

Empowering Women of 21st Century through Mass Media

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Abstract

Woman is a creation of the almighty just like a man. She is equal and sometimes even superior to men but the structure of the society has depicted women as a weaker section of the society. Its not the weakness of a women but the cruel outlook of the society which portrays women as helpless. It's the lessons taught by the society in the name of culture which puts fetters against the freedom of women. The ability and attributes of a women are commendable and superior to any creation of the Almighty but the trend of the society hinders the path of progress and development of a women. The term given to strengthen women is called WOMEN EMPOWERMENT but this empowerment remains futile if it does not knock the doors of those who are ignorant of their abilities. Mass media is an effective tool to enlighten those who are unaware of the changes in the outlook of the society be it the legislative aspects or sociological trends.

This paper shall be covering the aspect of women empowerment and the role of mass media in strengthening women empowerment. The researcher shall be applying doctrinal research methodology for the better understanding of the concept.

Introduction

Women are not only the deities of household fire, but the flame of the soul itself.

-Rabindra Nath Tagore¹

The rich heritage and culture of our motherland clearly depicts the oceanic difference between what women is and how she is portrayed. Women have always been portrayed as a symbol of grace, beauty, affection, honour and their purity but history has itself witnessed women with unparalleled knowledge, courage, wisdom and leadership but the patriarchal society only portrays the women as an ornament not as a human being. Society bestows the status of a Goddess to woman but at the same time ridicules her in infinite number of ways from cradle to grave. This double standard of the society has pushed the woman to a status worse than an animal and for these reasons women needs to be empowered. Women empowerment does not give anything additional to a woman; it just secures and ensures the rights which are already a part of human existence. Women empowerment merely makes a woman realise what she is and what she can do. The entire quest is for making a woman self reliant, self sufficient, self dependent and self made.

Women Empowerment : Meaning and Concept

“There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.”

- Swami Vivekananda²

Women empowerment comprises of the ability of women to enjoy their rights, to take decisions at their own and earn benefits from resources, assets, income and from their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic, social and political

status and well being. Thus women empowerment is an umbrella term encompassing all the vital attributes of status of women in the society. Thus, women empowerment may be classified in to-

1. Psychological empowerment
2. Sociological empowerment
3. Political empowerment
4. Economic empowerment

Psychological empowerment means strengthening the conscience of a woman so that she is able to realise her abilities, what she is and what she can do.

Sociological empowerment means strengthening the status of women in the society, making the society realise that she is not merely a commodity to be used and thrown, she is not only a birth giver but a bread winner too.

Political empowerment means strengthening the women by ensuring her minimal rights and awarding strict penal sanctions to those who dare to infringe a women's liberty.

Economic empowerment ensures a women's choice to practice any trade or occupations, property rights in family assets, maintenance rights, and freedom to best utilise her knowledge and time as well to be economically sound. When a woman is economically strengthened, her status in the society is all established.

India's steps towards Women Empowerment

In India, women empowerment at the very outset is ensured by the Constitution of India. Article 15(3)³ empowers state to make requisite laws for strengthening the status of women in India, Article 39(d)⁴ and 42⁵ ensures economic

empowerment of women, Article 51A(e)⁶ ensures social empowerment in the form of fundamental duty. The status of women is also legally protected under civil laws- (freedom to marry at the age of majority, right to adopt and to be adopted, right to divorce, maintenance and custody of child, right to inherit property etc.) and under criminal laws [the Indian Penal Code, 1860; the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956; the indecent representation of women prohibition act, 1986; protection of women from domestic violence act, 2005; the sexual harassment of women at work place (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION AND REDRESSAL)ACT, 2013]. Apart from these generally all laws contain provisions which are equally applicable on men and women as the supreme law of the land debars any kind of discrimination on the grounds of sex⁷. Apart from this the Government of India has enacted several schemes & policies⁸ for empowering women in the country viz.,

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme
2. One Stop Centre Scheme
3. Women Helpline Scheme
4. UJJAWALA : A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation
5. Working Women Hostel
6. Ministry approves new projects under Ujjawala Scheme and continues existing projects
7. SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances)
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
9. NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR
10. Awardees of Stree Shakti Puruskar, 2014 & Awardees of Nari Shakti Puruskar
11. Awardees of Rajya Mahila Samman & Zila Mahila Samman

12. Mahila E-Haats
13. Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)
14. Mahila police Volunteers

Understanding Mass Media

Mass media is a umbrella term comprising of several media technologies that reach a large audience via mass communication. It comprises of -

- **Broadcast media** where information is transmitted electronically, such as film, radio, recorded music, or television.
- **Internet media** incorporates email, social media sites, websites, and Internet-based radio and television.
- **Outdoor media** means transmitting information through billboards; blimps; flying billboards, placards or kiosks placed inside and outside buses, commercial buildings, shops, sports stadiums, subway cars, or trains; signs; or skywriting.
- **Print media** includes transmitting information via physical objects, such as books, comics, magazines, newspapers, or pamphlets.
Event organizing and public speaking can also be considered forms of mass media.

Women Empowerment & Mass Media

International Perspective

The objective of strengthening the status of women is not an affair restricted to a nation's

boundaries rather, it is an international affair and since the emergence of international organizations, women empowerment has gained an international concern. Women empowerment at the international platform seeks to ensure basic women human rights like Right to bodily integrity and autonomy, right to be free from sexual violence, right to vote, right to hold public office, right to enter into legal contracts, equal rights in family laws, right to work, fair wages and maternity relief, reproductive rights and right to education.

The United Nations has declared from the very first article of the UN Charter that human rights must be ensured by the nations irrespective of gender.⁹ Within one year, the ECOSOC established a commission on the Status of women, a global policy making body to ensure gender equality and progress of women across the world. Further, year 1975 was declared as INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR and subsequently 1976-1985 was declared as UN DECADE FOR WOMEN. In the year 1979, the UNGA adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) which has performed a key role in shaping feminist approaches and ensures women worldwide human rights and fundamental freedoms.¹⁰

The international approaches towards the Women empowerment are clearly evident from the Four major World conferences on women's rights viz.,

- Mexico City (1975),
- Copenhagen (1980),
- Nairobi (1985)
- Beijing (1995).

In the **Fourth World Conference on Women** in Beijing (1995) *the Platform for Action* was signed. This incorporated a

commitment to achieve “gender equality and the empowerment of women”. The Platform for Action declared twelve critical areas of concern and required concrete actions by the respective

The Platform for action required media to assist in women empowerment by providing a balanced picture of the diversity of women's lives and their contributions to society. *With the ongoing revolution in global communications and the introduction of new information technologies, the potential now exists for the media to make a historic contribution to the advancement of women.*¹¹ It required state parties to take strict actions towards pornographic and violent media products which affect the dignity of women. Role of media in women empowerment was highlighted in the conference in following points-

- Women taking up careers as journalists, reporters and broadcasters in several nations
- Emergence of columns and programmes devoted to women's issues through media outlets incorporating positive portrayals of women.
- Internet as a means to enable women to enter into online arrangements, gathering information and online assistance from help groups whenever required.
- Increasing gender sensitization by positive portrayal of women through media.

Indian Perspective

India is a hub for 82,237 newspapers¹², 857 permitted private satellite television stations¹³, approximately 49,000 publications¹⁴, 86 radio stations¹⁵ and approximately one million assessable websites. Mass media is considered as the fourth pillar of the Indian democracy. Mass media performs the key role in disseminating information. Mass media plays a

Governments of States. One of the areas was WOMEN & MEDIA. Thus, for the first time at the international platform, the role of media was recognised.

key role in empowering Indian women which can summarized under the following heads-

1. Television/ Cinema & Women Empowerment:

Television and cinema is the most effective way of women empowerment as it teaches the society how to behave in the most realistic manner. The serials aired on various channels contribute a lot towards women empowerment by positive portrayal of women. Serials portraying characters of Jhansi Ki Rani, Mahakali, Afsar Bitiya, Sandhya in Diya or bati hum etc are a few of numerous examples of daily soaps where women are portrayed in such a manner so that the society may learn what are the real attributes a female. Serials like Savdhan India, Crime Petrol and the like, warns the society against the heinous crimes committed in the Indian society against women. News channels play a prominent role in women empowerment by highlighting the contributions of women in the Country and even in the entire world, the latest laws and policies for women are firstly highlighted on the news channels, news channels do an effective coverage of crimes against women and many a times assist in the administration of justice. Advertisements also form a part of television, and strengthens women empowerment as various policies of government are advertised in such a manner so that each folk is aware of the initiatives leading to women empowerment.

Cinema is a golden platform for portraying the picture of an empowered woman and Indian cinema has best utilised this trend of showing the power of a women to the society. A few examples are Mother India, Kahani, Queen, Mardani, Marry Kom, Dangal etc.

2. Internet & Women Empowerment:

Internet is considered as a two way communication channel where on one side it plays a role of disseminating information regarding laws in India ensuring women empowerment, government policies in this regard, latest judgments, contribution of women in the society etc., and on the other hand internet through social media provides a platform to the women to express what they feel by writing blogs, status on twitter, facebook and the like and posting videos on youtube etc.

3. Radio & Women Empowerment:

Radio is a friend of all times. Through mobile phones, radio becomes the first choice of entertainment for every individual. Several stations like Akashvani, Vividh bharti etc., contribute a lot towards women empowerment through effective advertisements of government policies ensuring women's freedoms in the most simple manner so that even those who are illiterate and economically weak are able to understand the rights of women in the 21st century.

Advertisements of women help line, maternity facilities by government, girl child education, prohibition on sex determination, female foeticide, infanticide and child marriage, financial assistance to women by the government

etc are generally aired at frequent intervals for educating the people of India about women rights.

4. Newspapers & Women

Empowerment: Newspapers are most authentic source of information throughout the Country. It contributes in the women empowerment by circulating information regarding what is done by the governments in the field of women empowerment, what crimes are committed against the women in India, what was the public reaction, role of police and judiciary. Every aspect regarding women safety, women's rights and women empowerment is provided in the newspapers in a crystal clear manner.

Criticism

Every coin has two sides and so has the mass media. One side of mass media contributes positively in the women empowerment covering all possible dimensions ranging from imparting knowledge to delivering platform for expressing views. The darker side of mass media creates hindrances in the path of women empowerment and the governments is armed with numerous legislations and penal policies to curb the menace. Some are effective some are not. A glimpse of darker side of mass media may be summed up as –

- Portrayal of victimization of women in a manner which shakes the conscience of the society. Some of the serials as well as movies depict the character of women as a helpless creature which is nothing but an object of torture. Torture in the form of domestic violence, early marriage, jauhar, sati, rape, sexual harassment, eve teasing etc, are depicted

in the television and cinema in such a realistic manner that it aids in the birth of negative thoughts in the under developed minds.

- Newspapers and news channels are given the responsibility to be truthful and authentic but sometimes either the media do not cover the true stories or under the influence of man and muscle power they show what is actually not the truth .
- Internet is flooded with porn videos and sites which are against the prestige of a women. Stalking, hacking and abusing women in the most disrespectful manner is a common crime which is committed against the women specially in the cyber space.

Conclusion & Suggestions

It may be concluded that mass media is an effective measure for ensuring the dignified status of women in the society as it strengthens the concept of women empowerment in infinite ways. Media is a power defacto and needs to be immune from the prejudices of the society so as to bring a change in the mind set of the society by developing values which are not prejudiced against women. Few measures may be suggested for the better better role of media in empowering women-

- Professional guidelines and code of conduct should be framed to restrict negative portrayal of women through mass media
- Though Indecent Representation of Women's Act puts a bar on pornography yet certain additional laws should be framed for effective control on porn contents in cyber space.

- Involvement of women in journalism and their participation at decision making levels in mass media should be encouraged.
- Media campaigns and awareness programmes for gender sensitization should be encouraged

References-

¹ **The Home and the World** by *Rabindranath Tagore*, Chapter II-Bimala's Story available at <https://en.wiki source>

[.org/wiki/The_Home_and_the_World/Chapter_2/Bimala%27s_Story](https://en.wiki source) browsed on 03/02/2018

² WOMEN EDUCATION: SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S THOUGHTS available at <http://oldisrj.lbp.world/Article.aspx?ArticleID=6864> browsed on 03/02/2018

³ Article 15(3).-Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.

⁴ Article 39(d).- that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

⁵ Article 42.- Provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief The State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief

⁶ Article 51A(e).- It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; **to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.**

⁷ Article 15(1).- The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, **sex**, place of birth or any of them.

⁸ Women Empowerment Schemes available at <http://www.wcd.nic.in/schemes-listing/2405> browsed on 04/02/18.

⁹ **Article 1(3) of UN Charter.**-To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for



fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; available at <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/index.html> browsed on 04/02/2018.

¹⁰ **Article 1 of CEDAW.**- For the purposes of the present Convention, the term 'discrimination against women' shall mean any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms to the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/> browsed on 04/02/2018.

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<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/fs10.htm> browsed on 04/02/2018

¹² The Press Registrar at the RNI T. Jayaraj, RNI presented the 55th Annual Report 'Press in India' 2010-11 to the Uday Kumar Varma, Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_television_stations_in_India browsed on 04/02/2018.

¹⁴ <https://arcgate.com/blog/indian-magazine-market-overview> browsed on 04/02/2018

¹⁵ <https://www.quora.com/How-many-radio-stations-are-there-in-India> browsed on 04/02/2018