

Dalit Movements and Media

Students of the Delhi School of Journalism were privileged to attend a seminar by two prominent Dalit oppression thinkers and academicians Prof. Narayan Sukumar and Associate Prof. Hansraj Suman. In the times of illusive caste politics, the students of our department had the rare and timed opportunity to have a factual discourse by the experienced professors who provided a parallel opinion and alternate approach to the current political discourse.

Dr. Narayan Sukumar

Having an experience of more than 20 years in teaching political science to students, Dr Sukumar delivered a lecture on Dalit movements amidst beef ban and Ambedkar's policies in the constitution for the appraisal of the oppressed.

He began his talk with an advice and a wake-up call to journalists that they could not afford to sleep, they had the responsibility of helming a major sector and institution of democracy. He reminded the students of their passion for journalism and purpose for emancipating and empowering oppressed and excluded sections of the society. He raised a concern on the neglect of relevant issues in the media and dominating ideologies in the sector, which according to him has become a family firm and nepotistic.

Dalits, as he has come to derive, have undergone the negative impacts of cultural hegemony and deprived of education and career opportunities.

Being politically equal they are socially and economically unequal and outrage of the society changed the perspective of mainstream media. He also pointed out that Dalits have an upper hand in social media which changed the social discourse.

Students recalled the theories of Nom Chompski when he talked about his perspectives in the light of unequal structures of society.

He quoted George Orwell, "Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban. Press is extremely centralized, and most of it is owned by wealthy men who have every motive to censorship also operates in books and periodicals, as well as in plays, films and radio.

At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question."

According to him media houses have become registered offices for political parties and there exists a political economy of media and caste.

He quoted an instance of Anil Chamadia being ousted from the media industry because he is a Dalit and talked of the rights of the socially excluded.

He also cited trends of sheer under representation of women in media which was only 17%, and Dalit women were far from this sight since inclusion in this sector is a major challenge.

He concluded by criticising the lack of campaigns against Dalit oppression like manual scavenging which is still a relevant reality and urged students to think more about such issues.

Dr Hansraj Suman

Dr Suman has had a hands-on experience with the media industry and is well aware of the caste politics in our system. He recalled the history of Jyoti Phule who was a pioneer of Dalit Andolan in India after his experience of being beaten at a brahmin friend's wedding. This made him question the system and he worked with his initially illiterate wife to educate girls in Maharashtra in the 19th century. She ran 17 schools without government grant and girls of families who looked down upon the Phules studied there and sought admission. He had sown a seed in the minds of young journalists that it is only education that can break caste barriers and elucidate and emancipate the oppressed and excluded populations.

For him, good clothes and good utensils with a respectable salary was a right of every labourer. It is sheer violation of human rights and the irony of our system that a dalit gains education but no place in the media industry.

He contrasted the prominence given to Jyotiba Phule's work with that of Bharatendu who was supported since he belonged to a more superior caste.

He spoke about Manyavar Kashiram and WAMCEF which had 20,000 workers and included mainstream educated journalists to establish a counter discourse to the existing oppressing system of that time.

The last stage of the extensive seminar had students pose strong questions to the professors who were impressed with the zeal

The OSD, Dr. Manasvini M. Yogi gave a vote of thanks to the guest speakers and the brainstorm-provoking, heated session was brought to an end with a group photograph.



(Contributed by Gauri Joshi

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