

Participatory Journalism in Rural Area: A Case Study of *'Khabar Lahariya'*

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ABSTRACT

Media in its every format has always been a voice to those who are yet to be heard. Some things need to be heard and must be brought out to the whole world to make people aware of their motives and action. 'Khabar Lahariya' is one of those things or matters which people must be aware of. In this Contemporary society, where the term 'woman empowerment' is still batting as a mild joke there 'Khabar Lahariya' is standing as one of the serious successes of human struggle and course to show what a woman can do. 'Khabar Lahariya' is a weekly newspaper brought out by a group of marginalized women from Chitrakoot district of Uttar Pradesh. It is published in various Hindustani dialects, such as Bundeli, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Bhajjikka, etc, and English language. It covers local issues as well as global issues. In their unique style of news covering, 'Khabar Lahariya' has created its unique GLOCAL concept of communication. This research paper will briefly analyse 'Khabar Lahariya's deep relevance in this Contemporary society, 'Khabar Lahariya's journey as a newspaper, their struggle which depicts their courage and their strong backbone and how in a district like Uttar Pradesh women put their efforts and are successfully running their newspaper.

Keywords: Alternative Media, 'Khabar Lahariya', News Coverage, Participatory Journalism.

Introduction

Even in the 21st century, A society where women are still not taken that seriously. It is alas that we are standing in the era of modernization and still women have to prove they can do everything along with household work. After all these years and a lot of achievements, they still have to prove their potential. In this context, Media can be used as a powerful voice for the voiceless. Media is part of the very fabric of society. It takes place at all levels between peoples and between societies. The primary objective of media is to serve the people with accurate, unbiased information and news. In the context of the present scenario in India, mainstream media is prioritizing urban life as compared to rural. News coverage of Rural areas is very little in the dominant media sphere. The mainstream media has been facing constant pressure of profit maximization. To fill the gap between rural people with media, Small Newspapers can play a pivotal role in disseminating news, and views on matters of public interest. For example, a Newspaper like '*Khabar Lahariya*' stands tall as a powerful tool of print journalism for grassroots communication. This eight-page weekly newspaper and brought out by a group of marginalized women from the Chitrakoot district of Uttar Pradesh. '*Khabar Lahariya*'s decade and a-half journey not only represent their bravery and struggle as journalists, not even their struggle as a newspaper run by women of a district like Uttar Pradesh but it also shows the fractured and complex time we are in now.

Generally, a woman is an asset to any society. Once Michelle Obama stated that "In the world full of a real woman, there are still many causes worth sacrifices for, so much history yet to be made". Now, along with '*Khabar Lahariya*' and women's roles in there have together made a stronger approach towards real feminism. Women who are running '*Khabar Lahariya*' are indeed courageous and surely doing something bold, convenient, and relevant to uplift contemporary society. They are simply paving the way for women. They are journalists for people, they are courageous for every woman. They are the stairs of a building named Empowerment and then of course to prove a simple yet ignored truth that women can do everything.

Theoretical Perspectives

Social Responsibility Theory

According to this theory, although the press has a right to criticize the government and other institutions, it also has a responsibility to preserve democracy by properly informing the public and by responding to society's interests and needs (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2002). The most

significant contribution of this theory is its view that it is more important for citizens to have the right access to information than it is for the press to achieve complete freedom of speech (Stanley & Dabis, 2012). '*Khabar Lahariya*' points out development, and put forward the local issues, problems, and agenda of development to fulfil its social responsibility towards journalism.

Democratic Participant Media Theory

The main feature of this theory relates to the needs, interests, and aspirations of the active "receiver" in a political society. It is concerned with the right to relevant information, the right to answer back, and the right to use the means of communication for interaction in small-scale settings of community, interest group, and sub-culture. This theory strongly favours democratic grass-roots involvement and its bottom-up participatory approach (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2002). In rural areas, newspapers like '*Khabar Lahariya*' have set an example that how social participation helps in solving regional problems and taking up development work. Reporters, and editors of '*Khabar Lahariya*' belong to the same community which is needed to be connected to development through News pieces. '*Khabar Lahariya*' has now become a voice of the voiceless because of its role in solving the regional problem for their development (Stanley & Dabis, 2012).

Review of Literature

Diverse Media in Democracy

Diverse media has been said to be central to a healthy democracy. India is one of the biggest democracies in the world. To maintain the plurality of perspectives media should re-present our reality (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2010-2011). In a large country like India, citizens should have access to information and participation in all levels of development. In this context, media should construct a relationship between society and our lives and help to define who we are, our politics, our governments, our societal boundaries, and ourselves. Alternative media are the pillar of democracy as they have been seen to be fundamental in providing diverse content to society. The importance of media diversity to the enrichment of our daily lives cannot be denied.

Mainstream Media versus Alternative Media in India

In the context of the present scenario in India, mainstream media is prioritizing urban life as compared to rural. News coverage of Rural areas is very little in the dominant media sphere. The study conducted by Hoot stated that the mainstream media has been facing constant

pressure of profit maximization. The report analyses the coverage of news among five leading newspaper dailies (The Hindu, Times of India, The Indian Express, Hindustan Times, and The Economic Times) for the period of April-May, 2012. This study shows that these mainstream news cover more urban, mainly cities reporting in comparison to rural events. Also, the news in those 50 issues is majorly political, crime, and sports-related events (Kumar). This report has identified the loophole of mainstream media in terms of news coverage at the grassroots level. To fill up the gap between rural people with media, Alternative media, for example, Small Newspapers can play a pivotal role in disseminating news, and views on matters of public interest. Small or Local newspapers serve as a bridge between grassroots people and with government and the administration. These newspapers publish information generally not seen in the mainstream media and represent the perspectives generally not accepted within the mainstream press. *'Khabar Lahariya'* is one of the thriving examples of alternative journalism. *'Khabar Lahariya'* not only informs people they believe in participation as well.

'Khabar Lahariya': A New Experience

'Khabar Lahariya' is an independent newspaper in India. It is launched in 2002 to bring a sense of empowerment to local media and establish women as journalists in small towns and villages. Initially, it was funded by an organization called 'Nirantar'. However, since July 2013 it is now publishing under the banner of "Women Trust" (Kumar). *'Khabar Lahariya'* is a weekly newspaper run by a group of marginalized women from Chitrakoot district of Uttar Pradesh. It is published in various Hindustani dialects, such as Bundeli, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Bhajjikkaetc and in the English language. They bring stories that need to be told from diverse perspectives into the public domain. In her article Pooja Pande opine that "*'Khabar Lahariya'* strongly believes that the ability of independent media from rural areas to exist and survive is impactful in and of itself. *'Khabar Lahariya'* has received more than 12 awards in the last 15 years" (Pande, *Khabar Lahariya* brings women's voices to rural media in India, 2019). *'Khabar Lahariya'*, the only newspaper run by women, has also received first prize for its website from an international media agency (S, 2022). They believe in diverse definitions of impact. The independent, feminist media can play a pivotal role by telling the story of a violence survivor who wants justice; a victim of dowry murder; or a minor of child marriage-like issues. *'Khabar Lahariya'* faced social and financial challenges. On one hand, it was trying to break the glass ceiling and storm a male bastion; on the other hand, it needed financial stability which was hard to come by. Pande

also added, “Finding women reporters from marginalized communities in rural parts of Uttar Pradesh, one of the most populous but economically underdeveloped states of India, was perhaps only slightly less of a challenge than retaining them” (Pande, *Khabar Lahariya* brings women’s voices to rural media in India, 2019). As an independent rural media house, its biggest impact has been to establish a cadre of full-time women reporters from marginalized communities in areas that still see no women reporters.

Kabar Lahariya is playing a significant role in transforming society and contributing to the establishment of democracy, development, and justice. Increasingly it has been gaining mass acceptance and the establishment of a truly participatory society is much appreciated in the media spectrum. Many small newspapers from different countries are replicating ‘*Khabar Lahariya*’s model to promote development and participatory journalism. In this context, many researchers considered ‘*Khabar Lahariya*’ as an example of “subaltern media” in India.

Aims and Objectives

The study aims to investigate the role of ‘*Khabar Lahariya*’ in the development of the rural area and to analyse the news coverage of a small newspaper in the development process of marginalized and oppressed communities in India.

The objectives of the study are given below:

- To evaluate the role of ‘*Khabar Lahariya*’ to inform people about the recent development in rural India.
- To analyse the news coverage by ‘*Khabar Lahariya*’ in the development process of marginalized and oppressed communities in India.

Methodology

This research study has followed a methodology considering the research approach, philosophy along with research design.

Research Approach

This study is based on the post-positivism approach. Post-positivism is the interaction of external reality and internal perception. Thoughts, constructs, etc. cannot be observed directly but can be inferred from observational data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). In this study post-positivism approach has been used to formulate the objectives.

Research Method

This study is based on the Qualitative data analysis Method. This

research method is all about conceptual findings of qualitative data, which are collected through observations and participant observation or case studies that result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice.

Data Collection

In this study, data has been collected through the news portal of '*Khabar Lahariya*' to analyse the news coverage on several issues. The e-version of the newspaper has been collected using the archives of khabarlahariya.org.

Sampling

The sampling technique used was non-probability purposive saplings which is a sampling technique that researchers use to include participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about one or more than one phenomenon under investigation (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). All the contents which are already published on the '*Khabar Lahariya*' website (khabarlahariya.org) are the population of this research work. A total of 12 articles have been chosen for this study.

Selection Criteria for research article:

- Articles and news are published on the official website of '*Khabar Lahariya*' only.
- Article and news in the English language.

Discussion

'*Khabar Lahariya*'-s objective of reaching out to villages in which other forms of information and entertainment were limited. '*Khabar Lahariya*' put forwards rural developmental news and information. It reports on cases of violence against women and Dalit issues, as well as exposes bureaucratic corruption. It has been enthusiastically worked at, and how the paper is something of a name in the area. '*Khabar Lahariya*' is sold by the reporters and by other agents of the newspapers. Newspaper copies are distributed in the block development office, block headquarters and also available at small shops and tea stalls in remote villages of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The '*Khabar Lahariya*' team includes women from marginalized communities with differing levels of literacy and information. Considerable effort has been made by the reporters in disseminating the message and also, and they have tried to develop their literacy skills along with building capacities of journalists: for instance, their communication and interaction skills in the public sphere, their levels of information and understanding on politics, inputs

on writing and editing and so on. Another considerable challenge has been the lack of established systems of distribution even for mainstream media beyond the towns. Through this study, several major findings have been observed.

Breaking the Stereotype

In the traditional sense, generally, politics is not a domain for women who especially belong to poor, marginalized communities. By entering the field of political journalism '*Khabar Lahariya*' has gained a breakthrough. By reporting on national-level politics from their locations, women are commenting on macro-political events and making their opinions available in the public domain. These challenges the powerful sections of society and their hegemony.

Empowering Grassroots People

'*Khabar Lahariya*' has always been a weapon against cases of violence, bureaucratic negligence, and official apathy, and at the same time, they provide information that the community did not have. '*Khabar Lahariya*' has been conceived to empower the rural people in case of engaging them in the development process. Several newspaper reports are concerned with the highlighted issues like women's deprivation, dowry, and health & hygiene of children and women.

Bringing Progress and Change

Apart from social impacts, and grassroots empowerment, this newspaper has successfully created a deep impact and is bringing positive changes to the lives of women who have been working here. Also, the whole team of '*Khabar Lahariya*' have become reflective about their classes, communities, and identities.

Encouraging Journalism

Several initiatives have been organized for the '*Khabar Lahariya*' reporters to build their skills. It is strengthening their journalism skills, such as reporting, editing, production, and many other productive skills related to journalism. '*Khabar Lahariya*' encourages and promotes participatory journalism. '*Khabar Lahariya*' is the perfect example of how development journalism can uplift the livelihood status of poor, marginalized people.

Conclusion

'*Khabar Lahariya*' has become a synonym for journalism of public matters in the rural areas of Chitrakoot district of Uttar Pradesh. In a scenario where mainstream media has not reached those remote areas, an alternative medium like '*Khabar Lahariya*' is playing the role of

subaltern media with its commitment to justice and democracy. Several reports published in '*Khabar Lahariya*' help people and serve as a guide for the policymakers to redress the issues and formulate effective strategies to resolve the problems. '*Khabar Lahariya*' is a unique example of transformative education. It has enabled rural, Dalit, newly-literate women to create employment and economically empower them. Considerable effort is made, therefore, to obtain gender equality and equal accessibility at all levels of decision-making. The public arena of media and information creation is dominated by small but powerful groups in society. The media spectrum is previously controlled and structured by ruling groups, now the gender ratio is increasingly developing positively. '*Khabar Lahariya*' is doing the same with an innovative approach, it strengthens grassroots democracy and challenges gender and caste relations. Its investigative style of reportage not only makes it popular with its readers but is also important in putting in place a culture of accountability and transparency.

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