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A Critical Analysis of the Function of Mass Media Language as a Tool of Social Oppression

Radheshyam Jadhav, M.A, Ph.D.

Abstract

Sociolinguistics and sociology of language reflected in the newspapers explain the general approach and attitude of the media towards social and political issues, etc. Research in mass media should look beyond linguistic concerns to understand the functioning of the dominant structures.

Insensitive language content results in the stereotypical portrayal and discrimination. The print media is heavily 'elite' dominated and, accordingly, it has language preference, language loyalty, language attitudes and language choices. The language use relates to the use of words in a structured and conventional way to communicate using conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings. Communicative use of language is conversation where sender and receiver of the message are involved in the process.

The media language is affected by the graded inequality which has found new faces and forms in the new world order. The socio-religious sanctions in support of the oppressive structures and the language they speak are reflected in the media. The media speaks the language of the powerful and the dominant, and not that of the oppressed. The wider range of critical issues of the credibility and public interest along with accuracy, fairness, integrity, transparency, responsibility are at the core of the ethical debate. Imbibing of stereotypes, depiction of violence, sex, vulgarity and influencing the mass psychology in a specific direction are causes for concern. The oppressive structures use transmission and ritual

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conceptions of communication as per the situation demands. But mostly the ritual communication has been used in media to reinforce and glorify the oppression. Advertising is meant for selling products by using persuasive and emphatic use of language with crispy catchy and easy lines. But, in structural oppression approach, the line between the advertisements and the news is blurred. Media creates a mirage through news, advertisements and pursues conversion of readers into consumers.

Introduction

The language is use of words in a structured and conventional way to communicate using conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings. Communication with the use of language or any other means is nothing but conversation where message sender and receiver are involved in the process. In traditional newspapers, the letters to editor was the only space for the bidirectional communication. Otherwise it was one way communication directed by media to its readers. With new media providing more space for people to communicate with the messenger, the print media had to pave the way for conversation by introducing e-papers, websites, blogs, etc., to communicate. The concepts like citizen journalists have already taken roots with some of the newspapers bringing out special supplements to publish stories by readers.

The role of media has been a subject of considerable speculation in recent times. Communication scholars are divided on the role of media communication. There are some who consider communication as precondition and premise for the human development while there are others who state that media and communication are just facilitators in the development process.

The fact remains that media and communication can hardly bring radical change on the ground. Actual ground action is required for any sustainable change and media communication can facilitate the change.

The media and the language it speaks have assumed significance in today's globalised world. In a country like India, print still holds the fort in the era of new media.

This research paper tries to understand the print media language with focus on newspapers in the backdrop of the incessant oppression and exploitation. The mass media institutions have become one of the tools (sutra) in the hands of oppressors functioning within the structure of oppression and exploitation.

The Newspapers

(The information provided in this section is a summary from a variety of sources including the following:

- 1) World Association of Newspapers - <http://www.wan-press.org/article2821.html>
- 2) Kumar Keval J, Mass Communication in India, Mumbai, Jaico publishing House, 11th Jaico impression, 1999.
- 3) Lele R K, Marathi Vrutapatrancha Itihaas, Pune: Continental Prakashan, 2nd edition (2004).

The history of newspapers goes back to Rome where official documented information was displayed for the public. The daily events in the life of Romans were collected by reporters (known as *actuarii*), officially appointed by the state. These reports were displayed on a board. *Acta Diurna* means 'daily acts' in Latin. The *Acta Diurna* were also known as *Acta Populi* (Acts of the People), *Acta Publica* (Public Acts), or *Acta Urbana* (Municipal Acts). The pieces of news displayed on the board were kept as archives. War news, senate discussions, political developments, important events in Rome were displayed on the board. *Acta Diurna* were the initial form of daily news papers.

In the 8th century, the first newspaper appeared as hand-written newssheets in Beijing. In 1447 Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press. Newsletters were published during this period which gave information about trade and business developments. Also manuscript newssheets were started in Germany by the late 15th century. In 1556 the Venetian government published *Notizie scritte*. In the 17th century more newspapers were started in Western countries. In 1605 *Relation* was started in Germany, *Gazette* in France (1631), *Nieuwe Tijdingen* in Belgium (1616) and *London Gazette* in England in (1665). These newspapers were focused on the developments in European nations.

However, the invention of the telegraph in 1844 brought a revolution in the communication sector and it became possible to transfer the information within a few minutes. This was the harbinger of the new changing technology in the communication, especially the mass communication. Meanwhile non-European nations entered the newspaper publication.

Japan's first daily newspaper, *Yokohama Mainichi Shimbun*, appeared in 1870. The modern printing in India was started in Goa in 1550 by Spanish Coadjutor, Brother John de Bustamante. The first language printing press with vernacular types was established in 1557 at Vaipicotta. In 1766 William Bolts attempted to start a newspaper in India. However the first newspaper in India *The Bengal Gazette* or *Calcutta General Adviser* was brought out by an Englishman James Augustus Hicky. The first issue appeared on January 29, 1780. *Bengal Gazette* was the first Indian owned English daily launched by Raja Rammohun Roy in 1816 and since then the print media in India has dominated the media scene.

With the emergence of new age electronic media, questions are being raised on the survival of the print media across the world. In developed countries where internet has become part and parcel of life and digital media has penetrated every household there is decline in the print circulation. Printed newspapers and magazines were forced to change their forms and content to compete with the new age media.

The Present State of Print Media in India

Information provided in this section is culled from the following:

Shailsh Dabhol, 2010. Print media holds its own among India's youth. 9 February 2010. Available from <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/print-media-holds-its-own-among-indias-yout/577338/> Accessed on 6 January 2011.

In India, the print media still continues to hold large influence on the masses. According to findings of the National Book Trust-National Council of Applied Economic Research's National Youth Readership Survey (NYRS) 2009, India's youth population grew at over 2% to 459 million in 2009 from 390 million in the 2001 census, while the literate youth population grew at a more rapid 2.5% to 333 million from 273 million. Growth was faster in urban India (3.15% a year) than in rural India (2.11%).

The survey with a sample of over 3,11,431 literate youth (1,02,021 rural and 2,09,410 urban) covering 432 villages in 207 districts as rural and 753 urban blocks in 199 towns as urban helps to understand the media consumption, reading habits and preferences of literate Indian youth.

The survey, conducted in November-December 2009, follows the National Youth Policy 2003's definition of youth: people in the age group 13-35 years. Almost three-fourths (73%) of literate youth in the country are from schedule castes (22.7%), schedule tribes (9.8%) and other backward classes (40.3%), according to the survey.

Television emerged as the biggest media, with over 77% of the 333 million literate, or 259 million, youth exposed to it. Newspapers too are able to maintain their dominance, with over half (53%) of all literate youth, or 177 million, exposed to them. But in terms of preferred media for news and current affairs around two-thirds (63.4%) selected newspapers compared with just a third (22.2%) for television.

In fact radio, with 22.8% of youth preferring it for news and current affairs, still has a slight edge over television here. Radio, with a listener audience of 71 million youth, also punches above magazines (52 million) and Internet (12 million). Book readers (non-syllabus) number around 83 million (25% of literate youth), of which 39 million are in urban areas and 44 million in rural India.

The total number of registered newspapers, as on 31st March, 2008 was 69,323. The number of new newspapers registered during 2007-08 was 4,332 while percentage of growth of total registered publications over the previous year is 6.7 %. The largest number of newspapers and periodicals registered in any Indian language are in Hindi (27,527) while the second largest number of newspapers and periodicals registered in any language are in English (10,000). The state with the largest number of registered newspapers is Uttar Pradesh (10,779) while the state with the second largest number of registered newspapers is Delhi (9,483). The largest circulated daily is The Hindu, English, Chennai with a circulation of 12,75,553. The second largest circulated daily is Ananda Bazar Patrika, Bengali, Kolkata with a circulation of 12,55,850. The largest circulated multi-edition Daily is The Times of India, English (5 editions) with a circulation of 23,35,991.(1)

The Language Media Speaks

On this backdrop it is necessary to understand what media is communicating to the masses and in which language. The Journalists and masses are from the same country, but different classes. Especially in the English elite media the decision makers and writers come from the high elite class with so-called rich educational background from 'world famous' universities. The language and *parole* used by these journalists is regarded as 'standard' and according to

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these standards a village youth studying in local college will not be a 'suitable' candidate for the journalist's job though he is an English graduate or a doctorate degree holder. The language is same but its color, culture, content, parole and pronunciations are different. There is no newspaper to cater to the needs of new English learners which speaks their language.

In a tiny Bankagaon village in Uttar Pradesh near Lakhimpur Khiri, Dalits took a oath on April 30, 2010 to learn English and decided to worship the language as goddess. They also laid foundation of an 'English goddess' temple so that they could take 'blessings of this goddess and flourish in life like Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Even in government schools the number of parents who want to educate their kids in English language is on the rise. However, English media is far away from these new entrants of the language.

Same is applied to the regional media. The educated elite class language is regarded 'standard' and 'pure'. For example language spoken by about 80 per cent of people in Maharashtra is not found in newspapers, radio or television. The 'pure' Marathi spoken and written by the elite class is the set standard of language in Marathi media. The basic function of language is communication and if it could communicate effectively the grammar and rules of language should **not** be a barrier.

Assumed and Presumed Objectivity – Excluding and Ignoring Sections of Audience

Objectivity is preached in journalism, but hardly there is any objective reporting. Unfortunately in country like India one has to carry the tag of caste and religion and journalists are no exception. While dealing with the stories journalists are not just journalists but they are carriers of the cultural system they represent. He or she comes from a caste, religion, village/city, culture, school, college, ideology, experience etc. It is impossible for the journalist to keep all this aside and be an objective reporter while reporting.

The general norm of objectivity in journalism thus remains restricted to the representation of all sides in the story by adding quotes of the all parties involved. But the basic scope of the news, especially in the elite English media, is limited to the urban and elite class and it is reflected in rhetorical tropes and other semiotics of the news.

For example, eponyms like 'man Friday' which means a close and valued right hand person are used in the news frequently. The new learner of the language will not understand the eponym until he reads *Robinson Crusoe* -- a novel by Daniel Defoe that was first published in 1719.

The Transition of Language Did Not Change the approach and Attitude

The metaphors, allegories, social and ideological codes are drawn from colonial legacy and Unites States of America addiction. It is not only the language but also the subjects come from similar vibes. Thousands of poor women who became leaders of villages as *sarpanch* and who made a radical difference hardly find space in newspapers. The traditional upper class/caste in India which was quick to grab the opportunities in British era moulded self into a new model and shifted gears without changing core ideologies. The transition of language did not change the approach and attitude. Hence the caste convention in 'modern' urban cities organised to defend caste system and supremacy gets massive displays even in English

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media which speaks language of ‘modern ideologies’. Development communication efforts by traditional and folk artists are dubbed as entertainment by and for ‘lower class’. An illiterate farmer experimenting with drip irrigation to save water to reap crop hardly becomes a hero on newspaper pages.

In the middle of false icons and artificial heroes the real ones hardly get their space in media. Class of few still dominates the scene, only the tools with which they dominate have changed and media is the best example in India. The criteria, definitions and parameters are still defined and decided by a few dominant while others either try to get fit in the decided framework or innovate their way to break suffocation. The paradigms and models which are imbibed through the mainstream media reflects the ‘elite’ class and not masses.

Need to Shift Paradigm Focus and Theories

There is need to shift paradigm focus and theories should be re-organised. Efforts of common people who are trying to change their lives should reflect in mass media. Deprived and marginal communities are not represented as they should be in the main stream media. The representation of the Dalits, Advasis, minorities and marginal communities is meagre. Their contribution to socio-economic and cultural development is either neglected or ignored and their coverage is tinged with bias. The media and its makers play a role of facilitator to maintain the oppressive structure.

The *Sutra* Theory of Oppression and Exploitation – Graded Inequality

Oppression is prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority, while exploitation is the action or fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work. Oppression is not isolated or temporary scenario but it is continuous and evolving process. Structure of oppression exploits oppressed and reaps benefits of the structural system. The castes and classes in India have always enjoyed the power they derived from socio-religious-economic-political oppressive structures. With this power they oppressed and exploited those deprived of power.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar rightly said that the Indian (Hindu) social order could have vanished if it was based on inequality, but it continues to flourish in various forms as it is based on ‘graded inequality’ where everyone wants to pull others to their levels but not allow lower to become equal. This graded inequality has found new faces and forms in the new world order. The powerful oppressors toil to maintain the oppressive structure and any challenge to oppression and exploitation is challenge to this oppressive power structure.

World has witnessed many struggles between oppressors (exploiters) and oppressed (exploited). Since the human existence the oppressive power structures have played a role in human relations. These structures remain same through ages, operating overtly and covertly with changing forms.

A sutra of oppression and exploitation runs common in world civilizations. The literal meaning of *sutra* is thread or lineage that holds things together. The oppression and exploitation and their manifestation have found new forms and faces through ages which have also witnessed the struggle against oppression and exploitation.

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In India the roots of oppression and exploitation could be traced in the socio-religious discrimination which institutionalized the exploitative system. The social life is based on the discriminative varna dharma system which impedes individual from empowerment and self development. The economic life again revolves round the *varna* dharma which gives exclusive rights of holding property and economic prosperity to upper varnas. The polity is prerogative of the 'warrior' varna. The discriminatory religious structure deprives a huge chunk of people of the basic human rights in the name of varna and caste system. The Indian history is full of struggles against this oppressive and exploitative structure.

From Charvaka to Mahaveer and Buddha and from Kabir to Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Dr. B R Ambedkar hundreds of revolutionaries challenged the oppression and exploitation in various forms and ways. The Indian freedom struggle and majority of its proponents raised revolt against the oppressive and exploitative British Raj, but failed to find the antidote to the oppressive and exploitative structure within Indian society. In fact, for thousands of deprived in India, the freedom struggle and its outcome was just replacement of the oppressors (exploiters) as the sutra of oppression and exploitation continues with new Indian *sutradhars* (carrier of sutra). The structural sutra of oppression runs diagonal, it spreads, trickles down and flourishes to exploit the lowest in hierarchy.

Male-dominated Patriarchal System

The sutra of oppression could be traced in male-dominated patriarchal system which replaced the matriarchal system. It could be traced in the dominance of so called 'developed' nations, it could be traced in the culture, value system and the new world order as well.

The oppressor system derives power by exploiting powerless deprived from acquiring power. The answer to underdevelopment and poverty should be traced in the oppressive and exploitative structures. Finding answers to oppression and exploitation will lead to the path of development. The human life strives for development.

Meaning of *Development*

Though development has assumed new meanings and overtones, for the countries like India where even basic needs and human rights is a distant dream for majority, development means something different from what is being propagated and imbibed by 'developed' classes across nations. To develop is to use full human potential for betterment of life. To develop is to enjoy the equal benefits of social, economic, religious and political power. To develop is to fulfil the human needs – material and spiritual without any discrimination and degradation of environment. To develop is to live life with dignity. To develop is to combat oppression and exploitation.

However, the *sutradhara*'s of the oppressive structures want to maintain the structure and ensure continuity of the sutra of oppression and exploitation. However the moment the structure of oppression comes into existence it sows seeds of subversion. But the subversion of one structure does not mean end of structural oppression. The new structure replaces the old one and takes over the sutra. The instinct to have 'power over' keeps the sutra alive. And for this purpose the structure uses various tools. Communication and media are the tools the

oppressive structures are being used effectively throughout ages. The socio-religious sanctions to the oppressive structures and the language they speak is reflected in media. The media does not speak language of oppressed; it does not come out with the stories of oppressed as it will disturb the power balance.

Mass Media Communication as Tool

The concept of mass media has always been associated with the media which could communicate message to heterogeneous masses at one time. The mass communication is mediated by a device. *Many Voice One World* Report states that since the invention of the printing press and, in more recent times of a multitude of communication forms including telegraph, telephone, telex, camera and film, phonograph, radio, television, the world has been truly transformed.

Message of all kinds are continuously transmitted to a vast number of recipients. The mass society approach in communication considered that people are atomised and disconnected. Hence the mass media could largely influence them as the people in mass society are not under influence of social and psychological burdens which are 'hurdles' to receive new information. Institutionalized communication is the most prominent feature of the mass media institutions.

Former president of Press Council of India Justice P B Sawant is of the view that there is no other institution than the media which can perform the task of educating both the people and their representatives on a wide range of subjects constantly and directly and also to keep the line of feedback between the two constantly running. The media has thus become an indispensable institution not only for modern society but also for the modern democratic polity. (2)

In 1958 the UN General Assembly called for a programme of concrete action to build up press, radio broadcasting, film and television facilities as part of economic and social development. To draw up a suitable programme and assess the resources required, the General Assembly requested UNESCO to carry out a fact finding survey.

A UN Proposal

Based upon the UNESCO report submitted to UN, the General Assembly, in 1962, unanimously adopted a resolution expressing its concern that the survey disclosed 70 per cent of the population of the world lack in adequate information facilities and are thus denied effective enjoyment of the right to freedom. The UN General Assembly also emphasized that information media have an important part to play in education and in economic and social progress generally and that new techniques of communication offer special opportunities for acceleration of the education process.

Consequently, governments, especially of newly emerged developing countries, were urged to include in their economic development plans adequate provision for development of national information media. UNESCO was specially called upon to play active role and support programmes and activities leading to development of communication systems in the developing countries". The proponents of the mass media preached the importance of the

medium calling it ‘magic multiplier’ which could transform the ‘developing and under developed’ world. The governments of the nations which had become free from the colonial imperialism were easily enamoured with the theory. These nations invested in the media hoping that it could take them at par with the ‘developed’ nations.

The Western media experts, who were hired by the ‘developing’ and ‘backward’ countries, insisted on the media proliferation, talked the Western world language. The media and its communication could never catch nerves of the masses in these countries.

Media as Instrument to Spread and Reinforcement Hegemony – Meaning of Communication

Not surprisingly Antonio Gramsci, an Italian writer, politician, political theorist, linguist and philosopher, viewed mass media as instrument to spread and reinforce hegemony, where the dominant groups in the society maintain dominance with the consent of the subordinates.

Communication has its origin in the Latin word *communis*, which means “common.” The *Oxford Dictionary* defines *communication* as act of communicating, i.e., to share or exchange information or ideas, or pass on or convey (an emotion, etc.) (3)

James W Carey states that two alternative conceptions of communication are alive in American culture since 19th century. The transmission view of communication is defined by terms such as ‘imparting’, ‘sensing’, ‘transmitting’ or giving into others. (4)

The ritual definition of communication is linked with terms such as ‘sharing’, ‘participation’, ‘association’, ‘fellowship’ and ‘the possession of a common faith’. “A ritual view of communication is directed not towards the extension of message in space but towards the maintenance of society in time, not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs”. The ritual definition exploits the ancient identity of common roots of the term ‘commonness’, ‘communion’, ‘community’ and ‘communication’. (5)

The oppressive structures use transmission and ritual conceptions as per the situation demands. But mostly the ritual communication has been used for to reinforce and glorify the traditional oppression. ‘Ganesh drinking milk again’, ‘Mother Mary crying in Kerala’, ‘Jesus’ bleeds in Mumbai church’ are some of the headlines of newspapers in past few years.

On the other side, there are stories of multi-storey buildings, ‘development’ based on the economic prosperity, news about the big and famous. The media and its owners choose the subjects and language which suits them.

Four Theories in Oppression Structure

The four theories of the press/media were proposed by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Paterson and Wilbur Schramme (1956) in their book *Four Theories of the Press*. These were called as normative theories by Denis McQuail as theories explain functioning of media in specific system of social values.

The press/media system is divided into four categories: **authoritarian theory, liberation theory, social responsibility theory** and **Soviet media theory**. The sutra of oppression runs common in these theories. The oppressive structures work in all systems and make use of media and communication for their purpose.

Authoritarian Theory

Authoritarian theory comes from the era of Renaissance where ‘truth’ was confined to a few powerful. After invention of printing press these powerful rulers used the press to inform people selectively. Press belonged to rulers and preached official policies. Private ownership was allowed only with sanctions. In this theory the media is expected to follow and obey the authority. State takes precedence over the press. But it is a fact that not only dictatorial but even democratic governments opt for authoritarian control of media.

In today’s world, the owners of media, most of them, run the media as business and the objective of business is profit. Media and government work in tandem to mutually support and benefit each other. Here the consensus plays a role and government and media wield authority with consensus. Parts of government and media structures i.e., employees, reporters etc become a cog in the wheel of power. The election coverage in newspapers in recent times tells the story.

The Liberation or Free Press Theory

The liberation or free press theory places man above the state. ‘Truth’ is not property and prerogative of a few powerful. The press (media) is partner in search of truth and is not an instrument of the state. Press plays as a device with which people can make up their minds. Press is free from government control or influence. However the ‘truth’ press pursues is not always ‘truth’ or many times it is ‘truth’ from media’s own perspective. The power structures plays important role in deciding and defining the ‘truth’. During the Gujarat riots every media house decided what truth was and played accordingly. ‘Carnage’ ‘riot’ ‘revenge’ ‘lesson’ were the words used by different media to define the burning Gujarat.

Social Responsibility Theory

Roots of social responsibility theory could be traced in the Commission of Freedom of the Press, 1949 in the United States of America. The commission observed that the information needs of certain class were not met. The media was in hands of a selected few who controlled the content and dominated the media market. The theory came into picture after it was felt that media should have certain obligations, accountability, accuracy, objectivity and balance in its coverage. This led to formation of regulatory bodies such as press council.

However the social responsibility of the media is buried in the business as communication has become commodity in the game of power structures. Media is not medium of social change and reforms, but it is a ‘product’ to be sold in the market to reap profit. The picture of ‘development’ painted by newspapers in news and advertisement revolves round the ‘development’ which the power structure wants to impose. Big roads, buildings, cars, markets, business, gross domestic product, sensex and sex are the words one could see planted all over newspaper pages.

Soviet Media Theory

Soviet media theory is an outcome of the Marx-Lenin philosophy. In Soviet-Communist system, the state owns and controls the media and its content. The media is tool in the hands of the state to 'educate' and 'socialize' people. State hold authority over the media as it is accountable for the welfare of people.

But this scene is not exclusive to the Communist regimes. It is applicable to the democracies across the world. If the media fails or defies the government power structure it is certain to face the wrath. In fact the Government ensures that media speaks its language and for this purpose government uses various mean to put its words in media's mouth.

Besides these four theories development communication theory and democratization theory became part of the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The needs of these countries were different and with development on top agenda, media in these countries was expected to support the development initiatives. But the main stream media preached the development from the perspective of the 'developed' class and countries. Aspirations and basic needs of huge population were connived in the razzmatazz of development.

Functions of Mass Media in Oppressive Power Structure

As a tool in hands of the dominant power structure, the media itself becomes an oppressive structure while performing its functions.

a) Information: It is said to be one of the basic functions of mass media. It was thought that the information scarcity was the root cause of many problems and with the mass media disseminating more and more information the basic issues would be resolved. However the media which is part or the structural oppression and a tool in hands of oppressors provides the information which builds the consensus for the oppression and justifies exploitation in various ways. Information comes with the perspective and information is dumped without any knowledge about its use.

b) Consensus: The mass media assist in correlating response to the challenges and opportunities and reach consensus on social actions. The consensus thwarts the possibility to subversion and media as tool is used to communicate the importance of structure.

c) Entertainment: The diffusion through signs, symbols, sounds and images for personal and collective recreation and enjoyment is one of the functions of mass media. Through the recreation using dominant signs, symbols, sounds and images of the dominant oppressive structures are imbibed in the minds of those exploited. Under the influence, the lower strata respect oppressive structure and yearn to be part of it.

d) Socialization: The provision of a common fund of knowledge enables people to operate as effective members of the society in which they live and which fosters social cohesion and awareness thereby permitting active involvement in public life. Media maintains equilibrium in the society and does not support the revolutionary ideas that could disturb the existing

fabric of the society. Mind-boggling information that comes in wraps hardly creates awareness.

e) Education: Mass media can play a major role in education, especially the use of mass media is being largely made in distance education systems in developing worlds. But the education is again part of the oppressive structure. The language, grammar, history, culture and even sports are dominated by the oppressive structures and kids are made to learn and accept the norms set in this structure. The education system in country like India kills the basic instinct of innovation and makes student a carrier of the structural norms. Media further strengthens these norms.

f) Debate and discussion: Media determines, discusses, debates and dominates. The stand media houses take in various issues is determined by the owners. Media discusses the topics of its choice and initiates the debate which is dominated by it. For the popular perception media does talks on issues which are common mans concern but never tries to reach to the root cause of the same as it could lead to the uneasy facts and disturb the fabric of oppressive structures.

g) Cultural promotion: The dissemination of culture and cultural communication is one of the functions of mass media. The mass media provides a shared or common symbolic environment by connecting dominant cultures. Newspaper language reinforces the ‘mass’ and ‘class’ cultures.

h) Advertising: This is one the main functions of the mass media. It is a driving force for business, industries and mass media. Today with the paid news concept widely being accepted the line between the news and the advertisement is blurring. Many news are not advertisements as per say, but they advertise and promote certain things, values, cultures from the perspective of media owners.

i) Infotainment: It not only the information, but information mixed with entertainment has become a prominent feature of today’s media. The trivialisation of the content dilutes the seriousness and authenticity of the information.

j) Development: In ‘developing’ and ‘poor’ countries the mass media was envisaged to play a role of development communicator to address the issues like poverty, illiteracy, oppression, superstition, discrimination etc. However the media has just played a role to imbibe the dominant paradigm of development which has already failed in Western world.

Media Ownership and Pluralism

While discussing the role of media and communication in the sutra theory of oppression and exploitation the role of media ownership cannot be ignored. Diversity of ownership, various sources of information and citizens’ access to various voices and opinions forms essential part of the concept of media pluralism. Pluralism is premise of the democracy. Plural media ensures that diversity within society is reflected in media.

Media pluralism consists of diversity of ownership and output in form of content. The concentration of media in a few hands hampers the free and fair flow of information which is

essential for the healthy democracy. Diversity of content providers, market size, sources help to produce diverse output.

The Press Council report on print media states that monopoly over information whether of private individuals and institutions or of the government is detrimental to democracy, for it may disseminate one-sided information and endanger fairness and objectivity. The corporate sector has entered the press mainly to do business like any other business, and to earn profits. Further, the corporate sector has invariably its other businesses to safeguard and promote and it has entered media business to use its power to further its other business interests. Media ownership across the world is now concentrating in hands of a few groups and individuals who have massive economic capacity to invest. Survival of small and medium media houses, especially newspapers has become more and more difficult.

Expansion of Media

Expansion or growth within a single media sector is referred as **monomedia expansion**. For example a newspaper group taking over another publication and increase its chain of newspapers. In **cross section media expansion** the media owner spreads his/her monopoly over more than one sub sector. For example the owner of newspaper gets into television or radio or online publication business.

The expansion of media either ways has created a new power centres across the world giving birth to media moguls. These owners with concentrated power in hands influence the politics, governance and society. *Many Voices One World* Report states that concentration of ownership in fewer hands has resulted in anxiety. Industrialization has tended to stimulate a concentration in the communication sector through formation of oligopolies and monopolies in the gathering, storing and disseminating information.

This concentration operates in three directions – the horizontal and vertical integration of enterprises connected with information and entertainment, the involvement of enterprise operating in different branches with the media expansion (hotel, restaurant chains and other manufacturers are in media business) and merging and intermeshing of various information industries into large scale multi-media conglomerates.

News Factors

A) Following factors are the criteria for the news in structural oppression system.

a) Impact—How many people does the event affect? How seriously does it affect them? A film actress kissed by another actor, a marriage party of political bigwig, illicit relations ship between well known personalities, extra marital affairs, a billionaire gifting his wife a plane are some of the page one stories in the newspapers. What impact do the newspapers expect on its readers?

b) Proximity—An event will be more important if is closer to the readers. An earthquake in a far-off land is not as interesting as one that is close to home. But at the same time Prince Charls dating with someone can become page one news in local Indian paper. The uneasy

facts that could expose and destabilise the equilibrium are generally avoided by the newspapers and efforts are made to create proximity with the distant world.

c) Timeliness—Is the event fresh? Is it new? The news must be timely to be of use to readers. However hardly any news is new and fresh. Majority of the news are sequels and follow-ups. One could hardly read a fresh story in newspapers which could be used by readers. The theme and the message are same but names, faces, places and language is different.

d) Prominence—Names make news, and big names make big news. Ordinary people are intrigued by the doings of the rich and famous and this is what dominates the newspapers. Films, politics, crime, celebrities and sex are new age mantras.

e) Novelty—This is the new in news, the unusual. But it depends on ‘who’? Innovation by a villager, a poor farmer can hardly make national news unless it is really big. But politician dating new girlfriend grabs the headlines. Launch of new lipstick and cars is ‘novel’ news, but daily suicide of farmers becomes routine story which goes off the page.

f) Conflict—Conflict has been the currency of great literature, drama and movies for all time. There are evidences how the mainstream media had kept mum on the conflicts between the common man and the capitalists. Agitations against the special economic zones, farmers suicide and agitations against the big industrial houses constructing ‘environment hill station cities’ digging up green hills made the news only after the conflict gained serious proportions. But even this coverage is momentary. Conflict between Ambani brothers and Thackeray brothers in Mumbai is always news. The agitations, farmer’s suicide continues, but media leaves it back to look forward.

g) Audience—Who is the audience? The answer to that question helps determine whether an event is news at all, and if it is, where it will be played in the paper. One argument made by media houses is that they provide what people want and like. If they don’t want like, they will not ‘buy’ the ‘product’. Vulnerable audience plays at the hands of media structures.

W’s and H

Use the five “W’s and the H” – Who, What, Where, When, Why and How in the lead of the story. In the structural oppression W’s and H have gained new meanings.

Who – Who is the story about?

Answer- Hardly it is about the common people and their lives. It is about rich and famous, ‘modernisation’, money, sex and funfair.

What – What is the story about?

Answer- The story is about ‘development’, ‘modernisation’, corruption, extra marital relations and vulgarity.

Where – Where did the event you’re writing about occur?

Answer – In globalised world there is no boundary for such stories.

When – When did it occur?

Answer – In today's world it occurs 24x7

Why – Why did this happen?

Answer- Because the oppressive structures want it to happen

How – How did this happen?

Answer- Detail pictures will be provided of the events – how rape happened, modus operandi of crime like murder, what happened in bedrooms of leaders etc.

The News Language

Sociolinguistics (the effect of the society on the language) and sociology of language (language's effect on society) reflected in the newspapers explain the general approach and attitude of media towards the issues they are covering. Research in mass media should look beyond linguistic concerns to understand the functioning of the dominant structures.

What is News?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines news as 'report of recent events'. (6) While Oxford dictionary defines it as 'newly received or noteworthy information, especially about recent events' (7). The 'newsworthiness' is decided by the gatekeepers in the media.

'3 Indians in ICC's 'dream team' of ODI greats' is the page one news with lead saying, 'Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag won a massive endorsement from fans on Wednesday when they were effectively declared the finest one-day international (ODI) opening pair ever'. The story adds that 6 lakh voters in 97 countries voted them online. The story doesn't mention who were voters, if they really voted? from which country most votes came? And more importantly what are the criteria of voters? In the age of marketing there are many such competitions in television where singers, dancers, actors are voted by viewers to chose 'best'. Mobile companies are making business out of this. Sellable celebrities and ideas are sold and profits shared. (8) There is another newspaper with story 'Queenstown invites Dhoni, Sakshi for honeymoon' is the PTI news published in newspaper with Chief Executive of Destination Queenstown Tony Everitt's statement – 'We are thrilled to invite Mr and Mrs Dhoni to Queenstown to spend their honeymoon with us. I'm sure this will be the perfect romantic getaway for them'. (9) However the story doesn't explains why Tony Evritt's is 'thrilled' about Dhoni's honeymoon? But obviously he must have business calculations in his mind while tendering this invitation. There are news to declare 'best butt's of the year' and how a businessman is building multi storey house for his family. Tejaswini Sawant a girl from Kolhapur became news only after she won medal in world shooting championship, and her struggle came to limelight. If she had not won the medal probably she would have continued to suffer in darkness like thousands of sportsmen. News has become something that could be sold in the market without any effort.

News Structure - The Inverted Pyramid

The inverted pyramid is the accepted structure for news writing where information is arranged in descending order of importance. The most important information that reader

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should know immediately is placed at the top of story followed by less information. The first part of the story is called lead/ intro. It introduces the news story and answers the questions which will come into the minds of readers. Lead summarizes the story and/or to draw the readers attention and make him to read story further.

“ Nearly two years ago, in September 2008, Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange — the lone dalit survivor of the Khairlanji massacre of four dalits — had flashed a victory sign and a smile after the Bhandara sessions court sentenced six of the eight accused to death. But on Wednesday, there were smiles on the faces of the six convicts saved from the gallows after the Nagpur bench of Bombay High Court commuted their capital punishment to life terms. A nonplussed Bhotmange muttered, "This was totally unexpected." Four member of Bhaiyalal's family were lynched on September 29, 2006, in Khairlanji village in Bhandara district. The lead talks of smiles, ' Dalit's ' victory signs' and there is no mention of the caste of convicted people, but Bhaiyalal's ' Dalit' ness is mentioned. (10) 'Jaitapur villagers nuke power project' is headline followed by lead – 'Jaitapur, a small sleepy hamlet along Maharashtra's Konkan coast, is up in arms against an ambitious 10,000-mw nuclear power project being set up by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL). Angry protesters, who had gathered in large numbers, on Sunday made their opposition known by stalling a public hearing by the NPCIL'. Reporter/ newspaper didn't felt it necessary to put village voice in the lead or in the headline or even in the lead of the story. The story declarers –' However, the opposition from the unyielding villagers may throw the entire project off-track'. (11)

Hard and Soft News

Hard news - the news which has immediate and long term direct impact on lives of people (readers) and is directly concerned with their lives. In such news, the lead or the introduction should be straight and clear. No flowery language or intrigued words should be used. The message should be given clear and simple language. For example, *Two people on bike died in a road accident on Mahatma Gandhi road on Tuesday when bus collided with a two wheeler.*

Soft news – These types of news are not sensitive or directly making impact on lives of people (readers). The programmes in city, peoples' profile, routine developments are soft news. In such news, writer has chance to experiment with the lead or introduction and write in flowery language.

For example, *There are good Samaritans hanging around in world to make life easy by giving helping hand when needed. For hundreds of budding flowers deserted by their parents, Meeratai is one such Samaritan.*

However, the line between the hard and soft news is blurring. The media house decided on how should reporters and editors go about the story and turn hard news into soft and visa versa.

Blurring Lines – News and Advertising

Advertising is meant for selling products by using persuasive language. Emphatic use of language with crispy catchy and easy lines attracts readers. Like news, advertisements are

part of structural oppression. In fact the line between the advertisements and the news is blurring. Earlier advertisers bought space in the newspaper and paid for it. Now they could directly pay to the owners for news. News and advertisements have become similar. Exploiting the hypothesis that people have faith in printed words, advertisers are buying the news space instead of advertising. There is trend in media where business houses advertise in the newspaper and as return the newspaper publishes story endorsing the product.

‘Never lets you down’ is the catch line of a product to increase the potency. ‘100 per cent assured results, explore your wild side, for youthful vigour and vitality,’ says this ad. Supporting these advertisements are columns and stories on how to increase potency in beds. ‘You now have iconic status’ says the advertisement for apartments named as ‘Pride Icon’ or ‘be like Aishwarya’ says the fairness cream advertisement.

These are the advertisements meant for vulnerable audience who dream to do things they could not.

The advertisers’ job is to drag this audience to the limit and force them to buy the product and make it a habit.

Another advertisement of two wheeler has line ‘Naya year powerful and stylish banana ke liye anything karega’. This mix of language is not used in formal news, but advertisements make use of all possible language experiments to attract consumers.

Coalescence of the Functions of Ads and News

Advertisements are not meant to make readers think. The sole purpose is to trap them.

Paid News

The news is not doing anything different than this. Media creates mirage through news, advertisements and pursue conversion readers into consumers. On June 8, 2010 the Election Commission of India wrote to chief electoral officers of the state and union territories about ‘measures to check paid news during elections i.e. advertising in the garb of news’. The Election Commission has directed attention to paid news scenario. Paid news is ‘assuming alarming proportion’ as a serious electoral malpractice causing concern to the Commission in the context of conduct of free and fair elections. The commission asked to keep vigilance on paid news by making use of the existing provisions of law so that the incidence of paid news’ or surrogate advertisements in print and electronic media in the context of elections is arrested.

The cases of ‘paid news’ generally manifest in the forms of news articles/reports published about a particular candidate or a party eulogising them, or similar news articles/reports denigrating the opponents, both intended at unduly influencing the voters. The same or similar type of news articles/reporting (with cosmetic modifications) appearing in more than one newspaper periodical would amount to further corroboration as circumstantial evidence that such news publication could result from collusion of the candidate/party with the editors, publishers, financiers of the newspaper etc.

Such collusion would, however, have generally no transactional evidence of payment of consideration in cash or kind. But this is not restricted to the election period. The newspapers have started publishing paid news supplements to celebrate birthdays of politicians, business tycoons, god men and women.

The Semiotics of Structural Oppression

Insensitive language content results in the stereotypical portrayal and discrimination. The print media is heavily 'elite' dominated and accordingly it has language preference, language loyalty, language attitudes and language choices.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar is always a 'Dalit' leader, but M K Gandhi is 'Mahatma' in newspapers.

Words like *vedic scholar*, *Sanskrit scholar*, *pandit* are used for selected caste, class and education. But prolific tamasha script writer is never mentioned as scholar or pandit. *Lingua francae* which enable inter-ethnic communication is not preferred but the language which is spoken by the elite is. This form of language is dubbed as 'standard'. It finds place in media. Presentation and representation in media are supported by ideologies and attitudes of the decision makers.

In print journalism, signs take forms in words and images. Symbols (saffron, green, blue colours, etc.) icons (*well-dressed* means educated; *slum dwellers* means poor and illiterate, *villagers* means untutored in dhoti and saris, etc), and indexical expressions (like puja, urus, bhajan, untouchable, etc.) are used frequently in the news. 'Muslim bothers celebrate Eid' or 'Sikhs celebrate Nanakji jayanti' are common in writings. But one never writes headlines 'Hindu brothers celebrate Diwali'. The 'majority' psychology reflects in this types of headlines and news.

Conclusion

The media is speaking language of powerful and dominants. The wider range of critical issues of the credibility and public interest along with accuracy, fairness, integrity, transparency, responsibility must be discussed. Issues related to mass media ownership, business, advertising and self interests have added another edge to the ethic debate.

When it comes to discussing the role of nationalism, jingoism, communalism, caste, class, gender and ideological issues in a country like India, the role of media ethics needs a detailed study. Imbibing of stereotypes, depiction of violence, sex, vulgarity and influencing the mass psychology in a specific direction are causes for concern. The press is expected to represent the people in democratic set up and articulates their grievances and problems and acts as an intermediary and to give the feedback from people to the authorities and vice versa.

Unfortunately, media is playing a role of a tool in the structure of oppression and has become a part of the system.

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