

Women's Issues in India: Role and Importance of Media

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Abstract:

Governments, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations are responsible for the prevention of all forms of discrimination against women. Besides all of them, the responsibility of the mass media is also big in this issue. Because effect of the media is very large in the dissemination and interpretation of a lot of knowledge, innovation and the news. Today, the media constitute a big part of our lives. Almost everyone benefits from the mass media. Actually, it's a really big power to announce our thoughts and our goals about empowering women's economy. Why do not we bring up the ideas about media efforts for women's economic empowerment? What is the role of the mass media in the creation of women's social roles to reinforce them? How can we benefit from mass media for gender equality and women's economic empowerment? How can be improved women's visibility and effect in the decision making process in the media sector? In this paper the powerful and positive role that the media can play in the empowerment of women and gender equality has been analyzed and identified.

Media is the mirror of society and media reports are reflection of happenings in the society. Media has immense power to influence the masses and communication and IT revolution has further increased its importance. Unfortunately, nowadays media is wavering from its actual role and giving biased information which makes development of the society more difficult. Portraying women as equals in the society is a subject that has been given low priority by the Indian media. The Indian media needs to be sensitized to gender issues and now must focus on women issues in a decisive way as their role is detrimental for the women empowerment in India. In the light of these facts, the present paper focuses on women's issues in contemporary Indian society and role of media in addressing the issues.

Key Words: Women, Media, Empowerment, Social status, Equality, Discrimination.

Introduction:

Media is considered to be the most important tool of society in the modern times as it has the power to reach out to a large audience by mass communication and create an impact

Wherever it can reach, which now has become far and wide. Social media through its ever updating apps and networking is an inevitable source of influence on mass. The media at large has been instrumental though not to the degree desired in supporting the movement for women emancipation by focusing on the neglect and marginalization of the position of the

women in society. Communication is extremely important for women's development and mass media play significant role. It is to be distinguished that growth of women's education and their entry into this business through employment has contributed to the growth of media. If Media can be a powerful agent of change, it can be an equally powerful agent of oppression. It is without a doubt a dominant medium for advocacy of gender equality and the status of women. Yet the media can also reinforce stereotyped images of women and their roles in society. Women and their contribution to the society have always been overshadowed by the news of their hardships and atrocities inflicted upon them. It is indispensable that the print and electronic media present a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. As media has huge influence on people, it should act with more responsibility before reporting and publishing any news. Portrayal of women which is derogatory to their image by media is an evidence of lack of gender sensitivity and has called for making them accountable for such representation of women. Such instances had led the National Commission for Women to recommend amendment in the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act) 1986. The government in a move to strengthen the legal machinery protecting the dignity of women, approved amendments to the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act,

1986 in 2012. The aim was to include new technologies like MMS and the electronic media and some which were left outside the ambit of the Act like posters and TV serials which perpetuate stereotypes of women. Promoting a balanced and no stereotyped portrayal of women in the media is very important to use it in a progressive way and avoiding the ill effects of any such medium of Media. Women's knowledge about media and access to and control over the various forms of conventional and modern media is still limited in most societies.

The increase in the participation and access of women to self expression and decision-making through the media and new technologies of communication is in a way empowering women. The powerful and positive role that the media can play in the empowerment of women and gender equality should be supported and further explored.

Empowerment:

The origins of the concept of empowerment go back to the civil rights movement in the USA in the 1960. It has since then been interpreted differently and filled with new meanings and is today used in such different sectors as business, social work, development discourse and by advocates of very different political agendas. The different definitions of empowerment range between defining it as a largely individual process of taking control of and responsibility for one's life and situation, and defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged groups of people. At the former end of the continuum, where empowerment is defined largely as an individual process, empowerment can be used in the conservative political rhetoric of freeing the government of responsibility for injustices and for granting social security. Instead, the argument makes individuals and communities responsible for their own social security and welfare, without providing the necessary support and resources. The empowerment of women is located within the discourse and agenda of gender equality and is increasingly being taken in the agendas of international development organizations, perhaps more as a means to achieve gender equality than as an end in itself. At the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1993 and the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994 Governments committed themselves to the empowerment of women. This commitment was operationalised and formulated into a clear action plan at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 where Governments committed themselves to the "empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations."

Objectives:

- To understand the social status of the women
- To examine the role of media in empowering women's
- To find out the media coverage on women issues.
- To study the role of media in the process of women empowerment.

Methodology:

This research paper is theoretical in nature. In this paper attempt has been made to investigate the greatest hindrance in the path of women empowerment as well as to analyse the importance of media for empower the women. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study.

Review of Literature:

Narayana, A & Ahamad, T. (2016) revealed in their study that Media have a great potential for the empowerment of women, however the overall use of this media by women is very low. It also suggested that the powerful and positive role that the media can play in the empowerment of women and gender equality should be supported and further explored. They also found that how media can increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making. Khan, E. A. & Moin, A. (2013) studied in their research work named "Women Empowerment: Role of New Media" New Media is emerging as a powerful tool for gender empowerment in a developing country like India. There has been a rapid growth in the ICT sector since the late 1980's and the use of ICT has dramatically expanded since 1990's. The use of internet as a form of new media, the creation of different websites that focus on women empowerment in terms of education, literacy, health, knowledge, lifestyle and many more areas have been proliferated. Subhash, S. (2015) concluded in her study "Impact of Mass Media on Women: A Sociological Study of Gulbarga District" that impact of mass media on women has enabled their empowerment, but still there are many suggestions given by women to restrict crime related programmes, improvement of learning and

knowledge, equal status of women, gender equality etc. Hence the media should take into the suggestions of women and improve their programmes, telecasts, circulations, knowledge and information.

Role and Importance of Media:

Media is the mirror of society and media reports are reflection of happenings in the society. Media has immense power to influence the masses and communication and IT revolution has further increased its importance. The role of media has become very important in shaping present days society. Media is the part of the life, all around, from the shows one watches on television, music on the radio, the books, magazines and newspapers. It educates people about the current issues and influences the public opinion. The common people rely on media to know about happenings in the society. Media is often considered as the 4th pillar of the society and democratic medium of information. Media has the power to pressurize and criticize the drawbacks of democracy. It is instrumental in bringing about unity among the masses and is backbone of the nation. The reach of media to common people has increased and undoubtedly media has attained the role of a very powerful organ in virtually all spheres of life. The electronic media, particularly television, has become the most influential medium of mass communication in India.

Nowadays media is wavering from its actual role and giving entertaining or biased information which makes difficulties for development of the society. In the present era of globalization and liberalization, media has become more responsive towards global market and commercial gains. Today, newspapers and television channels are trying to make fast money by cashing on the news in wrong sense and wrong way. The result is that news is available in various interesting colour. Instead of giving important information and educative programmes, media is giving emphasis on sensationalizing the public. In the race to become more popular and to make more money, they have broken all the limits which they must follow while serving to build a healthy and progressive society. They have virtually no respect for the sentiments and ethics of the people and the land that they serve to.

Portraying women as equals in the society is a subject that has been given low priority by the Indian media. They have been interested in conveying to the public a particular kind of message regarding women. One can flip through the pages of popular magazines and news papers, watch television programmes and commercial films to get the content of them loud and clear. The Indian media loves to see women as home-makers and as an avid consumer. For them, the woman is the one who buys without end and her hair, dress, shoes, each bears the stamp of the latest, the most expensive products. Though the media purports to project them as modern and liberated woman, but in actual endorsed them as consumers.

Though television has become a pervasive and powerful medium of communication in India but the portrayal of Indian women on the television is derogatory to their image and is slightly linked with their real concerns. Given the fact that the majority of women workers are housewives, there is hardly a glimpse of every day adjustments women have to make in the home, the burden of housework, their contribution as housewives and mothers. On the other hand they are portrayed as housebound and tradition bound passive persons whose major concerns are domesticity. There are instances of stereotyping and discrimination. The news, sponsored TV serials and reality shows dealing with real life situation and character on television has huge TRPs. The Indian soap operas (TV serials) like Hum Log, Khandan and Buniyad of 1980s, revealed more clearly what one could expect from television's portrayal of women and strengthened the belief that no matter how vast the variety of women portrayed, the message they conveyed did not fill one with any hope. Even today on Indian soaps, women are portrayed quite badly, perhaps worse than before. In view of such observations, the PC Joshi committee (1985) recommended a system of regular monitoring of the portrayal of women on television.

The popularity of films in India makes one speculate the magnitude of the social consequences of such media portrayals even more. The portrayal of women in Hindi films reveals the sheer quantity and variety of violence directed towards them. Women in bollywood films are often portrayed as hysterical bimbos. Screaming, yelling and crying are part and parcel of woman's reaction to stressful situations. There are number of movies where women who assert themselves are considered 'bad' while men, even if they tease and hit women are considered 'heroes'. The Hindi film industry is a profit oriented business and the dictates of the patrons, to a large degree, limits the choices of the directors of the movies. The Indian audience also must be partially blamed for the acceptance of such mistreatments of women in movies.

There are many instances of mistreatment of women by Indian media and not much has changed regarding portrayal of women. Interviews of men in newspapers usually focus on their work and hardly ever mention their marital status or their dress sense. By contrast, women achievers are subject to irrelevant and distasteful queries. Take for example the interview of banker Tarjani Vakil by a leading daily. The interview treated the reader to colourful details about her appearance, personal life such as her penchant for beautiful sarees, her decision to stay single and her living in an extended joint family with emphasis on her feminine qualities like her soft voice. Another example is the television interview of the senior police officer Kiran Bedi in which she was asked if she likes to cook. The media

does try to establish a woman feminist, especially if she is a successful woman. Other examples of media biasness are also there. When the issue of reservation of seats for women in panchayats was discussed on television, it was men who did the talking while women sat as silent spectators. When women were shown leading dharnas against the Dunkel Draft, not even woman parliamentarian like Margaret Alva was approached for her views.

Women Issues in Media Coverage:

Media implicitly rank the importance of the public issues according to the amount of press coverage devoted to an issue. Lack of appropriate media coverage of an issue leads to the implication that the topic is not important. Public awareness is significantly lessened if a story is not reported. Violence against women is a global pandemic and the consequences of media ignorance and bias are horrific. In India, the amount of coverage in mainstream media is inversely proportional to the actual prevalence of the kinds of violence and gives a false impression. Most disturbing is the disproportionate coverage of sensationalized violence. Invariably, rape stories get far more coverage than domestic violence stories. In all likelihood, this is because rape stories usually focus on one individual woman. If she is attractive, she is a very marketable victim. It is no accident that rape is a frequent theme in pornography. The sexual brutalization of women is a highly marketable business and a profitable story for the news media. For example the Indian media, be it press or the broadcasters, choose to highlight the rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl rather than to report about the success of women in recent panchayat elections in the country. The media have no time to show the actual problems of real India at the grass root level, its culture, traditions, faiths and beliefs and so on. They usually show only those handpicked stories which sells and increase their TRPs.

Even the amount of media coverage women get overall is much less than men do. Men are provided with a larger number of opportunities to present their viewpoints and shown in diverse roles in all areas like administration, law, business, science and technology. While representation of women varies from negligible to total exclusions and are interviewed and talked about only in certain accepted professions such as educationists or doctors. If they are interviewed for achieving success in a 'male' profession, then it often goes to great pains to point out her 'feminist'.

Indian media needs to be sensitized to gender issues. It should play proactive role in inculcating gender sensitivity in the country and should ensure that women are not depicted in poor light. It should devote special slots for crimes against women in India and discuss all proactive aspects. The challenge before media is to move beyond clubbing what happens to women with routine crime briefs, on the one hand, and sensational stories, on the other. Media should take a proactive role in creating public awareness on the rights and privileges of women. Constitutional and legal rights should also be advertised and discussed regularly. The latest rulings and judgments are discussed so that the public are made aware of these rulings. Press Council should be given more teeth so that they could intervene effectively to counteract objectionable publications. There must be mechanisms to sensitize Censor Boards and bring about a working dialogue between members of the Censor Board and citizens groups.

Conclusion:

Though the status of women in India, both historically and socially, has been one of the respect and reverence, but the hard truth is that even today, they are struggling for their own identity, shouting for diffusion of their voices and fighting for their own esteem. Every day, they cross among the fears and fraught for individuality. Despite the constitutional guarantee of equality of sexes, rampant discrimination and exploitation of women in India continues. The incidence of bride-burning, woman battering, molestation and ill-treatment of women are on increase. It is high time now that women should get a respectable and dignified position in the Indian society. Awareness in the women as well as society should be created and their equal rights should be effectively implemented. Crimes against women should be made punishable and a research should be done on every crime which comes to the light.

In the era of globalization and with revolution in means of communication and information technology, the media role has become more crucial for women empowerment in India. The Indian media now must focus on women issues in a decisive way as their role is detrimental for the women empowerment in India. It is essential that media should devote a good percentage of their programmes to create awareness among women and the society at large, give information about women's rights and machineries to approach for their all round development. Programmes to strengthen women development should be enforced and news adversely affecting their development should be censored or banned. Thus, the distant dream of women empowerment in India can be realized with the support of media, government and NGOs. As Swami Vivekananda rightly said that "The nation which doesn't respect women will never become great.....". Therefore, in pursuit of making India a great nation, media should work towards giving women their much deserved status.

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