CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

With the press in hand it was easy to manufacture great man

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

To strengthen your movement, you must yourself become the media

- Kanshi Ram

1.1 Background

The mainstream media have been under severe criticism from Dalit reformers for being manuwadi or casteist. Kanshi Ram, the founder of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) reiterated not to trust the upper caste media and encouraged for a voice for Dalits in the media (Ninan, 2007). Ever since the evolution of mass communication be it print or audio-visual media, Dalits tried to run their own media on a par with the rest of the media industry. But, owing to many factors they could not survive. The Hindu newspaper celebrated its 125th anniversary on September 2003. Parayan, a Dalit magazine, which was started by the Dalit scholar Rettimalai Srinivasan in the same year as that of The Hindu newspaper does not find its existence today. Similarly many magazines were started by Dalit activists, but they eventually ousted as they could not withstand the caste politics (Ravikumar, 2001). Furthermore, economic conditions and caste supremacy did not allow them to sustain in the competitive media market.

One of the reasons as to why the Dalit media is not able to perpetuate its existence is the domination of the upper caste media. In India, most of the communication has been elite oriented and upper class monopolized in the field of communication (Thiagaraj, 2010). No wonder the Indian media was ranked number one in the hall of shame for being caste apartheid (Prasad, 2006). Most of the Indian broadcast media, even radio and most of the
print media as well, primarily owned by business houses who hail from upper caste. So, it is not surprising to note that they gave least preference to Dalit issues or recruited Dalits as journalists in their respective media. Thus, radio, television, cinema and newspapers were completely inaccessible media for Dalits as there were no Dalits to represent their issues. This conventional belief has been acknowledged by the researcher Robin Jeffery. The excerpts of his notes articulate that, “there were almost none in 1992, and there are almost none today: Dalits in the newsrooms of India's media organization”. He calls this deplorable situation of the exclusion of Dalits in the mainstream media as “the betrayal of the constitutional guarantees of equality and fraternity” (Robin Jeffery, 2012). Furthermore, Balasubramainam (2011) in his research paper narrates his experience where he was denied to get placed in one of the Tamil dailies as a journalist after having been enquired about his caste. In India, nearly 25 percent of the population makes up of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe, but we find news about them hardly in the mainstream media. Though international media have picked up the discrimination issues and started taking about them, Indian media has not yet come openly to champion Dalits. (The Hindu, April 9, 2012)

Varadarajan (2006) in his article on Caste matters in the media writes about his experience on how the story of atrocity committed on Dalit students was not heeded and he narrates that only after a lot of struggle he managed to publish only a part of the story “in a cut and mutilated form, a full month after the Dalit students began their dharna”. Further, he says that absence of Dalits in the media industry is one of the reasons as to why there are no reports about Dalits in the Indian media (Varadharajan, 2006). In a talk show called Media Manthan on Dalit and media, Chawla (2012), Editorial Director of The New Indian Express accepts the absence Dalits in the media. But he defends in the show that caste bias in the
media is not premeditated or any conspiracy hatched to avoid Dalits from entering the media industry. This is not an acceptable statement as one reads Balasubramanian’s experience about his rejection in the print media in his research paper (Balasubramaniyam, 2011). Speaking on this issue Varadharajan (2006) says that the absence of Dalit journalists is not 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. In the same talk show, Media Manthan on Dalit and media, Kancha Ilaiah (2012), a Dalit activist and an academician answers to the question as to why Dalit are sidelined in the media industry. He says that from pre-independence to post-independence, almost all the press has been with Brahmins. Even if the owner of the newspaper organization is from the Shudra community, the persons who worked in the media were Brahmins or majority of them in the press were Brahmins. So, they avoided deliberately reporting the issues concerning Dalit community.

African-Americans, who are less in population than Dalits in India, are able to have their own media on a par with American media. But in the case of Dalits, they are not able to either to have their powerful media or find their place in the mainstream media. St Louis American is an African-American weekly. It has emerged as the leading voice of the African-American community of St.Louis, Missouri, United States. The first issues of St Louis American appeared in 1928. At present this paper has grown leaps and bounds and has attracted a large number of readers. The St. Louis American is the third largest weekly newspaper on any type, in the entire state of Missouri. The St. Louis American now reaches an impressive 40-45% of black households in the St. Louis metropolitan area. This paper is commercially successful as well. Again, Ebony and Essence are African-American
magazines which cater the African-American community in USA. So Robin Jeffery questions, “If there are similarities between the plight of African-Americans in the past (and present) and Dalits today, then why are there no Dalit-oriented media voices like Ebony or Essence magazines or the old St Louis American or Chicago Defender?” (Jeffery, 2012).

In 1996, B.N Uniyal, a senior journalist in the pioneer, was confronted by a foreign journalist who wanted to get an opinion from a Dalit journalist over the reported dispute between Kanshi Ram and a few journalists. In an effort to find a Dalit journalist and to help the foreign journalist he started searching for a Dalit journalist. Faced with an utter failure in finding a Dalit journalist he writes,

Suddenly I realized 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. And worse still, was the thought that during all those years it had never occurred to me that there was something so seriously amiss in the profession, something which I should have noticed as a journalist. In all these years I have traveled almost every district of the country in the company of numerous journalists and met hundreds of others in different in different cities and towns and yet do not remember having met any Dalit journalist (Bhan, 2006).

Discrimination and rejection encountered by Dalits in India by the mainstream media are also encountered by many marginalised minorities across the globe. Explaining the onus of media towards the underprivileged and marginalised people in the society Cottle (2000) says, “The media occupies a key site and perform a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power”. Studies have proven that the key role of the mainstream media in protecting the marginalised communities is long forgotten
by the conglomerate media industry. Marginalized minorities are looking up for the media but the media is looking away from them. Minorities are suffering in the media and how these sufferings are chaired by the media is a valid question to be asked. The mainstream media, though differentiated by medium, outlet, genre and subject interests, all too often produce shocking examples of xenophobic reporting (Ramberg, 2006) and racist portrayal, while often publicly committing to the ideals and practices of an inclusive multi-ethnic, multicultural society. In the case of the society like Europe and North-America, the mainstream media has utterly failed in showing the positive images of the marginalised. Various studies have shown that distorted images of minorities are prevalent in news media. Researches on the western society find that many minority groups whose ideals, values and issues are largely ignored and at times feared or ridiculed by the greater public (ibid).

Van Dijk (1989) in his studies on minorities and media has repeatedly talked about the attitude of the mainstream media towards minorities. He says that researches have time and again shown that the conservative and popular press especially indulges in sometimes blatant "foreigner bashing" and the reproduction and affirmation of racist prejudices. Popular resentment against refugees and other immigrants and minorities is thus both legitimated and at the same time exacerbated. In many countries marginalised problems are ignored or denied and seldom defined as the problem. Everyday discrimination in so many domains of the society is hardly newsworthy. One can hardly find minorities as journalists in the mainstream media. The increasing numbers of competent minority journalists face systematic forms of discrimination in hiring—if they are hired at all—and in promotion. Virtually no European newspaper has minority editors or minorities in prominent positions.
In the United States of America, the minorities include the Blacks, the Latino Americans, the Hispanics, the Native Americans, and the Native Red Indians. They were excluded, seen as threatening and stereotyped by the mainstream media (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1985). Mahtani (2001) in his research paper opines that the under representation and misrepresentation of minority groups in the media affects Canadian society by upholding the stereotypical notions and ways that people perceive these groups. The Italian newspapers constructed the image of Albanians as “others” and excluded from the majority Italian society (Palmer, 2002). Many European and American studies have found continuous bias in the representation of ethnic minorities: negative stereotyping, broad generalizations, lack of background information, almost no attention is paid to the economical benefits of migration, and so on (Van Dijk, 2000) In Europe, in particular, little attention has been paid to audience responses within ethnic minority communities (Ross, 2001).

In this scenario, the emergence of the new technology – internet has paved way for the disenfranchised marginal to use it as an alternative to the mainstream media for writing and responding to the rest of the world. Minorities and marginalised in the world deem it as a boon to express and share their pain and happiness with others. The advent of the internet has provided them the hopes that it would make previously marginalized actors and arguments more visible to a broader public (Gerhard & Schafer, 2009).

Ethnic minorities are hardly heard in the traditional media and they struggle perpetually to be heard. This situation is due the power of the dominant discourse which purposely ignores marginal voices. Now, with the emergence of internet, marginalized groups can become powerful by creating a web page, or posting a message on a discussion board, and the ability “to speak” can be more important than to be “heard” (Mitra, 2004). As
we witness rapid proliferation and availability of internet, many marginal groups are creating their presence of in cyberspace. This phenomenon of ‘presence’ which the internet is producing is providing a unique forum for the dispossessed to find a voice in the public sphere that might have been otherwise denied to them in the ‘real world’ (Mitra, 2004).

Internet has proved a powerful tool of empowerment for minority nationalities with access to the web since it represents a *terra nullius* where readily accessible “virtual archives” of alternative histories can be constructed and maintained. Mitra (2001) articulates that Internet serves as a medium where marginalized individuals can exercise discursive power, and resist damaging representations. Socially marginalized groups speak to one another as they speak against authority. He says “On the Internet, the marginalized can call on the dominant and put the dominant in the difficult position of acknowledging the marginalized, or further distance the dispossessed by ignoring the call”.

Dewalt (2010) pronounces that since the popularization of the internet in the early 90’s African-Americans have had ways to talk back to these negative stereotypes by using various forms of internet – blogs, videos, editorial websites and social media communities to combat negative image and to create new societal norms for African-Americans. There has never before been as much opportunity for conversation and participation found in internet, where the marginal not only speak, but can expect a response as well.

Blogs, an additional feature of internet which saw its arrival in 1990’s has become a tool for the marginal to connect and share with others. Marginalized voices – poor, the radical and even everyday people - are given little voice in the Mass media news coverage. Blogs offer a chance those voices and stories to be heard (Roth, 2004). In a research
conducted by Pole (2006) on Black’s usage of blogosphere, it is found that blogosphere is place where more of political participation by Blacks and other minorities take place.

In another research, Bernardi (2010) attempts to explore the use of blogs by marginalized Saudi women and to see if and how those same issues are comparably articulated by non-governmental organizations, international government organizations, and media outlets. The findings of the research prove that the women blogging community in Saudi Arabia openly discusses women's issues, including issues which challenge religious norms.

In the case of Dalits’ usage of internet in India, Tirumal (2003) in his research paper proposes that educated Dalits’ presence is felt in the cyberspace. He says that internet has empowered the educated Dalits with much more than other technology or the media in the recent Indian history. Educated Dalits are beginning to use the internet as a platform to discuss issues concerning their community and to mobilize for their just place in the wider public sphere. There have been a number of efforts by Dalits needing to be articulated in the media for a long time – a media different from the current format. Speaking to the Dalit Camera, a Dalit websites which brings out videos of Dalit issues, about the advantage that the internet has thrown to the marginalised population like Dalits, activist and one of the members the Dalit website roundtableindia.co.in Nalgundwar (2013) and the moderator of kufr.blogspot.in says that the freedom given by to Dalits by the internet is unaffected by the Indian civil society and the mainstream media. Internet has helped thousands of voices to come together. Dalit websites like roundtableindia.co.in is the place of different articulation of Dalit related poetry, documentary, research, history and literary and creative Dalits. Further he adds, “readership in the Dalit websites and blogs are young and very
educated coming from diverse background across region, continent and country” *(ibid).* Internet provides a platform outside the status quo of disenfranchisement allow some kind of negotiation with the global community. Furthermore, internet has opened the door for counter-hegemonic public sphere (Tirumal, 2003). With the exponential growth and the increasing availability of internet, many marginalised people in the globe are producing their presence in the cyberspace. As mainstream media has closed its door for their ‘presence’, internet offers a plethora of space for the marginalised to rearticulate their social perception. Social media platforms of internet such as Facebook, Blogger, Twitter, WordPress, LinkedIn, Tumblr, MySpace and Wiki provide a place to air marginalised views in a media field previously dominated by media giants, corporations and moguls, favouring the powerful voices in society.

There is plethora of reports tattling that Dalits are the historically disadvantaged group in India. They continue to struggle to have their voices heard and to access information in the mainstream media. Initially, when internet was introduced in India it was considered as yet another medium of the upper caste. In passage of time, internet emerged as the medium for all the people. It is found from the previous researches that the usage of internet is proliferating and the space it provides enables more and more people turning to cyberspace. The present study is an attempt to find out the different types of articulation happening in Dalit websites¹ and blogs and to analyze whether Dalit websites and blogs are used as alternative media based the conceptual framework of Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier (2008) frame work of alternative media.

¹ The researcher will be using “websites” interchangeably with “web portals” throughout the research. The reason is: as a portal brings information together from diverse sources in a uniform way, Dalit websites too, provide diverse information about Dalits and their issues in its websites.
1.2 Conceptualization of the term Dalit

Caste-based discrimination is a form of discrimination prohibited by international human rights law, which subjects millions of people globally on the basis of work and descent. Victims suffer a hidden apartheid of segregation, modern-day slavery and other forms of discrimination as a result of having been born into a marginalized group or caste. Caste discrimination constitutes one of the most serious and widespread global human rights challenges today, affecting large proportions of societies in many regions of the world, which continues to function as a deeply rooted system of grave human rights violations. We live in a society that has still not freed itself of the mindset that condones brutal oppression and still believes that some races or castes are more equal than others. Due to this reason U.N.O conducted a world conference on “Racism, Racial discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance” in Durban. A debate then was initiated on whether caste system in India should be included in the formal agenda of the conference. The NGOs, led primarily by dalits, tried hard to force the government to accept their demand, which the latter opposed by all the means at its disposal. The opposition of the Indian government took many forms in denying the agenda of the dalit activists. It said that Untouchability persisted as a major problem and claimed that the states were taking all measures to abolish the remaining, purely social aspects of the practice.

In India, caste system is based on a certain hierarchical status according to Hindu religious beliefs. Traditionally, there are four principal castes which are further divided into many sub-categories. Dalits do not fall in any of the category of people and thus they fall outside the caste system. As members of the lowest strata of Indian society, Dalits face discrimination at almost every level: from access to education and medical facilities to
restrictions on where they can live and what jobs they can have. The discrimination against the Dalits is significant because of the number of people affected; according to the census 2011 there are approximately 170 million Dalits in India, constituting over 16 percent of the total population (Dwivedi, 1997)

The Dalits (also known as Untouchables, Harijans, or Scheduled Castes) have historically been poor, deprived of basic human rights, and treated as social inferiors in India. They still face economic, social, cultural, and political discrimination in the name of caste (Gochhayat, 2002). “Centuries of this ‘hidden apartheid’ that has perpetuated discrimination and denial of their human rights, has resulted not only in Dalits representing a disproportionate amount of the poor in India, but also in the creation of numerous other obstacles that hinder Dalit’s ability to change their situation” (Artis et al., 2003).

Within the Dalit community, there are many divisions into sub-castes. Dalits are divided into leather workers, street sweepers, cobblers, agricultural workers, and manual "scavengers". The latter group considered the lowest of the low and officially estimated at one million, traditionally are responsible for digging village graves, disposing of dead animals, and cleaning human excreta. Approximately three-quarters of the Dalit workforce are in the agricultural sector of the economy. A majority of the country’s forty million people who are bonded laborers are Dalits (Guru & Chakravarty, 2005). These jobs rarely provide enough income for Dalits to feed their families or to send their children to school. As a result, many Dalits are impoverished, uneducated, and illiterate. Most of the Dalit residing in the Indian state of Tamilnadu are agricultural labourers. They are steeped into poverty and find it very difficult to repay the debt and thus they become bonded labourers (Basu, 2011).
Human Rights Watch (2007) in its report ‘Hidden Apartheid Caste Discrimination Against India’s Untouchables’ explains the term Dalit says, ‘Dalit or so-called untouchables known in Indian legal parlance as scheduled castes, to a lifetime of discrimination, exploitation and violence, including severe forms of torture perpetrated by state and private actors in violation of the rights guaranteed by the Convention’.

The report of International Dalit Solidarity Network says that Dalits are those who are beneath the entire caste system – and are therefore literally ‘outcaste’ as well as ‘untouchable’ – call themselves ‘Dalits’. The word “Dalit”, meaning “broken” or “ground down”, is used by ‘outcaste’ people themselves to describe at the same time their oppression, their identity and their collective power for emancipation. They are the non-people, the ones that all belonging to the ‘varnas’ (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Shudras) can content themselves with being above. According to Koirala (1996) Dalits refer to “group of people who are religiously, culturally, socially and economically oppressed, who could belong to different language and ethnic group”. Gangadhar Pantawane, a professor of Marathi and founder editor of Asmitadarsh (mirror of identity) defines:

To me, Dalit is not a caste. He is the man exploited by the social and economic traditions of his country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, holy books teaching separatism, fate and heaven because they have made him slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution (Paswan & Jaideva, 2002).

From the historical point of view Rajshekar (1987) explains that Dalits are the descendents of the African who founded the Indus Valley civilization and who were captured by fair skinned Aryans from the North. Ambedkar writes, “In the Hindu social
Hierarchy, the Brahmins are at the top and Dalits are at the bottom” (Ambedkar, 1989). Dalits who are called by different names in different places are *Chandalas, Ati Shudras, Avarnas, Pnachamas, Antayas* and *Antyavasin* in the Hindu religious scriptures; they were ‘Broken Men’ and ‘Protestant Hindus’ to Dr Ambedkar and ‘Harijans to Ghandhi’.

The Dalits live in segregated housing colonies. The *Ceris* are the place where the Dalits live. The *cheris* are ostracized from the *Oor*. The oppression of the Dalits is materially manifested in the physical isolation of Dalit *Ceris* (quarters). Here *Oor* directly reveals the place where the dominant castes are living. In towns too, the Government programs maintain the existing spatial segregation (Mala, 2011). Although the practice has been condemned by many Indian leaders, including most recently by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, unless the government accepts responsibility to end the widespread prejudice, crimes against Dalits will continue.

### 1.3 Conceptualization of the term Internet

The Federal Networking Council (FNC) defines the term “Internet” to the global information system that is logically linked together by a globally unique address space based on the Internet Protocol (IP), is able to support communications using the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) and provides, uses or makes accessible, either publicly or privately, high level services layered on the communications and related infrastructure described herein.

Burstein and Kline (1995) explain that Internet is a vast network system that processes data and information between innumerable sites in the virtual electronic world called cyberspace. Further they state that it is a revolutionary phenomenon that enables
millions of individuals across the globe to access, exchange, analyze, and create vast amounts of information and serves as a major factor in the information highway.

The Internet is worldwide system of computer networks i.e. “network of networks” that consists of millions of smaller domestic, academic, business, government networks, which together carry various information and services, such as email, online chat, file transfer, search for information, e-commerce, online payment etc.,

According to the definition put forth by Merriam Webster dictionary (2012) internet is an electronic communications network that connects computer networks and organizational computer facilities around the world.

Stringer (2005) in his research paper on internet, calls internet as a remarkable phenomenon ever happened with the invention of man. He goes on to say that internet is just a large number of computers connected together in such a way that communication between them is both reliable and fast. Phrased in this way, it is wholly unremarkable. But the Internet is also the people who use it, to communicate and to share information, even to build relationships and communities. It’s a culture that has grown within a virtual space, and that has permeated many aspects of our everyday lives.

1.4 Conceptualization of the term Blog

Weblogs, or what is often called the blogosphere, can be deconstructed in a variety of ways: as alternative ‘citizen’ journalism; as participatory instruments for citizens/activists to produce their own media content; as websites of opinion; as a social platform to inform friends and family within everyday contexts; and increasingly as a new marketing and propaganda tool for elites (Deuze, 2005).
Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of the blog, most seem to agree that the term *weblog* was coined by weblog writer John Barger in 1997 (Blood, 2000). A personal website, often in the form of a journal, containing the author's observations and comments and typically linking to other websites and blog postings. Blogs are usually updated frequently, with postings arranged so that the most recent additions appear at the top of the page, and many are set up to enable readers to leave comments on the original posting. The word (first recorded in 1999) is an abbreviation of ‘web log’; however, ‘web log’ can also be used to refer to a server's log files, so the less ambiguous ‘blog’ caught on quickly. The environment in which bloggers operate, or blog, has been termed the ‘blogosphere’, and a group of local blogs is sometimes referred to as a ‘blog hood’ (Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, 2009).

A blog is a discussion or informational site published on the World Wide Web and consisting of discrete entries ("posts") typically displayed in reverse chronological order. Indeed, the very term “blog” itself was chosen as Merriam-Webster’s word of the year 2004 (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006). Merriam-Webster defined blog as a website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and often hyperlinks. “Blogs are part of a fundamental shift in how we communicate” (Leaning, 2010). “frequently updated WebPages with a series of archived posts, typically in reverse-chronological order” (Nardi et al., 2004) and “modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence” (Herring, et al., 2004).

The blog, like other components of the internet, offers the opportunity for people to use their own voice, through the texts and discourse they create, to produce the identity of the blogger who is located in a specific and unique place. Eventually, the readers of blogs
move into the space created by the blogger when they read a blog. To many readers, finding
this space is particularly critical because the spaces created by the blogs could be ones that
the reader was once familiar with but has perhaps become distant from, for instance, through
a process of migration (Mitra, 2008).

Blog is a short form of “web log,” a website that is updated regularly by an
individual or organization with news article ranging from casual musings to formal essays.
Most of the blogs allow readers to post comments and feedback (Shekhar, 2012). Lexis-
Nexis database shows the first press to mention the word blog was in 1998, and by 2002
over five hundred articles appeared referencing blogs. It appears that blogs originated as a
way to share information of interest. These early blogs had three primary features: they were
chronologically organized, contained links to sites of interest on the web, and provided
commentary on the links. The early bloggers were web savvy individuals, generally
designers or programmers working in the technology industry. Not only did they have to be
able to locate information on the Web before search engines became as accessible as they
are today, but they had to be able to code their own HTML pages (Miller & Shepherd, 2004).

A blog is basically a journal that is available on internet. The activity of engaging
oneself in maintaining a blog by posting blog entries ia a “Blogger”. Using the computer
software blogs are updated. Blogging permits people with little or no technical knowledge or
background to update and maintain a web journal of their activities or interests. Further,
blogs range from individual diaries to collective presence of political campaign, media
programs and corporations, and from single author to having large number of community of
writers (Vatrapu et al., 2008).
The explosion and proliferation of blogs on the web was made possible with the help of commercial weblog software, such as Blogger (Blood, 2002). Through such user-friendly software, individual citizens without any institutional affiliations, could feasibly create and publish content on a potentially international scale with little technical knowledge. In the words of Morrison, “a blog is fundamentally about fostering personal expression, meaningful conversation and collaborative thinking in ways….” (Morrison, 2007).

The unprecedented growth of blogs is owing to the dynamic nature of blogs. While some blogs are updated weekly, many more are updated hourly or even more frequently with posting in reverse chronological order. Most of the blogs provide space for the viewer to leave their comments (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Unlike static websites, blogs depend upon hyperlinks not only to boost attention to their own blog, but to also ensure that users can be quickly led to relevant information. At their idealized best, weblogs have been said to be a space to reflect on the ‘deluge of data’ (Blood, 2002) that we receive, offering an antidote to the mass-mediated, corporatized culture that surrounds us. Blogs have the potential to report news without the restriction of censure or the pressures of advertising and draw upon a diverse range of sources (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Elucidating the potentials of blogs, Leaning in his article on “Blogs just another medium” puts forth four arguments in support of blogs:

- Blogs encourage civic participation and involvement
- Blogs allow rejuvenated sense of journalistic practice to emerge
- Blogs help in bringing about a new level of accountability for politicians
- Blogs erode the influence and power of formal groups and existing power structure and challenge corporate media power (Leaning, 2010).
Over the advantage of Blogs Kenix argues that blogs can offer a deeper analysis, based upon a diverse range of sources and contributing citizen commentators, which does not invariably happens with the corporate mainstream media (Kenix, 2009). Blogs remain a relatively easy-to-construct, interactive, flexible, and inexpensive mode of self-publication (Herring et al., 2005).

1.5 Conceptualization of the term Alternative Media

For centuries alternative media has been in existence, but not until in the middle of 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the concept managed to emerge as a specific form of media communication. In many countries social fermentation began to spread predominantly on various issues such as race, religion, lifestyle, orientation, politics and social organization. Thus there was a need to have own means of communication strategy. Thus, innumerous small press began their own publication. Brochures, newspapers, and eventually magazines provided a foundation for what was soon identified as fringe media, denoting the fact that these views were not generally held by the majority of the populace (Devi, 2012).

By the 1960’s, alternative media moved out from printed publications to the inclusion of low budget movies, as well as independent radio and television broadcasts that were syndicated on low-frequency media outlets. Over time, a number of these underground or alternative publications build considerable reader bases, and are able to increase the scope and the quality of their work. Others remain publications that serve a niche base of readers and continue to operate with relatively little resources. Thus, with proliferation of technology alternative media ranges from community radio to fanzines to news websites, it covers a wide gamut of media forms that challenge the status quo (Pickard, 2007).
Alternative media has begun to attract many research scholars as it is evident from the proliferation of its scholarly works (Haas, 2004). The concept of alternative media emerged as a response to the problems posed by a profit-driven media industry in which only a few corporations decided on what type media content to produced, which topic will be discussed, which form of expression will be seen/heard, and whose voice will be intimately silenced (Furness, 2007).

In its most expansive and popular use, the term “alternative media” includes all media that are somehow opposed to or in tension with mainstream media (The Encyclopedia of Media and Politics, 2007).

By way of definition, then, an alternative medium is one that answers to the following features:

• Individual citizens and minority groups have rights of access to media and rights to be served by media according to their own determination of need.

• The organization and content of media should not be subject to centralized political or state bureaucratic control.

• Media should exist primarily for their audiences and not for media organizations, professionals or the clients of media.

• Groups, organizations and local communities should have their own media.

• Small-scale, interactive and participative media forms are better than large-scale, one way, professionalized media.

• Certain social needs relating to Mass media are not adequately expressed through individual consumer demands, nor through the state and its major institutions.

• Communication is too important to be left to professionals (Lewis, 1993).
Alternative media is perceived to the fundamental agent in providing diverse content to democratic societies. Alternative media, which are situated out of the mainstream media, have been said to articulate a ‘social order different from and often opposed to the dominant’ (Hamilton, 2000). Alternative media, which is seen quintessentially different from the mainstream media, has the capacity to ‘transform spectators into active participants of every day dealings and events affecting their lives’ (Tracy, 2007). In other words, alternative media publish information which is generally not accepted and published in the mainstream media. Atton who has contributed remarkably to the concept of alternative media points out the following criteria of alternative media as suggested by the editors of Alternatives in print:

- The Publisher has to be non-commercial, demonstrating that ‘a basic concern for ideas, not the concern for profit, is the motivation for publication’.
- The subject matter of their publications should focus on ‘social responsibility or creative expression, or usually a combination of both’.
- Finally, it is enough for publishers to define themselves as alternative publishers (Atton, 2002).

Lee argues that from the liberal-pluralist point of view alternative media is created by those who have been denied access to the mainstream media marketplace. By alternative media, the liberal-pluralist addresses the media for dissident social groups; including minorities, feminists, utopian and communitarians, socialists and communists, and so forth.

This idea conceptualizes alternative media as the media which need to coexist with and supplement Mass media, rather than replacing them (Lee, 2007). The digitization has occasioned new counter-hegemonic spaces and new forms of journalism that are
deinstitutionalized and deprofessionalized, and whose radicalism is reflected in both form and content.

From the viewpoint of Marxism, alternative media is non-commercial media serving the public interests of the working class (Lee, 2007). The Royal Commission on the Press (1977) proposes the following definition on the alternative media as:

- An alternative publication deals with the opinions of small minorities;
- It ‘expresses attitudes hostile to widely held beliefs’;
- It ‘espouses views or deals with subjects not given regular coverage by publications generally available at newsagents’.

The commission further emphasized the capacity saying, ‘multiplicity of alternative publication suggest satisfaction with an insufficiently diverse established media, and an unwillingness or inability on the part of major publications to provide space for the opinions of small minorities’. The commission also recognized the marginality of the many presses, their small print runs and virtual invisibility in the market place.

1.6 Statement of the Problem

There is no denying that media coverage of Dalit-related incidents and issues in India were very scant. From the collected literature it is very clear that the Dalits were either underrepresented or misinterpreted. Communication is real power. It gives power over other. Those who own media like Newspaper, Television and Movie Studios, etc. wield enormous powers in society. This power was denied to the Dalits, who became as landless labourers. Thus there was a need for the quarter of the population to express themselves in a platform that will take them to the rest of the world. That’s why Dalits adopted different alternative
media like Paintings, Sculptures, Folklores, Bhajans, Street plays, Poetry, cartoons, tabloid newspapers, magazines and journals.

As the result of burgeoning internet-savvy, Dalits are making their presence felt. They no longer depend on the corporate media waiting for their stories to be published, as it happened in the case of Khairanji Massacre or where it took one full month to publish the atrocity by the mainstream media. Dalits have fashioned their own websites and social media to speak for themselves and for their fellow members. Therefore the overall purpose of the research is to investigate that websites and blogs owned and moderated by Dalits act as an alternative media to voice the issues confronting Dalits. Though internet has opened many avenues for the marginalized to empowerment and upliftment, only a few researches have been done on Dalits’ active participation in the cyberspace. Thus, the current research will enlighten about Dalits’ participation in internet like websites and blogs and ascertain whether the articulation of Dalits in Dalit websites and blogs are alternative media for Dalits based on Bailey’s et al., (2008) four approaches to alternative media. The characteristics of each approach will be analysed with the response of respondents, interviewee and the contents of Dalit websites and blogs to find out that they are alternative media.

1.7 Scope of the Research

On account of the proliferation of Internet and the new digitalization, multiple alternative media, such as local radio, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc, where users can interconnect with other people are making its way and are worthwhile looking at inside the theoretical framework of alternative media. As Tony Dowmunt puts it, “alternative media do give us specific, dynamic and lived examples of practices that challenge mainstream models – of how cultural consumers can become producers as well”. Therefore, as far as the
interconnection aspect is concerned, it can be looked at Dalit websites and blogs as an example of alternative media where it serves the Dalit community with multiple purposes.

This study utilizes Bailey’s et al., (2008) four frameworks of alternative media to present holistic views in understanding Dalit websites and Blogs as an alternative media for Dalits. By studying Dalit websites and blogs, the researcher seeks to explore the phenomenon surrounding Dalit websites and blogs and identify Dalit websites and blogs’ characteristics as alternative media in order to have a deeper understanding of alternative media’s philosophies and practices.

It can be surmised that a study on Dalit websites and blogs can make a crucial contribution to the existing literature on Dalits.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Bailey et al., (2008) theoretical approach to alternative media form the basis of this research. This theoretical framework provides an important scientific basis that complements the data the researcher gathered to analyze that the Indian blogs and web websites/websites run by Dalits have the characteristic as alternative media. Bailey et al., (2008) that contends alternative media as having four important roles. The first two approaches are media-centered and discuss alternative media activities from the perspective of the media producers in relation to the community and mainstream media. The latter two approaches come from a society-centered perspective that sees alternative media’s potential for the betterment of society and democracy by being part of a civil society, and balancing the power play against/with the hegemonic institutions. The researcher utilizes Bailey et al., (2008) four approaches to alternative media as the theoretical framework to present holistic
view in understanding Indian blogs and web websites as an alternative media to Dalits (Bailey et al., 2008).

Table 1.1

*Four approaches to alternative media (Bailey et al., 2008)*

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<tr>
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<th>Media-centred</th>
<th>Society-centred</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous identity of</td>
<td>Approach I: Serving the Community</td>
<td>Approach III: Part of the civil</td>
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<td>the Community media</td>
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<td>Identity of Community</td>
<td>Approach II: An alternative To Mainstream media</td>
<td>Approach IV: Rhizome</td>
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1.8.1 **Approach One: Alternative Media as Serving the Community**

Community and participation are two important aspects in describing alternative media roles in serving the community. Alternative media organizations may serve a particular community by providing opportunities for it members to communicate about topic of interests, and act as an alternative source of information by including voices and stories from the target community usually absent in the mainstream media. ‘Access’ by the community and ‘participation’ of the community are considered key defining factors. Alternative media not only allow but also facilitate the participation of members of the community in both the produced content and the content producing organization. One of the important goals of the Alternative media is to ‘validate and strengthen’ the community. Topics that are considered relevant to the community can be ‘discussed by members of that
community’. The aim of the alternative media in approaches one to serve the community is often translated as enabling and facilitating access and participation by members of the community. ‘Ordinary people’ are given the opportunity to have their voices heard and valued. Societal groups that are misrepresented, disadvantaged, stigmatised, or even repressed can especially benefit from using the channels of communication opened by Alternative media, strengthening their internal identity, manifesting this identity to the outside world, and thus supporting social change and/or development. Thus alternative media can be an opening a ‘channel of communication’ for misinterpreted, stigmatized or repressed societal groups.

1.8.2 Approach Two: Alternative Media as an Alternative to Mainstream Media

The antagonistic approach in defining alternative media opposed to mainstream media takes its roots in the dialectic of dominant power and representation. This concept brings into light a distinction between mainstream and alternative media, where alternative media are considered as a ‘supplement to mainstream media’. Alternative media is therefore a medium for subordinates to contest mainstream media’s domination and its elitist interests by appending mainstream media at both the organizational level and the content level. Present day mainstream media are large-scaled and geared towards large, homogeneous (segments of) audiences. Alternative media are small-scaled and oriented towards specific communities, possibly disadvantaged groups, respecting their diversity; independent from state and market; horizontally structured, allowing for the facilitation of audience access and participation within the frame of democratization and multiplicity; and carriers of non-dominant (possibly counter hegemonic) discourses and representations, stressing the
importance of self representation. Thus alternative media is supplementing, contesting and resisting mainstream media discourse.

1.8.3 Approach Three: Alternative Media as Part of Civil Society

The positioning of Alternative media as part of the civil society as it is considered to be apart from the state and market support. So, the alternative media can be considered the “third voice” between state media and private commercial media (Servaes, 1999). Bailey et al., (2008) views that the civil society should be autonomous and independent from the state and market.

![Diagram showing Generalist and Minimalist Models of Civil Society](image)

*Figure 1.1 Generalist and minimalistic models of civil society*

The alternative media can have different relationships with the state, the market, and the mainstream media. When there is an amalgamation of the state, market and the mainstream media, it may lead to compromise a civil society’s objectivity and position as an alternative voice against the dominant state and market. Civil society can be defined as a group of intermediate organizations, separate from the privately owned economic organizations operating in the market economy, personal and family relations and from the state and quasi-state organizations. By becoming part of civil society, alternative media’s
competitive value in upholding democracy and “a complementary alternative to both public service and commercial media”, especially in relation to empowering audience for participation. In general, alternative media inherit the importance of civil society for “enabling groups and individuals freely within the law to define and express their various social identities…and freedom of communication” (Bailey et al., 2008).

1.8.4 Approach Four: Alternative Media as Rhizome

It is an analogical concept of the network of ‘rhizome’ derived from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Bailey et al., (2008) define the rhizomatic approach to alternative media on three main aspects: “their role at the crossroads of civil society, their elusiveness, and their interconnections and linkages with market and state”. This approach highlights the capacity of alternative media to play the role of civil society and at the same time collaborate with state and market by assimilating them into the system without losing their “rebellious” identity.

![Diagram](Image)

*Figure 1.2 Civil society, state and market as rhizome. (Bailey et al., 2008)*
The above figure shows the transhegemonic relationship between alternative media as civil society and the state/market from the perspective of the community’s access and participation in the system. Community members can access and participate in the diverse community media and civil society organizations. They can also replicate and build transhegemonic networks in the new public sphere with the mass-self communication approach, and enjoy less hierarchical access to media production and reception. The community media and civil society organization synergize with the market and state in a transhegemonic interaction dynamic that allows them to coordinate and collaborate in a complex and contingent way.

This fourth approach builds on and extends the importance that is attributed to civil society and democracy. In contrast to the third approach, the main emphasis for describing the importance of alternative media is not their role as part of the public sphere, but the catalysing role they can play by functioning as the crossroads where people from different types of movements and struggles meet and collaborate, such as people from different women’s, peasants’, students’, and/or anti-racist movements. In this fashion alternative media not only function as an instrument giving voice to a group of people related to a specific issue, but also can function as a catalyzator, grouping people already active in different types of struggle for equality. What makes alternative media as rhizomatic is the capacity to highlight the fluidity and contingency of alternative media organizations, in contrast to the rigid ways mainstream public and commercial media often function (Bailey et al., 2008).
1.9 Methodology

The ultimate objective of the study is to study that the articulation of Dalits in Dalit websites and blogs constitute an alternative media. To call a medium an alternative media, it should have the characteristics of alternative media. Various scholars have studied the concept of alternative media. Based on these contributions, Bailey et al., (2008) have come up with four approaches to alternative media in their book ‘Understanding alternative media’. So, the conceptual framework for ‘alternative media’ was adopted from Bailey’s et al., (2008) four approaches to alternative media to gauge Dalit websites and blogs an alternative media for Dalits. For the purpose of the study, both quantitative and qualitative methodology was adopted to validate the claim that Indian web portal and blogs serve as an alternative media that provide a voice to the marginalised section of the Indian society – Dalits. The research design comprises (1) Online survey (2) Content Analysis and (3) In-depth interviews. The whole study was structured in three phases.

The first phase of the study is the on-line survey. The respondents of the structured questionnaire were identified based on their presence and involvement in internet - talking and responding Dalit related issues. The respondents were identified from Dalit related blogs, Dalit internet forums and groups and social networking sites like face book etc. The online questionnaire was posted in e-mail, Dalit related Facebook accounts, forums, blogs and websites. A total of months were given for the respondents to answer the survey. A reminder request was sent once a week to answer the online survey. For this study, purposive sampling methodology was adopted to choose the respondents for the study as the researcher’s motivation was only to select the respondents who converse Dalit related issues in internet. As the researcher’s core problem is to study whether Indian Dalit blogs and
websites could form an alternative media through which the voice of Dalit can be articulated, structured questionnaire was prepared keeping in mind Bailey’s et al., (2008) four approaches to alternative media and the collected review of literature. In the statistical analysis, Simple Percentage Analysis, Chi-square test, ANOVA test, Student t-test, Friedman test, Correlation Analysis and Regression Analysis are used to test the hypotheses and to analysis the results.

In the second phase, content analysis of Dalit blogs and websites was conducted to gauge how they act as an alternative media in providing space for articulating Dalits’ voice. The first step in developing a methodology of the inquiry was to decide the sample size. Therefore, in total ten Dalits blogs and ten Dalit websites were chosen for the analysis. Purposive sampling method was adopted to choose the Indian Dalit blogs and websites as they are limited in number. The criteria for choosing the websites and blogs for the study are; it should be written in English, it should have been regularly updated and it should of Indian blogs and websites. The content from the Indian Dalit blogs and websites were analyzed and studied from 1st January 2010 to 31st December 2012. The content of the websites was divided into four categories based on the approaches of Bailey’s et al., (2008) alternative media. They are: serving the community, alternative to mainstream media, part of the civil society and rhizome. Prior to collecting the data, a coding template was developed that would include possible content found in the websites and blogs of Dalits. This coding template was based on the possible features or themes associated with each of the four categories (serving the community, alternative to mainstream media, part of the civil society and rhizome). These coding categories also contained sub-categories. The coding template

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was used to record the content of each web site, within the unit of analysis. It is important to note that as new sub-categories were added to the coding book.

The third phase of the study concentrates on in-depth interview with the key informant - Dalit activist who utilize internet for their activism. Totally ten experts were chosen to conduct the in-depth interview. Convenience sampling method was adopted in choosing the interviewee who could form the basis for the in-depth interview. Questions were open-ended based on the review of literature. The participants were from academics as well as social activist who actively participate and make use of internet for their activism. The questions for the in-depth interview were based on the earlier mentioned four approaches to the alternative media by Bailey et al., (2008) and the review of the literature.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

- Though quite a number of websites and blogs were found in internet, owing to the lack of updation and the usage of regional language, only ten websites and ten blogs were chosen for the study. It was observed that many blogs were started during the time of a crisis to Dalits. Once the issue was over, then blogs too were not updated. Thus, the websites and blogs which were regularly updated were considered for the study.

- With regard to the in-depth interview, when the researcher contacted the moderators of blogs and owners of websites, they appreciated. But when they were requested to co-operate for the in-depth interview, many of them did not respond. Since contacting them through internet was the only source, only ten experts were interviewed.
• It can be found from the research data that the respondents who answered the survey were 210. This number reached only due to the constant reminder to answer the online survey. The reasons for the low turnout for answering online survey could be the dearth of educated Dalits with internet knowledge found in the cyberspace. This factor was highlighted in the research paper by research scholar Tirumal. So, the low turnout is another constraint for the research.