

# Journalism for Social Justice: A Comparative Analysis of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Journalists' Writings in India

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## ABSTRACT

Caste-based discrimination remains a deep-rooted socio-political issue in India, despite constitutional safeguards. During the freedom struggle the mainstream newspapers, controlled by powerful upper-caste people, prioritized anti-colonial narratives, while the oppression of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, received minimal attention. They did not pay attention to the problems faced by lower-caste people. This neglect led to the emergence of counter-publics in media to represent silenced voices that led to the urgent need for journalistic practices grounded in social justice, equity, and the amplification of marginalized perspectives in media spaces.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a visionary reformer, recognized the power of media as a tool for change, resistance and empowerment. He started his own newspapers, like *Mooknayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, *Janata*, and *Prabuddha Bharat*, to give a voice to the marginalized, challenged caste oppression, and promoted social justice. His journalistic style combined rational argument, moral critique, and advocacy journalism to amplify subaltern voices. Ambedkar's media practice established a framework for what can be termed 'journalism for social emancipation'.

This paper studies Dr. Ambedkar's journalism and compares with the work of contemporary journalists' writings on issues of caste and inequality in digital spaces. This research aims to trace the continuities and changes in approaches to social justice; to examine media's role in countering writings on casteism; and to assess how Ambedkar's media philosophies are reinterpreted today. This analysis contributes to understanding the relevance of 'journalism for social justice' in India's ongoing struggle for equity, equality and social justice.

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**KEYWORDS:** Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Caste Discrimination, Journalism, Contemporary Journalists, Social Injustice.

## INTRODUCTION

The struggle for social justice and the eradication of caste discrimination remains a critical aspect of the Indian socio-political landscape. With deep historical roots, the caste system has perpetuated inequalities and marginalized significant sections of the population. The media of different eras have played a crucial role in either highlighting or overlooking these issues. During India's struggle for independence, the mainstream press, often controlled by upper-caste interests, primarily focused on the movement against British rule, frequently neglecting the concerns of the oppressed castes. This historical context underscores the necessity of independent journalism dedicated to

social justice, a need that persists even in contemporary times where discrimination against Dalits and other marginalized communities remains a stark reality.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar stands as a towering figure not only as a social reformer and the architect of the Indian Constitution but also as a pioneering journalist who recognized the potent power of the press to advocate for the marginalized. He understood that newspapers could serve as vital platforms to educate, enlighten, and mobilize the masses against social injustices. Facing a mainstream media that often ignored or misrepresented the plight of the lower

castes, Ambedkar established his own publications, including *Mooknayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, *Janata*, and *Prabuddha Bharat*, to give voice to the voiceless and challenge the deeply entrenched caste system.

In the contemporary era, a new generation of journalists and news platforms has emerged, similarly dedicated to raising the voices of marginalized communities and fighting for social justice in the rapidly evolving digital age.<sup>16</sup> Inspired by Ambedkar's legacy, these journalists are leveraging the accessibility and reach of the internet to address persistent issues of caste discrimination, inequality, and human rights violations. The advent of digital media has lowered the barriers to entry into the media landscape, enabling the creation of independent outlets focused on specific social justice concerns. This report aims to comparatively analyze the journalistic styles of Dr. Ambedkar and these contemporary advocates for social justice, exploring the continuities, changes, and the impact of the evolving media landscape on their approaches. The enduring need for such journalism suggests a persistent struggle for equitable representation and the amplification of marginalized voices within the Indian media ecosystem.

### Objectives

- To analyze the journalistic philosophy and practices of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar
- To identify and describe the approaches of contemporary journalists writing on caste and inequality in digital spaces.
- To assess how Dr. Ambedkar's media philosophies are being reinterpreted, adapted, or continued in contemporary journalistic practices

### Methodology

The methodology will involve qualitative method where comparative analysis has been conducted among the works of B.R Ambedkar and other contemporary journalists like MeenaKotwal, Ashok Das, BabitaGautam and many more. The comparative analysis has been done systematically to analyse the themes, characteristics, Tone, narrative techniques, audience engagement, reach and many more.

### Identifying the Contemporary Vanguard: Profiling key contemporary Indian journalists and news platforms championing social justice for marginalized communities.

The contemporary Indian media landscape features a dedicated group of journalists and platforms actively championing the cause of social justice for marginalized communities, often drawing inspiration from the pioneering work of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. These individuals and organizations are utilizing the

power of digital media to address issues ranging from caste discrimination to gender inequality and human rights violations.

One prominent figure is **MeenaKotwal**, the founder of *The Mooknayak*, an online news channel and website established in 2021. Inspired by Ambedkar's original Marathi fortnightly newspaper of the same name, Kotwal's platform focuses on the persecution of Dalit, tribal, and minority communities, advocating for social justice and democracy for the marginalized. Another key journalist is **Ashok Das**, the founder and editor of *Dalit Dastak*, a media outlet that began as a monthly magazine in 2012 and has since expanded to include a news website and a popular YouTube channel.<sup>17</sup> Das explicitly states that his work aims to carry forward Ambedkar's journalistic legacy by highlighting systemic caste discrimination and celebrating the achievements of individuals from marginalized communities.

**BabitaGautam** is the founder of *The Voice Media* and co-founder of *Dalit Desk*, independent media platforms dedicated to amplifying the voices of the most marginalized sections of society, particularly Bahun women. Her work focuses on bringing to light the often-overlooked stories of caste, resistance, and dignity. **Sumit Chauhan** founded *The News Beak* (formerly *The Shudra*), a digital news platform that covers a wide range of social justice issues, including caste, class, gender, minority rights, and environmental concerns. His platform aims to raise awareness about discrimination and injustice affecting marginalized communities.

Beyond these individuals, several other significant news platforms contribute to social justice journalism in India. *KhabarLahariya* stands out as India's only digital rural news network run by women from Dalit, tribal, Muslim, and backward castes. Focusing on grassroots issues and using local dialects, *KhabarLahariya* acts as a crucial local watchdog. *Video Volunteers* operates as a community media network that empowers marginalized citizens to tell their own stories and create campaigns for change on a variety of social issues. Additionally, platforms like *Round Table India*, *Forward Press*, *Velivada*, *Dalit Camera*, and *Dalit News Network* also play vital roles in amplifying marginalized voices and addressing issues of caste and social justice. The emergence of these journalists and platforms signifies a dynamic and evolving landscape of social justice journalism in India, particularly within the digital sphere.

### Deconstructing Contemporary Styles: An in-depth analysis of the journalistic styles of contemporary journalists, including their narrative techniques, use of language, focus on specific issues, and

## engagement with their audience across various media.

Contemporary journalists advocating for social justice in India employ a variety of narrative techniques to effectively convey the experiences and struggles of marginalized communities. Many utilize storytelling as a central approach, weaving personal narratives and community voices into their reporting to humanize issues and foster empathy. Platforms like *Video Volunteers* explicitly empower individuals from marginalized backgrounds to become storytellers, ensuring that their own perspectives are centered. This emphasis on lived experience is a key characteristic of contemporary social justice journalism, allowing for nuanced and authentic portrayals that challenge dominant narratives.

The language and tone adopted by these journalists vary depending on their target audience and the specific issues they address. While some may employ an assertive and critical tone when confronting discrimination and injustice, others might opt for a more empathetic or educational approach. The use of local dialects, as seen in *KhabarLahariya*'s reporting, enhances accessibility and strengthens the connection with rural communities. This strategy ensures that the news resonates deeply with the intended audience.

Contemporary social justice journalists cover a wide spectrum of issues, reflecting the multifaceted nature of marginalization in India. Caste discrimination remains a central focus, but their reporting also encompasses gender inequality, religious biases, economic disparities, human rights violations, and environmental justice concerns. Platforms like *KhabarLahariya* highlight the intersectionality of these issues, demonstrating how caste, gender, and religion can compound experiences of marginalization.

A defining feature of contemporary journalistic styles is the engagement with the audience through digital platforms. Journalists utilize social media, YouTube, and interactive features to disseminate information rapidly and foster direct communication.<sup>16</sup> The use of WhatsApp groups, as seen with *The Mooknayak*, allows for immediate news dissemination and community building. This interactive aspect, largely absent in the era of print-dominated media, creates a more dynamic and participatory relationship between journalists and their audience. The ability to receive instant feedback and engage in dialogue can shape the ongoing journalistic process and strengthen community bonds around shared concerns for social justice.

## Dr. Ambedkar's Journalistic Blueprint: A detailed examination of Dr. Ambedkar's journalistic style as demonstrated in *Mooknayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, *Janata*, and *Prabuddha Bharat*, focusing on his tone, language, use of evidence, and the issues he prioritized.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's journalistic style was marked by a strong and analytical tone, driven by a deep commitment to humanist principles of justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity. His writing aimed to educate and enlighten his readers about the harsh realities of social injustice, particularly the oppressive nature of the caste system. In his inaugural editorial in *Mooknayak*, published in 1920, Ambedkar adopted a tone that was both critical of the existing social hierarchy and hopeful for the progress of the marginalized.<sup>61</sup> His style in *Mooknayak* has been described as a visceral attack on Brahminism and the caste system, employing classical Marathi alongside common idioms to ensure accessibility to the masses.

Ambedkar primarily wrote his journalistic works in Marathi, the language of the people he sought to uplift. This linguistic choice was crucial in ensuring that his message reached the widest possible audience within the Dalit community and beyond. His ability to articulate complex social and political issues in Marathi, using both scholarly language and everyday expressions, was a hallmark of his effective communication.

His journalism was characterized by a rigorous use of evidence and argumentation. Ambedkar's writing was based on logic, research, and a deep understanding of the social, political, and economic structures of his time. He clearly and logically articulated his ideas, providing intellectual grounding to the anti-caste movement. *Bahishkrit Bharat*, launched in 1927, adopted a more radical approach, serving as a platform for Ambedkar to directly address his detractors and advise his followers with an uncompromising voice.

Across his various newspapers, Dr. Ambedkar consistently prioritized key social justice issues. Untouchability and caste discrimination were central themes, as he relentlessly exposed the dehumanizing practices imposed on Dalits and advocated for their rights to education, social mobility, and participation in public life. He also consistently stressed the urgent need for political representation for the marginalized communities, arguing that true empowerment could only be achieved through political power. Furthermore, social reform was a continuous thread in his journalism, as he aimed to awaken and empower the Dalit community and challenge the oppressive caste system.<sup>2</sup> The very names of his newspapers –

*Mooknayak* (leader of the voiceless), *Bahishkrit Bharat* (excluded India), and *Janata* (the people) – clearly reflected his commitment to representing the oppressed.<sup>2</sup> In later years, with *Prabuddha Bharat* (enlightened India), his focus shifted towards envisioning a more enlightened and just society.

### **Bridging the Eras: A comparative analysis highlighting the similarities and differences in the journalistic styles of Dr. Ambedkar and contemporary journalists in their advocacy for social justice.**

Despite the significant temporal and technological differences, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and contemporary journalists advocating for social justice share fundamental goals and thematic focuses. Both are deeply committed to the eradication of caste discrimination and the empowerment of marginalized communities, recognizing the persistent inequalities that plague Indian society. This shared commitment forms a strong bridge across the eras, uniting their journalistic endeavors in the pursuit of a more just and equitable society.

Contemporary journalists often maintain a similarly assertive and critical tone in addressing social injustice, echoing the strong voice that characterized Ambedkar's writings. Just as Ambedkar fearlessly critiqued the caste system and the mainstream media of his time, many contemporary journalists adopt an uncompromising stance against discrimination and inequality. This continuity in tone reflects the enduring nature of the struggle and the need for a powerful voice to challenge the status quo.

However, significant differences emerge in the media and outreach strategies employed. Ambedkar primarily relied on print media, which, while impactful, had inherent limitations in terms of reach and speed of dissemination. In contrast, contemporary journalists operate in a digital age, heavily utilizing websites, YouTube, social media, and other online platforms to disseminate information widely and rapidly. This shift allows for a far greater potential reach, transcending geographical boundaries in ways that were not possible for Ambedkar's Marathi newspapers.

The language and narrative techniques have also evolved. While Ambedkar wrote primarily in Marathi, contemporary journalists often use a mix of English, Hindi, and regional languages, catering to diverse online audiences. They also frequently employ multimedia formats like video and audio, which were unavailable during Ambedkar's time. Furthermore, contemporary journalists often incorporate personal narratives and community voices

more directly into their reporting, potentially fostering a different kind of connection with their audience compared to Ambedkar's more analytical and editorial-driven style.

Globalization and the interconnected nature of the digital world have also broadened the scope and reach of contemporary social justice journalism. Unlike Ambedkar, whose primary audience was within India, contemporary journalists have the potential to reach a global audience, raising international awareness about social justice issues in India. This interconnectedness can also facilitate collaboration and the sharing of information across borders, adding a new dimension to the fight against social injustice.

### **The Shifting Sands of Media: Investigating how the evolution of the media landscape from print to digital has shaped the journalistic styles and outreach of contemporary journalists compared to Dr. Ambedkar's era.**

The evolution of the media landscape from print to digital has profoundly shaped the journalistic styles and outreach of contemporary journalists advocating for social justice compared to Dr. Ambedkar's era. Accessibility and reach have been significantly transformed. During Ambedkar's time, print media, while the primary means of mass communication, faced limitations in reaching marginalized communities due to issues of literacy, distribution, and control by dominant groups. Today, the internet and digital media have democratized access to information and platforms for expression, enabling marginalized communities to create and consume news independently. The widespread availability of smartphones has further amplified this accessibility.

The speed and interactivity of digital media have also brought about significant changes in journalistic practices. Contemporary journalists can report events in real-time and engage in immediate dialogue with their audience through comments, social media interactions, and live sessions. This immediacy allows for a more dynamic and responsive form of journalism compared to the slower production cycles of print media. The ability to receive instant feedback can also influence the ongoing journalistic process and foster a sense of community among readers and viewers.

Financial models and sustainability present a complex picture across both eras. Ambedkar's newspapers consistently faced financial challenges, often relying on donations and ultimately leading to the closure of some publications. Contemporary digital platforms also grapple with financial sustainability, often relying on crowdfunding, donations, and limited

advertising revenue. While the costs of digital publishing may be lower than traditional print, generating sufficient revenue to support independent journalism remains a significant hurdle.

Forms of censorship and control have also evolved. Ambedkar faced bias and lack of support from the mainstream press, which often ignored or misrepresented his views.<sup>1</sup> He also likely faced indirect pressure from the colonial government. Contemporary journalists, while benefiting from the relative freedom of the internet, face new challenges such as online harassment, including threats of violence, often directed at those reporting on sensitive social justice issues. There are also concerns about potential government pressure and surveillance in the digital space, raising questions about net neutrality and freedom of expression. The struggle for an independent and uncensored press continues, albeit in different forms shaped by the prevailing media landscape.

**Measuring Impact and Mobilization: Exploring and evaluating the impact and effectiveness of both Dr. Ambedkar's and the contemporary journalists' styles in raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and mobilizing action against social injustice.**

Dr. Ambedkar's journalism had a profound impact on raising awareness about the injustices of untouchability and mobilizing the Dalit community during a critical period in India's history. His newspapers served as crucial tools for disseminating his ideology, fostering a sense of collective identity among the oppressed, and galvanizing them to demand their rights. His journalistic work was an integral part of his broader strategy to 'educate, agitate, organize'.

Contemporary journalists and platforms are also demonstrating significant impact in raising awareness and mobilizing action in the digital age. The speed and reach of digital media allow for the rapid dissemination of information about instances of social injustice, often bypassing the filters of mainstream media. Platforms like *The Mooknayak* have been credited with prompting official intervention in cases of discrimination and violence. *Video Volunteers* has documented numerous instances where their community-driven reporting has led to tangible changes, such as improved infrastructure and access to resources for marginalized communities.

Measuring the precise impact of journalistic work, both historically and in the present, remains a complex endeavor. Attributing specific societal changes solely to journalistic efforts is challenging

due to the multitude of influencing factors. However, the role of both Dr. Ambedkar and contemporary journalists in shaping public discourse around caste and social justice is undeniable. Ambedkar's newspapers fundamentally altered the conversation around caste in India. Similarly, contemporary alternative media platforms are increasingly creating awareness among mainstream outlets, compelling them to address issues that might otherwise be overlooked.

**Navigating the Obstacles: A consideration of the challenges and obstacles faced by both Dr. Ambedkar and contemporary journalists in their pursuit of social justice through journalism.**

Both Dr. Ambedkar and contemporary journalists dedicated to social justice have encountered significant obstacles in their journalistic endeavors. Persistent financial constraints have plagued independent media focused on these issues across different eras. Ambedkar's newspapers frequently struggled with funding, relying heavily on donations and often facing the threat of closure. Similarly, contemporary digital platforms, while having lower overhead costs than print publications, often operate on limited budgets, relying on crowdfunding and facing challenges in achieving long-term financial sustainability.

Societal backlash and opposition have also been consistent challenges for those who dare to challenge the status quo. Ambedkar faced significant opposition from mainstream media and upper-caste society, who often reacted negatively to his critiques of the caste system. Contemporary journalists, particularly those reporting on sensitive issues like caste discrimination and communalism, often face online harassment, including threats of violence and smear campaigns. This online hostility can create a climate of fear and intimidation, hindering their ability to report freely.

The dominance of mainstream media, with its greater resources and wider reach, poses another significant obstacle for independent social justice journalism, both historically and in the present. Ambedkar started his own newspapers precisely because the mainstream press largely ignored or misrepresented the issues faced by Dalits. This underrepresentation and bias in mainstream media continue to be a driving force behind the emergence of contemporary Dalit and social justice media outlets.

Finally, independent media ventures often face internal challenges related to maintaining a dedicated team and ensuring long-term sustainability in a challenging and often underfunded sector. Building and retaining a team of committed journalists and

staff can be difficult, especially when financial resources are scarce.

### **Carrying the Torch: Evaluating the extent to which contemporary journalists are embodying and advancing the journalistic legacy and principles established by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.**

Contemporary journalists advocating for social justice are, to a significant extent, embodying and advancing the journalistic legacy and principles established by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Many explicitly adhere to the principles he championed, such as fairness, impartiality, fact-based reporting, and a mission-driven commitment to social upliftment. Just as Ambedkar prioritized the issues and concerns of Dalits and other marginalized communities, contemporary journalists and platforms like *The Mooknayak*, *Dalit Dastak*, *The Voice Media*, and *The News Beak* have made these communities their central focus.

Similar to Ambedkar's use of his newspapers to awaken and empower the Dalit community, contemporary journalists see their role as extending beyond mere reporting. They aim to empower and mobilize marginalized communities by giving them a voice, documenting their struggles, and advocating for their rights and social change.

Furthermore, contemporary journalists are strategically adapting Ambedkar's core principles to the opportunities and challenges of the digital media landscape. They are utilizing multimedia content, social media engagement, and online platforms to reach wider audiences and foster dialogue in ways that were not possible in Ambedkar's time. This innovative approach demonstrates a commitment to extending Ambedkar's mission into the 21st century. The very existence of platforms named *The Mooknayak* serves as a direct and powerful testament to the enduring influence of Dr. Ambedkar's journalistic legacy and the conscious efforts of contemporary journalists to carry his torch forward.

### **Conclusion: Reflections on the past, present, and future of social justice journalism in India, drawing lessons from Dr. Ambedkar's enduring influence.**

This comparative analysis reveals a remarkable continuity in the spirit and purpose of social justice journalism in India, spanning from the pioneering work of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to the contemporary efforts of journalists and platforms in the digital age. Both eras are marked by a deep commitment to giving voice to the marginalized, challenging systemic inequalities, and striving for a more just and equitable society. While the core mission remains consistent, the evolution of the media landscape has brought about significant changes in the tools, techniques, and reach of social justice journalism.

Dr. Ambedkar's journalistic vision, characterized by its intellectual rigor, accessibility, and unwavering commitment to truth and the empowerment of the oppressed, continues to hold immense relevance for contemporary practitioners. His fearless critique of the status quo and his strategic use of media to mobilize communities serve as enduring lessons for those working to amplify marginalized voices today.

Despite the transformative potential of digital media, contemporary social justice journalists face ongoing challenges, including financial sustainability and online harassment, which echo the struggles encountered by Dr. Ambedkar in his time. However, the digital age also presents unprecedented opportunities for wider reach, faster dissemination of information, and direct engagement with audiences, allowing for innovative approaches to storytelling and mobilization.

Future research could delve deeper into the specific impact of contemporary Dalit media on policy changes and societal attitudes. Comparative studies of journalistic styles across different digital platforms and languages could also yield valuable insights into the evolving landscape of social justice journalism.

In conclusion, social justice journalism, both in the past and present, plays a vital role in fostering a more equitable and inclusive society in India. By holding power accountable, amplifying marginalized voices, and promoting critical dialogue, this form of journalism remains an indispensable force in the ongoing struggle for social transformation, carrying forward the enduring legacy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Characteristic	Dr. B. R. Ambedkar	Contemporary Journalists
Primary Media	Print (Marathi)	Digital (Websites, YouTube, Social Media) (Hindi, English, Regional Languages), Print (to a lesser extent)
Language	Marathi	Hindi, English, Regional Languages
Tone	Assertive, Analytical, Educational, Mobilizing, Critical	Varied (Assertive, Empathetic, Personal), Critical

Narrative Techniques	Editorials, Articles, Logical Argumentation, Use of Historical Context	Storytelling, Personal Narratives, Community Voices, Multimedia (Video, Audio), Data Journalism
Audience Engagement	Primarily one-way communication through print	Interactive through comments, social media, live sessions, WhatsApp groups
Key Issues	Untouchability, Caste Discrimination, Political Representation, Social Reform	Caste Discrimination, Gender Inequality, Religious Bias, Economic Disparities, Human Rights Violations, Environmental Justice
Reach	Primarily within Maharashtra and Marathi-speaking communities	Potential global reach through digital platforms
Financial Challenges	Constant struggle for funding, reliance on donations, frequent closures	Reliance on crowdfunding, donations, limited advertising, struggle for sustainability
Societal Opposition	Bias and lack of support from mainstream press, negative portrayals	Online harassment, threats of violence, smear campaigns, discrimination in mainstream newsrooms
Goal	Awaken, educate, and mobilize Dalits against caste oppression	Give voice to marginalized communities, raise awareness, mobilize action, challenge dominant narratives, and advocate for social justice and equality

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