



Role of Hindi Journalism in the Protection of Human Rights: A Study with Special Reference to the Hathras Case

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Abstract

Human rights and journalism share a strong relationship in democratic societies because journalism performs functions beyond reporting news. It informs citizens, highlights injustice and creates public discussions on issues related to equality, dignity and justice. In India, Hindi journalism holds special importance because it reaches a large population living in villages, small towns and semi-urban areas where local issues often receive attention before entering national discussions. Hindi newspapers and regional media platforms have a wide social presence, making them important instruments for spreading awareness about rights and social responsibilities.

Hindi journalism has contributed significantly to bringing attention to issues such as caste discrimination, violence against women, labour exploitation, farmer distress, freedom of expression and social inequality. Reports from district correspondents and local journalists frequently introduce concerns related to marginalized communities into wider public debates. This process helps connect local experiences with administrative institutions and increases visibility of rights-related issues. Media reporting has also contributed to discussions that encourage inquiries, public responses and institutional accountability.



This study examines the role of Hindi journalism in the protection and promotion of human rights through reporting, awareness creation and public participation. The paper analyses how media coverage influences social understanding and strengthens democratic values. It also discusses the contribution of regional journalism in representing voices that often remain underreported, including Dalits, women, labourers and rural communities.

Special attention has been given to the Hathras case of 2020, which became an important example in understanding the relationship between media and human rights. The incident, which began as a local issue in a village setting, gradually developed into a national discussion concerning caste inequality, women's safety, human dignity and institutional responsibility. Continuous reporting by regional and national media expanded the debate beyond a criminal event and placed it within the larger framework of social justice and human rights.

The research follows a descriptive and qualitative approach using secondary sources such as news reports, human rights literature, academic studies and case analyses. The study argues that Hindi journalism functions not only as a medium of information but also as an important democratic tool that promotes awareness, encourages accountability and supports the protection of human rights. Despite challenges such as commercialization, misinformation and pressure on independent reporting, Hindi journalism continues to play a significant role in strengthening human rights discourse in India.

Keywords: Hindi Journalism, Human Rights, Media Ethics, Hathras Case, Dalit Rights, Social Justice, Human Rights Reporting

Introduction:

Human rights are the fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to every individual regardless of caste, gender, religion, language, economic condition or social status. These rights are essential for ensuring equality, dignity and justice in society. Human rights include the right to life, freedom of expression, education, equality before law, protection from exploitation and access to opportunities. At the international level, the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 established global standards for the protection of human dignity. In India, these principles are reflected in the Fundamental Rights guaranteed under the Constitution, especially Articles 14 to 21, which provide equality, freedom and protection against discrimination.



In democratic societies, journalism plays an important role in protecting these rights. The media is often called the “Fourth Pillar of Democracy” because it works alongside the legislature, executive and judiciary in maintaining transparency and accountability. Journalism not only provides information but also acts as a watchdog by exposing injustice, questioning institutions and creating public awareness. Through reporting, investigations and public debates, media helps society identify violations related to caste discrimination, gender inequality, labour exploitation and social exclusion.

India possesses one of the largest and most diverse media systems in the world. The country has thousands of registered newspapers and periodicals published in different languages. Among them, Hindi occupies a significant position because it is one of the most widely spoken languages in India. According to population and language data, Hindi is used by a large section of the population across northern and central India, giving Hindi journalism an extensive social reach. Hindi newspapers also account for a major share of newspaper readership in the country, making Hindi media highly influential in shaping public opinion and social discussions.

The importance of Hindi journalism becomes even greater because a large proportion of India’s population lives outside major metropolitan centres. Rural and semi-urban regions often depend more on regional language media than English-language platforms. Hindi newspapers, local editions, district correspondents, television channels and digital portals frequently become the first sources of information in these areas. Many discussions related to human rights begin at the local level and later reach national attention through regional reporting.

Historically, Hindi journalism has maintained a close relationship with social change. The beginning of organized Hindi journalism is associated with Udant Martand, published in 1826, which marked an important stage in the development of vernacular journalism in India. During the freedom movement, Hindi newspapers contributed to national awareness and social reform by discussing issues such as colonial oppression, education, women’s participation and social inequality. Journalists and editors used newspapers not only to provide information but also to encourage public consciousness and collective action.

After independence, the focus of journalism gradually shifted towards democracy, development and constitutional rights. Hindi media increasingly reported issues involving caste violence, land disputes, bonded labour, farmer movements, women’s rights and marginalized



communities. Over time, regional journalism developed as an important bridge between local experiences and national institutions. The expansion of television journalism in the 1990s and the growth of digital media in the twenty-first century further increased the influence of Hindi journalism. Today, news reaches audiences through newspapers, television channels, websites, mobile applications and social media platforms. This transformation has increased the speed of reporting and expanded the visibility of local issues. Incidents occurring in villages or small towns can now become subjects of national discussion within a short period.

Hindi journalism has played an important role in highlighting several major human rights concerns in recent years. Issues such as violence against women, caste discrimination, farmer distress, labour migration during the COVID-19 period, environmental conflicts and freedom of expression have received extensive attention in regional reporting. Many incidents first reported by local journalists later developed into larger national debates.

One significant example is the Hathras case of 2020, which originated in a village of Uttar Pradesh and later became one of the most discussed human rights issues in India. Media coverage expanded the discussion from a local incident to broader questions concerning caste inequality, women's safety, dignity and institutional accountability. The case demonstrated the ability of journalism to transform local experiences into national human rights conversations.

The role of Hindi journalism in protecting human rights becomes highly significant. It functions not only as a source of information but also as an instrument of awareness, representation and democratic accountability. By bringing marginalized voices into public discussion and connecting local realities with wider social institutions, Hindi journalism continues to contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights in contemporary India.

Objectives of the Study:

- Study the role of Hindi journalism in protecting human rights.
- Understand how the media creates awareness regarding rights issues.
- Analyse important human rights cases reported in Hindi media.
- Examine the role of hindi journalism in the Hathras incident.
- Identify challenges before human rights reporting.



Research Methodology:

This paper follows a descriptive and qualitative approach. Information has been collected from:

- News reports
- Human rights documents
- Media studies
- Case reports
- Secondary literature and articles

The method focuses on interpretation and case analysis rather than statistical modelling.

Evolution of Hindi Journalism and Human Rights Perspective:

The development of Hindi journalism has been closely associated with social reform, public awareness and democratic participation in India. The history of Hindi journalism began with Udan Martand, launched on 30 May 1826 from Calcutta by Pandit Jugal Kishore Shukla. Although the newspaper survived for only a short period because of financial difficulties and limited circulation, it established the foundation of Hindi-language journalism in India.

During the colonial period, journalism became an important tool against oppression and social inequality. Newspapers and magazines published in Hindi participated in discussions related to education reforms, women's rights, social justice and national consciousness. Journalists used print media to spread awareness among people who had limited access to English publications. The press gradually became associated with reform movements and the freedom struggle.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hindi journalism expanded significantly through literary and social publications. Newspapers highlighted issues such as child marriage, widow remarriage, women's education and caste discrimination. Journalism was no longer limited to information sharing; it became a medium of social awakening and public participation.

After India gained independence in 1947, the role of journalism changed from anti-colonial resistance to democratic development and constitutional awareness. The focus shifted toward subjects related to equality, public welfare and citizen rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India. Human rights issues gradually became central areas of reporting.



Hindi journalism contributed to human rights protection in several important fields:

1. Reporting Caste Discrimination and Social Inequality

Caste discrimination remains one of the major social challenges in India. Hindi newspapers and regional reporters have continuously highlighted incidents involving caste violence, discrimination and exclusion. Reports from villages and district editions often bring attention to issues that may not immediately reach national media.

According to crime statistics released in recent years, thousands of cases are registered annually under laws related to atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Media reporting has played an important role in bringing these incidents into public discussion and increasing awareness regarding equality and social justice.

The Hathras case (2020) became one of the strongest examples where regional reporting transformed a local village incident into a national human rights debate involving caste discrimination and institutional accountability.

2. Coverage of Violence Against Women

Women's rights have remained an important area within Hindi journalism. Reports related to sexual violence, domestic abuse, harassment and gender inequality frequently receive attention through newspapers, television channels and digital platforms.

India records tens of thousands of cases related to crimes against women every year. These include incidents involving assault, domestic violence and harassment. Media coverage has contributed to public discussions regarding women's safety, legal reforms and institutional responsibility. Major incidents involving gender violence often become national issues after continuous reporting by regional and national media. Hindi journalism has therefore played an important role in creating awareness regarding gender justice and human dignity.

3. Highlighting Labour Exploitation and Migrant Issues

Labour rights became a major topic particularly during the COVID-19 period. The migration crisis during the nationwide lockdown exposed challenges faced by workers including unemployment, food insecurity and transportation difficulties. Hindi journalists working on the ground reported stories of migrant workers travelling long distances on foot, inadequate access to resources and economic hardships. These reports brought labour rights into national discussion.



The coverage expanded debates related to:

- Right to livelihood
- Social protection
- Employment security
- Welfare measures

4. Reporting Custodial Deaths and Police Action

Human rights journalism also includes monitoring state institutions. Hindi media has reported cases involving custodial deaths, alleged police excesses and administrative negligence.

Reports on custodial violence raise questions regarding:

- Right to life
- Due legal process
- Institutional accountability
- Protection against abuse of authority

Many cases that begin as local incidents gain wider attention because district-level journalists continue coverage even when resources are limited.

Role of Regional Reporting in Human Rights Protection:

One of the strongest features of Hindi journalism is its regional network. India has thousands of villages and many human rights concerns emerge outside metropolitan areas. Local correspondents and district reporters frequently become the first people to document incidents involving discrimination, violence and exploitation.

These reporters often work with limited resources but contribute significantly to human rights reporting. Many important stories that later become national debates initially appear in local editions.

The Hathras incident of 2020 clearly demonstrated this role. What began as reporting from a small village in Uttar Pradesh gradually expanded into a nationwide discussion on caste inequality, women's safety, dignity and administrative accountability.

Hindi journalism has continuously adapted to changing social realities while maintaining its role as a platform for public awareness and social justice. Today, it remains an important medium connecting marginalized voices with democratic institutions and human rights discourse.



Hindi Journalism as a Protector of Human Rights:

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has itself recognized the media as an important partner in identifying human rights violations. NHRC noted that media reports frequently help in exposing negligence, abuse and denial of rights, and even lead to suo motu action in some cases. The Commission also highlighted the importance of vernacular media in bringing attention to neglected regions and communities.

Giving Voice to Marginalized Communities

A major contribution of Hindi journalism is representation. Dalits, tribal communities, women and rural populations often receive attention through local language reporting. For example, reports on manual scavenging, bonded labour and caste violence became subjects of public discussion because regional journalists continued coverage even when national attention was limited. Many stories from villages first appear in district editions before reaching national media. This makes Hindi journalism an important bridge between local communities and institutions. NHRC has observed that mainstream media often overlooks issues affecting Dalits, Adivasis, women and the rural poor, while regional and vernacular journalism continues reporting these concerns.

Creating Public Pressure and Institutional Action

Hindi journalism does not only report incidents; it also influences public discussion and administrative response. Continuous media reporting leads to Human rights investigations, Court monitoring, Compensation announcements, Government inquiries, NHRC intervention. For example, in several cases NHRC has taken notice after issues became visible through media reports. The Commission specifically acknowledges media reporting as an important source in identifying rights violations.

Human Rights Awareness Among Citizens

Hindi newspapers, television channels, digital news portals and community journalism regularly publish information related to constitutional rights, government schemes and social issues. Through reports, interviews, debates and ground coverage, citizens become aware of issues that directly affect their lives.

Hindi journalism also helps people understand social problems that may otherwise remain invisible. Reports on manual scavenging, caste discrimination, farmer distress and



displacement due to development projects have expanded public understanding of human dignity and social justice.

An important example is the Hathras case (2020). Media reporting moved the discussion beyond a criminal incident and raised questions related to gender justice, caste inequality and human dignity. The case showed how journalism can transform local issues into national conversations on rights and accountability.

However, awareness still faces challenges. Lack of education, misinformation, digital inequality and social barriers often limit people's understanding of their rights, especially in rural regions.

Hathras Case: Human Rights and Role of Hindi Journalism:

The Hathras incident of 2020 became one of the most debated human rights cases in contemporary India and received widespread national as well as international attention. The incident took place in September 2020 in Hathras, where a 19-year-old woman belonging to a Scheduled Caste family was seriously injured and later died during treatment in Delhi. The case quickly became a major public issue because it involved questions related to caste discrimination, violence against women, human dignity and institutional accountability.

Initially, the incident received limited attention outside the local area. Information first emerged through district-level reporting and regional Hindi newspapers. Local journalists and Hindi news channels played an important role in bringing details of the incident into public discussion. As media coverage expanded, the issue moved from a village-level crime report to a national debate concerning social justice and human rights.

One of the major reasons the case attracted widespread attention was the controversy surrounding the late-night cremation of the victim. Reports suggested that the cremation was conducted in the presence of police and administrative authorities while family members raised objections regarding the process. Images, field reports and continuous television coverage intensified public discussion and generated serious questions regarding dignity and procedural transparency.

The incident also highlighted concerns related to caste-based violence in India. According to crime data published in recent years, thousands of cases related to crimes against Scheduled Castes are registered annually across the country. Human rights organizations and social



activists argued that the Hathras case reflected broader structural issues involving caste discrimination and unequal access to justice. Hindi journalism played a significant role in connecting the incident with larger debates concerning Dalit rights and social inequality.

The case also raised important questions regarding institutional response and access to justice. Several journalists reported restrictions, heavy police presence and administrative control in the village during the early stages of the investigation. This further increased media attention and public debate concerning transparency and democratic accountability. The National Human Rights Commission took suo motu cognizance of the matter and sought detailed reports from state authorities. The Commission observed that the incident raised serious human rights concerns and required careful examination. Media reporting played an important role in maintaining national attention on the issue during the investigation process.

Hindi television debates, newspaper editorials and digital news platforms continuously discussed themes related to:

- Gender violence in rural India
- Social exclusion and caste hierarchy
- Institutional sensitivity toward victims
- Role of police and administration

The Hathras case also demonstrated the growing influence of digital Hindi journalism. News videos, mobile reporting and social media updates allowed information to spread rapidly across regions. Hashtags, online debates and public reactions transformed the case into one of the most discussed topics in Indian media during 2020.

Another important aspect of the case was the role of regional journalism in influencing national discourse. Many national discussions began after local correspondents and Hindi reporters highlighted the seriousness of the issue. This reflected the importance of regional media networks in identifying and reporting human rights violations occurring outside metropolitan areas.

The incident further strengthened debates regarding women's safety in India. Crime reports related to violence against women continue to remain a major social concern, and the Hathras case became part of broader discussions regarding legal protection, social attitudes and



institutional response mechanisms. Media attention ensured that the issue remained within public discourse for an extended period.

At the same time, the case also exposed challenges within journalism itself. Different media organizations presented varying interpretations of events, leading to debates regarding media ethics, sensationalism and political polarization. This demonstrated both the power and limitations of contemporary media environments.

Challenges Before Hindi Journalism in Human Rights Protection:

Political Pressure: Media organizations may face influence from political groups, which can affect independent reporting.

Sensationalism: Human rights issues are sometimes presented dramatically to gain attention rather than focusing on facts.

Commercialization: Competition for TRP and readership may reduce serious and investigative reporting.

Misinformation: The fast spread of news on digital platforms increases the risk of false or unverified information.

Limited Rural Resources: Many local reporters work with fewer resources, which affects detailed human rights coverage.

These challenges influence the effectiveness of Hindi journalism in protecting human rights.

Conclusion:

Hindi journalism has played an important role in protecting and promoting human rights in India by bringing social issues into public discussion and giving voice to marginalized communities. Through newspapers, television channels and digital platforms, it has highlighted issues such as caste discrimination, violence against women, labour exploitation, farmer distress and social inequality.

The Hathras case demonstrated how regional and Hindi media can transform a local incident into a national debate on human dignity, gender justice and institutional accountability. Continuous media coverage helped increase public awareness and encouraged wider discussions on human rights.

Although Hindi journalism faces challenges such as political pressure, sensationalism, commercialization and misinformation, it continues to function as an important democratic



institution. Its strong reach in rural and semi-urban areas makes it an effective medium for spreading awareness, encouraging accountability and strengthening democratic values in India. Therefore, Hindi journalism is not only a source of information but also an important tool for the protection and promotion of human rights in contemporary society.

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