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PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE OF VIOLENCE ON DALITS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PARAMAKUDI FIRING

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Abstract

The Present paper is aimed to study the representation of biological and symbolical killing of Dalits with reference to Paramakudi Firing in Print media. Space allotted for Dalits in print media will be analyzed. Six Dalits were shot dead at the Police firing on Sept 11, 2011 in Paramakudi. The Dalits were assembled to pay homage to Immanuel Sekaran, a Dalit leader on his death anniversary which turned violent following the arrest of their leader John Pandian. Content analysis will be the primary research method for this study. To study the inclusion and exclusion of Dalits in Print media, both the English and Tamil dailies will be selected including one week samples from sept 11-17, 2011 of *Dinamalar*, *Dina Thanthi*, *Dinamani*, *Dinakaran*, *The Hindu*, *The Times of India* and *The New Indian Express* of Madurai editions will be used for the content analysis. All the articles, editorials, photographs, letters to the editor regarding the Paramakudi incident will be the unit of analysis. The variables of the study will be the sources in the article, the news language, the frequency of news occurrence and the themes. The data of content analysis shows that the themes of the news, the photographs and the news language is biased and one sided. The voice of the victims was absent in the news items. Like the Indian social set up, the Dalits views were excluded from the news reports. This is also a form of social exclusion.

Keywords: Dalits, Paramakudi Firing, Print Media, Content analysis



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The Present paper is aimed to study the print media coverage of violence on Dalits with special reference to Paramakudi Firing. the Space allotted for Dalits in print media will be analyzed. Six Dalits were shot dead at the Police firing on Sept 11, 2011 in Paramakudi. The Dalits were assembled to pay homage to Immanuel Sekaran¹, a Dalit leader on his death anniversary which turned violent following the arrest of their leader John Pandian². The under-representation of Dalits in Indian media has been suggestive of their unimportance or their non-existence. The Dalit issues were ignored by the Press similar to the Indian societal set up which abandon Dalits. “The press in India has rarely documented, in any detail and with any sensitivity, the grinding poverty, the day-to-day deprivations and discriminations and the all too frequent atrocities faced by the Dalits in this country” (Nagaraj, 2005).

By looking at published editorials in two big Newspapers Times of India and The Hindu , Robin Jeffrey conducted a similar investigation from a journalistic perspective. In his well-known book India's Newspaper Revolution, Robin Jeffrey emphasised the lack of coverage of Dalits in newspapers and their invisibility in newsrooms. He identified only four pieces about Dalits in the editorial pages of the English-language Times of India and The Hindu for the first nine months of 1996, out of 717 items in the Times of India and 478 in the Hindu.

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¹ Immanuel sekaran is a Dalit leader who laid his life in the struggle against caste depression in Tamil Nadu after Independence.

² John Pandian is the leader of the TMMK which represents an assertive leadership against the inequalities of caste. His rise as a dalit leader in the 1980s coincides with the rise of dalit assertion in southern districts.



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nine months of 1996, out of 717 items in the Times of India and 478 in the Hindu. Hindu (Jeffrey, 1996). The observers on the media coverage of the Dalits argue that the minimum space is devoted for the Dalits issues. Even that the coverage of the Dalits issues is uniform, similar and stereotyped. The other side of the Dalits is not discussed in the media. The positive qualities, their demands and the background of the Dalit's problems are often absent in the media ((Prasad, 2005) (Thankappan 2007) (Gorringer, 2005)).

The previous studies concerning the violence on Dalits mostly got under represented or else mis represented. Regarding the media coverage of Tirunelveli massacre³ Gorringer stated that, Reports in the media struggled to make sense of what had happened, painting frightening images of protestors being truncheoned as they cowered in the water. Khairlanji⁴ issue was not given due importance in Indian media. Even the Hindu readers editor justified that it was very distant from Tamil Nadu and so we did not covered. The proximity plays a major role for the coverage of Dalit issues and violence against Dalits. It was published very lately in the media.

Gorringer also cited a Corbridge and Hariss study. In their discussion of the Tsundur massacre in Andhra Pradesh, Corbridge and Hariss emphasised the media's prejudice. They claim that the media emphasised Dalit violence while downplaying upper-caste violence. Several researchers exposed that the media repeated the police version of the Paramakudi firing. On September 11th the police firing killed six among the several Dalits who had assembled in paramakudi to observe the 54th death anniversary of their leader, Immanuel Sekaran. Another 30

³ On July 23, 1999, Manjolai tea estate workers demonstrated on the banks of the river Thamirabarani in front of the Tirunelveli district Collectorate with the assistance of political parties, resulting in the deaths of 17 people.

⁴ The Khairlanji massacre occurred in 2006, when members of the Kunbi OBC caste murdered a Dalit family in a lynching-style murder. The deaths took occurred in the small Indian village of Khairlanji, which is located in the Bhandara region of Maharashtra. Four members of the Bhotmange tribe were killed on September 29, 2006. In Kherlanji, a tiny village in Bhandara district, a Dalit underclass family was slaughtered. Maharashtra is a state in India. Surekha and Priyanka, the family's women, were displayed in public naked. assassination Assailants from the Kunbi are accused of carrying out the criminal act for "opposing" the government. seizure of their field in order to construct a road over it According to initial accounts, the women were supposedly Before being murdered, she was gang-raped.



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were seriously injured and are undergoing treatment in various hospitals. The immediate cause for the police firing was the road block held by the protesters on that day. The police and other public officials are trying to justify the firing and the subsequent deaths, to the media and to the rights' activists, by saying that the protestors had attacked the police and destroyed public property (Navayan, 2011).

Parthasarathi stated that the media reports have mostly reproduced the police statements justifying police action. He also mentioned that the Paramakudi violence was not accidental nor was it due to efforts at restoring law and order by the police, as the media reported (Parthasarathi, 2011). Anand Teldumde indicted that the media reports, which rarely take pains to unearth the truth in cases where Dalits are involved and unquestioningly portray the police version (Teldumbde, 2011). Kuffir in his article emphasised that the media was trying to whitewash the Paramakudi massacre. The media wished to play down the enormity of the bloodbath from the beginning (Kuffir, 2011). Geetha revealed that the Tamil weeklies which gloat over every minor political event until they can render it sensational have shut up after making initial noises about the Paramkudi firings (Geetha, 2011). The coverage of Dalit issues could be compared with the coverage of minorities. We could get inputs from more international studies on the media coverage of minorities. Wolfsfeld & et al. study on the Hebrew media coverage of the Arab minority reveal that cultural and political assumptions are translated into the routine production of negative news about disadvantaged challengers. The lower the political, social, and media status of the challenger, the more difficult they find it to overcome these journalistic routines. While protests by more "acceptable" groups can sometimes lead to a public



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debate about injustices, Land Day coverage inevitably centers on how to deal with “troublemakers.” (Wolsfeld & et.al., 2000)

Islamophobia is a current phenomenon discussed worldwide. The Muslims are the religious minorities in the western countries. Anti-Muslim discourse is evident in western press. The fear or fright of Islam and/or Muslims is described as Islamophobia. Sands examination of newspaper headlines on the reporting of Islam in the New York Times after post 9/11 found that the news media are placing a greater emphasis on the religion of the threats to American safety instead of the people themselves. The New York Times often portrays Islam as a militia and as a political force, but what seems to be forgotten in the headlines is that Islam is a religion (Sands, 2003) There is a bad view of Islam in the United Kingdom as well. The following remark is supported by Abbas' analysis of South Asian Muslims in the British press. Muslims are categorically viewed as threats to civilization, as "fundamentalists," as foreigners, with genuine and unique patterns of racial and ethnic disadvantage rarely, if ever, highlighted. The media prefers to focus on 'black crime' and 'Islamic political militancy' rather than the economic, social, and educational hardships that the vast majority of British South Asian Muslims face (Abbas, 2001).

The print media coverage of the Paramakudi firings was studied using content analysis. A research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications, according to Bernard Berelson (Berelson, 1952). Content analysis is a research method that concentrates on the content and internal characteristics of media. It's used to find and quantify the presence of specific words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences in texts or groups of texts.



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Research questions

1. What is the extent of the coverage of Paramakudi firing in newspapers?
2. What are the various types of the Dalit news being covered and neglected?
3. 4. What are the various themes of news on the Paramakudi firing was reported?
5. How are the vocabulary and lexical choice used in the text?

Method

Content analysis will be the primary research method for this study. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected through content analysis technique.

Universe of the Study

The print medium was chosen for the study. It was decided to study the content of the Tamil and English dailies. These medium remains the permanent distributors of information. The Madurai edition was selected since they would give a full picture of the media framing of the Paramakudi firings.

Sample selection for content analysis

According to Wimmer & Dominick (2003), most content analysis in mass media involves multistage sampling. This process consists of three stages: sampling of content sources, selection of dates and selection of content.



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Sampling stage 1: Selection of newspapers

The Tamil dailies namely *Dinamalar*, *Dina Thanthi*, *Dinakaran* and the English dailies namely *The Hindu*, *The Times of India* and *The New Indian Express* were chosen for the study. *Dinamalar*, *Dina Thanthi*, *Dinakaran* were selected as they were the largest circulated Tamil dailies of Tamil Nadu. *The Hindu*, *The Times of India* and *The New Indian Express* were chosen as they were the largest circulated English dailies of Tamil Nadu.

Sampling Stage 2: Selection of Dates

In many studies, the time period from which the issues are to be selected is determined by the goal of the project. The goal of the present study is to examine the print media coverage of Paramakudi firings. The one week samples of the selected dailies from sep11-17, 2011 were selected for the study.

Sampling Stage 3: Selection of Content:

The content regarding the Paramakudi firing and the Dalits were selected for the study.

Units of Analysis

All the articles, editorials, photographs, letters to the editor regarding the Paramakudi incident were the unit of analysis.

Categories of the study

Five content categories were developed drawing on those in previous studies. The content analysis identified the content categories and their variables. The content categories of the study were the sources in the article, the lexical choice, the frequency of news occurrence and the themes. The coding schedule was prepared and finalised after a fine review of literature.



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- ✓ "News" is the timely report of events, facts, and opinions that interest a significant number of people. Here "News" also means a direct, matter-of-fact rendering of events related to Dalits.
- ✓ Frequency of news - within the sampling period, the appearance of the news story
- ✓ Lexical choice - Use of a word with positive or negative connotations
- ✓ Themes – News and Photographs on Violence of Dalits filed by reporters, News and Photographs on Violence of Police, news of statements by NGOs & Dalit politicians, news on Politicians & Bureaucrats and Special articles
- ✓ Sources – Views of official sources, views of politicians and views of victims

Data Collection

Data collection for the content analysis was achieved by coding each item within a sample newspaper directly into a Microsoft excel sheet across each of the categories of the content analysis. The direct application of coding into a computer would limit errors in transferring data for analysis.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data collected from the newspapers employing content analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, percentage distributions, percentages, graphs, was used.



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Results

Table 1.1*Frequency of the themes of the news items*

Sl.No	Name of the newspaper	Total No of news
1.	<i>Dinamalar</i>	45
2.	<i>Dina Thanthi</i>	39
3.	<i>Dinakaran</i>	64
4.	<i>The Hindu</i>	28
5.	<i>The New Indian Express</i>	30
6.	<i>The Times of India</i>	21

Table 1.1 shows that all the newspapers give more coverage to Paramakudi firing. *Dinakaran* and *Dinamalar* published more news on Paramakudi firing. Among the English dailies, *The New Indian Express* has covered more news articles.

Table 1.2*Frequency of the themes of the news items*

Sl.No	Name of the newspaper	Violence of Dalits filed by reporters	Violence of Police – statements by NGOs & Dalit politicians	Politicians & Bureaucrats	Special articles



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1.	<i>Dinamalar</i>	22	4	19	0
2.	<i>Dina Thanthi</i>	18	6	13	2
3.	<i>Dinakaran</i>	36	11	17	0
4.	<i>The Hindu</i>	10	10	7	1
5.	<i>The New Indian Express</i>	14	12	8	0
6.	<i>The Times of India</i>	7	2	6	5

The table 1.2 shows that all the dailies published more news on the violence of Dalits. *Dinakaran* and *Dinamalar* have covered more news on the violence of Dalits. The *New Indian Express* and *The Times of India* have also published some special articles on the related issues of Paramakudi firing. The Tamil dailies rarely published special articles. *Dinamalar* and *Dinakaran* with the first day report on the Paramakudi firing, they have emphasised the injury of a police woman.

Table 1.3

Frequency of photographs published in the sample newspapers

Sl.No	Name of the newspaper	Total No of Photographs
1.	<i>Dinamalar</i>	22



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2.	<i>Dina Thanthi</i>	33
3.	<i>Dinakaran</i>	35
4.	<i>The Hindu</i>	10
5.	<i>The New Indian Express</i>	17
6.	<i>The Times of India</i>	12

The table 1.3 shows that the Tamil dailies *DinaThanthi* and *Dinakaran* published more photographs on the incident. Among the English dailies under study, *The New Indian Express* published more photographs on the incident.

Table 1.4

Frequency of the themes of the Photographs published in the sample newspapers

Sl.No	Name of the newspaper	Violence of Dalits	Violence of Police	Politicians	Bureaucrats
1.	<i>Dinamalar</i>	13	2	5	2
2.	<i>Dina Thanthi</i>	19	6	8	0
3.	<i>Dinakaran</i>	24	4	7	0
4.	<i>The Hindu</i>	4	0	6	0
5.	<i>The New Indian</i>	8	3	4	2



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	<i>Express</i>				
6.	<i>The Times of India</i>	8	2	2	0

The table 1.4 shows that the more photographs on the violence of Dalits were published in the sample newspapers. Only photographs on the violence of police are published in the newspapers. The photographs of the injuries of the police officials particularly a police woman are published more in the Tamil dailies. *The New Indian Express*, *Dinakaran*, *DinaThanthi* published even a photo essay on Paramakudi firing.

Sources

The qualitative content analysis revealed that all the reports filed by the sample newspapers quoted only the official sources. The first report published on sep12 after the incident, the sources were mostly the police officials and the statements of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. The news reports disclosed that the reporters depended mostly on the official views. They have not followed the two source rule like British Broadcasting Corporation (Bhaumik, 2008). The reporter should get the views from the sources from the both sides that are in conflict. The reporters did not present when the incident happen. They have not taken the views and opinions of the people who were present during the incident. The reporters have only taken account of the views of witness from Police side. The views of the witness from Dalits side were not included in the news items. The newspapers have published only the statements of the Dalit politicians and the NGOs. But when reporting on the incident they have not included the views and opinions of the so called mobs or protesters. Only two stories on the views of the victims got published. One story titled, “Dalits resolve not to accept compensation” was published in the *Times of India*. In that story also, they did not include the bytes of the so called Dalits or the common



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man. They interviewed only the human rights activist and a lawyer. In another one story in *Dina Thanthi*, the news report on the meet of Stalin from Dravida Munnetra kazhagam party with the families of the persons who were killed in the Police firing.

The personal communication with the Principal correspondent⁵ of the *Times of India*, Madurai shows the limitations of the reporters. He said that although the firing happened in the day time, he could not get the details till the late evening. He added that he could not contact any official sources. The senior police officials and the District collector are not answering his calls. He also could not travel since all the ways are almost closed due to tight security.

Words used

The terminologies the reporters used in the news reports showed the nature of the report whether it is balanced or biased. The reports have very normally used adjectives for describing the Dalits. In the *New Indian Express* they used Rampaging mob, violent mob to refer Dalits. In *the Hindu* they called stone pelting mob. The caption of the photograph repeated the official version. The caption said that “Police resort to lathicharge to disperse a mob in Paramakudi on Sunday” In *the Times of India* they identified them as angry dalit mobs. In *Dinakaran* and *Dina Thanthi*, they called them as supporters until the violence started. After that they called them as mob. They have branded the Dalits as mob but no such branding for Police force.

⁵ V Mayilvaganan, the Principal correspondent of *Times of India*, Madurai.



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Findings

The quantitative data of content analysis revealed that more space and more news reports were filed on the Paramakudi firing. Although more space was allotted for Paramakudi firing in the print media, it did not give the full picture of the issue. The newspapers echoed the views and opinions of the official sources. The news language and the news selection showed that the news reports were not written sensitively. The newspapers have stereotyped the Dalits as violent and immoral like other previous conflicts coverage. They have not followed the two source rule like British Broadcasting Corporation. They have taken only the official views. They have not taken any views from the witness or the victims.

The newspapers filed more reports describing the violence of Dalits. The violence of police was not reported by the newspapers. The newspapers have not directly written about the violence of police. Only through the statements of NGOs and the politicians, they have given news about the violence of police. The vocabulary and lexical choice of the newspapers shows biased towards the Dalits. They have described the Dalits with negative words and adjectives. But they have not given any description of the police force. *The Times of India* and *Dina Thanthi* have published special articles regarding the Paramakudi firing. *The Times of India* discussed the relevant social, economic and political reasons for the Paramakudi firing. It also published feature articles on Immanuel Sekaran and John Pandian. *Dina Thanthi* gives the full details of the persons killed in Paramakudi firing. The *New Indian Express* has published more news reports on the fact finding reports of Nongovernmental organizations.

The photographs also reflected the police version. They published the photographs of the violence of Dalits, the burning government vehicles and the buses hit by stone pelting. The photographs tried to show that how the mob indulged in violence and damaged the government



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buses. Also they justified the police attack as a defence mechanism to stop the violence of the mob. The violence of police was not exposed in the photographs.

Dinamalar and *Dinakaran* even tried to represent Dalits as chauvinistic. They emphasised the injuries of a police woman with the headline *harassment against a police woman*.

Conclusion

Unlike the previous incidents, in this coverage of Paramakudi firing also, the Dalits are identified and stereotyped as violent and immoral. The data of content analysis shows that the themes of the news, the photographs and the news language is biased and one sided. The voice of the victims was absent in the news items. Like the Indian social set up, the Dalits views were excluded from the news reports. This is also a form of social exclusion. The photographs portrayed Dalits as violent. Though the photographs showed the inhumane violence of police on Dalits. It was not correlated in the news items. The words used to describe Dalits in the news items were discriminatory. The violence of Dalits is highlighted and the violence of police is downplayed in the newspaper coverage. The police justified Tirunelveli massacre by blaming the agitators for misbehaving with the police women. In the Paramakudi firing also the police and the part of media glorified the attack on the police woman and tried to depict the Dalits as chauvinistic and immoral. The coverage of the Paramakudi shooting could be likened to how Islam is covered in the Western media. The American media's coverage of 9/11 has resulted in Islamophobia. The media coverage of the Paramakudi shooting in Tamil Nadu after 9/11 has resulted in Dalitophobia. Dalits in Tamil Nadu are fearful or frightened as a result of the coverage. As a result, it's also known as Dalitophobia.



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