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**Rashmi Beck**  
Assistant Professor in History  
WBES, Jhargram Raj College,  
Girl's Wing, Jhargram, West  
Bengal, India

## **A historical analysis: On the Dalit Mobilation through social network**

**Rashmi Beck**

### **Abstract**

The term 'Dalit', connotes as untouchables, broken or the people belonging to the lowest stratum of the society but James Lochtefeld a professor of religion and Asian Studies, said in 2002 that adoption and popularization of the term 'Dalit' reflects their growing awareness of the situation and their greater assertiveness in demanding their legal and constitutional rights and even today despite a plethora of provisions for affirmative action in the Indian Constitution, they suffer exclusion on various counts. In this era of 21<sup>st</sup> Century after 75 years of independence the dalits are trying to express themselves by voicing out their grievances, creating awareness amongst themselves and helping to restore the dignity of a community that has been wronged for ages through various socio-political struggles, unprecedented movements, literature and social media. It is helping the oppressed to arise as they have always been looked as people with no brains, very timid, not creative and one who cannot argue. However with the gradual passage of time, the opportunity of education and modern technologies the situations are changing and their combat relating to their stigmatized identity as downtrodden and untouchables are being accorded. In the recent studies it has been seen that social networking sites are playing a significant role in mobilization, to disseminate and to become a voice to the voiceless especially to the marginalized and weaker sections of the society who are being conscious of the facts of the things that are happening around them.

The proposed study is an attempt to understand the need of social networking platform in today's world to the unknown and to understand its path to empowerment. Secondly, to bring about the challenges faced by these marginalized section in bringing about their issues in social media. Thirdly to study how it is sensitizing and mobilizing the Dalit society in making a voice for themselves and helping to address their problems.

**Keywords:** Dalit, Dalit mobilization, social network, voice, social impact

### **Introduction**

In the social stratification of the Indian society we find Dalits outside of the four *varna* system who are considered as the most marginalized section of the society. The nomenclature 'Dalit', connotes as untouchables, broken or the people belonging to the lowest stratum of the society. James (Lochtefeld, 168) a professor of religion and Asian Studies, said in that "adoption and popularization of the term 'Dalit' reflects their growing awareness of the situation and their greater assertiveness in demanding their legal and constitutional rights and even today despite a plethora of provisions for affirmative action in the Indian Constitution, they suffer exclusion on various counts. However during the colonial rule European missionary efforts was a significant factor in the modernization of India as stated by Srinivas in his work '*Mobility in the Caste System*' states that how these missionaries 'were active in humanitarian work and education, who ran hospitals, orphanages and schools concentrating their attention on the poor and the lowly, that is, untouchables and others from the low castes, tribal folk living in remote areas and women behind the purdah and they also stimulated the growth of regional literature by setting up printing presses, cutting types for various Indian scripts, printing books and founding journals, writing dictionaries and grammars and translating classics in the regional tongues into English' (Srinivas, 317). However the missionaries and other great reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule and others who had tried to eradicate atrocities, discrimination and tried to uplift the downtrodden but still in this 21<sup>st</sup> century the caste system is still prevalent in India despite our 76 years of India's independence where one talks of empowerment, equality and

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Rashmi Beck**  
Assistant Professor in History  
WBES, Jhargram Raj College,  
Girl's Wing, Jhargram, West  
Bengal, India

upliftment especially the recent case of Jalore district of Rajasthan which has become viral in social media it is seen where a student belonging to the lower caste was beaten up by the headmaster who was of higher caste just for drinking water from his pot which shows the selfishness of upper caste and the very dominant caste rigidity in India. (The Hindu, Jaipur August 20, 2022).

The study sets to investigate and to understand the need of social networking platform like facebook, whatsapp, instagram, youtube, snapchat, tiktok and twitter in today's world to the unknown and to make the invisible visible. Secondly to find out the changing dynamics of representation in social media as whether it has helped in increasing the voices of the Dalits. Thirdly to assess the challenges faced by these marginalized section in bringing on their issues in larger platform. Fourthly, to identify how mechanism are sensitizing and mobilizing the Dalit society in making a voice for themselves and helping address their problems in a greater level.

The methodology used for the proposed study is empirical and descriptive in nature where the data has been collected through structured schedules and secondary sources has been collected through various books, online journals, articles and government websites.

Today Dalit Mobilization has taken a greater shape by preparing groups for collective action. "Collective action can simply be defined as people acting together in pursuit of interests they share, for example, gathering to demonstrate in support of their cause" (Dalit Mobilization, 1). While tracing the presence of Dalits in the main stream of media is very scanty and cannot be heard. It is being mostly dominated by the upper caste as the politics of presence is the only way to ensure the representation of every individual's voice in Indian Media and this presence ensures politics to acknowledge the identity of the people. Therefore this meager representation of the Dalit is creating havoc among Dalits. Lack of socialization through media has great impact as the way issues related to this marginalization sections are either covered or abandoned by the main stream media organization. As the marginalized sections need media to narrate their lifelong struggles of thousands of years of revolts, exploitation, discrimination, atrocities done to them just a voice in the main stream. However due to passage of time, the very advent of modern technologies and the inventions of social networking sites like internet has become an alternative option for the Dalits. Here with the help of social media dalits are trying to express themselves by voicing out their grievances, creating awareness applying for various employments and helping to restore the dignity of a community that has been wronged for ages through various socio-political struggles, unprecedented movements, literature and social media. Today social media is one of the biggest mechanisms of communication and mobilization. 'It is a collective term for websites and applications that enables us to communicate and stay up to date with our family and friends around the world who share similar interests or ambitions, join or promote worthwhile causes; sensitization on important issues: Where People can share opinion through groups, photos, status, forums, conduct meetings, discussion, and even go live with videos events, news, information in real time. This is creating a great impact on the lower strata of the society where they are feeling free to express themselves as they have always been looked down as people with no brains, very timid, not

creative and one who cannot argue. But with the passage of time and education and modern technologies things and situations are changing and their combat relating to their stigmatized identity as downtrodden and untouchables are being accorded. In the recent studies it has been seen that how social networking sites is playing a significant role in mobilization. It has become a voice to the voiceless especially to the marginalized and weaker sections of the society who are being conscious of the facts of the things that are happening around them. The area that will be covered under proposed study is Dooars the northern side of West Bengal where majority of the population belong to these Dalit communities of adivasis in the tea plantation sector.

The demography of North Bengal is a package of multi-ethnic communities where the population is majorly dominated by the Dalit communities of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Caste and Other Backward classes. Despite their great strength their voice is hardly been heard over the time nor it was heard during the Colonial Period. Therefore to understand the scenario of media which was the voice during that period than one has to assess the history of press and media of North Bengal. "The first newspaper in North Bengal was published 1870 from Darjeeling and it was in English. Though the main publications from this area was in Bengali but apart from Bengali newspapers English, Hindi, Nepali and Tibetan newspapers also enriched and focused much on its socio-cultural and political activities during this period. So we see that at the beginning, the press and the periodicals of North Bengal were published in some major Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, Nepali and Tibetan. A good number of newspapers were also published in English. As a result it is evident that the publications of North Bengal during the period of the study were multi-lingual and consequently the progress of such press was bound to be multifarious in character. It is assumed that in 1870, a printing press was established at Darjeeling to publish "The Darjeeling News", a weekly paper. Before the 47 publication of this paper, we got no evidence about any other publication in North Bengal. So this printing press was the earliest one in North Bengal. But it may be noted that this was not vernacular printing press. It was an English printing press. Journals and papers printed by this press were in English. But the exact date of the publication of the "The Darjeeling News" is not definitely known. According to W. W. Hunter, in the year 1871, the circulation of the paper was 150. The news items covered in the paper was mainly about the owners of the tea gardens. So it can be mentioned that the first publication from North Bengal was the "Darjeeling News. And it is studied that, it had come late due to lack of infrastructure disadvantages, lack of essential pre-requisites of printing and publications, and more over this area was backward as compared to other parts of Bengal even in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> Century remained the same as per the census report of 1931 on literacy rate where only 4.3% were literate" (Das, 42-43, 48). Due to their lack of education they had no idea about their legal rights nor could they express themselves.

There were few missionary schools with boarding's where the adivasi tea plantation labourer's children would study like Nirmala Girls' School established in 1957, St Josephs' Boys School in 1958, Mariam Busty s/c primary school in 1952, Jalpaiguri Zilla School 1876. It was indeed a difficult situation for the adivasis residing here as they had migrated

to this new region as labourers, from Chottanagpur region and other areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa for the growth of the capitalist market of the Britishers. They were totally an alien to this region with huge difference in language, socio-culture and other aspects. The new opportunities – educational, economic, political were in theory caste-free; that is they were open to all and no one was banned from having access to them by reasons of birth in a particular caste or sect or religion and to catch up with the high caste mere sanskritization was not enough. Thus they became more determined to obtain western education and the fruits that only could it yield (Srinivas, 96-97). However with the gradual process of time and education, they had started to open up and many completed their studies. By the 20<sup>th</sup> Century some started to apply for jobs by reading the newspapers and some even got employed in government sectors. They still had to go more as they were far more behind than the other communities in North Bengal. They could not even voice out for themselves of the various atrocities done to them by their employers or by the upper castes out of fear nor could they demand for their legal rights. As such they preferred to stay in their own shells.

With the advancement of technologies and education in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century was a boon to the adivasis in this region. Thought process began to change and the interactions with the outside world paved the way for a need of change in their community. However in the recent years a media of regional channel was established with the name Dooars T.V. This was established in 2019 in the Dooars region of Nagrakata in North Bengal. This was started in 2019 with the joint venture of two adivasi persons Manoj Tamang who was the *panchayat sabhapati* and Sanjay Kujur who has an Agni gas agency along with the patronship of CCN (Cable network suppliers). It was telecasted from Nagrakata just only for two hours from 6pm to 8pm as it was the leisure hours for the tea plantation labourers after the whole days toil. Their main idea was to educate the adivasi through social media and to keep them updated regarding the things happening around the world and also by entertaining them through cultural songs and dances of the language they understood. The Dooars TV was moderated and conducted by five media anchors that belonged to this community such as Aryan Ekka, Supriya Turkey, Sikha Chikbarik, Abhishek Bittu Tigga Sonia Toppo and there were others who worked behind the scene. This Doors TV channel was categorised into four slots focusing on four themes:

- 1) *Samajik Muda* (Social Aspects)
- 2) *Doors Ker Ithihas* (History Of Dooars).
- 3) *Bises Charcha* Based On Politics
- 4) *Nari Shakti* (women empowerment).

Medium of instruction used was *sadri* which is the common language among the adivasis in this area. By far this channel was doing well to the dalits of this region by creating awareness and sensitizing them on various issues. It was even very active during the COVID-19 pandemic time where the moderators did their best risking their life to disseminate to the people regarding the world wide situation, necessary precautions to be taken during pandemic and other health issues related.

However after the lockdown the Dooars TV had stopped due to some economic crisis erupted as one of the partner had demised therefore it could not be continued further in

local channels. Despite this, the Dooars TV continued with the help of youtube channels and other links like *PrimeSadri*, *Johar tv*, *Chaishramik sanghtan links*, *Dooars Sangbad* and other blogging sites on facebook, instagram, watsapp, tiktoks. Thus this social media mobilization has led to an eruption of opinions and self-expression where the dalits of this region are raising voice. They are also demanding for land (PATTA) for themselves as their legal rights because their forefathers had been working since the very inception of the tea gardens in North Bengal. It is helping them to raise voice against injustices done to them. They are also giving deputations to the higher authorities of their demands and legal rights. In this way they are gathering attention by the higher authorities to see into their cases. Thus “All this online platforms are helping dalits to formulate arguments and theories that enable them to understand how they can deal with the caste system and the cruelties of Indian mainstream society (Venkateswarlu and Rao, 144). The dalits of this region are learning about their constitutional rights as most of them are educated now and trying to apply it in their lives, raising voices and going for protest in case of any sorts of discrimination faced by them. All these could be done with the help of social Networks which is providing them a larger forum for discussions and learning. Thus ‘these alternative media spaces are challenging the main stream media as the postings, discussions and responses in Dalit networks contain the pain, pathos, anger and anguish against the inhuman caste system’ (Venkateswarlu and Rao, 142).

In this ways the Dalit voice in social media is taking a place but still now it has not succeeded in changing the present situations. However some moves have been made with the gradual process of time, the situations are changing and their combat relating to their stigmatized identity as downtrodden and untouchables are being accorded and will be accorded in the near future to come.

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