

MEDIA ACCESS AND USAGE AMONG STUDENTS OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

In a postmodern world media has become an important preoccupation for the people. Hence, it is subjected to commercial, political, and cultural influences of a country or region. Individuals, cohorts or group of audiences and communities will have their own ways of using media. Mass media, which is a modern day public sphere of the elite classes, as described by Habermas, provides myriad forms of information and knowledge with a set of its own agenda and orientation. Hence, media accessibility becomes an important precondition to have an understanding of the medium as well as the message. Given the preeminence of media to manufacture and influence the opinions of the ever obliging general public, it becomes important to understand how a student community belonging to a lower rung of the Indian society makes use of media, if at all it has access to them. This paper attempts to focus on this aspect by examining the Dalit student community of Kuvempu University, set in the rural heartland of South-west Karnataka.

Keywords: Dalit students, media awareness, Dalit representation, television, new media, upward mobility, content preference, educational skills.

INTRODUCTION

In India, Dalits, also known as untouchables or scheduled castes and tribes, are marginalized from many centuries in caste Hindu society. Generations have passed, but the oppression and discrimination continues in one form or the other, many times in subtle manner. On the one hand, Dr. B R Ambedkar and others have dealt in detail about the manner in which Dalits were systematically marginalized as untouchables and blamed Sanatana Dharma or Varnashrama Dharma for their sorry state of affairs.

In post independent India, Dalits were given assistance in education and political field. Reservation policy initiated through the Indian constitution gave reservation benefits to Dalits in educational institutions, in government appointments and in political representation. Political empowerment was seen as one of the most significant factors in the empowerment of Dalits. Although reservation policies have brought in economic change among some sections of Dalit communities, they have not been accepted into the mainstream society. Even today Dalits are treated as untouchables, psychologically if not physically. They are still quintessential pariahs when it comes to matrimonial alliances and socialization. Many argue that the problems pertaining to Dalits are internal. They even go to the extent of saying that Dalits are in such a bad position in society because of their own shortcomings.

Being a ‘Dalit Student

Right from the day one of his admission, the journey that a ‘Dalit’ student undertakes in the college and university campus, shapes not just his future, but the hopes of a community hinges on him. A student is influenced by many forces during his stay in the campus. Teachers, syllabi books, peer group, formal and informal dialogues, and media, are some of the influential parameters that moulds his personality.

Mainstream mass media and new media, controlled by caste Hindus, set the agenda for the public to discuss and subvert some of the pertinent issues to the background. In order to critically understand the agendas of mainstream media, it is important to assess the awareness level of students. In this case, the paper focuses its attention only on Dalit students. As the messages are heavily loaded against them in a subtle manner, it is interesting to know as to how Dalit students are receiving them. Whether they are jumping into the bandwagon or resisting the attempts of homogenization of mainstream culture and issues. Fundamental to this is the understanding of media accessibility and usage pattern by Dalit students. In this background, this study aims to look into media accessibility and media awareness among Dalit students of Kuvempu University. It also focuses on terms and references of their media use.

Literature review

Many independent studies have taken place especially pertaining to portrayal or representation of Dalits in mainstream mass media. A report published by Dalit.org discusses about the media accessibility of Dalits. The report says, that an examination of media access of the Dalits reveals that most have some access, but limited invariably to only the point of being hearsay knowledge of printed news told or retold or read-out to them by others, casual or passing listeners of radio, and viewers of television.

The report says that poor transport facilities, economic conditions and literacy rates, particularly in the distant rural areas have kept the readership low, however many Dalits in towns and cities often have some newspaper or other magazines to read. The report suggests that the Indian newspaper editors and management needs sensitization so as to increasingly involve the Dalits, and to take up frank and active discussions of Dalit issues in a medium to which the Dalits have some access.

In a study titled ‘Media awareness among nomadic tribes of northeastern Karnataka-an empirical study (2012),’ Ravi & Sathyaprakash, have tried to measure the media accessibility achieved by the respondents of nomadic and essentially semi- nomadic communities in the Bellary district. The study also has focused on evaluating the media awareness level among these communities. The authors have come out with two important findings. First; each group had been affected by modernization and was into increasing conflict with sedentary villagers, with whom they no longer seemed to share a symbiotic relation. Second; as a result of the changing times, the value of their occupation had gone down. Increasingly, nomadic people are turning to the labour markets or construction sites for jobs. Some of these nomads who have a rich cultural heritage are now using their art for begging. Communities which are living settlement camps are bereft of basic facilities.

Dalit Representation in Media

Aijaz Ashraf (2013) writing on ‘Dalits in media’ says that Dalits in media feel the sting of caste discrimination. Working on a research project commissioned by the *The Hoot*, a website on the media, he has come out with telling findings about the discrimination meted out to Dalits in mainstream media. The study has found out that caste-based discrimination was ranked as the principal factor why Dalit journalists want to leave the media.

Discrimination in its most severe form was experienced in the Hindi media and other languages. Dalits having ambiguous surnames, often adopted to conceal their caste, invited relentless questioning from upper caste colleagues. At the disclosure or identification of their Dalit identity, most of the 21 journalists reported harassment, snide remarks, and deliberate targeting that was manifest in a denial of promotions and increments.

Shivnarayan Rajpurohit (2014) notes that the conscious or unconscious exclusion of Dalits from the Indian media has given way to a lopsided public sphere which hardly manages to generate comprehensive debates. Corporate interests have aggravated this malaise, given the indifference of the corporate sector towards fomenting a diverse media, cutting across caste, religious and class lines. The primary conclusion of his research was that English-language media as an institution has been undemocratic because it draws its workforce from a homogenous set of people, overlooking the urgent need for diversity. In that sense it is hostile to opposing viewpoints and diversity of arguments.

On media prejudices towards aspiring and existing journalists, some of the examples have been recurring motifs: the experience of J Balasubramaniam (EPW, 2011) and D.S. Ravindra Doss, former president of the Tamil Nadu Union of Journalists to name a few. Sharing his personal experience, S. Anand (2005) says, "The advantages of being born in the 'right caste', I think, equally helped me with my other jobs, as also in other spheres of my life, sometimes without my being aware of these advantages." Siddharth Varadarajan (2006), the former editor-in-chief of The Hindu, highlighted the pernicious role played by caste in media.

Brahminic Media Constructions

Smita Patil (2011) writes in her paper titled violence of silence: Brahminic media constructions of caste and Gender, engages with the interlinkages that exist between media forms, caste and gender. In particular, it explores the manner in which media re-presented the murder of Dalit women and their family at Khairlanji, Maharashtra. Drawing on the media representation, she argues that media reproduces Brahmanical ideology that stereotypes caste-gendered social spaces of Dalit women.

She notes that, representation of Dalit women by the mainstream media is a reflection of their dominant social space on Dalits. Hence, the space of the dominant- Brahmanical media becomes the space of caste ideology which conditions the media for the larger population and practices tangible and intangible forms of caste. The stereotypes that are produced on the life worlds of Dalit women are the products of Brahmanical, patriarchal media improvisations. The politics of the media is embedded in a complicated milieu of caste and gender.

Lamenting on the absence of Dalits in media, Jeffrey (2012) says that the Dalit absence from the media has been focused on sporadically since 1996. That's when Kenneth J. Cooper, the *Washington Post* correspondent, himself an African-American, tried to find a Dalit media person in New Delhi. Cooper wrote about his failure to do so, and B.N. Uniyal publicised Cooper's inquiries in the *Pioneer*. "Suddenly, I realised," Uniyal wrote, "that in all the 30 years I had worked as a journalist I had never met a fellow journalist who was a Dalit; no, not one." Since the time he published *India's Newspaper Revolution* in 2000, Jeffrey notes that nothing had changed by 2006 when a survey on the 10th anniversary of the Cooper-Uniyal inquiry found not a single SC or ST among more than 300 media decision-makers.

Jeffrey offers two suggestions to incorporate Dalits into mainstream media. "To begin with, the Editors' Guild could commit itself to carrying out an annual census of newsroom diversity of the kind that the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) began in 1978. Secondly, Dalits need a publication that looks at the world from their perspective- bottom up,

not top down. A first-class publication- like an *Ebony* or an *Essence*, two of the glossy magazines of Black America that report achievements as well as outrages.

Focusing on caste diversity in media industry, Siddharth Varadarjan (2006) says, there are no official or industry statistics but every journalist is aware of the extent to which forward castes dominate the media. He goes on to state that, one is not saying the absence of Dalit or OBC journalists is the product of conscious discrimination though that factor cannot be ruled out. But the reality of their absence is something the media must have the courage to acknowledge. As it is evident from the above review of literature, many articles and some research works have been done pertaining to representation of Dalits in media and also on incorporating the Dalits into the mainstream media. Robin Jeffrey, Siddharth Varadarajan speaks of bringing about diversity in news room, so as to make the journalism more inclusive and holistic. However, not much of studies are available pertaining to media behavior of Dalits. This study was taken up to fill that void and to make a beginning. The researcher hopes that this will act as a foundation for the many such studies in future.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The present research work makes an attempt to study two very important dimensions of development; accessibility to mass media and media awareness. Media accessibility is a necessary condition in creating media awareness among the people. In this background, the present study attempted at evaluating the media awareness among Dalit students of Kuvempu University. The objectives of the study are:

1. To study the media accessibility among Post graduate Dalit students of Kuvempu University.
2. To assess the media awareness among them.
3. To find out the terms and references of their media use

RESEARCH METHDOLOGY

Study Area

The study is carried out at the Kuvempu University, located at Shankaraghatta, around 30 kilometers away from Shimoga town. It has a 41 post graduate departments belonging to arts, science, commerce, education and law faculty, offers 45 post graduate courses and four PG diplomas and one undergraduate programme. The student enrolment ratio at Kuvempu university stands at around 2000, considering the average taken from 2007-08 to 2012-13. So far as SC & STs are concerned, the figure is somewhere around 300 to 350 during the period. As it is given above, around 2000 students enroll for different courses at Kuvempu University, 18% out this total student strength belong to SC & ST communities. Keeping these factors in mind, the study was taken up.

Sampling Procedure

As stated above, Jnanasahyadri campus located at Shankaraghatta is chosen as the area of the study. The researcher considered using simple random sampling method to select samples for the survey as it is a probability sampling as they are representative and provide most valid and reliable results. But it is virtually impossible to prepare foolproof sampling frames that provide each and every member of the universe equal chance of selection. A sampling frame comprising the SC & ST students was prepared and chosen on the basis of random selection. Variables like age, gender were given importance while selecting samples.

Sampling size

The sampling size for the study was 120, which is 33% of the total population of Dalit students studying at Kuvempu University. This base figure of 120 reflects the demographic characteristics of the population and it is an exact mini replication of the universe of the study. Every attempt has been made to represent all the students in sampling frame. The average student enrolment ratio at Kuvempu University for various courses is 2000. Hence, the size of the universe of the study was taken as 2000. 18% of this base figure is 360, which is the population of the study.

Sample distribution

The following paragraphs provide information pertaining to sampling distribution of the study. Variables like gender, age, parental occupation, family type and family income are taken into account while choosing the respondents. Although, the population for the study was post graduate Dalit students studying at the Jnanasahyadri campus, a sample size of 120 is chosen, keeping in mind the overall strength of the Dalit students.

Gender wise sample distribution

Of the total sample size chosen for the study, 80 respondents which amount to 67% are male students, and 40 students weighing 33% are female students. Although, the overall enrolment ratio of female students at Kuvempu University is more in comparison to male students, Dalit students’ enrolment ratio tells a different story. Among Dalit students, boys outnumber girls. More number of Dalit boys are enrolled at the PG departments of the university than girl students, which is a realistic prototype of the larger society.

Table 1. Enrolment ratio of Dalit Male and Female Students from 2008-09 to 2012-13

Year	Gender	Student strength	Total
2008-09	Boys	265	406
	Girls	141	
2009-10	Boys	184	279
	Girls	95	
2010-11	Boys	213	281
	Girls	68	
2011-12	Boys	245	320
	Girls	75	
2012-13	Boys	230	377
	Girls	147	

Source: Compiled from Student enrolment data of Kuvempu University

Sampling distribution based on gender is substantiated by the fact that the average Dalit female student enrolment ratio is 31.62% as per the data provided by the above table for the academic years from 2008-09 to 2012-13. The Dalit male student enrolment ratio is 68.3% for the same period. The average male student enrolment stands at 227 and female enrolment ratio stands at 105. Based on the following data, the sampling size of 80 and 40 respectively for male and female students are justified as the proportion reflects the actual student.

Parental Occupation

58 respondents with 48.3 % have reported that their parents are involved in agricultural occupation. 52 respondents with an average of 43.33% of the total respondents revealed that their parents are working as laborers- while some of them are involved in agricultural labor; others are occupied as construction workers. Only 10 respondents' parents with an average of 8.33% were doing occupations like teaching, own business and government service.

Family Income

Another important criterion in understanding the socio economic conditions of the students' family is income. 38 respondents which amount to 31.66% have a family income below 30 thousand rupees per annum. 46 respondents i.e. 38.33% have income between 30 to 50 thousand rupees per annum. 28 respondents that amount to 23.33% of the total sample size, have income range between 50 to 1 lac rupees per annum. And only 08 respondents, a tiny 6.66% have the family income above one lac per annum.

However, the conditions of all the respondents are not so bleak. Exceptions should be made as the incomes of some of the respondents' family could be more than what is reported by them. For instance, some of the respondents have personal laptops, smart phones, digital television and DTH connection for them also. It only indicates the point that income reported by the respondents should be taken with a pinch of salt. Based on the logical speculation, it can be hypothesized that the income could range somewhere between 50 thousand rupees to five lacs rupees per annum. But the average would definitely be skewed below one lac rupees per annum.

Media profile: Newspapers and magazines

Traditionally, a community which is not known for literacy or scholarship is now moving towards being part of the knowledge economy. Spending money on newspaper subscription, its language notwithstanding, is an important step for the families of these respondents.

Table 2. Print media subscription data

Media subscription at home	Percentage
Newspapers	60%
More than one Newspaper	-
Magazines	26.66%
Journals	-

Source: Field Survey

As the above table indicates, 72 respondents at an average of 60% are subscribed to newspapers at home and 48 respondents at an average of 40% do not subscribe to any newspaper at their home. This is an important finding of the study. 60% of the Dalit post graduate students having subscription to newspapers indicate that their families have understood the importance of being informed in the modern information society.

In another revealing finding of the study, 32 respondents at an average of 26.66% are subscribed to magazines at their home. This is significant information, which should be understood with a positive intent. More than the number, the willingness of the parents to invest on the magazines, weekly or others, is an upward media behavior on the part of the parents of these respondents.

It is very much possible that these students would well have influenced their parents in taking such an important decision, given the economic status of the families of these respondents. Among the 26.66% of students subscribed to magazines, most of them have subscriptions to magazines like *Sudha*, *Taranga*, *Spardhachaitrya*, all in Kannada language. However, none of the respondents are subscribed to more than one newspaper at their homes. Similarly, none of the respondents are subscribed to any journal at home.

Time Devoted to Read Newspapers and Magazines

Per day readership figure is usually quite different from subscription figures. A respondent may not have subscribed to a newspaper at home, but he or she could have read newspapers at library or friends, relatives or neighbors' houses. Hence the subscription figure stands at 72 with an average of 60% and per day readership at 80 with an average of 66.66%. The remaining 40% of the respondents do not read newspapers on a daily basis; however, they could be reading at their own convenient time and duration.

So far as the time spent on reading these newspapers are concerned, 60 respondents with an average of 50% devote more than 30 minutes per day to read newspapers. This is good majority given the readership figure of the respondents that stands at 66.66%. This indicates an upward trend among the respondents, who are willing to spend more time in updating themselves with the latest news and current affairs developing around the society. 12 respondents with an average of 10% devote 15 to 30 minutes in a day to read newspapers and 08 respondents with an average of 6.66% devote up to 15 minutes in a day to read newspapers. 40 respondents with an average of 33.33% do not read newspapers every day. However, this could also mean that these respondents would be reading newspapers as and when they find time and access to newspapers- may be on alternative days or twice in a week. Similar logic may also be applied to magazine readership, which is discussed in the next part.

The day to day magazine readership among the respondents stands at 52 with an average of 43.33%. Among the total sample size 24 respondents with an average of 20% devote more than 30 minutes in a day to read magazines. This is also not a bad trend given the respondents' readership figure of magazines. 12 respondents with an average of 10% devote 15-30 minutes in a day to read magazines and 16 respondents with an average of 13.33% spend up to 15 minutes in a day to read magazines. 68 respondents with an average of 56.66% do not read magazines on a daily basis.

Radio

So far as the radio ownership is concerned, 96 respondents with an average of 80% own a radio set at home and only 24 respondents with an average of 20% do not have radio at home. This is not surprising, given the low cost of radio set. However, what is surprising is that radio still holds a place in the homes of these respondents, despite the availability of new communication media. Another important factor is that the most of the respondents hail from rural areas, where private FM radio has very low or no presence at all. So, the radio programs, these respondents and their families listen to are Akashvani programs aired through FM, shortwave and medium wave.

The time spent on listening to radio programs in a day provides an interesting data. 24 respondents with an average of 20% spend more than 30 minutes in a day to listen to radio programs. While 16 respondents with an average of 13.33% spend 15 to 30 minutes in a day to listen to radio, 04 respondents with an average of 3.33% spend less than 15 minutes in a day to listen to radio programs. The remaining 76 respondents with an average of 63.33% do not listen to radio on a daily basis at all. However, chances of these respondents listening to radio at their own convenient time cannot be ruled out. This clearly indicates that the

respondents do not take a liking to radio in comparison to other media. Perhaps, the expansion of FM radio in rural areas in a big way could generate interest among the audiences and could pave the way for the revival of radio in these parts of the country as well, just like it happened in the cities.

Television

Television market has expanded in a much bigger way in the past decade. Television industry in India has gained new momentum due to liberalization. The number of private satellite TV channels has grown astronomically over the years. Clearly television today has become one of the most influential media in the country. The following part provides significant data from the respondents in relation to this all important medium.

Table 3. Television ownership profile of the respondents

S. No	Type of TV	Number of owners	Percentage
1.	Analog	46	38.33%
2.	Digital	74	61.66%
3.	Color	102	85%
4.	Black & white	18	15%
5.	Cable connection	100	83.33%
6.	DTH	20	16.66%

Source: Field survey

The above table indicates all the respondents own television set at home. Hence, the reach of television among the samples chosen is 100%. Another significant outcome of the study is that out of this, 61.66%, which is a clear majority, own digital television set at home. This could be analyzed in two ways: i) that even the lower income groups can afford digital television, the prices of which have drastically come down; ii) These communities are willing to pay for an electronic home appliance like television because of its influence as an indispensable medium of entertainment and information.

Further dissection of this data has been quite a revelation. 102 respondents with an overwhelming average of 85% own color television sets at home. Only 18 respondents with an average of 15% own black and white television set at home. This clearly brings home the point that Dalit families that are still occupied with agriculture and agricultural labor are now willing to spend on media technologies like television and mobile telephones. The affordability factor of television gadgets would definitely have acted as an influential factor in this trend.

The reach of private television is also absolutely 100%. The number of families that have cable connection to their television stands at 100 with an average of 83.33% and 20 respondents with an average of 16.66% have reported that their television sets have DTH connection. Among this, 12 families have *Tata Sky* connection and 08 families have *Sun Direct* DTH connections at their homes. The television ownership trend clearly points towards the upward swing for the people who are placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. It is a pleasant surprise for the researcher to know that the television penetration is absolute and the digitization of this ownership is also on the upward move. It indicates that the Dalit families have realized the importance of acquiring the modern gadgets that are more affordable now, in order to be in tune with the ever evolving situations.

Time Spent on Television Viewing

It is one thing to know that the television penetration among the respondents is absolute, but it is equally important to understand the amount of time spent on watching television by the respondents. 36 respondents with an average of 30% spend half an hour to one hour in a day to watch television when they are at home. 32 respondents with an average of 26.66% spend up to 30 minutes in a day to watch television when the opportunity is there. 30 respondents with an average of 25% spend more than 90 minutes in a day to watch television and 22 respondents with an average of 18.33% spend 60 to 90 minutes in a day to watch television when they are at home.

52 respondents with an average of 43.33% spend more than one hour in a day to watch television. According to George Gerbner these viewers may not be considered as 'heavy viewers,' as the chances of them getting influenced are lesser. According to Gerbner a 'heavy viewer' who watches television more than three hours in a day is more prone to persuasion by the content aired in television. On the basis of this, it can be safely said that though respondents spend a good duration of time in watching television, they may have been using television as an entertainment medium sparingly at their own convenient time.

Another important factor to be understood here is that for example, 60 minutes spent on watching television in a day by the respondent may not be at a stretch. This time could have been split and spread throughout the day. A viewer may watch TV for ten minutes at a go and stop. He may again catch up with his or her favorite program for 30 minutes and stop. This could go on. This logic is applicable to other media like radio, newspapers, and magazines as well. But newspapers and magazines are quite different in the sense that reading is more about internalizing in comparison to listening or watching.

Television Content Preferences of Respondents

This question was open ended. The choice of content and the television channels were not given. The respondents were asked to provide their favorite channels and programs. The data was then classified using content analysis technique and the number of respondents and averages were calculated based on the classification of content categories. The content here is general but classified separately as 'Kannada' and 'Other' based on the responses given by the respondents with regard to their television channel preferences. Other TV channel here refers to other language television channels preferred by the respondents.

The number of respondents who prefer to watch news in Kannada news channels like *TV 9*, *Public TV*, and *Suvarna 24/7* stands at 120 with an absolute average of 100%. Whereas 16 respondents among them with an average of 13.33% also prefer to watch English news channels like *NDTV 24/7* and *Times Now*. 68 respondents with an average of 56.66% prefer to watch general entertainment and reality TV content in Kannada channels like *Colors Kannada*, *Zee Kannada* and *Udaya TV*. 26 respondents with an average of 21.66% prefer to watch similar content in Hindi and Telugu channels like *Star Plus*, *Zee TV*, *Gemini TV*, and *Maa TV*.

24 respondents with an average of 20% likes to watch public service broadcasting channel like *Chandana* in Kannada, which airs content on socially relevant issues along with general entertainment. But such content is not preferred by the respondent in other languages. So far as programs on education and information are concerned 36 respondents with an average of 30% prefer to watch channels like *History*, *National Geographic*, *Animal Planet*, and *Discovery*. It should be noted here that such channels are not available in Kannada. Similarly 36 respondents with an average of 30% prefer to watch sporting events in channels like *Star Cricket*, *Star Sports*, and *Ten Sports*.

48 respondents with an average of 40% prefer to watch musical programs on Kannada channels like *Udaya Music* and *Public Music*. None of them watch other music and musical programs in other languages. 20 respondents with an average of 16.66% prefer to watch movies in Kannada channels like *Udaya Movies* and *Udaya TV* and 08 respondents with an average of 6.66% prefer to watch movies in channels like *Star Movies* and *Movies Now*. Lastly, 12 respondents with an average of 10% prefer to watch comedy content in Kannada only.

In one of the important findings of the study, the table indicates that all the respondents prefer to watch news in Kannada and English as well. This clearly brings home the point that the Dalit students are now attuned in familiarizing with the things happening around them. This trend is continued in relation to television as well. Similar trend was found in data pertaining to newspapers, magazines and radio also. This is followed by general entertainment, indicating the trend that respondents are increasingly perceiving television as a medium of entertainment. This trend continues with the next preference given to music content by the respondents. The content related to education and information is also given importance by the respondents, which is followed by sports in descending order. The upward mobility trend shown in earlier parts of the study in asserting their tastes and preferences is maintained here also.

New Media Profile

The growth of the Internet, satellite transmission, and mobile phone services has rendered it impossible to gauge the true extent of media outlet proliferation. Furthermore, new media, such as blogging, Twitter, Facebook and so forth have added an expansive dimension of what media means today and who has access to it. In this backdrop it is essential to understand the impact of new media technologies on Dalit students. Do they have access to digital technologies like computers, laptops, smart phones, Internet and Internet enabled services? These are the questions this section tackles with.

Table 4. New Media Ownership Profile of the Respondents

S. No	Type of New media	Number of ownership	Percentage
1.	I-pod or I-pad	32	26.66%
2.	Desktop or laptop	51	42.5%
3.	Internet connection to Desktop or laptop	15	12.5%
4.	Mobile phones	98	81.66%
5.	Data connection to mobile phones	88	73.33%

Source: Field survey

The above table provides very interesting data about the new media technologies owned and used by the respondents. As indicated in the table 98 respondents with an average of 81.66% own mobile phones- some of the respondents among this pool own smart phones. 88 respondents with an average of 73.33% have Internet data connection to their mobile phones. This is an important finding of the study, indicating the general growth trend being witnessed in telecom sector across the country due to low cost data plans and aggressive competition among the telecom service providers like Airtel, Vodafone, BSNL, Tata Docomo among others. Not surprisingly Dalit students are also equipped with this indispensable modern technology, thanks to the proliferation of low cost smart phones in the country.

51 respondents with an average of 42.5% own either desktop computer or laptop and 15 respondents out of this with an average of 12.5% have internet connection to their respective computers. This is another important finding of the study, indicating the desire and willingness shown by Dalit families in investing on electronic gadgets like desktop or laptop to help their children in honing the educational skills.

Among this pool some of the students have bought laptops by availing either educational loan or by governmental assistance. And lastly 32 respondents with an average of 26.66% own entertainment gadget like I-pod, I-pad, basically meant for music. This is also significant given the socio economic background these students come from. It could be hypothesized that students are willing to spend money on such gadgets for entertainment purpose. However, this aspect of the respondents could be further investigated.

Internet activity of respondents

As discussed in the previous part 73.33% of the respondents have internet data connection in their mobile phones and 12.5% of the respondents have internet connection to their computers. Keeping this in mind, it would be interesting to see the kind of activities the Dalit students are indulged in Internet. In other words, this section attempts to analyze the internet usage behavior of the respondents.

24 respondents with an average of 20% use internet for browsing information through Google and other websites. 18 respondents with an average of 15% are using internet for educational purposes like learning English language, reading E-books or Wikipedia. This is an important trend witnessed in relation to other media discussed before as well. But here the trend related to education is not so encouraging, as more respondents are using internet for socializing purposes than anything else. 14 respondents with an average of 11.66% use internet for news reading as well. If the above three categories are combined, the average percentage totals up to 46.66%. This clearly indicates that more than half of the respondents who have accessibility to internet are hooked to the media for education and information purposes along with socializing. It should be noted here that this trend is witnessed with regard to other media like newspapers, radio and television as well.

With the analysis of the data provided by the respondents it is quite clear that mass media like newspapers, magazines, television and Internet- which is both mass and personal media- have become indispensable part of modern society. But given the socio economic conditions of the families of the respondents it is heartening to know that they own television, computers, smart phones, and I-pods as well. On examining what they were doing with these media technologies or gadgets, it was not at all disappointing.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

When the researcher set out this project, the idea was to keep it simple. The objectives identified for the study was in a sense limited to documenting the media accessibility of Dalit post graduate students studying at the Jnanasahyadri campus of Kuvempu University. The second objective was to assess the media awareness and to find out the terms and references of their media use. Although the study was aimed at generating primary data about the media ownership- newspaper and magazine subscription, television ownership, computers and other electronic devices and Internet- the outcome is not just about the numbers thrown up by the study, there is more to it, as these numbers also reflect lot of things pertaining to the respondents.

However, it should be noted here that documenting the fundamental aspects of Dalit media accessibility is also really important, as there are hardly any literature pertaining it. The researcher is hopeful that this project acts as a spring board for other studies to come up in

future. For example, in one of the findings of the study, it came to light that Dalit students prefer some newspapers over others and prefers reading content related to education, culture and sports in comparison to other categories like politics and crime. Studies could be carried out by using qualitative methods as to why they prefer to read the content they are reading in newspapers.

As discussed elsewhere in the study media accessibility is an indispensable requirement in creating media awareness. Hence, the outcomes of this study is doubly useful as it not only provides insights into the types of media Dalit students have access to, but also provide information on media usage behavior among them. Spending money on newspaper subscription, its language notwithstanding, is an important step for the families of these respondents. More than the number, the willingness of the parents to invest on the magazines, weekly or others, is an upward media behavior on the part of the parents of these respondents.

Just like print media, radio content preference of the respondents indicates a leaning towards upward mobility at least in terms of thought process, tastes and preferences among the respondents. So far as the television is concerned, the study has indicated that even the lower income groups can afford digital television; or these communities are willing to pay for electronic home appliances like television. The upward mobility trend shown with regard to other media in asserting their tastes and preferences is maintained in relation to television also. Similarly Dalit students and their parents have also shown desire and willingness in investing on electronic gadgets like desktop or laptop to help their children in honing the educational skills as seen in numbers pertaining to internet enabled computers.

It is quite clear that respondents have understood the importance of mass media in the contemporary world. Contrary to the belief of the researcher the respondents are using these technologies in a responsible manner and more importantly, they are controlling the media and not the vice versa. Barring few exceptions inferences drawn throughout the study indicates an aspiration shown by Dalit students towards upward mobility in terms of their choices, tastes and preferences. If this positive trend is tapped, encouraged or given shape in a constructive manner, it bodes well for the future of Dalit communities in this part of the country.

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