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CENSORSHIP, VOICE, AND RESISTANCE: A HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES APPROACH TO INDIAN JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT

In India, political influence, economic pressure, cultural hierarchy, and quickly developing digital technology all impact the complicated framework in which journalism operates. Together, these factors result in a variety of censoring tactics, some overt and authorized by law, others covert, internalized, and ingrained in regular journalistic operations. The manifestation of censorship in modern Indian journalism is examined in this essay, along with the ways in which journalists negotiate, oppose, and reinterpret these limitations. The study contends that journalism in India is not just a profession but a dynamic space of conflict where meaning, identity, and power constantly intersect by fusing Humanities perspectives on discourse, identity, and representation with Social Sciences approaches to political economy, institutional power, and sociology of professions. Indian journalists continue to use acts of bravery, creative storytelling, group unity, and alternative media techniques to make their voices heard despite systemic obstacles. In the end, Indian journalism is characterized by a persistent conflict between vulnerability and agency, quiet and expression, and suppression and resistance.

KEYWORDS: Censorship, Voice, Resistance, Indian Journalism, Humanities, Social Sciences, Media Freedom, Political Economy, Digital Harassment, Public Sphere.

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest, most varied, most politically active media environments in the world is found in India. India seems to have a pluralistic and democratic communication environment, with hundreds of television stations, thousands of newspapers, and an expanding digital

media ecosystem. However, beneath this surface, a variety of censoring practices have a significant impact on journalism, influencing the framing of stories, the amplification or silencing of voices, and the kind of public discussions that take place.

In India, censorship cannot be reduced to a top-down government initiative. Rather, it is a multi-layered, distributed process that involves many different actors, including state institutions, corporate media owners, social media platforms, political parties, extremist organizations, and even audiences. More covert types of "soft censorship," such as self-censorship, editorial pressure, market-driven news selection, and digital harassment, have become widespread, even as overt censorship still occurs in the form of government prohibitions, legal notices, FIRs, and regulatory actions.

Discourse analysis shows how language shapes public opinion; narrative theory looks at how stories reflect ideology; and feminist and postcolonial theories show whose voices are heard and whose are silenced. The humanities provide useful tools to comprehend this terrain. In the meantime, frameworks from the social sciences—particularly political economy, institutional sociology, and communication studies—explain why censorship endures structurally: media ownership concentration, reliance on advertising, and political-business partnerships create weaknesses that jeopardize editorial independence.

However, censorship is never total. From the colonial-era freedom movement to the Emergency, from exposing corruption scandals to recording violations of human rights, Indian journalism has a long history of speaking truth to power. Resistance is still being redefined today by independent digital platforms, cooperative investigative initiatives, citizen journalism networks, and grassroots reporting. In the face of threats, surveillance, and public animosity, journalists—particularly women, minorities, and independent reporters—display amazing bravery.

In this essay, censorship and resistance are seen as forces that shape each other. It makes the case that journalism in India is not just a profession but also a place where ethics, creativity, power, and identity come together. The study, which takes a Humanities and Social Sciences approach, shows that Indian journalists do more than just record events; they also negotiate meaning, question dominance, and push the limits of democratic discourse.

Review of Literature

Scholarship on censorship and journalism highlights that modern censorship has moved beyond bans and prohibitions. Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model demonstrates how media systems are shaped by ownership, advertising, and political interests. In the Indian context, Jeffrey (2010) argues that corporate consolidation has created new forms of ideological alignment between media houses and political power.

Foucault's (1978) concept of power as dispersed and embedded in social practices helps explain how censorship can become internalised by journalists. Butler (1997) further argues that language is deeply tied to power and identity, shaping both what is said and what remains unsayable.

Indian scholarship by Thakurta (2020) shows that pressures on journalists include legal harassment, intimidation by political actors, and editorial interference. Feminist scholars such as Roy (2018) and Joseph (2021) highlight how gendered harassment functions as a form of censorship that disproportionately affects women journalists, especially those reporting on politics, human rights, and marginalised communities.

Digital media research by Udupa and Mohan (2018) shows that online trolling, algorithmic bias, and platform governance create new forms of censorship even as they allow alternative voices to flourish. The literature collectively suggests that censorship in Indian journalism must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, interdisciplinary methodology combining:

1. Humanities Approaches

Discourse analysis of media narratives

Critical theory on representation, identity, and power

Narrative inquiry into journalists' lived experiences

2. Social Sciences Approaches

Political economy of media ownership

Institutional analysis of newsroom practices

Sociology of professions

3. Data Sources

Secondary analysis of research papers, reports, and case studies

Documentation from press freedom organization

Analysis of interviews and testimonies available in public domains

This integrated approach captures both the structural constraints and the human agency that shape Indian journalism.

Interpretive analysis

The study's conclusions show that censorship in Indian media is a dynamic cultural and political process rather than a unique occurrence. An interpretive analysis enables us to comprehend how journalists read these limitations and react to them in their social contexts. Only when censorship is analyzed via the lived experiences, identity negotiations, and symbolic battles of journalists who work within overlapping networks of power does it become meaningful from the standpoint of the humanities and social sciences. Therefore, interpretive analysis moves the emphasis from quantifying censorship as an outside force to comprehending it as a phenomenon ingrained in daily routines, professional beliefs, and storytelling practices.

In ways influenced by their identities, ethics, and institutional positions, journalists understand, absorb, resist, and occasionally strategically adapt to censorship.

This study demonstrates how journalists view censorship as a combination of cultural norms, commercial pressures, and editorial hierarchies that determine what is deemed "publishable," in addition to government pressure. Political pressure is often seen by reporters as a continuation of larger socio-political narratives that portray dissent as increasingly anti-national. Their professional decision-making is impacted by this interpretive framework; some react more cautiously, while others are more dedicated to critical reporting. In a similar vein, journalists frequently interpret market-driven censoring as a compromise between ethical obligation and financial survival. Advertising demands, owner interests, and audience analytics are described as narratives that influence which stories are prized and which are marginalized, rather than just as external limitations. By using this perspective, the newsroom becomes a place where reporters seek to maintain their independence in the face of structural constraints and interpret conflicting agendas.

Interpreting technological restriction through lived experience also gives it a greater significance. Online harassment and digital surveillance are described by journalists, particularly women and independent reporters, as a type of psychological and emotional

restriction that affects how comfortable they feel expressing themselves in public. But they also see digital spaces as arenas of resistance, where new avenues for publishing critical stories are made possible by collective campaigns, alternative media, and international cooperation. This duality—technology as both liberating and repressive—becomes a key issue for interpretation. Journalists view themselves as both powerful actors who use digital tools to reach larger audiences, get around gatekeepers, and expose injustice, and as susceptible targets of cyberattacks.

Journalists view censorship culturally through the prisms of moral obligation, identification, and belonging. Many say that their opposition to censorship is shaped by a sense of obligation to oppressed groups or democratic ideals. Others portray censorship as a struggle between professional responsibilities and personal principles, especially when newsroom bosses put pressure on individuals to change or drop stories. According to these readings, censorship is negotiated within the informal power structures and cultural norms of journalistic institutions rather than being imposed from above. Colleagues, mentors, and activist groups are examples of informal solidarity networks that reporters frequently turn to in order to understand these pressures and formulate resistance tactics. These networks serve as interpretive communities that offer practical assistance, moral counsel, and emotional affirmation.

A key interpretive finding of this research is that resistance is not a uniform or heroic act but a Through the lenses of moral duty, identity, and belonging, journalists examine censorship from a cultural perspective. Many claim that their resistance to censorship stems from democratic values or a sense of duty to persecuted populations. Others depict censorship as a conflict between personal values and professional obligations, particularly when newspaper managers exert pressure on staff members to alter or remove stories. These readings suggest that rather than being imposed from above, censorship is negotiated inside the informal power structures and cultural norms of journalistic institutions. Reporters sometimes rely on informal solidarity networks, such as activist groups, mentors, and coworkers, to comprehend these constraints and develop strategies for resistance. These networks function as interpretive communities that provide emotional support, moral guidance, and helpful advice. An interpretive lens also contributes to the explanation of why censorship does not result in consistent silence. Journalists create personal narratives to support their decisions, and these narratives have an impact on how they deal with limitations. For instance, some use a rights-

based language to frame their work, viewing themselves as protectors of free speech, while others use professional standards like impartiality, justice, and public service to justify their opposition. In constrained settings, these internal narratives serve as tools for meaning-making that support journalists in retaining their feeling of autonomy.

Ultimately, interpretive analysis shows that the symbolic force of voice, narrative, and unity, in addition to control mechanisms, shapes Indian media. Collective resistance is fueled by journalists' interpretation of their profession as a part of a broader democratic battle. Journalists use alternate channels to cooperate, create, and reclaim public space even when institutional censorship restricts individual action. Thus, comprehending the intricate terrain of Indian journalism requires a grasp of the junction of meaning, identity, and power. According to this interpretation, censorship appears as a condition against which journalism constantly redefines itself, reinforcing its position as an essential democratic practice, rather than as a force that silences journalists.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Rise of Soft Censorship

Editorial pressure, political influence, advertiser-driven suppression, and organizational self-censorship are examples of "soft" kinds of censorship that Indian journalists are increasingly subjected to. The limits of acceptable discourse are shaped by these subtle but powerful mechanisms.

2. Structural Control through Ownership and Politics

There is a contradiction between journalistic ethics and institutional allegiance since large corporate-owned media outlets have strong ties to political power. When covering delicate subjects like elections, religious strife, corruption, or marginalized groups, reporters frequently encounter editorial gatekeeping.

3. Digital Harassment and Algorithmic Silencing

Minority voices, independent reporters, and female journalists are disproportionately targeted by character insults, threats, and trolling. Through opaque algorithms, digital platforms elevate some narratives while suppressing others, resulting in a new kind of technological censorship.

4. Legal and Regulatory Pressures

Journalists are often intimidated by laws pertaining to sedition, defamation, and public order. Self-censorship is encouraged, particularly in smaller towns and rural newsrooms, by the fear of legal repercussions.

5. Everyday Acts of Resistance

Through independent web portals, cooperative investigative journalism, data journalism initiatives, and innovative narrative, journalists manage to resist these constraints. Collective action, such as public campaigns for press freedom, online solidarity networks, and journalist unions, can also give rise to resistance.

6. Humanities Insight: Voice as Identity

Resistance is intensely personal as well as political. Journalists describe writing the truth as an ethical and emotional obligation. Their voice becomes an integral part of who they are, making censorship an assault on personal integrity as well as a professional limitation.

CONCLUSION

Indian journalism censorship is intricate, multifaceted, and intricately linked to the nation's political, economic, technological, and cultural landscape. It is created by a web of power relationships involving the government, businesses, internet platforms, journalistic hierarchies, and social conventions rather than being merely imposed from above. The tales that journalists tell, the language they employ, and the voices they amplify or silence are all shaped by these factors in their day-to-day lives. However, in spite of these limitations, Indian media still exhibits incredible fortitude.

Censorship is contested by journalists nationwide in both overt and covert ways. They continue to cover delicate topics in spite of legal threats, reveal corruption in spite of the possibility of political reprisals, and record violations of human rights in spite of negative public opinion. Their persistence on revealing the truth is a sign of both moral bravery and professional dedication.

Journalism is a fundamentally human endeavor, as demonstrated by a Humanities and Social Sciences approach. It entails moral decisions, emotional labor, and ongoing identity negotiation. Journalists do more than just report facts; they also create meaning, influence public perception, and contribute to the country's democratic imagination. They are

upholding their identity as storytellers, witnesses, and defenders of public accountability in addition to preserving freedom of expression when they oppose censorship.

Through creativity, narrative experimentation, and alternative media activities, journalistic resistance endures even under constrictive settings. Social media activism, community journalism projects, independent digital channels, and cooperative investigations have all developed into potent instruments of resistance and voice. Counter-narratives may be disseminated, marginalized perspectives can be heard, and democratic engagement can be increased in these settings.

Therefore, the landscape of Indian journalism is defined not just by its limitations but also by the tenacious efforts of journalists who do not want to be silent. The continual conflict between restriction and resistance is what makes Indian journalism so vibrant. The democratic spirit of Indian society will endure as long as journalists speak, write, question, and observe.

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