

## An Open letter to Rajdeep Sardesai

To,  
Rajdeep Sardesai,  
Editor-in-Chief,  
CNN-IBN and IBN 7

Dear Rajdeep,

Do not get surprised by this open letter written by one of your million viewers. Yes, I know it is established Journalists like you who normally write open letters to celebrities. But then two gigantic and yet contrasting incidents that took place in last few weeks made me go for this exercise. I chose you since you are the latest and perhaps youngest of the Media tycoons. But then, this letter equally applies to others in the same business.

1. 2 Oct 2006: The Golden Jubilee of conversion to Buddhism at Nagpur.
2. 29 Sep 2006: The gruesome rape and killing of four Dalits in Bhandara, Maharashtra.

Both events that took place in Vidharbha, Maharashtra were very critical to the entire Dalit-Buddhist movement in India. While the former was a cause of major celebrations for Dalits and Buddhists, the latter was a terrible shock to them. However, they both exposed the grossly biased “Global Age” News medium like yours. Here is how.

### 1. Ignoring the DhammaChakra

Every year Dalits and Buddhists gather at Nagpur to remember 14<sup>th</sup> Oct 1956. They number anywhere from 800,000 to 10,00,000. According to solar calendar, this is the day when Dr Ambedkar led the biggest conversion sans bloodshed or allurements in the history of the world. On that day alone, around 500,000 Dalits had converted to Buddhism leaving behind the cobwebs of caste ridden Hindu society.



A section of the mammoth crowd at DeekshaBhoomi, Nagpur on 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct with an illuminated Stupa at the background.  
(Courtesy: Loksatta, Marathi Daily)

But this year, an estimated 2 Million, yes, a whopping 20, 00,000 people gathered from across the world to mark the 50th year of Dhamma Chakra Pravartan din on 2nd October! According to local reports, some 200,000 Buddhist *Bhikkhus* (Monks) wearing saffron clothes, forming a 6 Km

long chain took the procession turning the entire orange city into saffron and blue. The Celebrations lasted for more than a week.

Now, for an Indian media- that is always looking for something sensational- that's a huge gathering, isn't it? And how many white collar Journalists holding Handy Cams from the leading electronic media turn up, including your own? None! Reason? Ignorance? No. It is what I call an absolute boycott!



Buddhist Monks at the Procession as an Ambedkarite offers them water. Nagpur, 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct 2006.  
(Photo Courtesy ACJP).

Like the Upper caste villagers boycott Dalits in Villages, their caste Hindu counterparts in the media boycott almost everything that is related to Dalits. Otherwise, which news channel in the world would ignore such a huge gathering, repeatedly? Annual gathering of around a million people on 6<sup>th</sup> December at Chaityabhoomi, Mumbai - where Dr Ambedkar's last rights were performed - is also never reported. Since the people who gather at these two places are Dalits, Adivasis and Buddhists, they get blocked. But a Hindu festivals like Ganesh festival or Kumbh Mela gets not only full coverage by the Media but discussions and special features running for hours. As I write, your website [www.ibnlive.com](http://www.ibnlive.com) opens with a Happy Diwali page.

## **2. Ghatkopar, Seoni, Jajjhar, Kherlanji..the shame continues!**

On Sep 29, in one of the most gruesome and dreadful incidents of Dalit atrocities, Bhaiyyalal Bhootmange, a Dalit-Buddhist farmer in Kherlanji (Bhandara, Maharashtra) witnessed his wife Surekha (44), daughter Priyanka (18), sons, Roshan, 23, and Sudhir, 21 being killed by the Landlords in front of the villagers. Worst, the mother and daughter were first paraded naked; gang raped, and then sticks were pushed into their private parts. The sons were stabbed repeatedly and their private parts mutilated. And what was their fault? Surekha had dared to fight for getting back a portion of their farm, which was grabbed by the landlords.



Bhaiyyalal and Sudan, Surekha's sister, are inconsolable. Photo Courtesy- DNA.

The local police and doctors completely covered up this incident but the Ambedkarites made sure the news of this cruelty spread like wild fire amid the Golden Jubilee celebrations. DNA (Daily News and Analysis) was the only English daily that published this news and that too after 18 days! Seeing the hue and cry, not among media but the people, some VIP politicians including Dy. CM R.R. Patil visited this place after weeks and made some arrest drama and suspension of local police officers. But knowing the history of the Maharashtra government's handling of Ramabai Case (Killing of 10 Dalits by Police in Mumbai in 1997), I do not believe the culprits will be brought to book.

Just see the scale of atrocities against Dalits. India's National Crime Records Bureau working under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Home affairs has reported that in the year 2005 alone, 26,127 crimes were committed against SC/ST's including 1172 rape against Dalit women and 669 cases of Murder (Reference: <http://ncrb.nic.in>). To summarise, every day, while three Dalit women are raped and two Dalits are murdered, two Dalit homes get torched. If you add to this the thousands of unreported cases, the picture is abysmally inconceivable!

And how does the News media, including your own medium, react to the above facts and figures? While a soft atrocity news like "Dalit Entry banned in Hindu Temples" gets a little space once in a while, graver issues like daily rape and massacre of Dalits constituting about 1/4<sup>th</sup> of India's population are literally ignored. As if this section of population means nothing to you. Why no news channel, ever holds any discussions on "How to stop atrocities on Dalits"? If this is not Media's discrimination based on caste, what else is it? You, the news medium, is as responsible for these inhuman crimes as the Kheranjali oppressors by just being selective and dishonest.

Such is the intensity of this inhuman caste-killing in Bhandara that the world media took the cognizant of it. Some western Human Rights based organizations like ACJP (Ambedkar Center for Justice and Peace) who take up atrocity cases in India are going to publish a detailed report on this case soon. And your continued blockage of such incidents will not only expose your bias but also raise question on your ethics and compatibility.

What a Shame, Rajdeep! Having shown a balanced opinion on the OBC quota issue by highlighting the pro-reservation side too, you had us believe that you were going to be a moral and diversified media face. But now it is clearer that such tactics were aimed at merely adding some extra spice for your politics loving class. I had always believed in power of the Media but I

am realizing now that if it is run by an upper caste establishment then it is not more than a 'Money-Machine'. And this is where the now famous proverbial label "Manuwadi" fits best.

If you feel you have been at fault, then better be late than never. Cover the Kherlanji case and its legal proceedings. Awake the people on the gruesome caste realities in India. Telecast a half and hour program dedicated specially to Dalit atrocities every week. Send your stylist English speaking field reporters to the remotest part where Dalits are suffering and order them to cover unbiased news and help the due process of Justice. Will you?

Remember Media is one of strongest pillars of democracy. Strengthen it.

Only then you would be doing your true duty! And then Dalits would forgive you, since they believe in Buddha's teaching of forgiveness.

There is still time, Rajdeep!

With Metta Bhavana (Loving Kindness),

Ravikiran Shinde,  
Columbus, Ohio  
USA.