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Resistance and Representation in Caste and Gender Media Studies

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Abstract:

The connection between caste, gender, and how people are shown in the media in India shows the long-standing unfairness, social rankings, and old power structures that still exist. Indian media, like movies, TV shows, newspapers, news channels, and online websites, has a big influence on how people see caste and gender issues. Media can help challenge unfair treatment between different groups and bring attention to people who are often ignored. However, most media content often repeats ideas that favor certain groups and support traditional ideas about gender and power. These representations usually focus on the views of higher-caste, mostly male people, and leave out the experiences and voices of Dalits, Adivasis, and women. The problem becomes worse for Dalit and Adivasi women because they face discrimination based on caste, unequal treatment because of their gender, disadvantages due to their social class, and being pushed to the side of society all at the same time. Mainstream Indian media has traditionally played a role in shaping social identities by giving specific traits and roles to different groups based on caste and gender. Upper-caste people are often shown as educated, wealthy, good-looking, moral, and in charge. At the same time, characters from lower castes are usually portrayed as poor, working hard for others, facing violence, or living in a less developed society. These portrayals aren't just about individual stereotypes; they show how caste affects a person's chance to get power, resources, education, jobs, and recognition in society. So, media portrayal can make existing power structures seem normal, good, or something that can't be changed. Television has played a big role in spreading ideas about caste, gender, beauty, family, and how people see each other in society. Hindi TV shows, which are watched by many people in different parts of India, have usually shown women from higher castes and with lighter skin as examples of perfect women. These characters are often linked to ideas like being pure, having good morals, standing up for family pride, making sacrifices, and being seen as better in terms of ethics. In contrast, women with darker skin and those from less privileged communities have often been given roles that are lower in status, negative, funny, or based on stereotypes. These portrayals strengthen the link between how someone looks, where they are from in terms of caste, and how much society values them. The constant favouring of lighter skin and traditions from higher castes shows how caste and gender discrimination can happen at the same time through the way people look and the culture they follow. Shows like Balika Vadhu and Uttaran are good examples of how TV stories deal with social class and hierarchy. Although these programs deal with social inequality, their storylines can sometimes create a divide between characters who are privileged and those who are not. Characters from lower castes or those who are not wealthy often end up in less powerful positions in society. On the other hand, characters from higher castes are usually shown as

having more power, being respected, and seen as morally right. In this way, TV stories can both point out social unfairness and end up showing the same power differences they are trying to show. News media is another key place where caste and gender inequalities are created and spread. The way Indian journalism is organized has traditionally had too many people from wealthy and upper-caste backgrounds in key roles like editing and making important decisions. This lack of caste diversity can affect which problems stay in focus and how disagreements between groups are understood. Issues like caste-based violence, discrimination, manual scavenging, abuse of Dalits, and the challenges faced by marginalized groups often get little attention or are only covered occasionally in the media. When caste-based violence is seen mainly as a single crime, a personal argument, or a public order issue, the bigger system of caste-based oppression can be overlooked. This way, each violent action is seen apart from the bigger systems and history that allow such violence to happen. The way Dalit political leaders and activists are shown in the media shows how caste and gender are connected to the power of media. For example, Mayawati has often been shown in stories that focus on her being strict with power, having strong political goals, standing out as a person, or being involved in controversial situations. These portrayals might make it harder to see the real importance of Dalit political actions and their call for social justice, respect, inclusion in politics, and sharing power more fairly. The way the media presents women in political roles can be influenced by gender expectations, where being strong and showing power is seen in different ways based on the woman's background and identity. As a result, Dalit women in public settings might face both caste-related and gender-related judgment. The rise of intersectional feminist ideas has shown the limits in the usual talks about gender equality. Scholars and activists say that gender must be understood along with other factors like caste, class, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and other systems of social power. In the Indian context, the work of Dalit feminist thinkers and activists is especially important because it challenges the idea that all women have the same experiences. Ruth Manorama has always worked to support the rights and respect of Dalit women, highlighting the various ways they face unfair treatment. Kiruba Munusamy has also pointed out that caste and gender should be seen as linked systems rather than separate forms of oppression. The rise of Dalit feminist voices, independent media, alternative films, digital activism, and social media has opened up new opportunities to question and challenge the usual ways people are portrayed. These platforms let people from underrepresented groups share their own stories instead of only relying on organizations that have been run by those with more power and advantages in the past. Digital spaces have allowed activists, writers, filmmakers, journalists, and community groups to question unfair caste and gender beliefs, record unfair treatment, and share stories that challenge these ideas. These kinds of resistance show that media isn't just a tool that keeps inequality going; it can also be a place where people fight back, become more politically aware, and bring about real changes in society. An intersectional look at Indian media shows that caste and gender are not separate issues and must be understood together. For example, the way a Dalit woman is shown isn't just because of gender ideas or caste ideas on their own, but because these ideas affect each other. Her body, how she looks, what she does for a living, her sexual identity, where she stands in society, and her political views can all be understood through the combined influences of caste and patriarchy. The same is true for Adivasi women and other oppressed groups, as their stories are often

left out of the main stories that people usually tell. So, the Indian media is in a tricky situation when it comes to caste and gender. On one hand, mainstream media can spread common ideas by making caste hierarchies, traditional gender roles, skin color preferences, and typical portrayals of less powerful groups seem normal. On the other hand, alternative media, Dalit feminist activism, independent filmmaking, and digital platforms have provided chances to question these portrayals and take back control of the story. Looking at this tension is important for understanding how media helps shape social identities and power connections in modern India. A more welcoming media environment needs more than just showing diverse groups; it also needs more involvement from Dalit, Adivasi, and women professionals in creating, understanding, and sharing the stories in the media. This method can help shift Indian media away from reflecting social hierarchies towards a fairer and more inclusive public space.

INTRODUCTION

India is known for having a lot of different cultures, religions, languages, communities, and ways of life. Even though there is a lot of diversity, Indian society is still affected by long-lasting systems of social hierarchy that impact how people get resources, power, opportunities, and recognition in society. Among these structures, the caste system is still one of the most important ways that society is divided into different groups. Caste has developed and changed over many centuries, and it has shaped the experiences of individuals and groups in many areas like education, work, involvement in politics, moving up in society, marriage, traditions, and getting access to power in institutions. Even though there are laws and social changes that have tried to stop caste-based discrimination, caste still affects people in India today, both in obvious ways and in more hidden ways. Gender is another key way that social power and inequality are set up. Women have always faced limits when it comes to getting an education, finding jobs, moving around freely, expressing their sexuality, owning property, taking part in politics, and making important decisions. However, the experiences of women cannot be fully understood just by looking at their gender. Women from lower castes and tribal groups often face many different kinds of unfair treatment at the same time. Dalit and Adivasi women, especially, face the combined impact of their caste, gender, class, and being socially excluded. Their experiences show that women face oppression in different ways, and this depends on where they are in the different systems of power that affect their lives. Looking at caste and gender together means we need to see how different kinds of unfair treatment connect and support each other. In this social setting, the media plays an important role in shaping and spreading ideas related to caste, gender, identity, and social rankings. Movies, TV shows, newspapers, news channels, and online platforms don't just show how society is right now; they also help shape how people and groups are seen and understood. Media can shape how people see different groups in society and where those groups stand by using repeated images, stories, character traits, words, and visual styles. So, representation becomes a key area where power is shown, because whether certain groups are seen or not can affect how much society recognizes them and how legitimate their culture is. Mainstream Indian media often repeats the views of the powerful castes and traditional male ideas. In movies and TV shows, people from less powerful groups might be shown in ways that focus on poverty, being servants, violence, being less advanced, or being lower in society. On the other hand, those from more powerful groups are usually shown as educated,

respected, in charge, morally good, and having higher social standing. Gendered representations also create specific ideas about what it means to be feminine by focusing on traits like beauty, fairness, obedience, sacrifice, staying at home, and being sexually proper. These patterns become especially important when caste and gender are connected, because the way Dalit and Adivasi women are seen can be influenced by several things at the same time, like caste-based discrimination, traditional ideas about women's roles, skin color bias, social class differences, and harmful assumptions about sexuality. News media helps shape how discussions about caste and gender issues happen in the public conversation. The way news is picked, shown, and understood can either show unfair treatment in society or hide it. When caste-based violence is seen as a single event instead of a sign of deeper discrimination, the big systems that support this violence might stay hidden. When there is not enough presence of Dalit, Adivasi, and women journalists and commentators in powerful media organizations, it limits the variety of viewpoints that are shared in public discussions. The issue of representation goes beyond how marginalized groups are shown to also include their involvement in creating and sharing knowledge. At the same time, media can't be seen just as a tool that keeps oppression going. It can also serve as a place where people resist and bring about social change. Dalit writers, filmmakers, activists, journalists, feminists, and online creators are more often speaking out against unfair portrayals. They are sharing stories that show how people face discrimination based on their caste and gender. Independent films, alternative news, social media efforts, digital stories, and activist websites have given voice to groups that are often overlooked, allowing them to share their own stories and challenge unfair stereotypes. These kinds of counter-representation challenge the power of usual stories and bring more attention to experiences that have been left out of the main cultural conversations in the past. The rise of intersectional feminist ideas has added more depth to conversations about how people are represented. Dalit feminist thinkers and activists have pointed out that many approaches to gender justice fail to recognize that women are not all the same and often ignore how caste differences affect the experiences of women. An intersectional approach shows that caste and gender work together at the same time. The struggles faced by a Dalit or Adivasi woman can’t be fully understood just by looking at caste or gender alone. This view is especially important for studying media because the way things are shown is influenced by many different social identities and power systems all at once. In this context, the current study closely looks at how caste and gender interact in the way media represents people in India.It explores how different groups, especially Dalits, Adivasis, and women, have been shown in the media, often in unfair or limited ways, and how they are being given more power and visibility through new and alternative media forms. The study looks at movies, TV shows, news stories, and online platforms to understand how ideas about higher castes and traditional gender roles are shown in media stories. At the same time, it looks at resistance movements, different ways of using media, feminist actions that consider multiple identities, and online activism that question these portrayals and push for more control over stories and better recognition for groups that are often left out. The study looks at media as both a place where ideas are repeated and a space where people can resist those ideas. By looking at how representation relates to social power, it shows that media images aren't just fair copies of real life but are tied to bigger systems like caste, gender, and cultural influence. It's important to closely look at these portrayals to understand how social

rankings are made normal, challenged, and possibly changed in modern India. Having more diversity in media means more than just including people from underrepresented groups in stories.It also means letting them take part in making the stories, understanding them, and sharing them with others. This way of doing things can help create a fairer media environment where different experiences are shown in a respectful, thoughtful, and responsible manner.

Caste and Gender in the Indian Social Structure

Caste is one of the longest-lasting systems that divides people in Indian society, based on old religious, cultural, economic, and social traditions. Even though the Indian Constitution ended untouchability and created laws to stop discrimination based on caste, caste still affects how people relate to each other and their chances of getting education, jobs, political power, land, money, and recognition in culture. The continued existence of caste in modern society shows that simply ending unfair treatment through laws isn't enough to remove long-standing social beliefs and system rules. Caste still affects how people see themselves, how they relate to others, and how they feel about being accepted or left out in society. Dalits, who have been treated unfairly due to their caste and faced discrimination for a long time, have gone through many years of being left out socially, economically, and culturally. Even though there are laws that protect people's rights, programs meant to help disadvantaged groups, and efforts to change society for the better, Dalit communities still face unfair treatment in many areas of daily life, both in public and private settings. Their being left out is also shown in how culture tells stories, where the experiences of Dalits are usually shared from the point of view of people who are in more powerful social groups. These portrayals might make Dalit people seem only poor, helpless, oppressed, or behind in society, and they might ignore the history of fights they've had, the decisions they've made politically, the ideas they've shared, and the culture they've create. The issue of representation is closely tied to who has the power to tell the stories of people who are often overlooked or ignored. Adivasi communities are in a complicated situation within India's social and political system. Adivasis are made up of many different Indigenous and tribal groups, each with their own languages, cultures, traditions, and ways of connecting with the land and forests. Over time, these communities have suffered from being forced to move from their homes, unfair economic treatment, being left out of political decisions, and losing their cultural identity. Their experiences are not the same as those of Dalit communities because caste and tribal identities come from different histories and social backgrounds. Even though both groups have faced being left out of the main systems that control power and how people are represented. Mainstream media often narrowly shows Adivasi communities, focusing on ideas like being simple, poor, living in remote areas, or different in culture.This way of showing them usually ignores their ability to make political decisions, their own ways of knowing and learning, how they take care of the environment, and their fights for land and cultural rights. Gender adds another important layer to these systems of inequality. Patriarchal social systems have traditionally affected how women have been able to get an education, find work, own property, take part in politics, move around freely, and make important decisions. However, the experience of patriarchy varies from one social group to another. Different factors like caste, class, ethnicity, where someone lives, and their economic situation affect how gender discrimination is faced by people. So, the experiences of women from

higher castes cannot be taken as the same as the experiences of all women in India. Dalit and Adivasi women face a very difficult situation because their lives are influenced by both the discrimination they face due to their caste or tribal background and the unfair treatment they experience as women. Understanding the position of Dalit and Adivasi women requires knowing about intersectionality. Their experiences can't be fully understood by looking at caste and gender on their own. Instead, these structures come together to create unique kinds of discrimination and vulnerability. A Dalit woman might face discrimination not just because she is a woman, but also because of her caste and where she lives. A woman from an Adivasi community might face discrimination based on her gender, along with being excluded from society, forced to move from her home, having limited economic opportunities, and being viewed through harmful stereotypes about her culture. Their experiences show how different power systems can happen at the same time and make each other stronger. The connection between caste and gender is also shown in how culture and media present things. Media is a powerful way of creating and sharing culture, shaping how people think about things like who they are, where they stand in society, what's considered beautiful, what's right or wrong, how people express themselves, how work is seen, and what it means to be respected. Movies, TV shows, news stories, ads, and online platforms can shape how people in a community are seen by the rest of society. When groups that are already treated as less important are shown in limited or exaggerated ways again and again, it can help make unfair social rankings seem normal and accepted. Dalit and Adivasi women have often been ignored or shown in a limited, unfair way in representation. They are often shown mainly as people who suffer from violence, poverty, exploitation, or unfair treatment, but their ability to take action, get involved in politics, contribute with their ideas, and fight back are not talked about as much. These portrayals can limit how we understand the lives of women from marginalized groups by showing them only as suffering, instead of highlighting their ability to deal with challenges, stand up against unfair situations, come together in groups, and change the conditions they face. Not having complex and independent ways of thinking can be a type of being left out or treated as less important. Media representation also raises issues about who creates the content and the influence of powerful organizations. It's important to look at how marginalized groups are shown in media and culture, but we also need to think about who creates those images, whose views are seen as important, and which voices aren't included in making cultural stories. When media organizations don't have enough people from different castes, tribes, and genders, the usual views might keep influencing the stories that are shown to the public. This can lead to repeating stereotypes even when media content seems to talk about problems like social inequality. At the same time, groups that are often left out have started to push back against these ways of showing things by creating their own kinds of cultural expressions. Dalit literature, Dalit films, Adivasi stories, independent news, feminist actions, and online media have given a platform for people and groups who are treated unfairly to share their own stories and feelings. These types of counter-representation question the idea that marginalized groups are only seen as subjects to be represented, and instead show them as people who create and share their own knowledge and cultural expressions. So, caste, gender, and how people are shown in the media are all connected parts of social power in modern India. The lasting presence of caste systems and traditional male-dominated structures affects more than just chances for

success; it also shapes how people from less privileged groups are seen and portrayed. Media can help spread inequalities by supporting stereotypes, making some groups invisible, and favoring common cultural ideas. But media can also help fix these issues by giving space for different stories and voices from people who are usually left out. To truly understand the complicated lives of Dalit and Adivasi women, it's important to look at how the media represents them. This kind of analysis helps us see how media portrayal can both control and challenge society.

The Role of Media in Perpetuating Caste and Gender Stereotypes

Indian movies, especially Bollywood movies, have played a major role in shaping the way people think and behave in society. Dalit characters are generally portrayed as characters who are victims of injustice in society or as villains who are rule-breakers and enemies of the established order. In mainstream films, the stories of Dalit characters hardly ever go beyond certain limits, and they are rarely ever shown as agents of their own change. Women, in particular Dalit women, have been largely excluded from mainstream cinema. When they are displayed, they tend to be displayed as being controlled, either in abusive relationships or subjected to sexual assault. Similar trends are also visible in the way television, which reaches a larger, more varied group of people, depicts caste and gender. The mainstream Hindi soap opera, which is quite popular on TV, is inclined to have upper-caste characters (particularly fair-skinned women) as the central heroines. Most reporters and editors in the news media in India come from higher castes and have also helped in perpetuating the unfair treatment of people based on caste. Mainstream news organizations do not often report enough on caste-based violence or portray it in a way that makes it seem less important. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have given an opportunity for Dalit activists and feminists to raise their voice for their issues and join hands for change. Hashtags like #DalitLivesMatter and MeToo Dalit have become potent rallying cries for those wanting to fight caste and gender discrimination. These waves, sometimes led by young people from marginalized groups, are fighting for more media and social visibility and opportunities. Media houses such as Dalit Camera, The Caravan, and The Wire, led by Dalits, have gained prominence in the media world. They provide different stories that question the usual discourse of caste and gender in mainstream media. Feminist movements, including Dalit feminism, have played an important role in exposing how mainstream feminist groups and Dalit politics generally overlook the particular concerns of Dalit women within the Dalit communities. Digital media, Dalit-run journalism, and independent films are telling new stories that challenge the ways in which caste and gender are usually seen and discussed.

CASTE AND GENDER STEREOTYPES IN MEDIA

The media has a large impact on how people think and feel about society, showing and promoting the beliefs and values that are prevalent in a culture. Caste and gender are two social factors that are interconnected in India and have a significant impact on people's lives. Indian movies, particularly in the Bollywood industry, have frequently come under fire for how they depict caste and gender issues. Dalits, Adivasis, and poor women in films are portrayed using old stereotypes, either pushed to the margins or left out altogether. These images reflect societal perspectives on certain issues, and they also influence those perspectives, as they are viewed

by many and influence public opinion. A big chunk of Indian films often misses out the struggles of caste and mostly focuses on characters of higher castes. The stories are generally narrated by characters of higher castes, and the stories they tell rarely mention the discrimination or suffering caused by one's caste. Whenever caste gets mentioned in a story, it is either treated as a side issue or sanitized, which takes away from the real challenges and realities that people face because of caste discrimination.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While there is more support for movements against caste and gender stereotypes in media, a lot of problems still hinder real change from happening. The influence of big companies on TV and news, and online bullying of Dalit activists, are big problems that keep caste-based inequality alive and stop people from lower castes from being heard equally. This section discusses the main issues faced by Dalits and other oppressed groups in relation to their representations in the media and the ways to make the media more equitable and inclusive. The major media in India is mostly owned and run by people belonging to upper castes. This structural problem directly affects the coverage, presentation, or non-coverage of issues of caste and gender. Training content creators and audiences on caste and gender biases in media can change attitudes and create more just and inclusive stories. Journalism schools need to revamp their curriculum to include courses on caste sensitivity, intersectionality, and ethical reporting on caste issues. NGOs and Dalit groups should organize workshops and public awareness campaigns to educate journalists, filmmakers and media workers about caste issues and help them identify and confront wrong notions and unfair treatment based on caste. Encouraging social media companies to adopt anti-caste policies: Advocacy work should encourage large social media platforms like Meta (Facebook), Twitter and YouTube to implement stricter rules to stop caste-based speech and false information. The battle to end caste and gender stereotypes in media is far from over. Digital platforms and independent media have given voice to the voiceless, yet there are still big problems such as corporate control, online caste discrimination, and the way Dalit stories are used or changed by others. Going forward, affirmative action in the media space, support for media owned by Dalit communities, and widespread media literacy efforts will be key to dismantling the caste-based inequities in the representation of people in the media. Only collective action and institutional changes can make India's media truly inclusive and reflective of the myriads of groups in its society.

Conclusion

Representation of caste and gender in Indian media is an important area of research as typical stories on television and in newspapers tend to reinforce unfair treatment through stereotypes, exclusion and misrepresentation. How Dalit and other marginalized groups are represented in films, television programs, news media, and online media demonstrates how issues of caste and gender are intertwined. There have been movements and alternative stories in recent years that are challenging the typical media messages and calling for more authentic and equitable representations. The study explored the permanence of caste and gender stereotypes in the media and their sustenance as well as the various forms of resistance by oppressed groups

against negative representations. It examines all kinds of media, including movies, television shows, news reports, and internet content, to demonstrate the challenges and opportunities of effecting real change.

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