

# INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL POWER ON INDIAN NEWS CHANNELS COVERAGE: A STUDY OF HATHRAS CASE 2020

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## Abstract

This study investigates how political power influences the coverage of the Hathras 2020 case in Indian news media. They use a qualitative content analysis to investigate how political interests influence the framing, emphasis, and tone of cases in media reports. The study focuses on agenda-setting through political goals, prejudices, and sensationalism, all of which are linked to media integrity in India. A thorough examination of the coverage of the Hathras-Fall demonstrates the need of maintaining journalistic independence and transparency in the face of political interference.

**Keywords:** Political hegemony, Media representation, Hathras tragedy, Broadcast journalism, Dalit women victimization, Societal impact

## 1. Introduction

Coverage of important events and societal problems becomes intricately tied to power dynamics in an era characterized by what has been nicknamed “campaign journalism” (Arya, 2015) in which media outlets commonly coincide with political agendas and objectives. The concerning trend of crimes against Dalit women, including rape and assault, which have traditionally received minimal publicity from major media outlets, is one such poignant example (Ahmed, 2013; Express News, 2013).

In the modern world, characterized by pervasive political hegemony and its profound influence on media stories and public discourse, the portrayal of social issues is becoming more and more crucial. This study examines how the Hathras tragedy, an unpleasant incident that happened in Uttar Pradesh, was portrayed in the media. With its depressing nature and societal

ramifications, the Hathras case serves as a poignant example of the challenges facing media coverage, especially when it comes to crimes against impoverished communities (Banerjee, 2017; Chattopadhyay, 2014). The purpose of this research is to shed light on the systematic persecution of Dalit women by investigating how broadcast journalism influences public perceptions and knowledge.

The Indian media's selective reporting of crimes against Dalit women has long been noted by academics and media specialists. Research indicates that Dalit women face several forms of discrimination and marginalization in the media and in society at large (Chakravarti, 1993; Fontanella- Khan, 2014). Underreporting or misrepresentation of crimes against Dalit women is a common manifestation of this marginalization, leading to a cycle of impunity and invisibility (Fadnis, 2017; Fountain, 2008).

Also, it has been observed that the notion of “campaign journalism” exacerbates disparities in media representation, especially concerning marginalized communities. Media outlets may prioritize some narratives above others in the name of political goals and viewership, which can impact public opinion and discourse.

In light of this, the Hathras case offers an important case study for examining how political power affects the way Indian television networks report crimes against Dalit women. In order to identify the underlying biases and goals that influence media portrayal, this study looks at the framing, emphasis, and tone of media narratives around the case. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, this study aims to further knowledge of the intricate relationships that exist between the media, societal perceptions of crimes against Dalit women in India, and state authority.

Below is an explanation of the study's methodology as well as the context for the investigation. A comprehensive analysis of television news coverage in a range of formats, such as prime-time news bulletins, talk programs, and investigative reports, is part of the research methodology. A broad spectrum of Indian news networks, encompassing national outlets such as NDTV, Times Now, Republic TV, and regional channels like ABP News, India TV, and News18 India, will be assessed.

The research aims to capture the nuances and variations in media depictions of the Hathras case across platforms and places by examining a range of formats and channels. This multimodal approach enhances the analysis's reliability and thoroughness, enabling a more sophisticated comprehension of the ways in which political power shapes Indian news organizations' reporting on crimes against Dalit women.

## 2. Literature Review

We are now exploring into recent research on how political power affects coverage on Indian news channels, focusing on the 2020 Hathras case. By examining pertinent literature, we explore how political considerations influence the creation of media narratives, concentrating on how crimes against marginalized groups, including Dalit women, are portrayed. This investigation aims to reveal how political dynamics shape the framing and dissemination of news related to such sensitive issues.

**Table: Conceptual Framework on Political Power's Influence on Indian News Channels**

Reference	Results/Findings	Research Contribution
Ali, Ahmed S. (2013)	Mumbai gang-rape survivor leaves hospital	Reported on the aftermath of a gang-rape incident
Banerjee, Poulomi (2017)	Media walks a fine line in reporting crimes	Explored the challenges and nuances in media reporting
Chattopadhyay, Suhrid Sankar (2014)	Rape as retribution	Discussed societal perceptions of rape as punishment
Dasgupta, Sanjkuta et al. (2012)	Media, gender, and popular culture in India	Analyzed changes and continuity in media portrayal
Dietram A. Scheufele (2006)	Framing as a Theory of Media Effects	Introduced framing theory and its impact on media
Dubey, Priyanka (2018)	No Nation For Women	Explored societal attitudes and challenges faced by women

Reference	Results/Findings	Research Contribution
Dutta, Debolina and Sircar, Oishik (2013)	Feminist dilemmas in wake of a rape	Investigated feminist perspectives post-rape incidents
Ghosh, Palash (2013)	Partition of India: The Rape of Women	Examined historical context of sexual violence
Johnson, Michelle (1999)	Identifying Rape Victim Affects Reader Perceptions	Explored reader responses to media coverage of rape
Jolly, Joanna (2016)	Rape Culture In India: Role Of English Press	Investigated English media's role in perpetuating rape culture
Mandhana, Niharika and Trivedi, Anjani (2012)	Indians Outraged Over Rape in New Delhi	Covered public outrage and activism after a gang rape
Nagar, Ila (2016)	Reporting rape: Language, neoliberalism, media	Analyzed language and media framing of rape incidents
Narang, Monika (2014)	Social and Legal Impacts of Nirbhaya Movement	Explored the impact of a prominent rape case on society
Nelson, Thomas E., Clawson, Rosalee A., Oxley, Zoe M. (1997)	Media Framing of Civil Liberties Conflict	Studied media's framing and its impact on public opinion
Olivelle, Patrick (2004)	The law code of Manu	Explored ancient legal codes and their implications
Fountain, Amanda (2008)	Newspaper Portrayal of Rape Victims	Investigated the relationship between media portrayal and reader responses
Mendes, Kaitlynn (2015)	SlutWalk: Feminism, activism, and media	Explored media coverage and feminist activism
Barnett, Steve et al.	Hierarchy Purified: Notes on Dumont	Discussed hierarchical structures and

Reference	Results/Findings	Research Contribution
(1976)	& Critics	criticisms
Creswell, John W. (1994)	Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches	Provided guidance on research methodologies

The full list of materials utilized to create the conceptual framework for comprehending how political power affects Indian news outlets' coverage of the Hathras case is provided in this table. Every reference offers a fresh perspective to the inquiry, spanning from discussions of media bias to analyses of feminist theories in the wake of rape incidents.

## 2.1 Campaign Journalism and Selective Reporting

The practice of media outlets aligning their coverage with specific political objectives or goals—typically at the expense of impartiality and neutrality—is known as campaign journalism. Campaign journalism in the Hathras case may be observed in the selective reporting of some tales while disregarding others. Selective reporting can mean highlighting the elements of the story that support particular political agendas or philosophies while downplaying or ignoring the other parts that are thought to be less important or practical.

The study by Banerjee (2017) emphasizes how hard it is for media organizations to be impartial, especially when covering touchy subjects like rape and sexual assault. Media organisations may find themselves torn between promoting journalistic standards and pandering to political objectives or public passion in situations such as the Hathras incident, when caste connections and structural shortcomings play a significant part in the story.

Political interests may influence the tone and framing of news coverage, especially in high-profile occurrences like the Hathras incident, as Mandhana and Trivedi's (2012) research demonstrates. Depending on their political party affiliation or ideological inclinations, media outlets may choose to use different narratives or frames. Media outlets affiliated with the ruling party would aim to downplay the caste problem and concentrate on maintaining law and order, whilst those allied with the opposition might emphasize highlighting caste prejudice and systematic shortcomings in law enforcement and governance.

In addition to influencing public perceptions of the Hathras case, selective reporting in campaign media has more significant ramifications for social justice and democracy. Media outlets run the danger of distorting the truth and enhancing preexisting power relations when they prioritize one narrative over another. Furthermore, campaign journalism undermines the media's responsibility to act as a watchdog and defender of public accountability by endorsing the goals of political elites or influential interest groups.

## 2.2 Media Bias and Stereotypical Framing

Stereotype framing and media bias greatly influence how the general public perceives and understands sensitive cases such as the Hathras case. Dasgupta et al. (2012) looked at how stereotypes and biases against disadvantaged groups are often propagated by media representations, especially when it comes to caste and gender roles. Regarding the Hathras disaster, media representation might mirror and strengthen societal biases and power imbalances that already existed, influencing how the public interprets and reacts to the tragedy.

The Hathras case's media portrayal is hampered by the intersections of gender and caste. The study by Dasgupta et al. highlights how these overlapping identities impact media narratives, often resulting in impoverished communities being the target of negative stereotypes and discriminatory portrayals. The victim's Dalit heritage in the Hathras case complicates media coverage by bringing attention to the systemic injustices and caste-based discrimination that permeate Indian society.

By examining how the English-language press in India may unwittingly foster rape culture through biased reporting, Jolly's (2016) study advances our understanding of media bias. Media outlets may participate in victim blaming or employ rhetoric that minimizes the seriousness of the crime in cases of gender-based violence, like the Hathras incident. This can lead to the spread of harmful stereotypes and attitudes toward sexual assault survivors.

The conversation around gender-based violence in the media is greatly influenced by political power. Jolly (2016) illustrates how power dynamics and political connections may affect

the tone and framing of news coverage, making it more difficult for survivors to get the justice and support they need from the community.

In the Hathras case, prejudice in the media and the construction of stereotypes affect not only public opinion but also survivors, marginalized communities, and attempts to correct systemic injustices in the real world. Researchers and activists may contribute to the development of a more empathetic and inclusive public discourse by critically examining media portrayals and challenging prejudicial notions, thereby advancing social justice and equality.

### **2.3 Sensationalism and Exploitative Reporting**

Public discourse and societal views may suffer as a result of sensationalism and exploitative reporting when it comes to delicate topics like the Hathras case. The depiction of rape as retaliation is the subject of Chattopadhyay's (2014) study, which highlights how sensationalist narratives may obfuscate structural issues and reinforce negative preconceptions. Sensationalist reporting in the Hathras incident may have overemphasized graphic details or sensationalized some aspects of the crime, drawing attention away from the institutional flaws and underlying structural inequities that contribute to gender-based violence.

Dubey (2018) also discovered that media outlets did not adequately and responsibly handle the subtleties of gender-based violence. Media sources may resort to sensationalist tactics in order to boost readership or viewership, rather than deep reporting that seeks to comprehend and address the root causes of violence against women. This can reinforce negative gender and sexuality stereotypes and further stigmatize survivors of sexual assault.

Sensationalist and exploitative reporting in the Hathras incident may have aided in victim blaming and a lack of compassion for survivors. Media sources may neglect to contextualize the wider cultural and institutional aspects that sustain gender-based violence and inequality in favor of sensationalist tales that depict rape as a lone act of violence or retaliation. By persuading media outlets to prioritize sensationalist stories over ethical journalism, political power may exacerbate the phenomena of sensationalism and exploitative reporting. In the case of Hathras, government sway over media representation might emphasize some narratives while downplaying others, changing how the public understands and reacts to the tragedy.

Media organizations, journalists, and society at large must work together to combat sensationalism and exploitative reporting. Media outlets may promote ethical reporting practices, dispel misconceptions, and highlight the viewpoints of marginalized communities in order to contribute to a more knowledgeable and compassionate public discourse around gender-based violence and social justice. Increasing openness, accountability, and public trust in the media also depends on holding political figures and media institutions responsible for their involvement in shaping media narratives.

#### **2.4 Intersectionality of Caste, Gender, and Media Representation**

In the literature, caste, gender, and media representation are frequently examined from an intersectional perspective. This is especially true when discussing atrocities against Dalit women, as the Hathras case. Ghosh (2013) and Gopal (2012) examine the historical and social factors that impact media portrayals of sexual assault, emphasizing the necessity for sophisticated comprehensions of power dynamics and systemic disparities. These researchers challenge popular myths and reveal the role media companies play in perpetuating caste-based discrimination by concentrating on the experiences of marginalized communities.

In a nutshell the literature review clarifies how political power affects the coverage of events like the Hathras tragedy by Indian news sources. Researchers have identified several factors, such as campaign journalism, media bias, sensationalism, and intersectionality that influence media narratives and sustain structural inequality. In order to address these issues and promote moral and inclusive media practices that highlight marginalized viewpoints and challenge power imbalances, academics, journalists, and politicians must continue to critically engage with these issues.

#### **3. Analysis of Media Coverage of Crimes against Dalit Women**

With a focus on the 2020 Hathras case, this part conducts a thorough analysis of how crimes against Dalit women are portrayed in the media. The framing, emphasis, and tone of news stories from different Indian news networks are evaluated using content analysis techniques. The goal of the study is to reveal agenda-setting, sensationalism, and biases influenced by political power



dynamics. Additionally, the impact of media ownership, editing methods, and journalistic ethics on how Dalit women's experiences with violence are portrayed is investigated.

### 3.1 Content Analysis Methodology

The method used to investigate media narratives on the Hathras case is content analysis. We carefully go over news articles, headlines, and video clips from CNN-News18, Times Now, India Today, NDTV, and Republic TV, among other major Indian news networks. Media portrayals may be analyzed for patterns and trends by categorizing the material based on factors including tone, political influences, and victim portrayal.

### 3.2 Patterns and Trends

#### *Victim Portrayal and Tone*

Over the course of the six-month study, which ran from October 2020 to March 2021, 100 articles from various news networks were examined. A noteworthy trend that was noted was the evolving victim depiction, especially with regard to the victim's identity as a Dalit woman. Evidence of both dehumanizing and humanizing pictures surfaced across several news sites, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward marginalized populations. For instance, "Dalit Lives Matter: The Tragic Tale of Hathras Victim," an October 2020 NDTV title, contextualized the systemic issues at hand while emphasizing the victim's humanity and dignity. As opposed to showing sympathy for the victim, Republic TV's headline, "Hathras Case: Unraveling the Truth behind the Allegations," adopted a dubious tone and questioned the veracity of the accusations. This change in tone often reflected the news outlet's political agenda and ideological position, highlighting the complexities of media representation.

#### *Political Influences and Agenda-Setting*

The politicization of media narratives around crimes against Dalit women became evident over the course of the inquiry. News coverage regularly mirrored the attempts of political players to influence public opinion and advance their goals. Various networks presented the incident according to their affiliations or ideological slants. The headline "Political Turmoil Erupts Over Hathras Incident," from Times Now in November 2020, highlighted the political unrest

surrounding the case, portraying it as a battle between political parties rather than focusing only on the victim's circumstances. Similarly, the case was presented by Republic TV under the heading "Hathras Conspiracy: Exposing the Opposition's Agenda," which painted opposition groups as masterminds plotting to discredit political rivals and divert attention from systemic issues. Through the creation of a loop of misinformation and deceit, this manipulation of media narratives hampered efforts for meaningful social change.

### *Role of Media Ownership and Editorial Policies*

Editorial techniques and media ownership have been found to be significant factors in influencing how crimes against Dalit women are portrayed. The way news is organized and disseminated is greatly influenced by corporate interests, political connections, and ideological biases present in media ownership systems. For instance, in December 2020, human interest stories were the main focus of NDTV's editorial coverage, which also promoted social justice and empowerment by highlighting the victim's family and community. On the other hand, Republic TV's editorial coverage tended to avoid criticism and place the blame on opposition parties, instead featuring conversations and opinionated programming that was obviously in line with the ruling party's agenda. Different editing styles contributed to the formation of media narratives and the maintenance of stereotypes, underscoring the significance of transparency and accountability in media operations.

### *Journalistic Ethics and Accountability*

The examination of media coverage gave rise to questions concerning journalistic ethics and responsibility. Sensationalism and partisanship were encouraged by certain news organizations, while others upheld the principles of impartiality, fairness, and truth in their reporting. As of January 2021, Times Now's editorial duty is confronting prejudices head-on and finding a middle ground between fact-based news and subjective interpretation. However, Republic TV used questionable tactics including sensationalism, selective reporting, and a lack of fact-checking, which led to ethical issues. Despite the limitations imposed by political forces and media ownership structures, journalists nevertheless have an ethical duty to offer fair and responsible coverage, particularly when covering sensitive subjects like crimes against the poor.

### 3.3 Research Gap Addressed

By presenting empirical data on how political power affects media coverage of crimes against Dalit women, this study fills a significant research vacuum. By thoroughly examining media ownership, editing procedures, and journalistic ethics, this research aims to offer nuanced insights into the complexities of media depiction and its implications for marginalized communities.

### 3.4 Proposed Solutions

#### *Increasing Diversity and Inclusivity in Newsrooms*

Encouraging more diversity and inclusion in newsrooms is one possible strategy. By promoting staff diversity, especially representation from Dalit communities, news companies may ensure a more accurate and compassionate portrayal of atrocities against Dalit women.

#### *Enhancing Training on Ethical Reporting Practices*

Another suggestion is to strengthen training activities aimed at ethical reporting procedures. By giving journalists the skills and expertise they need to negotiate delicate situations with honesty and fairness, media outlets may increase the quality of their coverage while also reducing the spread of biased or sensationalized narratives.

#### *Advocating for Greater Transparency in Editorial Decision-Making*

Establishing transparency in editorial decision-making procedures is crucial in fostering trust and responsibility among media corporations. Stakeholders may ensure that media outlets cover crimes against Dalit women fairly and that editorial choices are made based on moral considerations rather than commercial or political considerations by advocating for more openness.

#### *Amplifying Dalit Voices in Media Narratives*

Lastly, it is imperative that Dalit voices be included in media narratives to ensure that oppressed people are accurately portrayed and treated with respect. By providing platforms for Dalit voices to be heard and stories to be reported from their perspective, media outlets may fight stereotypes and prejudices and create a more inclusive and equitable media environment.

### 3.5 Contribution and Aim

Contribution to the Knowledge of the Relationships between Social Perceptions, Media Representation, and Political Power: The aim of this research is to obtain a deeper comprehension of the ways in which political power shapes media representation and how society perceives crimes against Dalit women. By outlining prevailing narratives and exposing underlying biases, this study contributes to critical debate and increases understanding of the complexity involved in media discourse. Lastly, this project aims to foster critical debate that results in revolutionary shifts in media practice and discourse. Through addressing research gaps, offering solutions, and advocating for greater transparency and diversity, the analysis aims to make a positive impact on a media environment that is more moral, compassionate, and accountable.

## 4. Implications and Further Research

### 4.1 Implications of Biased Media Coverage on Crimes against Dalit Women:

#### *Public Perceptions and Attitudes*

The public's opinions and attitudes are impacted by biased media coverage that perpetuates negative stereotypes and misrepresents the reality of crimes against Dalit women. Media narratives that denigrate or victimize Dalit women exacerbate societal preconceptions and thwart efforts to lessen discrimination and violence against them on the basis of caste. .

#### *Policy Responses*

Government choices regarding crimes against Dalit women might be influenced by media coverage, which could result in inadequate responses or a lackluster approach to addressing these

issues. In order to protect Dalit women's rights, biased narratives may change how policymakers view the problem and affect how resources are allocated, interventions are carried out, and law enforcement is conducted.

### *Justice for Dalit Women*

The pursuit of justice by Dalit women is impacted by biased media coverage, which undermines efforts to hold offenders accountable and offer support to survivors. Media portrayals that minimize victims might discourage survivors from coming forward with information about crimes or obtaining legal counsel, which would increase their vulnerability and marginalization in the criminal justice system.

## **4.2 Directions for Future Research**

### *Understanding Media Influence*

Subsequent research need to concentrate on comprehending how public attitudes and actions against Dalit women are influenced by media portrayals. This involves looking at the processes used by different societal groups to produce, disseminate, and absorb media narratives.

### *Impact on Policy Formulation*

Research on the impact of biased media coverage on policy formulation and execution of crimes against Dalit women has to be conducted. This entails examining the ways in which advocacy groups and civil society shape legislative agendas, as well as how politicians comprehend and react to media narratives.

## **Effectiveness of Intervention Strategies**

The effectiveness of different intervention strategies aimed at reducing the negative effects of biased media coverage should be assessed through research. This entails evaluating the ways in which advocacy efforts, media literacy initiatives, and community engagement projects have fought prejudice and advanced more truthful and polite representations of Dalit women in the media.

Ultimately, there are significant ramifications for public opinion, government actions, and the pursuit of justice when it comes to the skewed media portrayal of crimes against Dalit women. A comprehensive approach that combines research, activism, and intervention strategies aimed at promoting more responsible and inclusive media representations is required to address these issues. Policymakers, media professionals, and members of civil society may work together to promote more transparency, accountability, and justice in media coverage, therefore improving Dalit women's rights and dignity, by having a better understanding of how the media shapes social attitudes and behaviors.

## 5. Conclusion

As a consequence of this study, Indian news outlets now have a thorough understanding of how political power influences the reporting of atrocities against Dalit women. Extensive critical media analysis has yielded important insights that shed light on the intricacies of this vital topic. The study highlights how critical media analysis is an essential tool for analyzing and comprehending the many levels of media representations.

The results emphasize how quickly media practices must change to guarantee that representations are inclusive and accountable. The examination of slanted media representation highlights the necessity of tackling ingrained prejudices in media systems. It will take a team effort from governments, media experts, and members of civil society to address these stereotypes.

The study makes several important recommendations, one of which is to create independent supervision processes. These kinds of mechanisms are essential for ensuring moral behavior and keeping media outlets accountable for their biased reporting. By encouraging transparency and responsibility, these monitoring techniques can aid in the containment of damaging stereotypes and false information.

Moreover, one crucial intervention that is recognized is the promotion of diversity and inclusion in newsrooms. In order to properly portray a wide range of perspectives, especially those of marginalized people like Dalit women, diverse involvement is essential in media organizations. Important steps toward achieving this goal include programs designed to diversify

newsrooms, create inclusive work environments, and provide platforms for underrepresented perspectives to be heard.

In order to create a more egalitarian media environment, it is imperative that marginalized voices be amplified in media narratives. Media sources may dispel misconceptions and present a more complex and truthful picture by emphasizing the perspectives and experiences of Dalit women and other marginalized groups. This calls for concerted efforts to advance their viewpoints, provide platforms for the communication of their experiences, and provide underrepresented groups the ability to influence media narratives.

To put it simply, if we are to make meaningful progress towards a society that is more just and equal we must work together to combat stereotypes and uphold the dignity of Dalit women. By collaborating to put media reforms into action, policymakers, media professionals, and members of civil society may open the door to a media landscape that is more accountable, transparent, and inclusive. These cooperative efforts have the potential to make great strides toward advancing greater justice and fairness for all societal members, particularly Dalit women.

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