



THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE SOCIO – ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: A STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF STREE SHAKTHI PROGRAM IN KOLAR DISTRICT

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Abstract:

Women is considered as an important human resource of the nation and every state should try to utilize them as mediators of economic growth and development is a general belief. In many cultures the role of women is restricted to build and maintain the homely affairs like task of fetching water, cooking and rearing children. Since the beginning of the century, the status of women in India has been changing due to growing industrialization, globalization, and social legislation. With the spread of education and awareness, women have shifted from kitchen to higher level of professional activities. The role of Women entrepreneur in economic development is inevitable. Now-a-days women enter not only in selected professions but also in professions like defence, trade, industry and engineering. Women are also willing to take up business and contribute to the Nation's growth. Women entrepreneurship must be moulded properly with entrepreneurial traits and skills to meet the changes in trends and challenges of global markets and also be competent enough to sustain and strive for excellence in the entrepreneurial arena. Encouragement for women entrepreneurship is one of the ways for that. But unfortunately the traditional mind set of the society and negligence of the state and respective authorities is an important obstacle for the women entrepreneurship development in India. In spite of this women of today, break all those obstacles and involve themselves in various sectors and proving their excellence. Stree Shakti Sanghas are proving to be the launchpad to inculcate the entrepreneurial abilities of women. Though the primary objective is to promote savings amongst women and provision of thrift, of late, these groups are playing an immense role in developing entrepreneurial abilities amongst women and help them not only in arranging necessary finance needed for the initial capital to be invested but also playing an indispensable role in improving their communication skills, finance managing capabilities and developing network. Therefore, these self-help groups are now being considered as drivers of economic growth, transforming the lives of millions of women at the grass root level and contributing in rural development. This rural development in turn results in country's development.

Keywords: Women, Financial Help, Entrepreneurship, Business activities, Growth.

INTRODUCTION:

The Indian Constitution envisages that nothing shall prevent the State from making any special provisions for the protection of women. The reason is that women's physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence and her physical well-being becomes an object of public interest in order to preserve the strength and vigour of the race. In order to enable the women to stand on their feet, the constitution empowers the state to give preferential treatment to women in various fields of life. Statistical evidence depicts the weak position of women in India. In 1901 the sex ratio was 972 and it decreased to 946 in 1951, it went on decreasing continuously till the year 1991 when it was 927. During the decade 1991-2001, the sex ratio increased to 933. The female literacy rate was 8.9% against 27.2% of male in 1951. In 2001, though the female literacy rate increased to 52.1% yet was lagging behind much than the male literacy rate which was 75.8%. It means nearly half of the women in India are not even able to read and write. How can we expect them to understand their rights, the laws protecting these rights and the mechanism available to redress the violation of these rights?.

However, the judicial wing of the governance has not lagged behind in protecting women's rights in India. The landmark Judicial decisions reveal that the Judiciary is equally concerned about injustice towards women and successfully defended their cause and interest whenever they have been subjected to discrimination and unequal treatment. Gunnar Myrdal describes Indian society as a "soft society", one that does not have political will to enact laws that are necessary for its progress and development and to implement the laws even when made. This is evident from the time taken to enact reservation for women legislators and the opposition it faced. The gender issues being a matter of discussion even in 21st century, proves the fact that woman is being denied of the justice for which she is worth. The present study tries to analyze the role of media in empowering women economically, socially and politically.

Development has been one of the major components of knowledge system in the social sciences. Development is approached in a variety of ways by modern thinkers across disciplines. Scholars, Economists, Statesmen, International agencies such as UN are concerned with the problems afflicting the humanity. Many countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Middle East have been grouped up to meet the standards of developed countries. Economists and world leaders are grappled with the developmental realities around the world. Ideas of development could be traced in the classical economic thoughts. The modern ideas on development are very intricately linked to the efforts of United Nations and the US efforts.

Daniel Lerner(1958) believed that mass media will bring early modernization and changes in society. Mass media are not only considered as agents of change but they are also indicators of development itself. The establishment of mass media would itself result in the mass media industries, business, services and change. Utilization of media to the promotion of social change was also conceived to be part of the process of development communication. (Stepenson, 1992)

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: KEY TO SOCIO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Empowerment of women is a fundamental human right under the Indian Constitution. The socio-economic rights of women has ensured right to livelihood, maintenance, inheritance or equal treatment in the workplace or equality in earnings. Empowerment has been one of the important theoretical issues which has caught the international attention. Empowerment has been used as one of the potent instruments of socio-economic development more so in the case of women. Empowerment has been defined “as an active multi - dimensional process which should enable women to realize their full potential and powers in all spheres of life. It would consist of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives, have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice. (Balbir, Sony, 2001). Attainment of Gender equality is the ultimate aim of empowerment which seeks to mobilize and organize women to this endeavor. Empowerment is a key solution to many of social problems like population growth rates, environment degradation and low status of women. The empowerment is a means to redress the problems of women.

Empowerment is viewed as a process of women’s development to make women aware of developmental needs, politically assertive, economically self-sufficient and ideal to enable women to make informal decisions. Prof. R. L. Barker defines the concept “as the process of helping a group or community to achieve political influence or relevant legal authority and is described as building community capacity to enhance the aptitude of community, groups, to procure and manage social and economic resources and the development of the resources and skills necessary for individuals and communities to exert authority and power”.

Empowerment is a process of social change. It involves changes in values, roles and status which constitute established social institutions of oppression. Block, a distinguished empowerment – scholar explains that ‘empowerment goes hand in hand with politics. It implies the process of exchange of power. People empower themselves by discovering a positive way of being political. They become political without being manipulative. Communication is an important social component and a major agent of social change. Communication is one of the hallmarks of modern civilizations. Mass Communication is one of the most advanced terms of communication where group communication gets extended in the usage of mass media tools such as Newspapers, Radio, Cinema, Television, Video and the Internet. The process of mass communication is associated with its tools.

Information of the mass media are used for a variety of purposes by the audience to satisfy their inner urge, to have luminal ritualistic experience, to fulfil psychological and social needs, mass media will continue to enjoy the freedom that society has bestowed on them. A free and independent mass media is an integral part of modern political system and regarded as symbols of democracy.

STREE SHAKTHI – a vehicle of social transformation

Stree Shakthi (Women Empowerment), a highly successful program for women empowerment sponsored by Karnataka government. The main aim was to make rural women self – sufficient and independent through organizing 20 lakh women into Self Help Groups. Being the brain child of former Chief Minister S. M. Krishna, it is successfully implemented for the all round development of rural women.

The main objectives of the stree shakthi programme is:-

1. To increase socio-economic development for empowering rural women.
2. Creating sustainable atmosphere which could accomplish financial progress and social status of women.
3. Stimulate confidence and self dependence to have control over financial resources.
4. Increase the income of poor women, create financial stability.
5. Provide opportunities and take measures of availability of loans through financial institutions.

The target group of stree shakthi were members of the Self Help Groups, women living below poverty line, landless agricultural labourers, women belonging to SC/ST community, families with alcoholics, drug addicts or physically disabled persons. It is implemented throughout the state in all the villages of 175 taluks.

THE PRESENT STUDY:

The role of communication in the empowerment of women is an important aspect of women empowerment and communication scholarship. Stree shakthi is one of the well planned and well equipped women empowerment project which helps in economic, social and political empowerment of women. The present study focuses it's attention to understand how mass media can accelerate the quality of the programme and its effect on stake holders. The study would also analyze whether mass media contributed for success of stree shakthi and whether it has brought any political awareness, social change and economic empowerment among the stree shakthi stake holders. It is in this context that this study assumes importance in understanding how mass media have played a role in the success of stree shakthi programme or whether stake holders presume that they have really been benefited by mass media or not.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the extent of exposure to media among the respondents.
2. To assess whether Stree shakthi programme have brought any economic improvement, social change and political consciousness among the beneficiaries.
3. To know whether Stree shakthi beneficiaries are aware of local politics.

METHODOLOGY:

The study was undertaken in order to collect research data on the Role of mass media and stree shakthi program in the Socio-Economic and Political empowerment of women in Kolar district. The survey research method was chosen as a method to collect appropriate data. A respondents of 100 were selected from Kolar

District. A questionnaire was prepared and the responses were recorded from the stree shakthi stakeholders and SHGs.

ANALYSIS OF DATA :

The study 'Role of media in Economic-Socio and Political Empowerment of Women with special reference to Stree Shakthi – A Study in Kolar District' has been conducted by following post facto research method. The empirical data was collected based upon the administered interview schedule which has yielded some interesting findings. The data has been collected from sample respondents from 04 Taluks from Kolar district.

District	Taluk Selected	Total no of house	Total Respondents
Kolar	Bangarpet Malur	32	25
	Chintamani	28	25
	Mulabagil	36	25

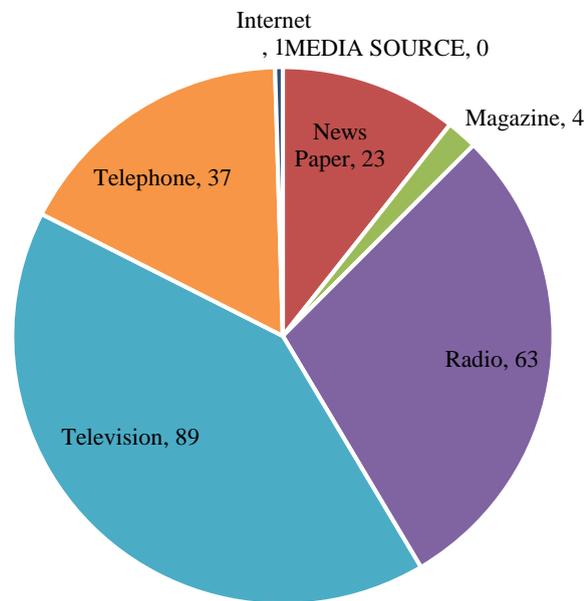
Source: Primary Data

The interview schedule consisting of 05 items administered to 100 respondents generated basic data for the purpose of the present study. The data reflects the socio- political-economic characteristics of the respondents, their media profile, interpersonal Communication behaviour and their responses on the role of media in the empowerment process in the context of stree shakthi programme.

TABLE 1.1(a)

MEDIA EXPOSURE: DOMESTIC SOURCE ACCESS TO MEDIA AND MEDIA USAGE

MEDIA SOURCE	DOMESTIC SOURCE	
	Nos	Percentage%
News Paper	23	23.00
Magazine	04	3.80
Radio	63	63.80
Television	89	89.40
Telephone	37	36.80
Internet	01	0.80



The present study has revealed that about 23% of the respondents read newspapers and 3.8% read magazines. The print media is accessed and owned by nearly 26.8% of the respondents. Surprisingly 89.4% of the respondents own Television sets even though their economic background is not conducive enough to own a television set. Therefore, it may be presumed that television is the most popular and easily accessed media in the study area. About 63.8% of the respondents have exposure to the Radio. It appears that the radio is the second most accessed and owned media. Broadcast media is the most accessed, exposed and owned media compared to the print media. About 36.8% of the respondents access and use telephone and only about four people (0.80%) have access and therefore use the internet. Mobile telephones have made better inroads into the rural population, way ahead of main stream print media. Though less than one percent, it is a good news that Internet is accessed in the rural parts.

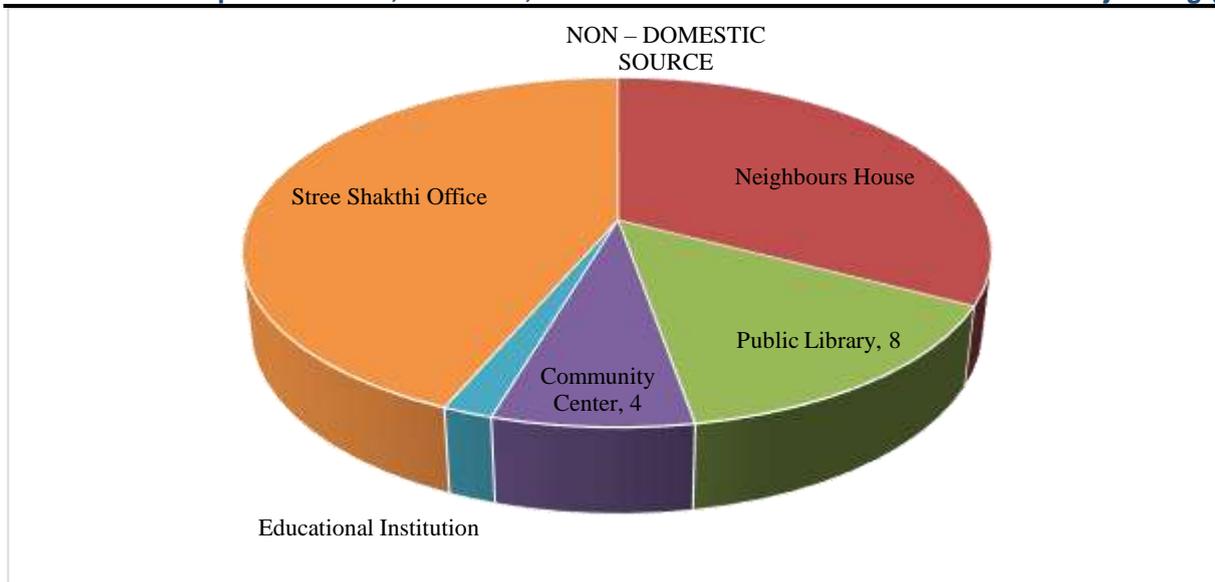
The above media profile clearly illustrate that there is a greater media exposure and media are accessed and used as a source of information at the domestic level.

Table 1.1(b)

MEDIA EXPOSURE: NON- DOMESTIC SOURCE ACCESS TO MEDIA AND MEDIA USAGE

NON – DOMESTIC SOURCE	DOMESTIC SOURCE	
	Nos	Percentage %
Neighbours House	18	18.0
Public Library	8	8.0
Community Center	4	4.0
Educational Institution	1	1.0
Stree Shakthi Office	24	24.0

Source: Primary Data



The table revealed that about 24% of the respondents visit stree shakthi office for accessing media, about 18% access media from the neighbors house. The study has revealed that the stree shakthi offices are visited regularly by the members for watching television and reading newspaper. About 8.0% go to the public library for accessing the media and about 4.0% and 1.0% of the respondents go to community centre and nearby educational institutions for media usage.

1.2: MEMBERSHIP OF POLITICAL PARTY

Parameter	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	No.s	Percent	No.s	Percent	No.s	Percent
Member of Political Party	14	14	86	86	100	100

Source: Primary Data

The study attempted to know the political empowerment of women who participate in stree shakthi programme. Respondents were asked to detail whether they were members of any political party. A majority of the respondents are not politically active. Nearly 86% of the respondents were not the members of any political party. Only about 14% of the respondents indicated that they are members of a party or organizations. It appears that a majority of women are not interested in the political activities.

Table 1.3: ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN POLITICAL DECISION PROCESS

MEDIA	To a great extent		To Some Extent		Little Extent		No Response		TOTAL	
	No.s	%	No.s	%	No.s	%	No.s	%	No.s	%
News Paper	03	3.0	11	11.0	09	9.0	77	77.0	100	100
Magazines	01	1.0	04	4.0	03	3.0	92	92.0	100	100
Radio	14	14.0	10	10.0	08	8.0	68	68.0	100	100
Television	18	18.0	14	14.0	14	14.0	54	54.0	100	100
Telephone	04	4.0	02	2.0	03	3.0	91	91.0	100	100
Internet	01	1.0	01	1.0	02	2.0	96	96.0	100	100
Anganawadi	43	43.0	16	16.0	06	6.0	35	35.0	100	100
Government Organizations	12	12.0	10	10.0	04	4.0	74	74.0	100	100
NGOs	08	8.0	09	9.0	07	7.0	76	76.0	100	100
SHGs	09	9.0	09	9.0	07	7.0	75	75.0	100	100

Source: Primary Data Political decision and participation in political activities is an important aspect of democratic administration. The study attempted to measure the political participation and decision making processes and rate of media in political decision making. Large number of respondent i.e, 92.0% have indicated that the mass media have not played any major role in making any political decision. Even interpersonal channels of communication also have not played any profound impact on the political decision making process. Interestingly 43.0% of the respondents have indicated that the Anganawadi workers have influenced them in their political decisions followed by government organizations. Therefore, the above table reveals that the role of mass media is comparatively lesser than the interpersonal channels of communication in the political decision making process.

TABLE 1.4
IMPACT OF STREE SHAKTHI PROGRAMMES IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY OF LIFE OF RESPONDENTS (ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT)

Quality Parameters	Great Extent		To Some Extent		No Response		Total	
	NOs	%	NOs	%	NOs	%	NOs	%
It has brought Economic Independence	49	49.0	34	34.0	17	17.0	100	100.0
Taught me how to earn money	50	50.0	34	34.0	16	16.0	100	100.0
Improved the savings habit	53	53.0	39	39.0	08	8.0	100	100.0
Awareness about new job opportunities	33	33.0	32	32.0	35	35.0	100	100.0
Promoted Self-Confidence	45	45.0	45	45.0	10	10.0	100	100.0
Improved the quality of life of the family members	32	32.0	38	38.0	30	30.0	100	100.0
Improved the Community Relationship	31	31.0	31	31.0	38	38.0	100	100.0
Brought Social Change in the village	18	18.0	37	37.0	45	45.0	100	100.0
Made Politically Conscious	17	17.0	23	23.0	60	60.0	100	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Most of the respondents have revealed that stree shakthi programmes have improved their living conditions and the quality of life. The table has revealed the mixed response. About 49% of the respondents have highlighted that stree shakthi programmes have brought economic independence, enabled them to earn money, self-confidence and savings habit (53.0%). About 33% have indicated that it has improved the quality of life, savings habit (39%), Social change in village (37.0%), Economic independence (34.0%), earning money (34.0%), political consciousness (17.0%). Stree Shakthi has done a remarkable job for the respondents in improving their economic position, social environment and quality of life.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

1. Broadcast media is the most accessed, exposed and owned media compared to the print media.
2. Majority of the stree shakthi respondents have improved their savings habit, improved earning capacity which has brought economic empowerment among stree shakthi stake holders.
3. Stree Shakthi programmes have brought social change in the village but it has not made the women politically conscious.

4. Large number of respondents have indicated that the mass media have not played any major role in making political decisions.
5. Information dissemination is very important in rural sector, where most of the respondents were not aware of certain programmes and facilities available to them.
6. Stree Shakti Sanghas' are playing an important role in passing and spreading information amongst women.
7. Women empowerment ultimately leads to building a strong, vibrant nation.

CONCLUSION

Political decision and participation in political activities is an important aspect of democratic administration. Majority of the respondents have indicated that the mass media have not played any major role in making political decisions and the stree shakthi respondents are benefited economically but not politically. The stree shakthi program has brought social change, economic empowerment among women in village but it has not made them politically conscious. Mass media has not been successful in Political Empowerment of women.

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