shows, and voice-based platforms), and internet-based social media have emerged in India's media landscape. So before we move to the impact of cinema, let's briefly have a look at other media and communication sources and its importance in uplifting the SC/STs.

PRINT MEDIA
According to the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (GOI), two newspapers in Adivasi (ST/SC) languages were published in the central indigenous belt in 2011. They were Johar Sahiya (now defunct), a monthly Nagpuri newspaper, and Disom Khobor, a fortnightly Santali newspaper, with circulation figures of 5317 and 6669 copies, respectively. Both newspapers place an emphasis on current Adivasi/SC issues, primarily to raise awareness and solidarity in the pursuit of economic, political, and social justice. In recent years, these newspapers have faced a severe financial crisis. As a result, Johar Sahiya's publication ceased at the end of 2013. One of the key contributions of the newspapers, Disom Khobor (still in operation), was their consistent fight for the legal recognition of Adivasi languages. Johar Sahiya has consistently advocated for the recognition of Adivasi languages as official languages of Jharkhand, India, since its inception. The newspaper documented how the Adivasi people organised social movements and collective protests to legitimise their language rights, as well as other sociopolitical and human rights issues. Aside from the aforementioned publications, some newspapers and magazines were also published in Sadri, Kharia, Kurukh, and Santali languages, with some of them employing indigenous scripts such as Ol-Chiki. Despite their best efforts, many Adivasi/SC publications funded by local groups face a variety of challenges, including an inadequate distribution network, inadequate marketing infrastructure, and limited financial resources.

AUDIO AND VISUAL MEDIA
At the national or regional level, India currently lacks a dedicated radio or television channel for indigenous people. In some areas, a few non-prime TV and radio time-slot(s) have been set aside for the broadcast of indigenous cultural programmes and performances such as folk dance and songs. In addition, some indigenous and exogenous organisations and individuals disseminate Adivasi/SC issues/programs through electronic media such as community radios, voice-based platforms, and documentary films.

COMMUNITY RADIO
Community radio initiatives play important roles in legitimising contemporary Adivasi/SC issues in some parts of India, partly because they involve Adivasi people in co-creating media discourses. Participation of locals in community radio stations allows the marginalised to share their stories and discuss issues in their communities. For example, they use community radio to bring forth local indigenous matters in local languages; they talk about local cultures, festivals, events, and art forms such as folk-song and drama; such gestures encourage local people to interact and contribute to the rest of the nation. Literacy, child education, employment opportunities, alcoholism, dowry, family planning, health (including HIV/AIDS) awareness, water and natural resources, environment, indigenous knowledge (e.g., medicinal plants and processes), agriculture practises, local market rates of essential commodities, and so on are some of the key local Adivasi issues addressed by the programmes. Despite the fact that community radio stations exist in various parts of India, the overall environment is bureaucratic and lacks editorial freedom. Because there is no dedicated Adivasi community radio station in India, a few community radio stations run by local organisations in Madhya

Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Gujarat pay attention to Adivasi issues and voices. In August 2001, two non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Alternative for India Development (AID) and the National Foundation of India (NFI), launched a community radio programme, "Chala Ho Gaon Mein," to promote local development and community empowerment in 45 villages in Jharkhand's Palamau district. The programme was developed in response to feedback from interactive workshops organised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in which villagers identified community radio as a powerful and effective communication medium for raising their contextual issues.

VOICE-BASED PLATFORMS

In recent years, indigenous people have used voice-based online platforms like "CGnet Swara" and "Avaaj Otalo" to discuss and draw attention to their issues. "CGnet Swara," a voice-based platform, allows illiterate and semi-literate Adivasi and non-Adivasi people in Chhattisgarh, to call, record, and upload their voices (i.e., audio files) in local languages; wider audiences can access, read, and share local narratives via the internet, specifically websites and social networks (Mudliar, Donner & Thies, 2013). Voice-based communications have aided Adivasi communities, particularly in the case of languages that lack written scripts or adequate legitimacy in mediated spaces. Other voice-based social media platforms (voice4All) based in Gujarat, such as Avaaj Otalo, enable rural farmers, including Adivasi agriculture workers, to access agriculture and rural-development information and share their opinions via voice messages sent via mobile phones (Patel et. al, 2013).

DOCUMENTARY FILMS

In the global context, indigenous audio-visual media such as third Cinema, video popular, video indigene have used subversive discourses in order to disrupt the hegemonic depictions and (mis)representation. Similarly, in India, the parallel film and art film movements (1942- 1976), as well as contemporary independent films and documentaries, elevated many Adivasi issues to the forefront of mainstream discourse. Many of the films, such as Bastar: Tribes and Tribulations, Hill Kharia Tribe of Orissa, and Chenchus — Children of the Forest, were ethnographic films that documented the lives of Adivasi communities. Some films, such as Festival of Love and Shikar Utsav, were made to document indigenous festivals and culture. Aside from the aforementioned types, a few biographical documentary films, such as Ulgulan-Ek-Kranti, a biography of legendary indigenous leader Birsa Munda, were also produced. Many films have addressed contemporary Adivasi issues such as poverty, insurgency, land rights, and/or violence against indigenous people from the standpoint of activism, particularly to raise consciousness among indigenous as well as exogenous people. For example, the film Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda depicted how the Adivasis of Jharkhand bargained and protested against health hazards caused by mining industry pollution.

INTERNET-BASED MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Most of the Adivasis of India are rural and semi-literate; consequently, they are negotiating with the issue of digital divide. According to research, urban Adivasi youths have greater access to the internet and social media resources than other age groups (Vanneman, Noon, Sen, Desai & Shariff, 2006). Adivasi communities and organisations are increasingly having their own Facebook, Twitter, websites, and YouTube channels; these resources are used to share news and thoughts on Adivasi lives and current issues. For example, Adivasi-Tribal India and Dalit Adivasi Dunia on Facebook discuss general Adivasi issues in India, whereas Santhal Community and We the Banjara are more community-specific. These social media spaces, in addition to sharing festival-related, cultural, educational, and job-related information, promote internet-based activism and legitimise issues concerning basic human rights.

(Mis) REPRESENTATION OF CASTE BASED NARRATIVES IN INDIAN CINEMA

Films and television shows, for example, provide an important lens for investigating the past and have been used to present harsh realities, criticisms, and a wide range of social commentary. Among all artistic mediums, television shows and films offer the most accessible way for people to experience and immerse themselves in specific times, places, and situations outside of their own lives. Film has been used to respond to current political and social trends, as well as to spread cultural ideas and values, since its inception.

The birth of Indian cinema occurred at the same time as the nationalist struggle to end British colonial rule and the end of World War II. At the time, themes such as identity, nation, nationhood, nationalism, and realism were frequently used in pre- and post-independence cinema to portray a monolithic Hindu aesthetic and the state's ideological position as India's cultural identity. Films such as Mother India (1957), Naya Daur (1957), and many Raj Kapoor films, such as Chalia (1960), Awaara (1951), and Shree 420 (1955), have explored the aforementioned themes in various combinations to highlight an individual's relationship with the state.

Popular Hindi cinema creates, disseminates, and naturalises stereotypes based on Hindu caste sensibilities. The ongoing struggle of Dalits against caste oppression, on the other hand, is frequently overlooked in cinematic narratives. The portrayal of Dalit reality is largely melodramatic, which obstructs a thoughtful portrayal of the reality. According to Harish Wankhede, a political scientist, in an interview with The Print, "the experiences of caste discrimination and exclusion have a negligible presence in the narratives of Bollywood cinema." He goes on to say that Hindi films are written, directed, and produced by people with upper caste sensibilities for an upper caste audience. Even the films based on small towns hardly see any Dalit characters.

A 2015 study by 'The Hindu' revealed that Dalits, who comprise of nearly 200 million in India, were non-existent in Hindi cinema. Out of 300 Bollywood movies released in 2013-2014, only six of the lead characters were characters who were visibly from 'Other Backward Classes', and none were Dalits. Marathi and Tamil cinema, on the other hand, have done well in depicting Dalit stories. These regions' specific histories of ardent Dalit movements and activists such as Phule and Periyar have embedded Dalit art and agency in their social fabric. However, resistance to Dalit gaze is much stronger in North India due to a lack of Dalit mobilisation and resistance. Things have progressed to the point where a Dalit filmmaker's seminal Marathi take on caste, 'Sairat' (2016), was remade into a Hindi film, 'Dhadak' (2018), which sanitised caste into a politically correct rich poor conflict. Brahmins and other

allied castes have actively imposed their hegemony on the medium of mainstream cultural expression through Bollywood. These films evoke an imagined utopia that does not speak to the majority of the population by obscuring Dalit narratives.

Caste has been obfuscated in Bollywood by lumping it in with categories such as "the poor," "the common man," and "the hard-working Indian." Films like 'Awara' (1951), 'Deewar' (1975), and 'Zanjeer' (1973) are good examples of how caste can be extrapolated but is rarely overt. Characters' socioeconomic status, physical untidiness, complexion, emotional weakness, submissiveness, or repeated subjugation are some of the traits that may lead the audience to believe they are of "low" birth. Movies like 'Aarakshan' (2011) and 'Chakravyuh' (2012) discuss caste, but only in terms of upper caste political discourses. Issues concerning reservations and upper caste notions of merit are discussed, but the possibility of combating social ills and other criminalities associated with casteism is not explored beyond a certain set of boundaries. Dalit characters exist only to make the upper caste hero look better in films like 'Lagaan' (2001) and 'Swades' (2004), and caste exists only as a semi-fleshed sub-plot in the larger scheme of things. Their caste is only mentioned as a possible explanation for their exclusion from society, derailment, and subjugation. Even when films like 'Masaan' (2015) and 'Manjhi: The Mountain Man' (2015) make an active effort to engage with caste issues, they only provide a limited alternative narrative centred on caste issues such as inter-caste relations, the burden of Dalit identity, and the hope of escaping caste prison. These films focus on Dalit individuals rather than the Dalit community as a whole. There is no sense of Dalit space represented in these films. As a result, there are still reasons to doubt whether caste identity has been accurately represented in mainstream Hindi films.

'Article 15' depicts a world of 'Saviour' and 'Victim,' with the philanthropic Brahmin attempting to help the helpless Dalits. Dalit men are seen tied to a jeep and flogged in the street, followed by a bare-chested man emerging from the sewer. These are a few examples of Dalits being depicted in a pitiful light, but the audience is never allowed to enter the sufferer's subjective world. Although there are many Dalit characters in the film, only three of them have significant dialogue. By removing their voices, these characters are rendered inaudible. Thus, 'Article 15' falls victim to the same caste stereotypes and clichés. Despite its efforts to expose caste privilege and discrimination in contemporary India, there have been concerns raised about the film's Brahmanical gaze and portrayal of the Dalit community.

CONCLUSION

Indian cinema is the apparatus of the Indian state. The state is sometimes the Congress or the BJP, but the ideological bent of a filmmaker determines a film's socio-political viewpoint. I've taken a personal and political interest in researching and filling the gap in caste representation that Indian film theory has so far missed. The mainstream cinema has victimised or exoticized Bahujan characters in order to peddle a distorted identity of secular India. However, it is important to note that Bahujans would never fit into India's popular imagination. If they do, it will be to demonstrate the state's Brahaminical and casteist ideological position. However, the human mind is capable of thinking beyond fundamentalism, as evidenced by Shekhar Kapur's Bandit Queen and PA Ranjith's Kaala, which both express such ruptures of cinematic and sociopolitical agency. Films like these help me re-establish my faith in the institution of art and cinema.

In contrast to Hindi cinema, Marathi and Tamil films have been successful in reclaiming Dalit stories through lived experiences. Dalit filmmakers such as P.A Ranjith and Manjule have not only told their stories, but have also humanised Dalit lives and their complexities. Recognition of the Dalit community, which has previously gone unnoticed in the mainstream, is only possible through the assertion of Dalit identity. In contrast to non-Dalit filmmakers who view them with pity. Most Hindi films feature Dalits in minor roles that are impoverished and helpless and must be rescued by an upper-caste liberator. Only by incorporating members of the minority community into the Bollywood film industry can it be made more inclusive. Stakeholders in Bollywood are primarily urban, upper-class elite who are unable to empathise with the majority of the country's population. There is a need to include Dalit producers, directors, writers, and actors who can bring to the forefront the stories of those who have been "untouched" by the Hindi film industry. Only by being inclusive can Bollywood become a democratic platform for telling stories.

As a result, media and communication play an important role in the country's sociopolitical and economic development. The analysis reveals that media life can be either modern or traditional in terms of communication, but both have an equal impact on the social development of a community by assisting in the discovery of alternative ways of living with dignity. Communication not only helps to raise a family's socioeconomic status, but it also creates demand for goods, aids in increasing literacy rates, and improves living standards, among other things. Evidence and findings indicate that there has been a shift from age-old traditional knowledge and status, as well as the ability to achieve power and prestige, as a result of communication.

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