

Indian Media and Society: A Journalistic approach of Dr B. R Ambedkar for Nation Building

Dr Prakash Chandra Dilare¹ and Dr Manushi²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida

²SRA, Department of Communication Research, IIMC, New Delhi

Abstract: This paper explores the pivotal role of media in Indian society, from its early days as a tool for social reform to its instrumental contribution to the independence movement. The media, in its various forms, has been a vital source of information, education, and entertainment, shaping public opinion and influencing social and political discourse. In the Indian context, the press has played a dual role, serving as a catalyst for social change and a watchdog against injustice. Early social reformers leveraged the press to challenge regressive customs and promote modern education, while nationalist leaders used journalism to mobilize support for the independence movement. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a pioneering social reformer, employed journalism to give voice to the marginalized Dalit community and fight for social justice. This paper examines the historical significance of media in shaping Indian society, its impact on social identity, and its role in promoting social and political reforms. By analyzing the intersection of media, society, and politics, this paper sheds light on the enduring legacy of media in shaping India's past, present, and future.

Keywords: Media & Society, Journalistic, Role of Media, Indian society

INTRODUCTION

The word media has been originated from the Latin plural of the word medium. According to Oxford Concise Dictionary media means “*the main means of mass communication (especially television, radio and newspaper) regarded collectively.*” A Kumar has defined the term media as, “*such tools are used for communicating certain well defined messages to humans having geographical, social, demographic, perceptual and psychological diversities.*” The media are the means or vehicles of mass communication and include TV, radio and the press in a collective sense.

Media permeates every aspect of our lives, from the TV shows we commonly watch to the music we often listen to on the radio to the books, magazines, and newspapers we regularly read. People know about the outside world through media. Without it, people will become alienated from the outside world and local towns and cities, legislators, and governments. It is a well-known reality that communities flourish when knowledge flows freely, and the media facilitates making this possible. Media helps in widening the array of information which ultimately facilitates the people in decision making and opinion building. Word of the mouth is the most powerful and ancient way of information distribution. Today, it is equally relevant and popular tool for the sharing of the information as it was in ancient days. Technology's instantaneous nature has made information exchange quick and easy, opening the door for larger and better media outlets with instant information access and satisfaction. Today we are

living in the information age surrounded by different modern mediums to access and share the information instantly.

Role of Media in Society

Media plays major role in everyone's life in today's society. Media has broader responsibility in the society as an educator, informer, and entertainer. It is also known as “mirror” of the society as it reflects the reality of the society. It is also well-known as the “watchdog” to protect the society from misconducts. Media is also considered as “fourth pillar” of the democracy along with other pillars i.e. parliament, Judiciary and administration. Media ensures the transparency of these three pillars. Media plays important role in implementation of government policies and programs too. There are number of examples available (Polio, HIV AIDs, Corona Virus etc.) where the media has disseminated information to generate awareness among the masses to achieve the goal set by the government. Today, media has emerged as a powerful tool which has complete control over the narration of the events and opinion building of the common people. Media play important role in nation building and development process.

Cotemporary media has made interactions possible beyond time and distance. A person sitting in the remote area can connect to his people through phone and internet without any barrier of time and distance. Traditional media is limited to informing people whereas digital media engage people along with enhanced information sharing. Digital media has created opportunity for the people to make

their own groups based on their shared purposes to take common actions and make their voices heard throughout the world. It has huge impact on social, political, economic and cultural aspects of the people. Media is no doubt offering great service to people and become an integral part of the society.

We are living in the information age where information is everything. Dissemination of the right and unbiased information is the core responsibility of the media. It's the media who serve good content to the people. Basically there is requirement of two things for information flow first one is having good content which people can understand and second one is having good communication infrastructure for better access to the content. When people have better access to good content they get well informed. A well informed citizen can think broad and make better decisions for himself in narrow sense and for nation in broader sense. This way, media is helpful in dissemination of right information for effective communication.

Indian Society in 19th Century

In 1608, the English East India Company (EIC) arrived in Surat as traders, marking the beginning of British rule in India. In the seventeenth century, they built trading posts on India's east and west coasts and established English-speaking settlements in and around Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta, the presidential towns. Eventually, the British colonized India and expanded their control over other spheres of life, including social, politics and the economy. During British India, there were a number of political and social reform movements that sought to enact various social and religious reforms in the country at large. The Hindu reform movement was the most notable of them, with the goal of altering Hindu culture and religion. The Muslim and Sikh reform movements also brought about substantial changes. The socio-religious reform movement was a significant movements that was led by key figures such Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Annie Besant, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, HP Blavatsky, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Sri Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and Pandit Karuppan. Every movement had distinct objectives and tactics that produced various results. These movements had a long-lasting effect on Indian politics and society, paving the way for the country's ultimate independence.

Two of the biggest obstacles facing Indian society in the 19th century were religious superstitions and social obscurantism. Human dignity and values were violated by the social practices like female infanticide, child marriage, sati, polygamy and a rigid caste system were more prevalent. There were many customs characterized by restriction, credulity, rank, power, prejudice, and mindless fatalism. Max Weber in his work *Sociological Study of Indian Religion* (1916) mentioned that "Hinduism had become a compound of magic, animism and suspension". The lower status of women during that period was most distressed aspect of the Indian society as the birth of a girl child was frowned upon due to problem of dowry at the time of her marriage, and if her spouse died before her, it was considered unfortunate for her to become a widow. With these sentiments on one side female infanticide and foeticide were prevalent whereas on side widows would frequently set themselves alive on their husband's funeral pyres—a custom known as *sati*. In the words of renowned Indian social reformer Raja Rammohan, this is "murder according to every religious text." Women of 19th century were discriminated at every stage of her life. Priests had an unhealthy and overbearing impact on the populace. Their monopoly on scripture knowledge and ceremonial interpretation was strengthened by their practices of idolatry and polytheism. Religious ideology had the power to convince people of anything at that time. Priestly class customs included costly offerings, rites, and traditions following death or birth. By this time Indian society had become a dirty, stagnant reservoir as a result of its malpractices and superstitions. Caste was another crippling aspect. It aimed to uphold a ritually-based, hierarchically prescribed structure of segregation. In addition to encouraging social separation and shaping individual initiative, the norms and laws of the caste system impeded social mobility. Intercaste marriage was forbidden and there were rigid caste regulations. In addition, it was forbidden for members of different castes to interact with one another. The people's occupations were determined by caste. Caste organizations were in place to effectively impose social control over individuals by enforcing caste laws. These organizations primary responsibility was to uphold morals and social order as effectively as they could. The Indian caste system serves as foundation for untouchability. Untouchability is the practice of discriminating against different people and groups based on their caste and occupation. Caste in

Hinduism derives from the Varna system which includes four primary varnas Kshatriya, Brahmina, Vaishya, and Shudra . A person's occupation in the past was primarily determined by their caste. Untouchability, a source of humiliation, was detrimental to humanity.

Thus, in 19th century the main social issues that fell within the ambit of the reform movements were casteism and untouchability, education to bring about societal enlightenment, infanticide, child marriage, widow remarriage, and emancipation of women. The main problems in the religious domain were priest exploitation, idolatry, polytheism, and religious superstitions (Chandra, 2020)

Socio-Religious Movements & the Enlightened Leaders

In India's history, the social and religious reform movements of the nineteenth century hold a unique position. Given its reach and diversity, it can be categorized as a struggle movement. During this period religious ostentation and superstitions were common and there was dominance and a state of intellectual bankruptcy across the country. Hinduism was ruled by idolatry and worthless religious rites. In general at that time, Indian society was feudal, with numerous classes, castes, and tribes living there. In the absence of the structured educational system most of the people were illiterate.

Rationality and religious universalism were two important ideas that influenced the reform leaders at that time. A rationalist analysis of socio-religious reality characterized the majority of nineteenth-century reforms. A very logical approach was taken to socio-religious issues by early Brahma reformers and "Young Bengal" followers. The rationalist viewpoint in Brahma Samaj led to the denial of the Vedas' infallibility and in the Aligarh movement, which Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan started, it resulted in the alignment of Islamic teachings with the demands of contemporary society. Even if proponents of social reform cited scripture as their authority, religious considerations did not always drive their actions, such as in the cases of Vidyasagar's widow marriage argument and Rammohan's sati abolitionist argument. Another key nineteenth-century religious doctrine was universalism, or the notion that all religions are essentially the same and that there is only one godhead. Rammohan first viewed Brahma Samaj as a Universalist church and considered all other faiths to be

regional manifestations of universal theism. Nearly the same idea was reiterated by Sayyid Ahmad Khan: every country and nation had its own prophets, but all prophets shared the same deen (religion). This point of view was more clearly expressed by Keshub Chandra Sen, who created the breakaway Brahma organization Nav Bidhan and aimed to bring together the ideas of all major faiths. Nonetheless, rather than providing the basis for the development of a more expansive secular ethos, universalism reverted to religious particularism when faced with the difficulties of colonial culture and ideology.

Raja Rammohan Roy, a renowned scholar, humanist, and nationalist, is referred to as the "father of the Indian Renaissance." Driven by a deep love for his own country, he dedicated his life to promoting the social, religious, intellectual, and political development of the Indian population. Rammohan Roy was the driving force behind the first reform movement in Bengal. He established the Atmiya Sabha in 1814, which served as the model for the Brahma Samaj that he convened in 1829. Roy's prominence in the history of modern India is largely due to his extremely modern thinking and vast social vision. A key player in the sati system's removal, Raja Rammohan Roy also advocated for women's inheritance rights and spoke out against child marriage and the purdah system.

The thoughts of the renowned scholar and reformer **Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar** were a harmonious synthesis of western and Indian philosophy. He had strong moral principles, was a profound humanist, and gave generously to the underprivileged. Laws permitting widow remarriage were enacted in 1856 as a result of Vidyasagar's effort. He also started a movement against polygamy and child marriage. He made a big impact on women's education by opening a number of schools for girls in the districts under his charge. The issues of women's education and widow-remarriage were strongly addressed by **Maharishi Karve**. The king of Baroda state, **Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekward**, fought to protect women's rights to education and remarriage, as well as to stop child marriage and polygyny.

Dayanand Saraswati established the Arya Samaj in 1875 which is a noble Hindu reform movement that is still active in modern India. According to him, all of the wisdom that God had given to humanity was included in the Vedas, and the

foundations of contemporary science could also be found there. He was against the priesthood, ritual, and idolatry; in particular, he was against the conventional caste system and the popular Hinduism that the Brahmins propagated. A network of schools and colleges for boys and girls was established in northern India to promote the spread of education. Self-reliance and self-respect were values that Arya Samaj attempted to instill in the Indian populace. Preventing Hindus from adopting other faiths was another of its main objectives. **Rama Krishna Paramhansa** saw the divinity in people and saw helping others as a path to salvation. Latter on this message was spread by the **Swami Vivekananda** throughout the world who was the student of Rama Krishna Paramhansa. Vivekananda placed a strong emphasis on social services or goods. In 1897, he established the Ramakrishna Mission to coordinate social services during periods of national crisis like as epidemics, floods, and famine.

Another notable social reformer emerged in Maharashtra was **Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade** who has founded the Prarthana Samaj which is similar to the Barahmo Samaj of Bengal with the intention of promoting reforming Hinduism by worship of one God. He advocated against child marriage and the purdah system, criticized the caste system and the supremacy of the Brahmin community, promoted widow remarriage, and placed a strong focus on female education. He founded Widow Remarriage Association, Deccan Education Society and National Social Conference for reforming Hinduism and implementing social changes across the nation.

Jyotiba Phule mobilized a strong opposition against Brahminical supremacy and upper caste dominance. Two of Phule's works that inspired the public a lot were Sarvajanic Satyadharma and Ghulamgin. He sought to abolish socioeconomic inequality and the caste system entirely. He and his wife **Savitribai Phule** devoted their lives to the cause of eliminating untouchability. When discussing the abolition of untouchability, two figures whose names must be included are **Mahatma Gandhi** and **Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar**. Mahatma Gandhi referred to them as "harijans," which means "god's children." They were known as "dalits" by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a term that is still commonly used today. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar started a movement against untouchability and inequality by his writings. According to him, the press would act as the movement's road shower.

Babsaheb appreciated the press's role in educating the public in the social reform movement; in his words, a leader without the press is like a bird without wings.

With the efforts of all these social and religious reformers several legislative measures were proposed at that time with the aim of improving the condition of women. For example, in 1829 the Governor General at the time, Lord Bentinck, made the practice of sati illegal. The widow remarriage act's introduction marked a significant shift in the status of women in society at the time. On July 16, 1856, the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act 1856 made it lawful for Hindu widows to remarry. Intercaste and intercommunal marriages were legalized in 1872 by the Special Marriage Act 1872 which was the first law governing civil marriages in India. Originally, it was an optional law available exclusively to people who did not practice any of the many Indian religion traditions. Its boundaries excluded Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jains, Parsis, Hindus, and Buddhists. Therefore, anyone who belonged to one of these groups and wished to get married under this Act had to give up their faith. The Act's main objective was to to facilitate inter-religious marriages. The Sharda Act, which outlawed child marriage, was passed in 1929. The act forbade marrying a male under the age of eighteen and a girl under the age of fourteen. All the movements strongly denounced the caste system and especially the practice of untouchability.

Dr. Ambedkar as a Journalist

One of the greatest achievements of Dr Ambedkar was his untiring crusade against the hierarchical practice of caste based 'untouchability'. When he started a revolt against this unhealthy system of graded equality prevailing, Indian freedom struggle was going on from so many fronts. Babasaheb joined it but kept the torch for justice to backward classes. Babasaheb challenged the oppressors; he not only challenged them but turned the theory of Manu upside-down before India got freedom. Though Dr. Ambedkar contributed to the world in the fields of History, Economics, Sociology, Philosophy, Psychology, Law etc but in journalism he contributed differently. He has made significant contributions to the journalism field. He edited and founded the publications known as Mooknayak (Leader of the Silent), Prabuddha Bharat (Enlightened India), Samata (Equality), Janata (The People), and Bahishkrit Bharat (Excluded India).

Dr. Mahesh Chandra Guru (1995) observed that, "Babasaheb Ambedkar was terribly frustrated in regard to the monopoly of press. He had diametrically opposed the ownership, control and management of the Indian press by Brahmins, Baniyas and the privileged class of the Indian society. He could not find even a single newspaper, which was committed to abolition of untouchability and emancipation of depressed classes from social injustice, economic inequality and political dominance. He had dreamt of waging a war against everything that came in the way of the emancipation of the depressed classes and their uplift. Thus, he chose to enter the field of journalism which wielded enormous influence on the minds of people." The names he came up with for the publications indicate how unhappy he was with contemporary society. His agony was only partially conveyed by the names of publications, which fell short of capturing his genuine and passionate commitment to the cause of untouchables (Kamble, Rajeev S, 2002).

In 1918 during political reformation, dalit scholar Ambedkar testified before the Southborough Committee on the Government of India Act 1919, where he was advocating for separate electorates and reservations for Dalits and other religious communities. Babasaheb Ambedkar realized the importance of political power and the need for an independent newspaper to create awareness, public opinion in the favor of political rights. He discussed the idea with his associates and Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja of Kolhapur who were impressed by the plan. A Marathi language newspaper called **Mooknayak** (Leader of the Silent) was started in Bombay on January 31, 1920, to educate the voiceless masses. Shahu ji Maharaj promptly donated Rs. 2,500 for the initiative. Babasaheb used this publication to attack politicians he perceived to be orthodox Hindus and the Indian political establishment's seeming indifference to caste discrimination. In the first edition, he emphasized the need for a newspaper to educate the voiceless masses and address ongoing atrocities. Upon scanning through the newspapers of the Bombay province, he saw that the majority of them were biased towards protecting the interests of specific castes and also attempted to distort their competitors. All of the publications were warned by Babasaheb Ambedkar that if any of the castes were to be denigrated, they would face retaliation.

In 1927, he launched his second newspaper, **Bahiskrit Bharat** (Excluded India), which he later

renamed Janata (The People). Following his decision to launch the newspaper, Ambedkar studied Indian social and religious reform movements together with all of Marathi literature. The majority of Marathi literature took him roughly seven months to read. This shows that the nation's socio-religious movements effectively used the press to achieve their objectives. Babasaheb Ambedkar wrote extensively and meticulously edited every issue of Bahiskrit Bharat despite his busy schedule. His articles mostly addressed contemporary issues. He harshly attacked Brahmin periodicals, national leaders like Nehru and Gandhiji, and organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and Brahmin Sabha. Babasaheb Ambedkar was more concerned in educating the readers about the social movement, according to Changdev Khairmode. According to Babasaheb Ambedkar, "Bahiskrit Bharat" signified starting a revolutionary movement among the untouchable masses. The motto for this publication was the message that he had selected from Sant Jnaneshwar and it said that 'by taking brave stand, you will uphold the spirit and prestige of Swadharma'. It stopped publishing in 1929 due to a severe financial shortfall and His keen interest in the rapid political changes taking place in the county. Also he got busy in attending "Sahabhojan" personally where members of the untouchable and touchable castes regularly dined together.

Samaj Samata Sangh was formed by B V Pradhan, D V Naik, and R D Dalavi on 4th September 1928. A large number of Samata members actively participated in the movement that Babasaheb Ambedkar initiated, and they genuinely dedicated themselves to the cause of the untouchables. A weekly newspaper called **Samata** (The Equality) was launched on behalf of Samaj Samata Sangh. On behalf of Bahiskrit Bharat, Babasaheb Ambedkar backed Samata. On December 7, 1928, he wrote articles in Bahiskrit Bharat supporting Samata and arguing that these two journals were the same. Later, Samata replaced the original title of Bahiskrit Bharat. The goal of this newspaper was to promote equality in society.

The fall of Bahiskrit Bharat deeply saddened Babasaheb Ambedkar. He decided to launch a new publication and within a year he launched **Janata** (The People) a monthly newspaper from Mumbai, on November 24, 1930 published and managed by B. R. Kadrekar, with Mr. D V Naik serving as its editor. Bahiskrit Bharat was renamed Janata by Babasaheb Ambedkar because the previous name

was stopping readers from purchasing the publication. He wrote several insightful letters and articles for this publication. The Janata also published a thorough summary of his speeches. Along with covering news on social and political concerns, the Janata made an effort to speak to the general public on their level.

On February 4, 1956, Janata was renamed as **Prabuddha Bharat**. Even after Babasaheb Ambedkar passed away, this publication continued to be published. An historical conversion event was covered by Prabuddha Bharat. Ambedkar believed that the press would be an effective instrument. Thus, he practiced journalism throughout his life and was successful in drawing public attention to the terrible circumstances of the oppressed classes to which he belonged.

CONCLUSION

Media, originating from the Latin plural of the word medium, refers to the key means of mass communication, including television, radio, and newspapers. It is everywhere in our lives, giving us information, helping us make decisions, and forming our opinions. Although word-of-mouth communication is an age-old technique, instantaneous technology has facilitated quick and simple information dissemination. We now live in an information age when sharing and fast access to information is possible through a variety of contemporary media. As a source of information, entertainment, and education as well as a mirror of society's reality and a watchdog against wrongdoing, the media plays a vital role in society. It is regarded as the fourth pillar of democracy, guaranteeing openness in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Government policies and initiatives, including those pertaining to the corona virus, HIV/AIDS, and polio, have been greatly aided by the media. Modern media has made it possible for people to communicate across time and space, forming communities around common interests and giving voice to their thoughts. Aspects of society, politics, economy, and culture are all greatly influenced by media.

The great concern of the 19th century social reformers in India first reflected in the efforts directed against certain social customs detrimental to the women's equality and, later, they tried to educate and bring the women to public stage. The Indian press born in Calcutta launched social reforms movement from its citadel, Bombay. All the reformers used the press as a tool for social awakening. On the one hand, through their

newspapers and journals they appealed the countrymen to free themselves from the incubus of obscurantist traditions; to discard the rigidities of caste and to equip themselves with modern knowledge and to cultivate thrift and industry and, on the other hand, they kept demanding on the authorities for schools for imparting modern education; curbing the haughty behaviour of the whites; improvement of conservancy services in Calcutta and making available the services of European physicians' services to the Indians. In the latter period the dual role of social self-criticism and political mobilization became the feature of a large section of the nationalist press.

All the leading intellectuals of western India were, at one time or another in their life, used journalism as the most convenient medium. They could gather the countrywide political consciousness and national movement expressed through the patriotic songs and plays, the press and the growing students associations and societies. During the movements the Indians united together as never before in history and even compelled the Government to take several legislative measures for social and political reforms. In the midst of the successes of the press and social reforms there had been occasions when their orthodox and progressive elements collided here and there. But on the whole they contributed a lot of historic value to bring changes in Indian society and polity.

India's press history is intertwined with the nation's liberation movement. Newspapers played an important role in building a nation and inspiring people to join the independence cause. Forming a social identity is greatly influenced by the media. Journalism was a common tool utilized by national leaders to inform the public about their news, opinions, and goals to mobilize support for the independence movement against the British government. Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar has also used journalism to spread his thoughts, giving Dalits and other oppressed groups a voice, and to make the public aware, educated, organized and agitated against the British government. For Ambedkar journalism was mission. He used it to fight for the downtrodden people. Ambedkar is consistently referred to be the Dalit leader and nothing else. Ambedkar believed that the Indian media marginalized his points of view. The Indian media has paid less attention to Ambedkar since his fight for social justice began. In his writings, Ambedkar made remarks regarding the media. He noticed that the media did not have enough representation of the underprivileged. He revealed

that the publications were stifling the opinions of both himself and his fellow citizens. Ambedkar claimed that the lack of oppressed people in the media was one of the causes of the media's conspiracy theories regarding the oppressed people. He understood that the ownership phenomenon influences the news in a significant way. Ambedkar understood well that media ownership is a crucial factor in defining the objectives, politics, principles, and philosophy of a newspaper. Having taken the circumstances of that period into mind, Dr. Ambedkar moved into the journalistic field. He edited five publications throughout his life. Dr. Ambedkar raised awareness among the Scheduled classes and other socially marginalized classes through these news periodicals. He consistently penned essays about the issues facing the Dalit community. He penned the editorial page for Bahishkrit Bharat himself. His primary goal as a social reformer was to abolish the Manuvad-Brahmanic caste system.

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