

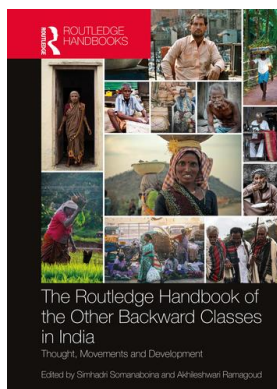
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 26 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of the Other Backward Classes in India

Thought, Movements and Development

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Media in India

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003152873-31>

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Published online on: 16 Nov 2021

How to cite :- P. L. Vishweshwer Rao. 16 Nov 2021, *Media in India from: The Routledge Handbook of the Other Backward Classes in India, Thought, Movements and Development* Routledge

Accessed on: 26 Mar 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003152873-31>

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MEDIA IN INDIA

Free to exclude?

P. L. Vishweshwer Rao

Introduction

The Indian media are among the most respected institutions in the country, with an illustrious history of being at the vanguard of the freedom struggle. In the post-independence years, it had its days of glory as a friend of the people and as a crusader against corruption. It also has a brief ten-month long period of shame during the Emergency when it caved in to the pressures of an authoritarian government and acquiesced to pre-censorship and even self-censorship.

In recent times, the media have been under severe criticism for abandoning their role as a watchdog and for selling their soul through paid news, private treaties, turning into a puppet in the hands of the government in power and so on. However, such criticism seems to have had not much of an effect on the astounding growth of the media, especially the print media whose doomsday has been spelled out in the Western developed societies. Evidently, it has a bright future in the developing societies where illiteracy is widespread. The print media certainly will continue to grow, especially in India as literacy grows and the overall economic status of the people improves.

India, world's largest consumer of newspapers

According to the World Association of Newspapers, India is the world's largest consumer of newspapers with over 92,222 newspapers with a circulation of over 100 million copies daily. With Indian print media accounting for 45 percent of total advertising spend, the reach of the print media is not only broad but also powerful in its impact. For the past decade, India's newspaper industry has bucked the trend across the West of declining readership. According to the Indian Readership Survey (IRS), the overall readership of newspapers had grown from 407 million readers in 2017 to 425 million readers at the end of the first quarter of 2019. However, for the next three quarters, the readership has seen a small but consistent decline in readership. Across India, 36 percent of the respondents read a newspaper in the last month (down from 38 percent in Q3). In urban areas the number stood at 50 percent (down from 51), while in rural areas the number was 29 percent (down from 30). The story was similar for magazines too (Campaign India 2019).

A change that has been wrought due to increasing literacy (from 12 percent in 1947 to 74 percent in 2018) and improving lifestyles is the increasing impact and power of the regional-language newspapers which have displaced English-language newspapers from their *numero uno* position, both in terms of circulation and business. Among the top ten largest circulated daily newspapers, only one is in English, namely the *Times of India*. Others are published in Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil and Marathi whose circulation ranges from 6 to 16 crores. As for readership, the *Times of India* had the highest average readership among English newspapers in 2017. Among the regional language newspapers, *Dainik Jagran* (Hindi) is at the top in the country. The other regional publications with high readership included *Malayala Manorama* (Malayalam), *Daily Thanthi* (Tamil), *Eenadu* (Telugu) and *Lokmat* (Marathi). (Keelery 2020)

Media, a conservative stronghold

The media are among the most conservative institutions in the country in terms of its ownership and the social profile of the journalists it employs. For about 240 years now, since the first newspaper was published in India by an Englishman in 1780, the media have remained elite institutions, owned, controlled and run by the so-called upper castes or the historically privileged people, serving their own interests, covering their own concerns and zealously protecting their position of power and privilege to this day. With very few exceptions, the entire media, both print and electronic, are owned by individuals and business groups that belong to the privileged castes. The Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and other traditionally oppressed groups have not yet gained enough financial muscle or developed enough vested interests to own media. The basic criterion of starting and sustaining media is financial strength which traditionally has been vested with the upper castes and continues to be so. One of the exceptions to this rule is the much-respected Bangalore-based Deccan Herald Group of Karnataka that was started by an OBC businessman five decades ago and has remained among the leading media houses of Karnataka, publishing newspapers and magazines in English and Kannada.

Babasaheb B. R. Ambedkar summed up the situation of the press and its relations with the privileged castes. As he said,

The Congress Press is close to them and is determined not to give the (Untouchables) the slightest publicity. The (Untouchables) cannot have their own Press and for obvious reasons ... The staff of the Associated Press in India, which is the main news distributing Agency in India, is entirely drawn from Madras Brahmins; indeed, the whole of the Press in India is in their hands and they, for well-known reasons, are entirely pro-Congress and will not allow any news hostile to the Congress to get publicity.

(Ambedkar 1945)

According to political scientist Robin Jeffrey, who has carried out a survey of the Indian Press,

The fact that no Dalit men or women worked in editorial jobs on Indian language dailies meant that aspects of the life of Dalits were neglected. And the fact that no sizeable daily in India was owned or edited by Dalits meant that stories about them were unlikely to receive the constant, sympathetic coverage of stories like those, for example, the urban consuming middle-class.

(Jeffery 2003)

Therefore, the finding of Robin Jeffrey is not surprising:

In more than 10 years studying Indian language newspapers, including 20 weeks of travel in which I stayed in 20 towns, visited dozens of newspapers and interviewed more than 250 people, I did not—so far as I know—meet a Dalit journalist working for a mainstream publication, much less a Dalit editor or proprietor.

(Jeffery 2003)

Where periodicals for the Dalits existed, they were fringe publications, often with a literacy emphasis and with limited influence beyond the circle that produced them. “The most senior Dalit journalist I met in more than ten years of studying Indian newspapers had never worked for a commercially-run daily,” says Robin Jeffrey (Jeffery 2003).

According to some surveys there are not even 50 Dalit journalists in India; all are employed in regional language press; almost nobody handles the political beat, and no Dalit journalist works for an English-language paper. Discrimination against the under-privileged caste journalists, where they are found, manifests itself in the form of marginalization in terms of beats allotted, the work given and in terms of issues like giving bylines and so on. Backward-caste journalists say they are marginalized not only inside the newsroom, where upper caste journalists may form a closely knit community but also in places like press clubs which are social spaces specifically meant for journalists.

Three-fourths of Indian citizens are invisible in the media

Yet another characteristic of Indian media is that it is dominated by men belonging to upper castes and upper classes. If OBCs, women and Muslims are poorly represented among journalists, Dalits and Adivasis are almost non-existent. Thus, almost three-fourths of the country's people are invisible in the media, having no say in their own affairs. When the people are invisible, naturally their voice too will go unheard, meaning that these citizens of the country are nonexistent for the media. Whether it was the Newspaper Revolution of the 1990s or the TV Revolution of the present day in India, they have all bypassed the suppressed people of India, the OBCs, the marginalized sections and the Muslims. The media ignore 80 percent of the population and yet it claims that it speaks for the entire country. This argument does not hold water.

The fact of the matter is that the media are merely a mirror reflection of the society, faithfully reflecting all the age-old biases and prejudices that have affected Indian society for hundreds of years. It ignores, plays down and even suppresses issues of the downtrodden people. It ridicules when it cannot ignore them, like during the anti-reservation agitation of recent times, and opposes policies that try to bring about a modicum of fairness and justice to the traditionally oppressed people belonging to the “lower” castes. The media reacted with outrage to the “Mandalization” of the country and blatantly threw its collective strength behind the anti-reservationists, giving a go-by to the well-known principle of objectivity that gives the profession of journalism credibility.

The managements of the media organizations and the editorial teams that work under them have, in reality, been reproducing the social prejudice in the content of the media for more than seven decades since the country's independence and the egalitarian values and policies as state policy as envisaged by the constitution. While the constitution abolished the Varna or caste-based discrimination, it also directed the state to accomplish the twin tasks of democratizing its own institutions by giving due representation to marginalized people, and to democratize Indian society.

Running a media organization that publishes a newspaper, magazine or a TV news channel or an FM radio station, is not like owning any industry. Since the press is regarded as one of the

pillars of democracy, it plays a significant role in shaping the opinion of the people, influencing the policies of the government and keeping a watch over the government and society in general, pointing out the negative trends and supporting the positive trends. The demand for representation of marginalized people in the media is not merely a plea for jobs but a demand for the implementation of democracy, on the lines of representation in the legislative bodies and Panchayati Raj institutions. It is a step towards ensuring social justice which is an integral part of the constitutional responsibility of the state and also of the media that is supposed to expose the injustices in the society with the aim of initiating change that makes a society just and equal. Yet, as the following pages reveal, Indian media have chosen to ignore the many ills of society that affect three-fourths of its people.

Exclusion in Indian media

The major characteristics of Indian media are the following:

1. It is monopolistic in the sense that a handful of individuals/entities own and control the entire media.
2. Diversity of opinion across different forms of media is lacking since a handful of individuals/entities own newspapers, magazines, FM radio channels and TV channels.
3. It lacks social diversity in its ranks in terms of the people it employs.
4. Both the management and the news departments are monopolized by the traditionally privileged caste groups.
5. Hindu upper-caste men dominate as decision-makers.
6. Gender bias is all-pervasive with women journalists constituting a small minority.
7. Caste-wise, upper castes are predominant, led by Brahmins, both in the newsrooms and as decision-makers in media organizations.
8. OBCs are negligible in terms of representation as journalists and even lesser as decision-makers in newsrooms.
9. Muslims are nearly absent in the newsrooms.
10. Only Christians are proportionately represented.
11. The representation of Dalits in the Indian media is very marginal.
12. The Adivasi representation is almost nonexistent in the Indian media.

If in the regional-language media the news departments are overwhelmingly “upper” caste and male-dominated with a stark absence of OBC, Dalit and women journalists, the situation is worse in the English-language media in this aspect, with near-absence of OBC and Dalit journalists on the rolls of the media organization. If getting entry to the media organization is difficult with the owner-editors being “upper” caste, surviving in the editorial rooms of the newspapers/TV channels is a challenge for OBC and Dalit journalists since almost all decision-makers and colleagues are also “upper”-caste individuals.

Democracy should facilitate equal opportunities to all irrespective of gender, region, caste and religion. But, in India where caste plays a predominant role, every opportunity is available based on caste only. With as much as 80 percent of the population discriminated against and deprived because of their caste affiliation, the media which should be concerned at this social injustice have made no efforts toward diversity in their own organizations, especially in the News/Editorial Department. The media have also not set up any mechanism to ensure inclusiveness in the media. The Indian media have covered issues of the marginalized people superficially or have maintained a studied silence on these issues. It is only after the commend-

able efforts of a few researchers to research the Indian media's caste profile that a debate on the discrimination against the caste-unprivileged people has been initiated.

Historically speaking, daily journalism gained momentum in India with the beginning of the 20th century. The earlier newspapers confined themselves mostly to social, economic or educational matters. The stance of the newspapers changed considerably as they began to take a critical stand on political issues with the freedom movement gaining momentum. The newspapers, especially Indian-language papers, were actively involved in mobilizing opinion and support for the freedom movement. They also supported social reform but even then, most newspapers, owned and edited and manned exclusively by upper castes, refused to speak about the oppressed people. This convinced B. R. Ambedkar that the so-called untouchable people needed a platform to voice their issues. Over time, he started as many as four newspapers that reflected his ideology and his struggles. Ambedkar strongly believed that newspapers could bring about a positive change in the lives of the oppressed people. He published three publications, all in Marathi. They were *Mook Nayak* (Leader of the Voiceless, a weekly newspaper), *Bahishkerit Bharat* (Excluded India, a fortnightly newspaper) and *Janata* (The People, a weekly magazine). Ambedkar started propagating a different vision of nationhood for his people through his publications which stressed the difference between his people's nation and that of 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 (Ratnamala 2012).

The social and caste composition of newsrooms in newspapers, magazines and digital platforms

In order to understand the coverage of caste issues in the newspapers in the Indian media, especially the print media, it is important to study the caste composition of the journalists manning the newsrooms of the media. The first major effort to address this issue was that of Delhi-based journalist B. N. Uniyal (1996) and of researcher Robin Jeffrey (2003) who documented the absence of Dalits in the Indian-language print media. While Uniyal and Jeffrey focus on the absolute exclusion of Dalits, they do not throw much light on the predominant exclusion of other unprivileged caste people, the OBCs and Muslims. In the recent past, a few efforts have been made to examine the caste composition of the media houses, with a focus on newsrooms. As a few OBC and Dalit journalists, both men and women, managed to enter the profession, some among them went public with their experiences in the casteist newsrooms. These are discussed here.

The 2019 study by Oxfam India and Newslaundry, a news website, has brought out the clear skewed representation of various people in the news media with upper castes dominating both in numbers and positions of power held in the media organizations. The report shows that vast sections of India's marginalized caste groups do not have access to the media platforms and discourses and they cannot contribute to shaping of public opinion. They are invisibilized despite constituting 80 percent of the country's population (Oxfam India 2019).

Of the 121 newsroom leadership positions—editor-in-chief, managing editor, executive editor, bureau chief, input/output editor—across the newspapers, TV news channels, news websites, and magazines under study, 106 (87.6 percent) are occupied by journalists from the upper castes, and none by those belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs). Other highlights of the study's findings are given below:

- Three out of every four anchors of flagship debates, that is 75 percent, are upper caste. Not one is Dalit, Adivasi, or OBC.

- For over 70 percent of their flagship debate shows, news channels draw the majority of the panelists from the upper castes.
- No more than 5 percent of all articles in English newspapers are written by Dalits and Adivasis. Hindi newspapers fare slightly better at around 10 percent.
- Over half of those writing on issues related to caste in Hindi and English newspapers are upper caste.
- Around 72 percent of bylined articles on news websites are written by people from the upper castes.
- Only 10 of the 972 articles featuring on the cover pages of the 12 magazines under study, or a mere 1 percent, are about issues related to caste (*Who Tells Our Stories Matters* 2019, 6).

Tejas Harad (2020) conducted a survey in his quest to find castes in newsrooms of English newspapers. He found a small number of Dalit/Bahujan journalists including women. Their experiences were anything but encouraging. The stereotyping that goes with caste identity was rampant, and hardly camouflaged; exclusion was not very subtle; and discrimination was overt. Reporters' stories were held over, or they were given assignments that required long distances. One Dalit even reported that he was never given a press release to his hand by his supervisor, a high-caste man. He just dropped them on the desk, evidently not willing to touch him or perhaps even to show his disdain. The problems listed by the respondents included experiencing backlash if they performed well or even mildly asserted themselves in the form of discarding their story ideas; they are attributed affiliation to political parties based on their caste, get overloaded with work compared with others, they are "given" stories while others asked for their interest, and not included in discussions over story ideas.

Half the respondents said they did not know a single other Bahujan journalist despite the fact that Bahujans make up close to 80 percent of India's population. While the mere presence of Bahujan journalists in the newsrooms may not change policies or the type of news covered, certainly there is strength in numbers. The minuscule number of Bahujan journalists who are part of the news industry will not be able to challenge the cultural bias and caste discrimination they face at their workplaces (Harad 2020).

The paper concludes that it is time to implement reservation in the newsrooms because India's English media newsrooms remain urban-centric, upper class, upper caste and ignorant to the realities of vast swathes of Indian masses. Market, modernity and merit have not been enough to fight the dominance of the upper castes in the newsrooms. "If the will for change is not there, it seems only a measure like reservations will dent the domination of upper castes in India's newsrooms," concludes the report.

The Indian press until recently was considered one of the best in the democracies of the world. Yet it failed to act on the several reports of lack of diversity in the Indian newsrooms and lack of space of the most vulnerable of people, namely Dalits both in the newsrooms and news pages. Despite the fact that the American experiment by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) was successful in improving the diversity in the American newspapers. The ASNE website outlines its belief that ethnic, social and gender-based diversity are essential for impartial and unbiased coverage of communities. Therefore, the ASNE conducts annual censuses of Hispanics, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and women in the newsrooms of major media houses and establishes three-year benchmarks for measuring progress. Thus far the American model has shown some progress: At the time of its inception in 1978, the percentage of representation of minorities in the media in the US stood at 4 percent. Twenty years later in 1998, the proportion had risen to 11.5 percent. Models like the ASNE could well be replicated in India but no media organization has taken any initiative in this direction nor has any regulatory authority like

the Press Council of India and Editors Guild of India. Aman Sethi quotes B. R. Ambedkar to reveal the double standards of those in public life to summarize the attitude of the newspaper owners.

It is usual to hear all those who feel moved by the deplorable condition of the Untouchables unburden themselves by uttering the cry, “We must do something for the Untouchables.” One seldom hears any of the persons interested in the problem saying, “Let us do something to change the Touchable Hindu.”

(Sethi 2007)

“National” media: Upper caste, majoritarian, male-dominated

The only major study on the social profile of key decision-makers in national media compared to the population share until the Oxfam India study report was released in 2019 was authored by Yogendra Yadav of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (Yadav 2006). It surveyed 315 key decision-makers from 37 “national” media organizations in June 2006. The survey findings revealed an imbalanced social profile in the upper echelons of the Indian media, with the overwhelming representation of the “upper” castes in positions of power in the media while the “lower” castes were negligible. Its major findings were:

- India’s “national” media lacked social diversity: It did not reflect the country’s social profile.
- Hindu upper-caste men dominated the media, with their share in the positions of power in national media being as high as 71 percent.
- The media’s caste profile is equally unrepresentative. “Twice born” Hindus (dwijas comprising Brahmins, Kayasthas, Rajputs, Vaishyas and Khatri) comprise about 16 percent of India’s population but they are about 86 percent of the key media decision-makers in this survey. Brahmins (including Bhumihars and Tyagis) alone constitute 49 percent of the key media personnel.
- Dalits and Adivasis are totally absent among the decision-makers. Not even one of the 315 key decision-makers belonged to the SCs or the STs.
- Similarly, the proportion of OBCs is abysmally low, being a mere 4 percent compared to their population of around 40 percent in the country.
- Muslims too are similarly under-represented in the media, their share being 3 percent compared to their population comprising 13.4 percent of the country’s population.
- Christians are far better represented in the media (mainly in the English-language media) than other minorities, their share being about 4 percent in the media as against their population share of 2.3 percent.
- Social groups such as women who suffer the “double disadvantage” of gender and caste, are also nearly absent among the key decision-makers: While there was not a single woman among the few OBC decision-makers, the number of women from the Muslims and Christians was negligible. Of late, women are seen more prominently but almost all of them belong to upper castes. A Dalit woman journalist is nonexistent, both in Indian-language and English-language media while OBC women journalists are found in minimal numbers, mostly in the regional media.

Dalit journalists in national media

One of the pioneering efforts to study the absence of Dalits from the media was done by B. N. Uniyal who studied the list of journalists accredited to the Press Information Bureau of the

Government of India, in New Delhi to check its caste composition (Uniyal 1996). The list of 686 journalists had 454 of them (66 percent) using their caste as the surname as is a practice among most of the upper-caste communities. The rest used no surname. Out of the 454 accredited journalists who used a surname, two-thirds belonged to the “upper castes.” A breakdown of the upper-caste journalists showed that a little more than half were Brahmins (240), while other upper castes comprised 35 percent. While there were 26 Muslims and 19 Christians, there was no Dalit. In Jeffrey’s study too, he did not find a single Dalit journalist in the Indian-language press. While the Brahmin community whose population is just a little over 3 percent of the Indian population, has monopolized the print media, the other marginalized communities like the Dalits who constitute 16.6 percent of the Indian population (according to the 2011 census) go virtually unrepresented. Interestingly, the percentage of Brahmin journalists is higher in Brahmin-owned establishments such as *The Hindu*, and of Nadars in Nadar-owned newspapers such as the *Dinathanthi* and *Dinakaran* in the Tamil language.

Ownership of big media houses: “Upper” castes dominant

An analysis of the ownership of various media houses and groups shows that out of the four most important English-language dailies, three are owned by Vaishyas and one by a Brahmin. The Times of India Group (Bennett, Coleman and Co. Ltd), the largest mass media company in India, whose holdings include *The Times of India* and the 24-hour news channel Times Now, is owned by the Jain family who are Banias. The *Hindustan Times* is owned by the Bhartias, who are Marwari Bania, and *The Indian Express* is owned by the Goenkas, also Marwari Bania; and *The Hindu* is owned by a Brahmin family.

Among the Indian-language media, *Dainik Jagran*, a Hindi daily newspaper which is the largest selling newspaper in India with a circulation of 55 million, is owned by the Gupta family, Bania from Kanpur. *Dainik Bhaskar*, which is among the most influential Hindi dailies with a circulation of 17.5 million, is owned by the Agarwals, who are also Banias. Reliance Industries Ltd, owned by Mukesh Ambani, a Gujarati Bania, has controlling shares in 27 major national and regional TV channels. The Zee Network, one of the largest national TV news and entertainment networks, is owned by Subhash Chandra, also a Bania.

In southern India, caste manifests itself in a slightly different way but nevertheless it excludes, discriminates and ignores the existence of the marginalized people. For example, the Eenadu Group which owns newspapers, the largest film city in the world and dozens of TV channels, among other businesses—is headed by Ramoji Rao of the Kamma caste which is a peasant caste of Andhra Pradesh. This media house bucks the tradition of Brahmin–Bania ownership of big media. The Kamma caste has emerged as a powerful force, politically and economically, in post-independence India. Earlier, it was an agricultural/peasant caste owning rich fertile lands in the Krishna delta areas of the coastal Andhra region. It invested the surplus generated by agriculture in real estate in Hyderabad, the Telugu film industry in Madras (now Chennai) and over the past four decades has emerged as a politically powerful force too, with the launch of the Telugu Desam Party by well-known film actor N. T. Rama Rao, also a Kamma. Over the years of its dominance, the Kamma caste has transitioned to being considered “upper caste,” especially in the public perception (Balasubrahmanyam 2004).

Another major media house in Tamil Nadu, the Sun TV Group, launched by Kalanithi Maran, is one of the biggest in the country. The Marans are designated as a backward caste, but Kalanithi Maran has emerged as the “undisputed leader” of regional media (Financial Express 2010). The Group owns 33 TV channels in four south Indian languages while the Sun TV Network Ltd is the largest TV network in Asia. The Group also owns 48 FM radio stations

across India while its Sun Direct is the fourth largest direct-to-home service provider in India. It also owns two Tamil-language newspapers and five magazines. According to the Broadcast Audience Research Council India, Sun TV is the leading channel across genres on an all-India basis (Indian Television 2020).

Media and social exclusion

The Constitution of India lays down that India is a welfare state which shall be committed to the welfare and development of the entire people including those who have been socially excluded for centuries. The constitution envisaged equality of all citizens through provisions of protective discrimination and focused on the disadvantaged people through educational and economic upliftment programs that would pave the way for effective social inclusion and development of marginalized peoples. Yet in the face of facts that poverty, illiteracy and disease afflict a majority of the citizens we cannot but conclude that the successive governments since independence failed the people. The development programs worked inefficiently and failed to deliver minimum quality of life to most people especially those who have traditionally been “othered” by Indian society.

The three pillars of a democratic state namely, the legislature, the judiciary and the executive have failed to ensure that the poor and the marginalized people got their due and rights promised by the constitution. The Fourth Estate *viz.*, the media, which are considered the fourth pillar of democracy have also failed in speaking on behalf of deprived and wronged people. With few exceptions, the media failed to focus attention of the government and decision-makers on the issues facing the people as it was busy catering to the urban-based middle class and concerned itself with only its readers and viewers. In the past few years, since the BJP has come to power at the center, the media, TV to a larger extent than newspapers, have become a tool to fulfill the agenda of the ruling party. Apart from this aspect, the media have been remiss in ensuring equal opportunity, equal representation to the marginalized people both in terms of coverage and in employing them in their organizations.

The marginalized people have been left out of the communication process. Most of the communication in India has been restricted to the elite and the upper-caste people who monopolized every field of communication. The fact that the marginalized people figure literally nowhere in the media in terms of representation and as decision-makers, reflects the true face of India's casteist society which is mirrored by the national media.

Biased coverage of marginalized people

The media have not only been the monopoly of the traditionally privileged people in terms of ownership of media organizations and employment in the media, but in terms of the coverage in the media of issues of the marginalized people it is either minimal or biased. For instance, if television and newspaper coverage of the anti-reservation agitation was indulgent and one-sided supporting the anti-reservationists, the lack of diversity in the editorial departments or newsrooms is one of the major culprits. In an ideal world where professionalism is paramount, the caste or religious affiliation of a journalist should not matter. But journalism that has little or no space for the majority of citizens is bound to end up missing out on the complexity of the society it seeks to cover. Story ideas will not be taken up, or if taken up, then they will be covered only from a particular perspective.

To be sure, many of the negative trends so evident in Indian journalism—the shrinkage of space, the lack of coverage of rural India or of the problems of poor Indians, the episodic, frenetic

nature of news, the preoccupation with trivia and sensationalism, will not be solved by newspapers and television channels hiring more journalists belonging to the marginalized sections, OBCs, women and Muslims. But greater workplace diversity will certainly infuse a greater degree of vitality in the newsroom as wider varieties of lived experience intrude upon and clash with the largely urban, rich, forward-caste Hindu certitudes of the overwhelming majority of journalists.

Nature of discrimination in news coverage

To understand the nature of discrimination in the coverage of issues relating to marginalized people, the experience of Siddarth Varadarajan, a leading journalist and former editor of *The Hindu*, one of the most respected English-language newspapers in India, is worth quoting in full to understand how caste matters in the Indian media. The following is an excerpt from his narration in *The Hindu*, of June 3, 2006:

My first brush with caste prejudice in higher education came in 1999, when a group of Dalit students from the University College of Medical Science (UCMS) came to see me at my office in another English newspaper where I worked at the time as an editorial writer. The students were residents of the hostel and had silently borne the brunt of casteist abuse and discrimination for some time. Whether by happenstance or design, the Scheduled Caste students were confined to two floors and not assigned rooms elsewhere in the building. In the dining hall, they were forced by the forward caste majority to sit together at one end. If a Dalit student sat somewhere else, he would be abused. “Bloody shaddu,” one of them was told when he sat amidst others, “You cannot eat with us.”

“The Dalits put up with this harassment and humiliation because, as one of their parents told them, “you have to become a doctor at any cost.” But the abuse eventually turned to violence and when one of the students was badly beaten and another had his room ransacked, they decided to go on a dharna.

This is also when they ended up in my office. After hearing them out, I requested the head of the Metro section to send someone to UCMS to cover the dharna. The head of the section promised a reporter would be sent soon. Several days went by but nothing appeared. It turned out no reporter was assigned. I tried again, this time going one notch higher in the editorial chain-of-command. Again there was no response. Eventually, I decided to do the story myself. I spent half-a-day at the college, interviewed the college authorities, the students on dharna as well as the general category students. One of them admitted reluctantly to using the slur “shaddu” for the Scheduled Caste students but only as a “pet name.”

I filed the story but it did not appear the next day or the day after. Nobody ever said the story was not interesting or not up to scratch but for some reason space could never be found. The story finally appeared, in a cut and mutilated form, a full month after the Dalit students began their dharna. Needless to say, the travails of the Dalit students at UCMS were not considered newsworthy enough by other newspapers or by any of the news channels.

(Varadarajan 2006)

Telugu news media: The beginnings and growth

The Telugu press has its beginnings during colonial rule in what is Andhra Pradesh today, this region was part of the British Madras Presidency. Therefore, it was started in Madras around 1830,

and established in the delta region of Andhra. Towns like Rajahmundry, Kakinada, Bezawada, Machilipatnam, Amalapuram, Narsapuram and Tenali emerged as centers of the Telugu press. The first publications in Telugu were due to the effort of the Christian Church and the initiative of the English-educated upper castes as only these people had the privilege of being educated. The social reform movement influenced the Telugu press to a large extent (Press Institute of India 1995).

The journal named *Vrutthantini* (1838–42) published from Madras is considered as the first Telugu journal. It was followed by *Vaaritha Tarangini* (1842), *Tatvabodhini* (1863), *Hitabodhini* (1864), *Sujanaranjani* (1872), *Andhra Bhasha sanjeevani* (1871), *Purushardha Pradhayini* (1872), Veeresalingam's *Vivekavardhini* (1874), *Andhra Patrika* (1885), *Satya Samvardhini* (1891), *Sasirekha* (1894), *Desabhimani* (1896) and so on (Ahuja 1998). Though these journals grew due to the influence of modernist and social reformism they did not overcome the Brahminical Hindu ideology. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Shudra communities became caste conscious and started caste organizations for the welfare of each of their respective communities. Against this backdrop, Anjaneya Chowdary published the magazine named *Chowdary* from Eluru for the Kamma caste and Venkanna published the magazine *Setti Balija* from Amalapuram for the Setti Balija caste. Several more were to follow this trend (Press Institute of India 1995).

The non-Brahmin movement which came in response to Brahmin dominance in education and employment was confined to peasant communities such as the Kamma and Reddy. It failed to take into its fold the suppressed castes. The early movements of assertion of the suppressed people came in the form of *Adi Andhra* and *Adi Hindu* movement by claiming that they were the sons of the soil.

Post-independence India saw a gradual change in the attitude and ideology of the Telugu-language press. The reformist and the religious focus of the press gave way to politics, and especially the interests of the ruling class. In the late 1950s, the prominent Telugu dailies *Andhra Patrika* and *Andhra Prabha* supported the ruling Congress and practiced what has come to be known as manufacturing consent by specifically targeting the alternative politics of the communists. The targets were the well-known writer-poet Sri-Sri and the collective of progressive writers, the Abhyudaya Rachayitula Sangham. The press maintained that writers and their literature should not be guided by politics. The opponents of the progressive school of thought banded together as Sahiti Mitralu in Vijayawada and brought out a book *Donga Dadi* which reflected ideology propagated by the media in favor of the ruling class. It is worth noting here that the Telugu press then was dominated, as elsewhere in the regional language media, by Brahmins both as editors and owners.

Telugu press in modern times

However, in the post-independence era, following the creation of a new Telugu state, Andhra Pradesh in 1956, a new set of people loosened the traditional hold of the Brahmins on the press. The beneficiaries of modernization such as the former feudals and upper Shudra caste like the Kamma, who used the surplus from agriculture and invested in agri-based industries, land and the entertainment industry of cinema. Their runaway success encouraged them to grab their share of political power that had been the monopoly of another upper Shudra caste, the Reddys who dominated as feudal landlords, especially in the former princely state of Hyderabad which covered Telangana region.

The newspaper *Eenadu*, started in 1974 by the Kamma entrepreneur Ramoji Rao whose main success was his chit fund company, Margadarsi, totally changed the discourse of press and politics in Andhra Pradesh. *Eenadu* was the voice of the aspirations of the Kamma community

and about a decade after it was launched, it played a major role in changing the political history by propelling the newly launched party Telugu Desam Party (TDP) of Telugu film idol and a Kamma, N. T. Rama Rao into power (Rao 1994).

Eenadu with its phenomenal growth and influence with the readers, became a kingmaker of sorts, influencing and even guiding the politics and fortunes of the Telugu Desam Party. On one hand, it had inseparable and strong links with the capital and politics of the Kamma community and on the other, its innovation, marketing strategies and use of sophisticated technology revolutionized the Telugu print media. The dominance of *Eenadu* and the strengthening of the social and cultural hegemony of the Kamma community and Telugu Desam Party went hand in hand.

To counter this dominance of *Eenadu* and the Kamma community, film director Dasari Narayana Rao whose sympathies lay with the Congress party, launched *Udayam*, a Telugu daily newspaper. This was followed by the launching of *Vārtha*, another Telugu daily newspaper, owned by Marwari industrialist Girish Sanghi. Subsequently, both men were elected to the Rajya Sabha on a Congress Party ticket. The other older dailies, *Andhra Prabha* of the Indian Express group and *Andhra Bhoomi* of the Deccan Chronicle group lost their importance as opinion-makers among the Telugu people while the two communist parties' papers *Prajasakti* and *Visalandhra* were confined to their loyal party cadres. *Andhra Jyothi* changed its ownership, shut down for a period and then it was taken over by a journalist belonging to the Kamma community who was beholden to TDP supremo and chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, N. T. Rama Rao's son-in-law and fellow-Kamma. He followed the example of *Eenadu* in promoting the policies of the TDP government and the interests of the Kamma community.

An addition to the Telugu dailies' stable was *Sakshi* started by Congress Chief Minister Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy's (YSR) son Y. S. Jaganmohan Reddy. Launched on March 24, 2008, with a big bang, publishing 23 editions simultaneously from 19 cities in AP and the four cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru, it soon became one of the leading newspapers. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations' figures released in December 2015, *Sakshi* is the second largest circulating newspaper in Andhra Pradesh after *Eenadu* with a circulation figure of about 11 lakhs.

The paper followed the examples of *Eenadu* and *Andhra Jyothi* and became the voice of YSR and his government. It also followed the recent tradition of the Telugu media of targeting the political, business and caste opponents of promoters of the various media. Hence, the targets of *Sakshi* were the TDP, N. Chandrababu Naidu and the Kamma community which it exposed through investigative reporting and so on. The Reddy community, the rivals of the Kamma community in the political arena, rallied behind *Sakshi*, and consolidated its political, business and editorial gains. After YSR's death in an air crash, *Sakshi* became the voice of his son and political heir, Jaganmohan Reddy. Subsequently, he started his own political party, the YSR Congress, after breaking away from Congress. *Sakshi* is to the YSR Congress what *Eenadu* once was to the TDP. Thanks to the inflow of capital into *Sakshi* and adoption of various editorial policies and the cult figure status enjoyed by the later YSR, today *Sakshi* has emerged as one of the largest circulated Telugu dailies in the two Telugu states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, *Eenadu* is at the top with 17 lakh circulation *Sakshi* daily came next with a 10.5 lakh circulation and *Andhra Jyoti* with a 6.6 lakh circulation (Audit Bureau of Circulations 2019). Today, Jaganmohan Reddy is the Chief Minister of the smaller state of Andhra Pradesh after Telangana state was formed with the division of the earlier Andhra Pradesh state. His paper *Sakshi*, undoubtedly, played a prominent role in his political victory.

With the formation of Telangana state, the two communist party papers, re-invented themselves into Telangana-focused papers, the *Praja Sakti* (of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

(CPI-M)) as *Nava Telangana* (The New Telangana) and *Visalandhra* (of CPI) as *Mana Telangana* (Our Telangana).

Even as the mainstream media were prospering, alternative media too emerged in Telugu society from the progressive and Dalit movements. Though they are confined to small circulations, they are effective in exposing the mainstream media and their ruling class ideology. These are left-wing magazines such as *Srujana*, *Arunatara*, *Janasahiti*; Dalit journals such as *Nalupu* (1989–93) and *Neeli Jhanda* (since 2008) edited by (the late) Bojja Tarakam; *Yedureeta* (1990–4) edited by (the late) U. Sambasiva Rao, *Neti Ekalavya* edited by (the late) K. G. Sathymurthy, *Dalita Rajyam* edited by Katti Padma Rao, *Kula Nirmulana* (2001) and *Bahujana Keratalu* (2001) edited by Palnati Sriramulu and *Samantara* (2005). However, for various reasons, most of these journals have had short lives.

With the movement for a separate Telangana state, a Telugu daily *Namasthe Telangana* was launched on June 6, 2011, as a branchchild of the leader of the movement K. Chandrasekhar Rao who became the first Chief Minister of the newest Indian state when Telangana state was born on June 2, 2014. Owned by Telangana Publications, the paper is published from all the (previous) ten districts of Telangana. Along with the TV news channel of the same name, it was the mouthpiece of the Telangana movement before the creation of the state and later it played a prominent role in the success of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti in the first elections held to the Telangana Legislative Assembly in April 2014.

The paper was launched basically out of a “historical necessity” to set right the distortions that were inherent in reporting on Telangana, its history, its people and its culture by the Telugu press that was owned and manned by industrialists from the Andhra region. Editor Allam Narayan said,

So far, Telangana people heard and saw through the eyes and ears of Seemandhra (word indicating Rayalaseema and Andhra regions) media. Now Telangana people will see through their own eyes and hear through their own ears ... it will rewrite the history, culture and rich traditions of Telangana people. It will re-tell the injustice done to the region and ... will voice the concerns, aspirations and ambitions of Telangana people.

The slogan for separate statehood has been living in the hearts of Telangana population all through the 60-year history. *Namasthe Telangana* emerges from that urge for freedom. *Namasthe Telangana* will be a newspaper by the people of Telangana, for the people of Telangana and of the people of Telangana. The paper will voice the concerns, aspirations and ambitions of the Telangana people.

(Pandey 2011)

Stories of the lives of vulnerable people ignored

This imbalance in ownership patterns and social and gender representation perhaps partly explains the imbalance in the Indian media's coverage and biased stance with regard to issues of social engineering. While the social and economic crises have overtaken the OBC service and artisanal communities in the era of globalization, and they are being displaced from their traditional caste occupations, and their services rendered irrelevant leading to loss of livelihood, their pauperization, these issues find no mention either in the print or electronic media. Suicides have become the bane of these castes: Goldsmiths, weavers and cotton farmers are taking their lives out of sheer desperation, yet they do not merit any special coverage either in terms of reporting or analyzing the causes and suggesting solutions. The uncertainty of life of the vulnerable people

and of those in the unorganized sector does not move the media. Therefore, there is no pressure on the government, either the union government or the state government to offer succor and solutions to the suffering and the weak.

We can conclude that such issues remain ignored, neglected and unknown to the general reading public thanks to the inherent and deep prejudices of those owning and manning the media towards these people, considering that all of them belong to the “lower” or “lowest” castes and hence, considered too unimportant to bother about. On the other hand, the interests, issues and concerns of the dominant castes are covered day after day. Their problems are projected as the problems of the entire country. Corporate news gets special treatment and special pages in general newspapers while there are exclusive newspapers for business, finance and industry. A new development due to this focus on the urban and privileged people is the emergence of an entire genre of journalism that focuses on the pleasure industry: Entertainment, travel, leisure, food, adventure sports, beauty and fashion, indulgences and so on. They get more space and time than the issues and concerns of the 80 percent of Indians.

The media selectively projects the reality of the country which, in fact, is the reality of a small minority of the powerful, privileged people. The reality of the lives of 80 percent of the people goes unseen, unheeded and unreported. By excluding the majority of the people from their news pages and program content, the media surely cannot be said to be democratic institutions. The media are merely a mirror image of the unequal, hierarchical, caste-ridden society that is India.

Caste discrimination within the media

Why are there so few journalists from the underprivileged castes in the media despite a large number of OBCs, SCs, STs and minorities, especially Muslims, acquiring higher education, getting exposure in cities and towns and participating in social and political movements that have given them awareness, confidence and determination? This is especially true of the regional-language media which is growing across all languages in the country. The situation in the English-language media is very different considering most of those who do seek and get entry into the media are elite, urban-based youngsters who are proficient in both writing and speaking English.

Often three reasons are cited for the OBCs and other suppressed people not getting into the media: One, caste discrimination; two, media do not offer the job security a government job does; and three, finding employment in the private sector requires a social network of connections and recommendations. Even if one manages to get into the media, to remain in the media is a tough call as it requires a thick skin, even courage to withstand the discrimination in assignments, constant direct and indirect criticism, exclusion and bad-mouthing. Very often, unable to take the harassment and overt discrimination, the OBCs and Dalits quit the media. Those who do show enough grit to remain in the profession, remain at the entry level, rarely going up the promotion ladder. Deep prejudice works against them: Their performance is measured not against their efficiency and ability but against social hierarchy. Those denied promotions were even told by their bosses that they feared that if they were promoted to decision-making levels, then those subordinate to them might revolt against taking orders from “lower caste” bosses.

Role of social movements

A survey carried out by this researcher for this study among journalists of the Telugu media found that in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, there is a fair number of OBC and Dalit professionals working in the media, especially in the rural areas. While there are no statistics, the

number is put between 5 and 15 percent of 10,000-odd journalists in the two states. They are mostly employed as “stringers” at mandal level while some are staffers even in English-language newspapers. A handful even head bureaus. The influx of a fair number of OBC youth into the profession is mostly due to the Maoist movement in the two states which inspired the rural youth of the oppressed castes to identify with its ideology, support it and even join its ranks. Most of foot soldiers and sympathizers of the movement were OBC and Dalit men and women.

Some of them grew to leadership positions, and when they quit the movement for one reason or the other, the media seemed to be the best alternative for these young, thinking and committed men and women. While the landed upper caste former Maoists returned to their land as they had the economic base, those upper-caste former Maoists who did not have such an economic base, fell back on their caste support system and caste network for re-entry into the mainstream of life. But the OBC and Dalit men and women who had no such alternatives found an alternative in the media, according to a journalist working in a Telugu daily newspaper. “Working in the media gives us a sense of satisfaction as we contribute to the betterment of society,” said a former Maoist now working for a Telugu newspaper. Another former Maoist-turned-journalist said media was an opportunity for OBCs and Dalit with some education and who remained committed to society and social justice. “Media serves as an instrument of change. We can contribute to society through it,” he said (Interviews with Journalists during the Survey, 2014–15).

However, although the space created for the OBCs and Dalits is not very large, especially in the mainstream media, the smaller publications do offer an opportunity. Each district has about 10–15 small newspapers where jobs are available for those with a passion for journalism. Detailed conversations with several journalists in Telangana by the author of this chapter broadly suggest the following:

1. Many OBCs/Dalits enter the media because they believe it can empower their community and help focus on issues relating to their community and people. Dalits and OBCs have some presence in the Telugu-language media whereas they are negligible in the English-language media.
2. While discrimination and antagonism against OBC/Dalit journalists is rampant in the Telugu-language media, it is less pronounced in the English-language media.
3. Discrimination is the principal factor behind the decision of OBCs and Dalits to leave the private sector media and opt for government jobs whenever they get the opportunity.
4. Apart from discrimination, they feel a career in the media is a risky proposition. Their weak economic base makes them fear job insecurity which is a defining characteristic of the private sector (Interviews with Journalists during the Survey, 2014–15).

Monopoly of upper castes over positions of power in Telugu media

Print media

All the leading 12 dailies of the two Telugu states are owned by upper castes and headed by them. Not a single daily is either owned or run by the marginalized people. The case is similar with the position of editor, which is the most powerful and prestigious position in a newspaper. While upper castes are editors of as many as ten out of 12 dailies, there are a mere two editors from OBC communities. There is not a single editor of SC or ST background. As for the position of news bureau chief, 11 out of 12 are from upper castes and a mere one belongs to

Table 27.1 Caste-wise Breakdown of Ownership and Managing Directors of Telugu Newspapers

S. No.	Newspaper	Owner	Managing director
1	Eenadu	Upper caste	Upper caste
2	Sakshi	Upper caste	Upper caste
3	Andhra Jyothi	Upper caste	Upper caste
4	Namaste Telangana	Upper caste	Upper caste
5	Andhra Prabha	Upper caste	Upper caste
6	Andhra Bhoomi	Upper caste	Upper caste
7	Surya	Upper caste	Upper caste
8	Prajasakthi	Upper caste	Upper caste
9	Visalandra	Upper caste	Upper caste
10	Vaaritha	Upper caste	Upper caste
11	Nava Telangana	Upper caste	Upper caste
12	Mana Telangana	Upper caste	Upper caste

Table 27.2 Caste-wise Breakdown of Editors and Key Decision-makers of Telugu Newspapers

Community	Editor	Bureau chief
Upper caste	10	11
OBC	2	1
SC	0	0
ST	0	0

the OBCs. There is no SC or ST news bureau chief. (See the following tables.) The data were collected through a survey carried out in Hyderabad in January 2017 (Tables 27.1 and 27.2).

Electronic news media

There are 26 news channels in Telugu and as many as 24 of them are owned by upper castes while one each is owned by an OBC and an SC. No ST owns a Telugu news channel. The case is similar with management of the news channels. Only two channels are managed by BC persons and the rest are managed by upper-caste persons only. We can find no MD or CEOs among the SCs and STs (Table 27.3).

Table 27.4 shows the caste-wise breakdown of key positions of power in the electronic media. As many as 24 out of 26 news channels have editors of upper-caste background while one editor each belongs to the OBC and SC communities. As for the Chief of News Bureau, 24 are “upper” castes and two are from OBCs. There is no editor or bureau chief belonging to the SC and ST communities.

Representation of SCs, STs and OBCs in Telugu newspapers

The media in the two Telugu states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are least represented by the marginalized castes, that is SCs, STs and OBCs. Out of 12 daily newspapers only two have

Table 27.3 Caste-wise Breakdown of Ownership, Managing Directors and CEOs of Electronic News Media

<i>Name of the electronic news media</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Managing director/CEO</i>
TV9	Upper caste	Upper caste
ETV	Upper caste	Upper caste
Sakshi TV	Upper caste	Upper caste
ABN Andhra Jyothi	Upper caste	Upper caste
HMTV	Upper caste	Upper caste
NTV	Upper caste	Upper caste
TV5	Upper caste	Upper caste
Zee 24 Hours News Channel	Upper caste	Upper caste
T News	Upper caste	Upper caste
MAHAA TV	Upper caste	Upper caste
i News	Upper caste	Upper caste
V6 News	SC	OBC
Studio N	Upper caste	Upper caste
TNN	OBC	OBC
Deccan TV	Upper caste	Upper caste
6 TV	Upper caste	Upper caste
Jai Telangana News	Upper caste	Upper caste
Express TV	Upper caste	Upper caste
Gemini News	Upper caste	Upper caste
10 TV	Upper caste	Upper caste
99 TV	Upper caste	Upper caste
Bharat Today	Upper caste	Upper caste
C TV	Upper caste	Upper caste
CVR Channel	Upper caste	Upper caste
Metro TV and Mega TV	Upper caste	Upper caste
Raj News	Upper caste	Upper caste

Table 27.4 Caste-wise Breakdown of Owners, Managing Directors, CEOs and Key Decision-makers in Electronic Media

<i>Community</i>	<i>(n = 26)</i>			
	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Managing director/CEO</i>	<i>Editor/in-charge</i>	<i>Bureau chief</i>
Upper caste	24	24	24	24
OBC	1	1	1	1
SC	1	1	1	1
ST	0	0	0	0

OBCs as editors while only one newspaper has an OBC as a news head. Out of 69 bureau chiefs in the print media, only two belong to the SC community and none is from the ST community; only three belong to the OBCs. Out of 79 desk-in-charges, six are from OBCs and not a single desk-in-charge belongs to the SC community and none from the ST community. The rest belong to the upper castes (see Tables 27.5 and 27.6).

Table 27.5 Caste-wise Breakdown of Editorial Staff of Telugu Newspapers

S. No.	Newspaper	Total editorial staff	SC	ST	OBC	Percentage
1.	Eenadu	435	10 (2.5%)	Nil	12 (2.7%)	
2.	Sakshi	380	7 (1.8%)	Nil	9 (2.3%)	
3.	Andhra Jyoti	280	7 (2.5%)	Nil	9 (3.2%)	
4.	Namasthe Telangana	109	6 (5.5%)	Nil	12 (11%)	
5.	Andhra Prabha	133	5 (3.7%)	Nil	7 (5.2%)	
6.	Andhra Bhoomi	136	5 (3.6%)	Nil	9 (6.6%)	
7.	Surya	25	5 (20%)	Nil	12 (48%)	
8.	Prajashakti	141	10 (7.0%)	Nil	10 (7.0%)	
9.	Visalandhra	82	3 (3.6%)	Nil	7 (8.4%)	
10.	Vaaritha	132	6 (4.5%)	Nil	12 (9.0%)	
11.	Nava Telangana	112	5 (4.4%)	Nil	13 (11%)	
12.	Mana Telangana	103	6 (5.8%)	Nil	9 (8.7%)	
13.	Total	2,068 (100%)	75 (3.63%)	Nil	121 (5.85%)	

With regard to the situation of editorial staff such as news reporters, desk-in-charges and so on, out of a total of 2,068, again the upper castes are predominant with 1,879 in various posts while a mere 121 belong to the OBCs, 75 to SC communities and only 1 to a ST community. Out of the 26 media houses, only two had OBCs as editor-in-charge/CEO and two bureau chiefs.

Table 27.7 shows that out of 26 channels, 24 editors-in-charge belong to upper castes and only two channels' decision-makers are OBCs. Almost all the important decisions of what goes into the channel are taken by the upper castes. Among the total number of journalists of 1,374, only 9.6 percent (132) belongs to OBCs, 5.8 percent (81) belongs to SCs and 0.2 percent (4) to STs. The predominance of the upper castes, who constitute a whopping 84.1 percent (1,156) in the Telugu news channels, clearly proves the totally skewed position in terms of control over Telugu news.

Table 27.8 clearly shows that the representation of decision-makers and journalists belonging to marginalized communities is almost nonexistent in the English-language press in Hyderabad. While there is not a single Dalit journalist, there are a mere five OBC journalists on the rolls of the English-language press.

Accredited journalists

The situation of journalists accredited by the government reveals a similar situation. Accreditation is the recognition by the government of a media representative as a journalist which gives him/

Table 27.6 Caste-wise Breakdown of Editors, Bureau Chiefs and Decision-makers in Telugu Newspapers

<i>Decision-maker</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>ST</i>	<i>OBC</i>	<i>Upper caste</i>	<i>Total</i>
Editor	0	0	2 (16.7%)	10 (83.3%)	12
News editor	0	0	0	12 (100%)	12
Bureau chief	2 (2.89%)	0	3 (4.34%)	64 (92.7%)	69
Desk in-charge	0	0	6 (7.59%)	73 (92.4%)	79

her access to government departments and, apart from other benefits, to facilitate the reporters to do their duty (see Table 27.9).

A caste-wise analysis of accredited journalists in Telangana shows that an overwhelming 91.4 percent belong to upper castes while OBCs constitute a mere 7.08 percent, the SCs 1.83 percent and STs a nominal 0.21 percent.

Composition of the Press Academy of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

The case is similar to the Andhra Pradesh Press Academy that is run by the government and is headed by a prominent media person as chairman. The chairman is appointed by the government with the powers and privileges equivalent to that of a cabinet minister. The Press Academy was established in 1996 in the undivided Andhra Pradesh. To date there have been seven chairmen and governing councils of the Press Academy. No person from the OBC, SC or ST communities has been the chairman of the Academy so far. Out of the 76 members of the executive board and the governing council of the Press Academy so far, who are selected from journalists, academics and other social scientists, not a single member belonged to either the SCs or STs while a small number belonged to the OBCs. However, after the creation of Telangana state, the first chairman of the Telangana Press Academy is from the OBCs. The governing council has one SC member but no ST members.

Conclusion

We can conclude from the data and discussion in this chapter that the Indian media, both print and electronic are monopolistic and exclusionary, with the “upper” castes retaining and deepening their casteist hold over the media. The media have refused to move with the times to introduce diversity both in their staff and the issues they cover. The traditionally privileged people lord it over in every single department and in all aspects of news-gathering and opinion-writing. The traditionally excluded people like the OBCs, SCs and STs get little chance of breaking into this citadel of the traditionally privileged castes. The newsrooms of both the newspapers and news channels are singularly marked by lack of diversity of staff in terms of caste, lack of diversity in coverage of the marginalized people, and of multiplicity of opinions and analyses.

The inclusion of the traditionally excluded people in the media works in two ways: One, it paves the way for diversity in the newsroom and the news pages in terms of expanding topics of coverage and bringing under the gaze of the public the unique issues facing the lesser people in our society. Impartial and unbiased coverage of the underprivileged and the disadvantaged communities could pave the way for better focus of the policy makers on their issues and even get some of them solved. Importantly, the news pages would reflect the society and familiarize the readers with aspects of the people that do not normally figure in the news. Even if the mere presence of a Dalit or an OBC or a Muslim in the newsroom or on the rolls of the newspaper

Table 27.7 Caste-wise Breakdown of Journalists Working for Telugu TV News Channels

Name of the media organization	Editor/in-charge/ CEO	Bureau chief	Total journalists/ news staff	SC	ST	OBC	Upper caste
TV9	Upper caste	Upper caste	90	6 (6%)	Nil	9 (10%)	
ETV	Upper caste	Upper caste	87	4 (4.5%)	Nil	7 (8%)	
Sakshi TV	Upper caste	Upper caste	99	4 (4%)	Nil	6 (6%)	
ABN/Andhra Jyothi	Upper caste	OBC	67	3 (4.4%)	Nil	5 (7.4%)	
HMTV	Upper caste	Upper caste	70	5 (7.1%)	Nil	9 (12%)	
NTV	Upper caste	Upper caste	76	3 (3.9%)	Nil	5 (6.5%)	
TV5	Upper caste	Upper caste	60	1 (1.6%)	Nil	3 (5%)	
Zee 24 Hours	Upper caste	Upper caste	70	4 (5.7%)	Nil	4 (5.7%)	
T News	Upper caste	Upper caste	60	2 (3.3%)	Nil	4 (6.6%)	
MAHAA	Upper caste	Upper caste	50	1 (2%)	Nil	2 (4%)	
i News	Upper caste	Upper caste	41	2 (4.8%)	Nil	3 (7.3%)	
V6	OBC	Upper caste	58	10 (17.2%)	3 (5.1%)	13 (22.4%)	
Studio N	Upper caste	Upper caste	58	3 (5.1%)	Nil	11 (18.9%)	

(Continued)

Table 27.7 (Continued)

Name of the media organization	Editor/in-charge/CEO	Bureau chief	Total journalists/news staff	SC	ST	OBC	Upper caste
TNN	OBC	OBC	36	6 (16.6%)	1 (2.7%)	13 (36.1%)	
Deccan TV	Upper caste	Upper caste	32	4 (12.5%)	Nil	6 (18.7%)	
6TV	Upper caste	Upper caste	40	4 (10%)	Nil	5 (12.5%)	
Jai Telangana News	Upper caste	Upper caste	35	1 (2.8%)	Nil	2 (5.7%)	
Express TV	Upper caste	Upper caste	43	3 (6.9%)	Nil	3 (6.9%)	
Gemini News	Upper caste	Upper caste	62	3 (4.8%)	Nil	3 (4.8%)	
10 TV	Upper caste	Upper caste	56	5 (8.9%)	Nil	7 (12.7%)	
99 TV	Upper caste	Upper caste	50	4 (8%)	Nil	6 (12%)	
Bharat Today	Upper caste	Upper caste	24	1 (4.1%)	Nil	2 (8.3%)	
CTV	Upper caste	Upper caste	34	1 (2.9%)	Nil	2 (5.8%)	
CVR Channel	Upper caste	Upper caste	38	1 (2.6%)	Nil	2 (5.2%)	
Metro TV and Mega TV	Upper caste	Upper caste	20	Nil	Nil	2 (10%)	
Raj News	Upper caste	Upper caste	18	Nil	Nil	1 (5.5%)	
Total: 26	Upper caste 24 OBC 2 (92%)	Upper caste 24 OBC 2 (92%)	1374	81 (5.8%)	4 (0.2%)	132 (9.6%)	1,157 (84.4%)

Table 27.8 Caste-wise Breakdown of Newspaper Ownership and Decision-makers in Hyderabad-based English-language Newspapers

<i>English newspapers</i>	<i>Ownership</i>	<i>Resident editor</i>	<i>News editor</i>	<i>Bureau chief</i>
Deccan Chronicle	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste
The Times of India	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste
The Hindu	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste
The Indian Express	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste
The Hans India	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste	Upper caste

Table 27.9 Caste-wise Breakdown of Accredited Journalists in the Telangana Media in 2016

<i>Caste</i>	<i>No. of accredited journalists (Total 926)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Upper caste	847	91.4
OBC	60	7.08
SC	17	1.83
ST	2	0.21
Total	926	100

Source: Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Telangana State, 2016.

may not make a huge difference since they do not wield the power of a decision-maker, it will normalize the atmosphere instead of the newsrooms becoming islands of caste and gender privilege. In terms of coverage of the different societies of the excluded people, the narratives would be more balanced, objective, empathetic and unbiased if the unprivileged were assigned to those stories. Representation of the people by their own people leads to more diversified content, relevant to their lives, and hopefully, less biased writing.

The Indian media, both Telugu- and English-language media, have failed to live up to the role as an agent of social change, and to spread awareness of the situation of the marginalized and the disadvantaged people of society. They have failed as conscience-keepers of society. The media have remained totally conservative, mirroring the social biases, prejudices and discrimination that go against the inherent role of the media as a champion of the underdog. Also, importantly, their policies of recruitment violate the constitutional rights of equality and equal opportunity.

Even as change is sweeping the world of media in other countries, especially the developed ones, the Telugu media maintain the status quo. To date, no media organization has tried to set right the imbalance by putting in place recruitment policies that will identify, train and absorb men and women of talent from among the oppressed castes as a part of their social responsibility. It seems that the Telugu media find it easier to preach equality in their editorials than to practice it. To that extent, the media are hypocritical, doing a disservice to their traditional role as defender of people's rights. They have lost the right to claim to be the Fourth Estate, as one of the pillars upholding democracy. They cannot claim to be the conscience of society when they practice casteism and exclusion, when it further deepens the entrenched caste prejudices,

injustices and discrimination against the oppressed people of its society. Far from being a change agent, the Telugu media continue to strengthen the hold of the traditionally privileged people. The media seem to serve none other than their own kind and their own vested interests. Instead of being a mirror of society, reflecting the social realities to the people so that change can be brought about in the attitudes, behavior and opinion of the people and grow towards equality, the media serve as one of the barometers of the prejudices, discrimination and injustices that have been the lot of the majority of people in society. They ensure that the oppressed remain in the chains of low status, lacking in dignity, denied social justice and opportunity to break free.

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