

Media – An effective tool in promoting women empowerment

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Abstract:

The Indian population comprises of 52 percent females who play a significant role in the development of the country. A woman in times has proved themselves in every sphere of life and has set an example and inspiration for others in the real life. But in reality the Indian women is still facing various problems that are hidden behind the closed doors and cannot be brought to light. Problems like girl child abuse, mal- nutrition , limited or no education to girl child, negligence towards health condition , right of property, domestic violence and many more to list are still left unidentified and often neglected or ignored by the society. Media as the mirror of the society reflects the real picture and problems faced by women. It is playing an important role in bringing of issues that were left untouched and brought acceptable changes in shaping public opinions. With change in time media has also changed the medium for delivering the messages on women empowerment and also made an effective use of both traditional as well as new medium of communication.

The paper gives an overview on various issues taken up by the media and the ways it has achieved success in eradicating various social malice. The paper also suggests those issues that needs a deeper thought by the media and should be taken up so as to uplift

the suppressed and under-developed women of the country and break the shackles of societal injustice and inequality faced by her. The media can also play a pivotal role in bringing the marginalized and underdeveloped women of the society to achieve success stories in various spheres of life that would lead to the progress of the society and the country as a whole.

Keywords: Women empowerment; Media; society; social malice; progress

Introduction

In the words of Swami Vivekananda “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.” The quality of Human Resource of any country leads to its overall development. In a developing country like India where 52 per cent of the population comprises of women, play a significant role in the overall development of the nation. However the condition of women in India is known to everybody where they are bound by the clutches of age old traditions. Women still today are discriminated, oppressed and exploited by the society on various grounds like gender issues, education, quality of life, participation, mobility, economic independency, public speaking, awareness and exercise of rights, political participation. While the list is endless, these issues are

raising serious concern for the development of the society and the country as a whole as no country could progress without the inclusion of the women in the process. Women are effective catalyst in the progress of the country as they are considered as the “transmitters” of culture, education and knowledge. The process of development would be incomplete without the active participation of women. Hence the development of women is the prime area of concern for the growth of the country. Issues related to women empowerment needs to be highlighted as well as well discussed and brought to limelight so that more and more people become aware of it and take adequate steps in this regard.

The unheard voice of the society can be highlighted by using effective Media which play an important role in shaping and modifying public opinion. Media which is considered as the “Watch-Dog” of the society can take up issues related to the women who form the weaker and marginalized section of the Indian society. The need of the hour is to maximize the use of various media and take up issues that need a serious thought by the policy makers, administrators, influential members of the society and the common men in general.

Women Empowerment and its importance

Women - the most valuable asset of the country are contributing equally in every field and made India proud at many occasions. No one can forget the contribution made by women Indira Gandhi, Medha Patekar, Arundhati Roy, Shobna Narayanan, Lata Mangeskar, Anjolie Ela Menon, Rekha, Meera Nayar , Kiran Mazumdar, Indira Nooyi, Roshani Nadar, Chanda Kocchar, Sania Mirja, Saina Nehwal ,Sunita Williams, Mary Kom, and many more in their respective fields. They are leading the country, corporate sectors and creating

milestones in their socio-economic as well as political condition of the country. They are setting examples for many and are excellent examples of inspiration for others.

This is one side of the coin but the other side shows the reality where she holds the secondary position and has been starving for attaining an identity other than of woman who is a wife, mother, sister etc. In India where she is worshipped as the goddess in various forms like Durga, Shakti, Annapurna, Sarswati etc at the same time she is deprived of basic necessities. She is discriminated on the basis of alien traditions and culture which has resulted in oppression, exploitation and marginalization of women in Indian society.

The word ‘empowerment’ means ‘to authorize’ oneself for certain things. Women empowerment basically refers for creating an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development. Women empowerment can be interpreted as totality of empowerment including political, social, cultural, and other dimension of human life as also the physical, moral and intellectual. Empowerment of women unlocks the door for modernization of any society. Participation and control over resources of power are critical indicators in the process of development. Women especially in rural areas possess the least proportion of these resources.

Women are inherited with potential to bring a change in their own status as well as the society or community in which they live as well the country. However the contribution of women towards the society remains undervalued, unrecognized as well as un nourished by the members of the society who are bound by traditions and age old thinking process.

Women’s empowerment is the capacity within the women to bring about economic

change for them and is viewed as the most important contributing factor for achieving equality between women and men. But economically strengthening women – who are half the world’s workforce – is not only a means by which to spur economic growth, but also a matter of advancing women's human rights. When governments, businesses and communities invest in women, and when they work to eliminate inequalities, developing countries are less likely to be plagued by poverty.

In some developing countries where Women empowerment has been practiced proved to be an effective tool as result shows some interesting facts that are listed below:

- Where women's participation in the labor force grew fastest, the economy experienced the largest reduction in poverty rates.
- When women farmers can access the resources they need, their production increases, making it less likely that their families are hungry and malnourished.
- When women own property and earn money from it, they may have more bargaining power at home. This in turn can help reduce their vulnerability to domestic violence and HIV infection.
- When women have access to time-saving technologies – such as a foot-pedaled water pump or a motorized scooter – economic benefits can follow. Technology helps women increase their productivity as well as launch income-generating pursuits and entrepreneurial ventures. Those kinds of outcomes empower women to become stronger leaders and to

more effectively contribute financially to their families, communities and countries.

India is a fast developing country but women empowerment in India is still a distant dream come true. The gap between the goals initiated by the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programs and other related mechanism and actual condition of women in reality has widen up. Although India is developing in all spheres but the condition of women in India still continues to deteriorate. There is a decline in sex ratio which clearly shows that there is discrimination towards women at the stage of birth. The crime graph against women has raised up which shows that rape, kidnapping, abduction, dowry related crimes, molestation, sexual harassment, and eve-teasing has increased in the last decades. Married women face domestic violence and even sexual abuse by the family members. Women irrespective of their class, caste, education, marital status, age are not safe.

Women empowerment is a difficult task and can achieve full support from the public only when they are aware of their rights and provisions in the constitution. Women participation and involvement can help in dealing with the problem in a effective manner. Women should realize that they have constitutional rights to quality health care, economic security, and access to education and political power. Mahatma Gandhi has stated that the status of women would not change merely by bringing legislations; it must be supported by change in the women’s social circumstances and situations and also man’s sexist attitude to women.

Current Issues related to women in India

Women empowerment can be better understood by discussing certain issues that

need attention by majority of people. These issues are undertaken one by one.

Political Issues

Women participation and selection in the political system of the country ensures the achievement of women empowerment to some extent. The 73rd and 74th amendment in the constitution of India makes a provision of reservation of one-third seats in all local elected bodies indicates the sign of political empowerment. Women are actively entering politics through Panchayat Raj elections. The percentage of women candidates in various levels of politics has increased but it has been found that their decision is mostly influenced by the male members of the family. It is important to train these ladies and inform them about their political powers which they can use for the benefit of the society and community in which they are residing. The Women's reservation bill is a sad story as it is repeatedly being scuttled in the parliament. All this shows that the process of gender equality and women's empowerment still has a long way to go.

Economic Issues

According to a report of UNDP women's work is usually undervalued in terms of economics. The value of household and community work is lower than the market value. There is discrimination in wage earned by the females as compared to the males doing the same work in various fields like agriculture, mining, trade, transport services etc. The wages earned by males in various sector is comparatively more than female's earnings.

The problem of women professions is not confined to wages rather they take up dual responsibility of profession as well a household and have to maintain a balance

between the two. Even the development programs and policies of the country tend not to view women as integral part of economic development as their productive role is often neglected in population programs.

Social and Cultural Issues

The socio-cultural values of the Indian society have affected the process of women empowerment. In Indian society still desire to have a male child who can look after them during their old age and can help in taking their "Vansh (generation)" ahead has also lead to the discrimination between the male and female child. A girl child often from her birth time is considered as "Parayadhan" and taken least care as compared to the male child. People should take care of their girl child and access the, with equal education, health, nutrition, employment and productive resources. This will help them in overall development of the female child and help them in paving their own ways for success.

Education

According to last census held in 2001, the percentage of female literacy in the country is 54.16%.

The literacy rate in the country has increased from 18.33% in 1951 to 65.38% as per 2001 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86% in 1951 to 54.16%. It is noticed that the female literacy rate during the period 1991-2001 increased by 14.87% whereas male literacy rate rose by 11.72%. Hence the female literacy rate actually increased by 3.15% more compared to male literacy rate.

Total literacy campaigns have provided illiterate adult women with a grand prospect for reading, writing, increasing awareness levels and skills training. Literacy campaigns have promoted gender equity and have

sought to empower them as to decision making about themselves, their families and their communities. The impact of literacy on women's life has often been dramatic. Experiences of Poddukuttai in Tamil Nadu (where women learnt how to bicycle and acquired ownership right in stone quarries) and Nellore in Andhra Pradesh (where a lesson in the literacy Primer inspired women to launch anti-arrack agitation that later engulfed the entire district and the state) have shown how women have been empowered at individual and collective levels as a result of their participation.

Health and Nutrition

The National Health survey came out with a shocking report that only 52 per cent of Indian women don't take consultancy about their own health. The maternal mortality rate in India is estimated at 437 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, result primarily from infection hemorrhage, obstructed labour, abortion and anemia. The antenatal and postnatal care is beyond the reach of Indian women. Various socio-cultural factors prevailing in the Indian society compels the female members of the society to eat last and less which directly affect their health.

Crimes against Women

The latest report of Crime Record Bureau of India shows that the total crime reported against women in 2014 is 309546 which includes kidnapping and abduction of women and girls, assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty, importation of girls from foreign countries, dowry death etc. This up soaring crime cases against women shows that women are dominated and exploited by the male members of the society. Crimes against women have taken various shapes in the form of domestic violence, female infanticide and feticide,

dowry, rape. Although we are aware of the problems prevailing in the society but only a few are reported by the victims and remain unheard because of the fear of society, family members, relatives etc.

Women empowerment can give voice to the women who are suffering from such heinous crimes and help in uplifting them in the society. These crimes are not only injurious and immoral for the women but for the society as a whole.

Media's Role in empowerment of women in India

Communication play a momentous role in development of the society and same is the case of women who play a significant role in all spheres of society that includes controlling population growth, increasing literacy rate, providing employability in different fields and improving the quality of life of the family and society at mass level. It would be justified to say that the various tools of communication can play a pivotal role in taking up such issues related to women of the society so that it creates awakening among the female members about their potentiality and thus leading to the development of the society. Media covers women problems drawing the attention of policymakers to issues requiring immediate attention such as the adverse sex ratio, infant and maternal mortality, crime against women and the effects of poverty on women.

Media has become a pervasive and powerful medium of communication in India but in the race of fast money making media houses are presenting news in a wrong sense and incorrect manner. Instead of giving important information and educative programmes, media is giving emphasis on programmes that are sensationalizing the public. Educative and informative

programmes are getting fewer places in radio, television, newspaper and have been replaced by soap operas, reality shows, interviews, or commercially beneficiary programmes. In the race to become more popular and to make more money, they have broken all the limits that must be followed for serving and building healthy and progressive society. They have virtually no respect for the sentiments and ethics of the people and the land that they serve to.

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:

The amount of coverage an issue gets from the media determines its importance in Indian Media. Certain issues remain behind the curtains as they don't get enough media coverage which lessens its importance in public sphere. Ignorance of media towards issues like violence against women which has become an epidemic in the prevailing Indian society has remained untouched by the Indian media. Disproportionate coverage of Sensationalized news has increased at alarming rate. Stories related to rape, sexual harassment find due place in media as it focuses on individual women who is attractive and a marketable victim. Media gives less weight age to women success stories that can set as an example for others. Women are often projected as show pieces beautifully decorated with saris and accessories to enhance their beauty that are plotting things to trouble other members of the family. The real problem at the grassroots level, tradition, truth, beliefs and faiths of the society and country are missing in this race to gain TRPs.

This is the time to rethink and revisit the country's mass media policy. There are many issues which should be discussed threadbare to have an unbiased and healthy media policy in the country. But before that materializes, the stalwarts of Indian mass media should exercise prudence and restraint, show the truth, unadulterated and unbiased news and views, unbiased analysis and non-sensationalization of events or incidences whether big or small.

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