ABSTRACT

REPRESENTATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN PRINT MEDIA IN INDIA

1. Introduction

The age of modernity contains a promise of and a belief in increasing human welfare. Modern states are responsible to protect and promote the economic and social well-being of its citizens. These modern states are also welfare states where safeguarding the interests of the weaker sections including the disabled in the society is of paramount importance. Since the disabled is weakest among weaker sections in the society, the study of their status in terms of socio-economic, educational, employment and political participation is quite relevant (Kananen, 2014; Marshall, 1950).

Media has a greater role in realising a welfare state. Media being the mirror of the society, is expected to reflect the needs and aspirations of weaker sections. In this context, the issues of disability are expected to be covered by media. However, the representation of the disabled in media in India which has invited numerous discussions is a recent phenomenon. Since the role of media is vital to address the issues of the disadvantaged sections and the disabled are facing several problems, such discussions carry a lot of weights. But, the discussions remain naïve, sub-standard and partial and enjoy pragmatic flaws. The issues of the disabled are yet to be understood and addressed (Haller, 2015). On other hand, many complain against the degrading role of media from watchdog to the lapdog. Hence, in order to have systematic and logical discussions on the current subject, taking stock of facts and developments on disability and media is highly imperative.

Disability, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is defined as an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty
encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations (“Health topics: Disabilities”, 2011).

According to the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) or Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act, 1995, “Disability” includes blindness, low vision, leprosy-cured, hearing impairment, loco motor disability, mental retardation, and mental illness. The Act further defines a “person with disability” as suffering from not less than forty per cent of any disability as certified by a medical authority. Under PWD Act 1995, the disabilities mentioned above have been included in order to enable the persons suffering from disabilities to derive certain benefits/concessions provided by the State Govt. / U.T. Administration/ Central Ministries/ Department and Local Authorities (“National Human Right Commission: Disability Manual 2005,” 2005).

It is apparent that the population of the disabled in India and the rest of the world is high and their interest must be safeguarded Since the population is significant, their contribution can be utilised for the national development. Needless to mention, the media considered to be the fourth pillar of a democratic nation, has the responsibility to address the weaker sections including disability.

2. Media and Society

Mass media plays vital roles in shaping public perceptions on a variety of important issues through the information emanated from its various channels. It also plays a large role in shaping modern culture, shaping the public opinion by selecting and portraying a particular set of beliefs, values, and traditions. It attempts to shape reality to be more in line with that interpretation, by portraying a certain interpretation of reality (Lorimer and Scannell, 1994; Webb, 2008). However, media at present is biased, class-oriented and advertising-driven, leaving the disabled people in sheer deprivation. Coverage of disabled related issues in media occupies the least as media has become lapdog instead of
The presence of the disabled has been ignored and their human resource to national development is undermined. Media in a democratic country like India is not performing its role and its role in the context of addressing disability issues is found ineffective. Hence, media should pay attention to the issues of the socially and economically disadvantaged sections including the disabled.

3. Review of Literature

It has been logically found that the media treat disabled as ‘deficient’. Initially, the concern was with media stereotypes of disabled people and experience of disability and subsequently with the processes by which meanings about normality and bodily difference are produced. It is sad to find the dismal scene of freedom of expression for disabled people in India. Media is callous, biased and manipulative towards the issues of disability, resulting in sheer deprivation of this class. Even though there is a huge population of the disabled in India, there is a skewed coverage in media. It is yet to get its due share in media coverage. It gains proportionally lesser coverage in media.

The Indian media is not conscious of the issues of the disabled from the dimensions of gender, geography, types and human rights. A disabled in rural regions face double discrimination than a disabled in urban areas. Female with disabilities face more discriminations than a male counterpart. Similarly, discriminations are varied when the problems of various types disabled are taken into considerations. However, media is yet to cover these aspects to resolve the issues (Mukherji, 2010; Nair, 2015).

There have been no serious discussions on Disability Studies. There are less papers on the issues of the disabled in India. There has been less research works on media and disability in India. The researches do not carry any systematic methodology. Those are mostly opinion writings. Systematic study on media and disability are still lacking. In the Indian context, even content analysis on the coverage of disability is still rare. It indicates the methodological flaws pertaining to media research on disability issues. Hence, current
situation in media research in India demands different research methodologies to probe the representation of disability issues. Hence, the current research is an attempt to address the above-mentioned flaws in the existing research in a comprehensive manner and to bridge the research gaps.

4. Aim and Objectives of the Study

Aim

To analyse the representation of issues relating to the disabled and print media in India

Objectives

1. To estimate the status of disabled and their rights in India
2. To study the role of media in protecting the rights of disabled in India
3. To explore the representation of disabled in the Indian media
4. To examine the coverage relating to disabled in print media in India
5. To understand the influential factors behind the disability representation in the Indian media

5. Research Methodology

The research methodology for carrying out the current study comprises of two parts, keeping the research objectives in mind. In a view to make the research holistic one, both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilised. The tools of content analysis, critical discourse analysis and in-depth interviews were used to understand the representation of the disabled in print media in India. Here, print media was restricted to two leading English dailies i.e., The Hindu and The Times of India publishing from Hyderabad. Firstly, the content analysis was employed to understand and comment on the quantity of representation of the disabled in English newspapers i.e., The Hindu and The Times of
India in India. Secondly, critical discourse analysis was adopted to understand the nature of representation in these two national English dailies. Thirdly, to explore the factors influencing the quantity, quality and complexities pertaining to the representation in these newspapers, in-depth interviews were employed.

6. Theoretical Frameworks

The current research is based on three theories to understand and assess the quantity and quality of representation of the disabled in English newspapers in India. These are the theory of social responsibility of media, critical discourse analysis and political economy of media.

Based on the works in ‘Four Theories of the Press’ by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm; Dennis McQuails (1987) frames six normative theories of the mass media. The normative theories reflect how media should be, what is to be expected of them rather than what necessarily happens in practice and it is out of the political, cultural and economic context that the normative principles arise. The current study is apt to the social responsibility theory of media – a part of normative theories - which states that freedom of press is subject to the responsibility of the society.

From the perspectives of qualitative analysis, Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory has been used to understand the latent values and ideologies of language on the disabled in English newspapers in India. The theory states that the language as a powerful tool which is the driving forces behind maintaining and changing the power relations (Fairclough, 1996: 1-16).

In a view to understand the perspective of media coverage on the issues of the disabled in India, in-depth interviews have been carried out. To probe the media contents through the disabled, disability right activists, media persons and media educators is based on the theory of political economy of communication.
7. Importance of the Present Study

The review of literature indicates that the disabled are suffering from the fronts of socio-economic, educational, employment and political participation. Their presence and contribution to the national development is being undermined and hence, immeasured.

Since media is the fourth pillar of democracy and it should safeguard the human rights of the disadvantaged including the disabled, it is inevitable to understand and assess the social responsibility of media. First of all, the studies on the representation of the disabled in print media in general and English newspapers in particular are very scant in India. Of those studies, systematic and empirical studies are not almost nil. Hence, the current is believed to an ice breaking in the domain of media research.

In order to assess the importance paid to the disability, huge population in the Indian society, the present study is of paramount importance. It has taken from the front page to the last page, covering general happenings, politics, economy, business, sports, entertainment, editorial and opinions columns to the ambit of research. In addition, the current study is of wholesome in nature as it employs both quantitative and qualitative methodologies through content analysis, critical discourse analysis and in-depth analysis in a view to understand the complex nature of the subject.

8. Scopes and Limitations of the Study

The current study enjoys certain scopes as it is a unique study in its kind. Since the problems of the disabled are many and the responsibility of media is immense, every study pertaining to the issue adds to the scopes of the research.

Employing quantitative and qualitative methodologies by using the tools of content analysis, critical discourse analysis and in-depth interviews, the current study attempts to explore the representation of the disabled in print media in India i.e., two English newspapers from the dimensions of human rights, gender, geography and types of
disability. The study exerts critically to analyse the policy prospectus relating to disability and media. It tries to explore the spheres of media industry, disability society and academia.

It attempts to verify the media policies and priorities towards the disadvantaged sections like the disabled. In addition, the study enlarges the dimensions of methodological inputs by employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

However, the current study suffers from certain pitfalls. It limits itself to the representation of the disabled in English newspapers in India. The probing was carried out from all the issues of two leading English newspapers – The Hindu and The Times of India - for the year 2013 from their editions of Hyderabad. So far as the empirical analysis pertaining to the representation of the disabled in media is concerned, other media like television, film and the Internet were not included in the ambit of current research.

9. Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Findings

When the coverages on the issues of the disabled were looked into in two major English dailies – The Hindu and The Times of India – for the year 2013 in their editions from the city of Hyderabad probed though content analysis, the findings were startling. The representations in terms of overages on the issues of the disabled remained low in The Hindu and The Times of India as the number of items were only 47 and 42 respectively.

It was found that there were maximum coverages of disability in the city pages of both the national English dailies. The Hindu gained the coverage of 42.55 % i.e., 20 items and The Times of India gained the coverage of 40.47 % i.e., 17 items on disability issues in the city pages.
Out of these items on the disabled, 2.12% and 4.76% were on the editorial page and 14.89% and 11.90% were on the opinion page of *The Hindu* and *The Time of India* respectively. The 14.89% and 11.90% of items were in the opinion page in *The Hindu* and *The Time of India* respectively. The critical issues of the disabled received poor coverages in the editorial and opinion pages. It showed sheer negligence on the part of these two major English dailies of India.

It is laudable initiative that both the newspapers covered most items on rights approach. The rights approach to the issues of disability is the most appropriate approach over medical model and welfare model of disability. Of total 47 items, *The Hindu* covered 24 items whereas *The Times of India* covered 16 items on rights out of 42 items. When the types of disabilities covered were looked into, the items on physical disabilities gained the maximum coverage of 25.53% i.e., 12 items for *The Hindu* if the category of ‘Unspecified’ is excluded. The items on mental health and emotional disabilities gained the dominant coverages of 26.19% i.e., 11 items for *The Times of India*, if the category of ‘Unspecified’ is excluded.

So far as the coverages of issues of the disabled from the dimensions of geography are concerned, it was nil for exclusive rural coverage in *The Hindu* and 2.38% of total coverage in *The Times of India*. When the dimensions of gender were taken into account considering the coverage of the disabled, *The Hindu* covered only 12.76% of exclusive items on female and *The Times of India* covered only 11.90% exclusive of items on female in the entire year.

When the types of disabilities covered were looked into it was found that *The Hindu* covered the 77.77% of total items on the physical disabilities. On the other hand, *The Times of India* covered the 47.05% of items on the mental health and emotional disabilities. When the types of disabilities covered were looked into it was found that *The Hindu* covered the 77.77% of total items on the physical disabilities. On the other hand, *The Times of India* covered the 47.05% of items on the mental health and emotional disabilities. A picture with an item in the newspaper attracts the readers. Out of total
items in *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* 74.46% and 71.42% respectively were with pictures. When the items with month-wise distribution on the issues of the disabled were probed, it was found that 21.27% and 30.95% of items were published in month of December itself in *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* respectively. However, 2.12% of items were published in the month of August in *The Hindu* and 2.38% items were published in the month of July in *The Times of India*.

When the discourses in the lead lines were probed, 57.14% and 45.71% of its news stories in *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* had news leads and thus, led to the representation of secondary discourse and direct discourse; high level of boundary maintenance; and low level of illocutionary forces.

When the overall contents were probed, it was found that 63.05% and 36.95% were the coverages on the issues of the disabled in which journalists of *The Hindu* played the role of news-givers and mediators respectively. On the other hand, 58.34% and 41.66% were the coverages in which the journalists of *The Times of India* played the role of news-givers and mediators respectively. The coverages of news-givers indicated the mode of DD and ID in which the voice of the secondary source was represented directly or indirectly. On the other hand, the coverages of mediators indicated the mode of UNSIG in which the voice of the primary source was represented in hidden forms.

Owing to explore and understand the reasons behind the low amount of quantity and sub-standard nature of contents on the issues of the disabled, in-depth interviews were conducted with the disabled, disabled rights activists, media persons and media educators. The respondents were not satisfied with the performance of media.

The disabled and disability right activists have stated that media was not disabled-friendly. Social responsibility of media was weathering away. Social agenda of media has been replaced by the business agenda of media. Disability rights activists opined that language was sympathetic instead of empathetic. Media has created specific terminologies and the common people were following them. Journalists were not aware of the reporting guidelines from the International Labour Organization (ILO). The media
persons admitted that they had not thought over this and there was no strategy to cover
disability differently.

The coroporatisation was ruling the media industries. The commodification of content,
audience and labour in media industries were rampant. Sometimes the journalists were
not sensitive to the issues. They were not aware of international standards of reporting on
disability issues. Media pedagogy on disability issue was yet to be fully acknowledged.
The current study spilled the beans of so-called ‘views syndrome’ of media which needs
correction.

9.2 Conclusions

The quantity and quality of representation on the issues of the disabled remain low in
English newspapers in India. Media is not fully disabled-friendly. The social
responsibility of media is weathering away. Social agenda of media has been replaced by
the business agenda of media. It has become event-centric instead of people-centric.
However, media persons blamed lower level of social activism on the part of disability
rights activists.

Media is not treating the issues of disabled as newsworthy. Many times the issues of
disabled are not visible and hence, not getting space in media. Several journalists do not
go to report on disability. Media covers the event if a known face involved or something
like abuse of disability rights. Sometimes journalists are not sensitive to the issues.

The coverages on the issues of the disabled are a mixture of news and views. It leads to
erosion in news values and puts the credibility of journalism at stake. The role journalist
as news-givers has been replaced by mediators. The language used for the representation
of the disabled is not inclusive and democratic. Media’s approach towards the issues of
the disabled is the commodification of content, labour and audience. More number of soft
stories indicates the commodification of news contents. The coverages and discourses are
functioning with the interests of media houses. It indicates the hegemonic structure of media in the field of disability coverage.

The disabled viewed that the coverages on disability issues remain marginal and skewed. The coverages are inappropriate while covering the disabled from the dimensions of gender, geography and types of disability. The notion of proactive and an agenda setter on the part of the English Press, is found flawed. The current study does not show the reality of *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* alone on the given issue, rather ugly yet real picture of the Indian English media’s concern towards a weaker section like disability was unraveled. Even though, the Indian constitution guarantees the rights of the disabled, they are not being specially treated in the media and society as well.

The English media is not free from biasness in terms of quantity and quality of coverage. The discourses were not accurate with poor representation of the disabled in terms of the number of coverages. Its veracity on the critical issues like disability is questioned and the bigger picture has come out to the public.

### 9.3 Recommendations

Media persons should treat the issues of disabled as newsworthy. Since their population is huge and the Constitution of India attempts to provide certain rights to achieve inclusive development, it is the duty of media to not ignore, but to cover the issues seriously.

Media should not be biased in the month of December by covering maximum stories in the same month. It should initiate awareness campaigns on disability rights among the disabled and non-disabled society. Since there is no much awareness among people, the media persons should be first to be educated and informed. It should inform and educate the persons who implement the disability laws. It should be involved in advocacy programmes which can bridge the gap between the disabled and non-disabled society.
Media should delicately deal with the issues of the disabled with the dimension of gender, geography and types so that the syndrome of double discrimination can be reduced to minimum. It should act as a news-giver, not a mediator. It should introspect itself. Training and orientation to the media persons is needed. Journalists should be educated and informed. The disabled rights organisations should organize training programmes for media persons.

Since language plays a vital role in representing the issues of the disabled, its use in media content should be inclusive, respective and democratic. Indian media should follow the norms set by the international bodies like International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Specialised reporting for disability coverage should be encouraged. Opinion columns on disability issues should be accommodated in the media so that free flow of information can be possible. Media persons should understand that the needs of various types of disability are different from one another.

It is suggested that the Press Council of India (PCI) should chalk out the reporting modalities which can check the mis-representations. The topics on disability could be imparted in course curriculum and research in college and university levels. In a view to overhaul in terms of representations, there should be co-operations among the disabled, disabled rights activists, media persons, media educators and civil society. The efforts of the people from all walks of life should go hand in hand so that issues pertaining to socio-economic, cultural, educational, employment and political participation can be minimised to a greater extent in India.
10 Chapterisations

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