Manifestation of Power in Media: Analysing From the Perspective of Self and Other

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Abstract: Media can be regarded as an important arena through which common people get an opportunity to vent their grievances more so in the recent times. Media has also emerged as a realm which very often indulges in the process of creation of 'power' as Foucault has hinted in his understanding of 'micro forms of power'. For Foucault, power is dispersed across various layers and structures and is not be found in any static locus. Power according to Foucault is not possessed by a dominant agent, but it is distributed through complex social networks. Taking Foucault's understanding in mind one can throw light on the role played by media in modern times in terms of advocacy and agenda setting and thereby normalizing people to accept the dominant culture (and lifestyle) and marginalizing those who don't adhere to the socially set norms. Thereby this paper while taking into the analysis of thinkers like Foucault, Habermas, Chomsky, Gramsci and Baudrillard will try to understand the process of 'creation of power' by the media more so in the Indian context which often leads to discrimination and subjugation of certain sections of the society (LGBT community is taken as a case for analysis). The paper also brings in the concepts of 'self' and 'other' to study this discrimination. Further the concept of radical media is brought to the fore to show that not every form of media practise discrimination but they themselves can sometimes be used as a weapon to fight discrimination.
Keywords: Media, Power, Discrimination, Self, Other, LGBT, Radical media.

INTRODUCTION

India is credited to have the world's largest democracy. Democracy in general terms is understood to be a form of government which is subject to popular sovereignty, essentially implying 'rule by the people' and is characterized by features such as honest elections, freedom of speech and expression, active judiciary, religious freedom and accountability of the chief executive towards the common people. India fortunately enjoys all of these. More importantly, India has a free press, an arena through which common people can express their views and opinions regarding different things. Media is a very important forum through which they can critically analyze functioning of govt. and also through media they are also made aware of various programs and policies of the govt. The claim of 'right to know' and making informed choices and holding those in authority accountable have been possible only through the media. Media in a way, has acted as the mediator between the common people and the govt. Thus, it can be regarded as the bedrock of Indian democracy. Even the 1950 enactment has widened the ambit of article 19(2). It enjoined that permissible restrictions on freedom of expression must be 'reasonable' and not arbitrary.

Media is regarded as the 'fourth estate'of Democracy (legislature, executive and judiciary being the first, second and third respectively) and it is also regarded as a custodian of the collective right of 'freedom of expression' and the vehicle through which the citizen largely exercises his right to know. Several historians credit the coinage of the term to Edmund Burke, who is said to have referenced the fourth estate when discussing the French Revolution, and Thomas Carlyle, a 19th century author, popularized the term. Media affect modern life in nearly every way. Media holds a very powerful capacity to set a social issue for mass audience to assume and talk about. Main work of media is to inform the people. In a democracy the "demos" (people) should know what goes on in the world as they are the one, who decides. A modern democracy cannot work without the media which are an agent between public and state, the Latin word "medius" describes a status in the middle and that is exactly where one can find media: between two entities of communication. Media is the most powerful tool of communication. It helps promoting the right things on right time. It gives a real exposure to the mass audience about what is right or wrong. But whether media is actually catering to the needs of people is still questionable as very often it is criticized of its elitist bias and non-inclusionary nature especially after its increasing corporatization.

The main thrust of the paper, thereby is to enquire as to how media images in India portrays the imagery of the 'other' (at the same time created a notion of the self which is very often socially structured) and thereby producing a dominant culture to which many have been conditioned to believe and comply with as it is often said people believe what they see. However, saying so might provide a lop-sided view and hence an attempt will also be made to see how many (marginalized) sections at times also use the medium of the media to carry forward their struggle. Thereby, this paper will try to see how media houses/ popular culture in India portray issues of alternative sexualities (LGBT).

Understanding media politics – A Theoretical Framework:

Jurgen Habermas (1991) [1]is an important figure to mention talking about media. In the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, Habermas described the 'bourgeois public sphere' of the 18th and 19th century in England, France and Germany. The public sphere in the work of Habermas refers to - 'a neutral social space for critical debate among private persons who gather to discuss matters of common concern in a free and rational way' [1]. Such sphere is open and accessible to the public. In this context, Habermas brings in the role of the media, when he said that media has contributed to the decay of the rational-critical discourse and causing the decline of the public sphere. Habermas focused on the institution of press and he set forth three stages in the development of print media. He described the first phase of newspaper trade as of resembling with small handicrafts business, which adhered to the principle of a modest maximization of profit. Then it evolved into a forum of public opinion and business or economic motive of publishing newspapers receded to the background. However, with the establishment of the bourgeois constitutional state press again became a commercial enterprise[1]. He lamented the fact that press can be manipulated and after the marketing of the editorial section became inter – dependent with that of the advertising section, press came to be controlled by a handful of few belonging to the affluent section of the society, who dominated the public sphere[1]. Since then more focus has been given on the technicalities of news production rather than the content of news. He also espoused the view that rise of other forms of media like film, radio and television had turned media into a public corporation. Worrisome factor, according to Habermas is that, media is also used in manufacturing public opinion especially during elections for favourable parties[1]. Thus, according to him, the public sphere falls because of the effects of commercialization, capitalism and the rise of mass media.

Marxists see the mass media as tools for creating a false reality so as to disguise a reality of oppression and exploitation. Chomsky (1989) [2], for example, talks of the media as just one of "a variety of measures to deprive democratic political structures of substantive content, while leaving them formally intact". Chomsky also talked about the 'Propaganda Model' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) [3]in this context and he mentioned about five factors that 'filter' out the news fit to print thereby forwarding a helping hand to the state and the dominant class of the society in reaching their messages to the public. These five factors include – first is the profit orientation of the dominant mass media firms which is felicitated by loosening of rules limiting media concentration, cross ownership and control by non-media companies. Advertising, also is reducing the content of news and as a fall out of this, media houses compete amongst themselves to gain patronage of the advertisers and accordingly try to design their programmes conforming to their (advertisers') needs. Apart from this, the media relies on government, business houses and experts for information, and these for their privileged position try to influence the media, which feel obligated to them, which in a way effects objective reporting. Negative responses of media programmes (termed as 'flak') in order to discipline it, is the fourth factor, according to Herman and Chomsky that can tremendously effect media operations. Last factor is the feeling of anti-communism which is used as a control mechanism as far as publication of news is concerned and this is done so as not to disturb the privileged and class position of the powerful (specifically property owner) section of the society[3].

Antonio Gramsci's writing also had a decisive influence on the study of media (Lull, 2003) [4]. Unlike Marx who focused on economic domination, Gramsci emphasised on the ideological influence and such scenario can be seen with media industries imposing their idea (or of the dominant class) and such practice through media images often go unnoticed. He argued that a social group or class exercised dominance in part by force, but more importantly by consent, by obtaining the consent of the majority. The media thus had a central role in developing public compliance.

In this context, it will be helpful to analyse Jean Baudrillard's(Baudrillard, 1994) [5]views as well. He tried to explore the process as to how mass media adopts the technique through which it tries to create meaning which is different from the actual meaning. He argues that media is more interested in inviting the audience to react to what it presents themselves with than the information we get from a text. This is very much akin to the present day phenomenon of presenting news as a source of entertainment to which audience can emotionally react to rather than providing (objective) information.

Media very often also engages (either deliberately or unknowingly) in the creation of the self and the other which needs further emphasis.

Media's creation of 'Self' and 'Other':

The idea of the 'self' and the 'other' have gained currency in social sciences specially in anthropology, history, political science, communications, and literary studies. However one dominant understanding of self is regards to power shaping the very idea of self and very well portrayed by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1977) [6]. For Foucault the very existence of the 'self' is the result of power. Such understanding of power brings the self into being through imposition of disciplinary practices on the body. Thereby the self here is rather than being an agent becomes a site of coerced existence and a mechanism of control (Callero, 2003) [7]. Thereby, power according to Foucault is not possessed by a dominant agent, but it is distributed through complex social networks. Thereby here power comes from multiple sources (e.g. schools, asylums etc.) in contrast to the Marxist-Leninist conception of power as emanating from one source i.e. capital. Thus, one of the primary effects of such notion of power is that 'certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses come to be identified and constituted as individuals.' Taking Foucault's understanding in mind one can throw light on the role played by media in modern times in terms of advocacy and agenda setting and thereby normalizing people to accept the dominant culture (and lifestyle) and marginalizing those who don't adhere to the socially set norms. Here Foucault's understanding of Bentham's panopticon can also be applied to growing media power as they in a way constantly scans society for signs of deviance with the threat of punishment by disclosure which is particularly threatening to those in public life. Bentham's panopticon according to Foucault was used to regulate the behavior of prisoner as they act in a certain way for the fear of getting watched. This, Foucault claims, is 'the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power'. This idea can also be linked to the sphere of social media whereby our activities are recorded and monitored by it (or by the state especially with the onset of security state). Thereby, it would be interesting to see how Foucault's idea can be applied to the Indian media scenario to decipher how the idea of self gets constructed through it and how the image of the other is created.

Nevertheless, it can be said that one of the important conditions for the realization of the self comes in presence of the idea of the other. The basic self/other binary makes sense in that when one sees another person and recognizes that that individual is separate physically and mentally, then one understands that the separate person is not the self, is another which is separate and cannot be controlled or comprehended physically and mentally, at least not as much as the self can be. This distinction can entirely be at physical level and not at the psychological one as Judith Butler proposes the concept of "vulnerability" to understand the way in which the self/other binary is not simple and clean, but rather the we are given over to one another and vulnerable to the touch and emotional effects of violence by or loss of the other. As regards to the social position of 'the self', 'the other' might act either confirming or rejecting such stereotypes. Media provides an important forum for the assertion of one's identities be it the self or the other. As far as identities are concerned in present time one has many of it – some privileged and some marginalized. Thus the idea of self has in a sense multiplied specially in this multicultural society and more so because of media. Media nevertheless influences a person's understanding of the world. Media outlets do not have that sort of control, but the piling up of various skewed, damaging or demeaning media images does seem to create an environment where, even if choices and actions aren't literally limited by laws, they created mental limitations for thinking about certain groups do have a direct impact on the consciousness of contemporary individuals.

However this idea can be contested by referring to Stuart Hall who brings in the concept of 'encoding-decoding' he points out that as the dominant forces seek to embed certain cultural values in the text, audiences have the option to have oppositional readings to it (Hall, 1980) [8]. Here the emphasis was put on audience reception and on texts open to more than one reading. The message is encoded by journalists, filmmakers, and decoded by audiences. One cannot assume effects from an analysis of the text alone. People very often bring their identities or context to their reading of a newspaper, or film. He further stated three readings/types of reception: dominant/hegemonic reading, negotiated/partial, oppositional (challenging the hegemonic frame). Thereby, as far as theory of media is concerned, there are broadly two in nature – one is the transmission view and the other is ritual view (Flayhan, 2001) [9]. In the former messages which are transmitted through media are regarded as mere information that travels from the sender to the receiver. While in the ritual view messages or information are received by individuals keeping in mind the cultural experiences which they are a part of thereby implying dynamic interaction between communication, consciousness, and culture.

In this context it should also be noted and at the same time argued that though media provides the space for creation of the imagery of the other, it at times carve out a space for the other for venting out their grievances and this will be shown in this paper taking into account the example of Indian media and how it takes up the issue of LGBT.

Indian Media – A Brief Appraisal:

In the earlier times, there was no idea, as such of the media, and terms such as 'press' was used in its place. The word 'press' didn't feature in the constitution yet its importance was not sidelined by the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution. As far as electronic media (Electronic media has also been able to cater to the illiterate masses, which print media failed to do) is concerned, after independence, 'broadcasting' was placed under the Union list of the Constitution. The Union list of the constitution's seventh schedule, item thirty one, includes 'posts and telegraphs, telephones, wireless, broadcasting and other like forms of communication'. According to Paul Brass, it was done for 'fear of disorder' and to ward off any attempt at de-centralization of the electronic media [15]. When LalBahadur Shastri was the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi was the Minister for Information and Broadcasting and she appointed the Asok K. Chanda Committee and on the basis of the recommendation of this committee, the administration of Doordarshan has been separated from that of the All India Radio in 1976, though it didn't function as an autonomous corporation.

Indian Media experienced its initial hiccups when in 1975 the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared emergency and this period marked severe curtailing of 'freedom of expression' which took the form of censorship of media. Post-Emergency journalism is often regarded as a period of 'new journalism' (B.G. Verghese can be credited for this phrase). The 1980s marked the introduction of colour TV in India. It was after the Asiad and during the second tenure of Indira Gandhi that her govt. decided to expand India's television system. The credibility of news however went down drastically during this period as it was used for publicity of Congress leaders and policies. This trend became prominent during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi. However, by 1987, the print media started criticism of Rajiv Gandhi on the issue of Bofors Scandal. In the late 1980s, another trend is to be seen, which is linking of TV with militancy, whereby station directors of radio centers were made targets of terrorist attacks. During the Khalistan Movement, the station director of AIR Amritsar was killed and Hindi broadcast was suspended. In 1990, the station director of Sri Nagar was killed by militants. One important achievement of the print media in the late 1980s is emergence and spectacular rise of regional press. The changing political scenario (regionalization of politics) could also said to be contributing to it.

Year 1991 marks a watershed period for media with liberalization and privatization of Indian market and with the arrival of transnational satellite television programming, Govt. of India effectively lost its monopolistic control of the airwaves. Thus, India got its first taste of cable TV by proxy a year before Star launched in February 1992. The popularity of the cable-satellite television indicates that India has now entered the era of electronic capitalism- beginning with two channels in 1990, Indian audience enjoy more than 500 channels till June,2010 (Press Trust India, 2010 Survey). The emergence of the social media (i.e. internet) in the new millennium is also a significant phenomenon to mention. Of late, sites like 'Orkut', 'Facebook', and 'Twitter' have become new entertainment quotient of people, especially new generation. People express their viewpoints in various 'communities' created through these sites. Also, now the concept of blogging (to be more precise political blogging) is on the offering and this has also become a platform for voicing opinion of people. The new forms of media (specially the internet) can be regarded as a part and parcel of the protest movement of the recent times.

The following section will deal with how Indian media (here all three forms of media i.e. the print, electronic and the social media are taken into account) has looked over the issue of homosexuality.

Indian Media's portrayal of the LGBT issue:

The issue of LGBT is one of the fiercely debated issues in India specially in recent times which also has got sufficient media attention. Homosexuality hasn't been accepted in Indian society and as far as law is concerned. Homosexual intercourse was made a criminal offence under Section377 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860. This made it an offence for a person to voluntarily have "carnal intercourse against the order of nature." In 2009, the Delhi High Court decision in *Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi* found Section 377 and other legal prohibitions against private, adult, consensual, and non-commercial same-sex conduct to be in direct violation of fundamental rights provided by the Indian Constitution. However, in December 2013, the Supreme Court of India had set aside the judgment of the high court order.

Indian media both the print and the electronic media has addressed this issue. This issue caught the imagination of the media especially after the Delhi court judgment of 2009 which was hailed by most of the media houses. Almost all the newspapers covered the news in the very front page. These media forums widely debated issues related with homosexuality ranging from same sex marriage, adoption, religious and ethical responses and by involving various personalities from all walks of life from activists to religious leaders. The underlying reason behind such unprecedented attention from the media might be to increase TRP but the fact they took up this issue which was for ages was unheard, undiscussed is commendable.

The issue of homosexuality has featured in talk shows such as *We the People, SatyamevaJayate* and so on and also to an extent in Indian movies (*My Brother Nikhil, Honeymoon Travels Pvt. Limited, Rules –*

PyaarkaSuperhit Formula etc.). As far as Hindi movies are concerned, homosexuality very often is treated in a comic way or as a sub-plot (e.g. *Dostana, Kal Ho Na Ho)* while whenever it is taken as a serious issue (e.g. *Fire, Dunno Why - Na JaaneKyun)* it often attracts the wrath of the censor board not to forget the saffron brigade (Sabharwal and Sen, 2012) [10].

Ashok Row Kavi, the doyen of gay right activist in India, estimates that there will be about 50 million homosexuals in India. However, according to him, Indian media shows homosexuality as a socially undesirable and totally marginalized issue (Dudney, July 2008) [11]. The gays themselves objected to the fact of selective media coverage showing sexual minorities in a bad light and that media houses haven't taken up this issue in a constructive way and they are more interested in raising their TRPs. This can be linked with the notion that media is increasingly coming under the sway of big corporate houses (or other dominant section of society) which has a significant influence on the content of what is to be aired which tends to exclude a major chunk of the population from its ambit.

In this context, it is helpful to mention that, there have been many attempts in recent years to decentralize the media and make them more accessible and responsive to citizens. Many countries have experienced a growth in non-mass, localized forms of media such as community radio, television and newspapers. This emergence of 'alternative media' can be seen as a response to the global dominance of multi-media conglomerates or the 'mainstream media' (Downey and Fenton, 2003) [12]. In a nutshell, radical media or alternative media implies small scale media that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities and perspectives. It may sometimes include minority ethnic media (Downing 2001) [13]. As stated by John Downing, these media formations are best realized in the activities of New Social Movements. Mainstream media, according to him, is largely monolithic, centred on profit making, exclusive journalistic tendency. John Downing makes his point clear when he says that rather than naming such media as 'alternative media' one should call it 'radical media'. Radical media, on the other hand, is democratic in terms of providing access to the protest groups in ventilating their grievances. Here, topics which are relegated to the background by the dominant media are taken into consideration (Atton 2002) [14]. Radical media generally opposes vertically from a subordinate position at the functioning of the dominant power structure.

In recent times, internet has been successful in fulfilling the aims of 'radical media' (Downey and Fenton 2003) [12]. Internet in recent times has also provided a space for people with alternate sexualities to voice their concerns, to create an identity of their own

(a self of their own) and asserting their rights. Mention here should be made to Khush list, the first mailing list for LGBT South Asians (established in 1993), LGBT India - an e-group (established in 1999), Gay Bombay, Good As You (Bangalore), Pratibimb (Hyderabad), and Movenpick/ Orinam (Chennai), GayBombay.org (established in the late 1998) and Orinam.net (established in 2006) and so on. An observation made in this regard is that such mailing lists had evolved even before the emergence of the social networking sites. In February 2014, a match making site for Indian lesbian or bi-women community was also inaugurated with the name of 'Wonderful Things Happen.'

There is another site which defines them self as 'Queer Media Watch' which archives information/news concerning the portrayal of LGBTQ people of/from India in the media, particularly the Indian Media. The main aim of this site as stated is to document the various news sources to carve out a chronological timeline to the various events associated with the Queer Rights' Movement. They have archived (May 2001 – February 2011) newspapers such as Deccan Herald, Times of India, the Hindu, the Indian Express, television channels such as NDTV and CNN-IBN and also presence of this issue in social media site such as Twitter. This site mainly covers the news of these newspapers and news channels related to the LGBT issue. This might be regarded as an alternate media (where they try to assert their self as against the other) space as opposed to 'mainstream' media space of the same nature (e.g. the Hoot).

CONCLUSION

Though Habermas (1996) was critical of the media initially yet has somehow changed his stance towards media in his subsequent publication. Herein, he emphasized the importance of not only public opinion but 'qualified public opinion'. He placed the onus on the common people as it depends upon them how they articulately put forth their interests so as to derive the attention of the concerned authority (Habermas 1996, pp. 361-363). Unlike his earlier views, he gave importance to the freedom of speech which along with freedom of association helps to create public opinion and make the authority aware of neglected issues and under-represented groups. He reiterated that through the help of various means of media such as press, radio and television, competing opinions can be entertained and diverse voices can be represented. According to him, development in mass communication will lead to more inclusive participation of people. Taking clue from what Habermas has to say, it can be concluded that media (or its usage) has its pros and cons. The common people should also be responsible while dealing with social media and also with other forms of media, they should know how to make best use of it and should always have a critical insight and shouldn't always go by what the media has to say.

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