

## Hindi News Channels Hype Anti-reservation Rhetoric

- ★ **On average over 62 per cent of all news on OBC reservation issue originated from Delhi**
- ★ **Only two out of five channels – NDTV and Doordarshan – in our study presented some kind of discussion on OBC reservation issue**
- ★ **The percentage of anti-quota news to the entire coverage of the issue varied from 63.70 per cent on Sahara Samay to 50 per cent on Aaj Tak. In contrast, the coverage of pro-quota ranged from 13 per cent on NDTV to the low of 5.5 per cent on Aaj Tak.**

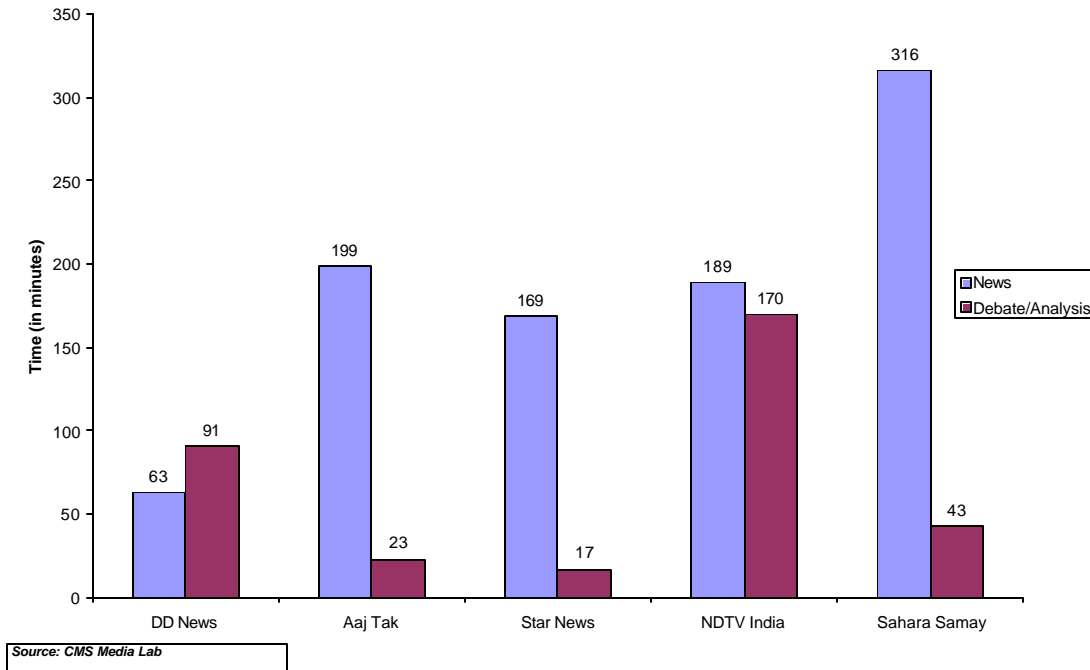
More than 50 per cent of the entire TV news coverage on the controversy over 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in the government institutes of higher learning was on anti-quota agitation; 62 per cent of all news on reservation issue emanated from Delhi. This finding emerged from CMS Media Lab's news tracking programme that monitors prime time news of five Hindi news channels - DD News, NDTV, Aaj Tak, Star News, and Sahara Samay with a collective TV news viewership of about 77 per cent in the northern region. The reservation issue was trekked from April 5 to May 24.

CMS Media Lab found polarization in the media coverage on the reservation issue, which is reflected both in the tone and tenor of the programmes broadcast as well as the audience provided to the two sides. DD news coverage on this aspect was relatively balanced. Further, barring NDTV and Doordarshan News, others almost shunned any debate on the issue. It was a media slip up in meeting the challenges emerging from a highly emotive and sensitive issue that fuelled doctors' strike that disrupted medical services in the central government institutions.

Perhaps, April 5 statement of Arjun Singh on reservation for OBCs in Government institutions of higher learning caught these channels and many of their viewers unaware. As, prior to this, these channels had no discussion on what 93<sup>rd</sup> amendment to Constitution entailed. Parliament passed this amendment that made provision for OBCs reservation in the government supported institutes of higher learning in January 2006. In this lapse of its own, media blamed the government for not informing people on this issue. All media discussions in the follow up to agitation refused to see the issue in its entirety. While some presented discussions not quite relevant to OBC reservations, others escaped the discussions and debates altogether.

Therefore, while Aaj Tak, Star News and Sahara Samay gave air time of 199 minutes, 169 min and 316 min, respectively, in the prime time news coverage on the issue from April 5 to May 15, their respective air time spent in analyzing the issue was 23 min, 17min and 43 min – this for a national policy that impacts all in some way.

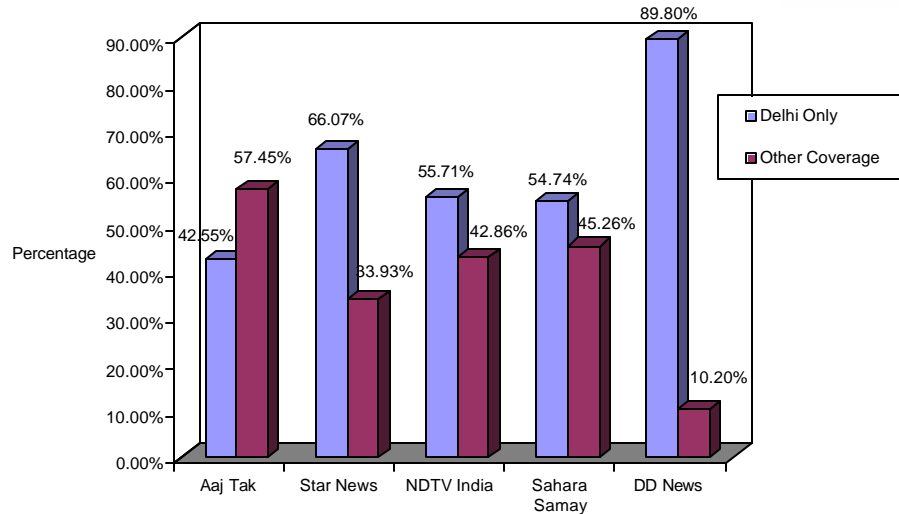
Reservation Issue on Prime Time: News Vs Debate/Analysis  
(April 5 to May 15)



Doordarshan News was wayward in at least two episodes of *Aamne Samane*. In one it discussed a proposal to raise the SC/ST quota in employment in proportion to the percentage rise in their population. In another episode, it focused on the divide among OBCs. What was DD trying to say? The two issues were not relevant to OBCs reservation in education institutes. Furthermore, the debate on these channels did not include all aspects and all stakeholders in the issue. With little representation from the purported beneficiaries of the policy that make over 70 per cent of the population, the debate was lead by the urban elite who talked of equality and egalitarian society without focusing on the extent of marginalization of the weaker sections in the society, and the impact of reservation on a community as a whole. In the absence of a voice from the weaker communities, media brimmed with anti-reservation advocacy.

NDTV and Doordarshan News that debated the issue had hardly any linkage with the rural areas or small towns. This vacuum was seen in the news coverage as well across all channels. In fact, in the Media Lab study of these channels, Delhi alone dominated the quota agitation. In the case of Doordarshan News coverage, as much as 89.80% news coverage on the quota issue originated from Delhi. In the case of Star News, NDTV and Sahara Samay, Delhi got as much as 66%, 55.7% and 54.74% of prime time air time of the issue, respectively (see *Origin of Primetime News on Reservation Issue*). The corollary is that Delhi lead the anti-quota agitation. It is noteworthy that the agitation drew no support from the southern states where caste-based reservation has an old history.

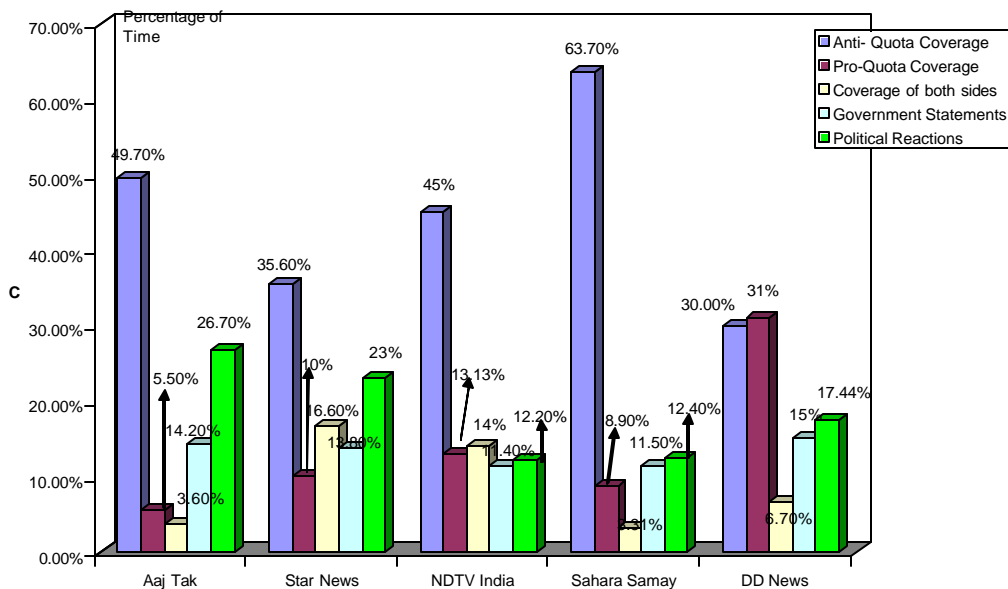
Origin of Primetime News on Reservation Issue  
April 5 to May 24, 2006



Source: CMS Media Lab

The other aspect that emerges from the study is the conclusive evidence of distortion in the coverage. Anti-quota stir received 64%, 45%, 36% and 50% of air time respectively on Sahara Samay, NDTV, Star News and Aaj Tak. Compare this with pro quota coverage of 9%, 13%, 10% and 5.5% on the respective channels. The distortion in the coverage is high among the market leaders Aaj Tak and Star News with individual TV news viewership of 25 per cent and 24 per cent, respectively (see *OBCs Reservation: percentage wise breakup of prime time*). Through their one-sided coverage of the issue, media hyped-up anti-quota rhetoric.

Coverage of Reservation Issue by Hindi News Channels  
(April 5 to May 24 2006)



In their handling of this issue, media wasted an opportunity of engaging in a wider debate on various aspects of quota policy in education and employment. Though media made a hue and cry about powerful sections in the OBCs, it skipped constructive debate on the issue. Instead, media fanned certain misconceptions about the impact of reservations on the quality of academics and various professions. Media thus missed an opportunity to engage in a more meaningful, informative and educative debate on an issue we cannot escape. Perhaps, a study of the four southern states could have provided some insight into the effects of reservation. But media ignored that.

It seems television channels are struck by passivism. They serve what is served to them, or what serves them right. Or else how can one explain the way discussion on 93<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the constitution was missed out, or the way anti quota-agitation was covered. The coverage of this issue has raised many issues. And this time round it is the media that need to do soul searching and explaining.

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