

IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA ON MODERN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

It is noted that Government is encouraging women to use media such as television by providing information in different aspects such as agriculture, education, literacy, environment, business, handicrafts, arts, drama, culture, etc. Further, many of the media such as internet are essential to gain information at the global level. Due to e-governance activities of the government, it is easy to communicate the information. Hence, mass media changed and transformed women's life by giving awareness about their rights and privileges in the society. On the other hand, the media is being misused by many persons, as reported in newspapers and other media. In this way, the mass media have both advantages and disadvantages. The paper analysis the impact of mass media on women.

INTRODUCTION

Today the society is more complex than it was a decade ago, making the process of communication also more complex and indirect. This view could be further strengthened by the research findings of Lerner (1958) who successfully established that the quickest way to change the _mind set 'of the traditional society was through the use of mass media.

Conceptually, the mass media are technological agencies and corporate organization, engaged in the creation, selection, processing and distribution of message that are produced at speeds and in quantities possible only with mass- production methods. Mass media, therefore, are the broadcast common currencies of public interaction in a society. Thus, the mass media are the organized means of reaching large number of diverse kinds of people quickly and efficiently.

Mass media of communication are very crucial for nation building and national development in any

developing society. Mass media are the creations of modern science and technology. They play a major role in informing, educating and entertaining the people. Besides, they are used to bring about certain desirable changes among the people, as media and society influence each other.

We are living in an era which has frequently been characterized as ‘the age of communication revolution’ a cycle of profound and accelerating social and cultural change often attributed to the impact of new media technologies. This communication revolution is, in fact, a succession of three overlapping technological stages that have taken place during the last 150 years.

To provide entertainment is one of the principal functions of all the media. Thus, whoever enjoys freedom has certain obligations to society and, therefore, the media, which are guaranteed freedom in a democratic Society, are obliged to perform certain essential functions of mass communication. The speaker must also remember that actions speak louder than his words.

WOMEN AND MASS MEDIA:

Mass media are used as channels of mass communication. The main aim or function of mass media is to inform, educate and motivate the people to accept new ideas and technologies so as to increase their living conditions and status. The ongoing communication revolution has opened up possibilities of accelerating development especially for the upliftment of women and children. But if it remains uncontrolled and unguided, this revolution will have adverse effect on the life of women. Every now and then, one comes across reports of one or the other group of women activists protesting against what they describe as wrong exploitatively projection of women in media particularly in the electronic media. Women are basically seen as performing a decorative function and being marginal to national growth and development. Their primary place is seen as being within the home and this value is reflected in the content and setting of most of the television programmes. The plural nature of Indian culture and diverse role that woman play is neither acknowledge nor communicated. This results in reinforcement of the stereotyped image and role specification of woman in an un-dimensional projection of their reality. When we speak of the image society projects of its women, we have in mind its ideal of woman hood or its popular stereo-types or the position of women of the institution, of the role or position of women or the vision of poets, artists and prophets relating to women (Shrivastva, 1992)

Schramm (1964) said that it is extremely difficult to imagine that the national and economic development can be achieved without the input of external information. Irrespective of this complexity and indirectness, the fact remains that development related information must reach the population if any positive change is to be

brought about. But when the bulk of population will live in less accessible and isolated villages both in plains and hills, such an effective communication is very difficult.

In such a situation mass media are extremely important in stimulating a sense of involvement, which is essential for development. Mass media create empathetic spirit, widens people's horizon and conducive climate for change. That is why Bellurkar (2000) stated that the mass media should be put to service for national development. Among the different mass media television is considered as powerful media, as an institutionalized source of information for creating awareness about the innovation existent with additional information. It is used as powerful educational tool to reach millions of people all over the world simultaneously. The eye and ear mindedness of rural women makes this media as one of the most promising of the present day educational sources. They offer vitality and newness, which attract attention, create interest and stimulate desire to learn. To keep pace with such development, effective utilization of Television as a means of communication is very much essential.

Media does not merely reflect reality; it shapes it, both at an ideological and at a material level. While there are times at which the media is relatively open to the plurality of women's roles and their contribution, these attempts often remain unseen and unheard because of the much stronger force of the negative messages as a result, of the women's movement of the seventies and eighties, that women's issues began to find their way into mainstream papers. While coverage has been mixed, it is also true that many issues such as women's struggles against violence, dowry, rape, their fight to protect the environment, have received a great deal of sympathetic coverage in newspapers. Several national dailies have also set up gender pages and there are more women working in the medium (Ramanamma, 2005).

The distance between women and media not only deprives the women of their right to information and knowledge but also keeps the women in the dark regarding the blatant misuse of the female and the distortion of the truth. Although the images of women as reflected by the different mass media in the country are not very different, it will be an interesting exercise to study how these images feed and reinforce the stereotypes. The distortion of realities by the media has increased the gap of understanding between the different sections of society. Effective informative communication is one of the most important channels for the growth and development of women in the informal or unorganized sector, as without information regarding services and benefits available through legislation, government schemes, banks and voluntary organizations, women can hardly take advantage of them (Ray, 2008).

The traditional mass media had a confined sphere in countries where it initially grew, functioning strictly in line with the values, norms, traditions and basic requirements of the local populace. But, the invention of new technologies like satellite communication, cable television and internet has helped it across national boundaries and address the worldwide audience. These boosting inventions have, in fact, made the world a global village by transforming media into an international entity.

A large group of working women of India is in the rural and unorganized sectors. Socially the majorities of Indian women are still tradition bound and are in a disadvantageous position. The reasons for such disadvantage are the inequality in women's access to and participation in all communications systems, especially the media, and their insufficient mobilization to promote women's contribution to society.

Women and girls are exposed to great discrimination in economic, education, health and social services access worldwide. On the other hand the range of women's economic activities in developing countries is very broad. It includes formal sector and informal sector employment, as well as self-employment in farming, trading and crafts production etc. There are numerous possibilities for ICTs to improve women's economic activities in the field of trade, governance, education, health, crafts, employment in formal as well as informal sector. ICT's bring lot of opportunities to women in the work situations and small business. Teleporting, flexi time and work from home arrangements are some of the gender dimensions of ICT's usages (VAPS).

Following are few areas, which affected the lives of women positively by mass media.

Women's Education:

In a country where illiteracy predominates over literacy, education becomes an important factor for social mobility and social change. In a developing society, education is a part of overall developmental effort. Indian women, for over a thousand years, were kept away from the corridors of 'education: In a closed traditional society family and kinship play the role of major agents of socialization. But in a transitional society part of this role, and that too the important part of is shifted to formal education. Education is, therefore, the first step towards the women's development. Many of the articles and reports published in newspapers emphasize the role of education for women. There are regular programmes in radio to increase the women's participation in education and employment. With the advent of television, this electronic medium has become an important agency of socialisation. Much is learnt formally through television. In our society, it is being used in the Schools as an aid in teaching. Moreover, many educational programmes are relayed on television as its regular feature.

Health, Hygiene and Nutrition:

Another important area of women's development is that of health and nutrition (including maternity). Although maternity in our society is highly valued, yet mothers are not cared for properly. In the same way, the food patterns and dining manners are such that females in a family eat in the last when everyone else has taken the food. They are, therefore, provided with whatever is left for them. Being male dominant, nutritious food in our society is given to male members in the families. Moreover, females in a house do much more hard work than men. Their work may appear routine and simple on the surface. In fact, they get up first in the morning and attend to the needs of every member of the family in addition to other household jobs and they are last to retire to bed in the night. Many of the regular columns in newspapers highlight the health, hygiene and nutrition for women. Further, there are also regular programmes on women's health and nutrition. Many of the health tips are also given in the radio programmes. Depending on the requirement, women can search ICT tools such as internet to get information on health and hygiene.

Women and Law:

Indian judicial system has a system of written and coded laws. Indian masses are not familiar with all the laws of the country. Legal knowledge has become a privilege of the few. This is true of men as well as women but it is truer in case of women than men. Many new laws have been enacted with a view to safeguard women's rights and to protect them from social discrimination. But majority of the women do not know these laws. Television is being used for disseminating knowledge about such laws. News papers are also playing significant role in revealing the provisions of different Acts and laws related to women.

WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT:

Even though housewives are doing household work, it is treated as unproductive. But due to social conditioning, the household work of women is not counted in the category of productive work. Whether their household work is recognized by society as productive or unproductive, the fact remains that they have been traditionally in the state of perpetual dependence. This has also contributed to their low status in society. Industrialization opened opportunities for women to seek gainful employment outside the home. Economic independence has contributed a lot towards the improvement of women's lot in society. Moreover, the life styles have become so costly now-a-days that a single earner in the family can't afford to meet all the requirements. Women's employment, therefore, has become an important element in women's development. Mass Media of communication have themselves attracted lot of talented women. Many of the web sites are providing information

about the self-employment, based on the homes of the women. Further, there are also many web sites which reveal the jobs for women in urban areas. Few of the TV channels telecast the self-employment opportunities for women.

ICT AS PROBLEM SOLVING MEDIUM:

Many of the weaker sections including women are suffering from different problems related to health, nutrition, social and law. The experts in the respective fields are interacting to the problems of these women to solve their problems through blogs and social networking web sites. There are also many programmes related to the women's problems in television.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Women are treated as weaker sex in the society. Realizing the importance of women in the society to improve the status of women, government has formulated many schemes and policies. Many of the schemes such as Stree Shakti, Myrada, SGSY, etc., are encouraging rural women to take up self-employment and generate savings. Further, the participation of women in administration of Panchayat Raj Institutions is also aimed for the women's political empowerment. All these policies and schemes are published in the newspapers and magazines, so that women must gain awareness on the same. Further, there are many programmes in radio and television, which are interactive for women empowerment. There are also web sites and social networking sites which popularize the women empowerment activities in India.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WORLD:

Mass media helped Indian women to gain knowledge about the whole world and now their views are not narrow and limited to their own geographical area. It is this awareness that widens the vision of persons and reduces certain prejudices and stereotypes. By reading newspapers or watching different channels in television, now women acquired more awareness about different countries and culture of those people. In this way, they have gained more knowledge about the social culture and life of different people all over the world.

UNIVERSAL FRIENDSHIP AND BROTHERHOOD:

Few of the ICT applications enhanced two way communications between people of different locations and countries. In this way, communication has made possible to create friendship and brotherhood for Indian women with other people. Many of the social networking web sites such as Orkut, Facebook, etc helped Indian women to

get links with their friends and other likeminded people all over the world

INCIDENCE OF CRIMES AND REDUCTION IN SOCIAL EVILS:

There are many social evils, violence and crimes, from which Indian women are suffering. They include exploitation, sexual harassment at work places, rape, acid attack, domestic violence, etc. Violence is on increase in everyday life. The front page of morning newspapers is full of stories of violence by the miscreants, criminals, terrorists, communal fanatics, feudal interest mongers, and by cruel and greedy dowry seekers. Majority of the films today are based on criminal and political themes full of violence and bloodshed. Mass media such as newspapers always report on the real events of such crimes and also reveals the punishments given to criminals against such crime. Many of the programmes telecasted in television related to crime are also helps Indian women to be cautious about the criminals who use many ways and means of violence against women. It also develops the legal knowledge of women against such crimes. Mass media also helped Indian women to increase awareness on social evils and practices such as dowry, Devadasi, child marriage, etc.

MODERN LIFESTYLE:

Modern woman is not only rational, but disciplined also. She is industrious, achievement-oriented and progressive. She is expected to work according to a well chalked out work schedule. Such a woman can never be expected to support anything which is not bound with pre-decided rules. But in the name of individual freedom in matters of personal likings and tastes, sometimes unbridled life style is promoted. The style of conspicuous consumption also prompts for unbridled life style. In transitional society, this is more likely to happen. When traditions begin to be challenged, the traditional authority loses its potency. A state of anomie prevails. Mass media is no exception to it. Commercial advertisements carry attractive and unbridled images. Hence, it is possible that mass media may help in development of favourable attitudes for an unbridled life style.

TRADITIONS, NORMS AND VALUES:

In recent times, tradition and modernity have loomed large in the conceptual baggage of sociologists. The process is an old one and earlier, it was subsumed under the terms ‘social change’ or ‘development’, whereby less developed societies tend to acquire characteristics associated with the developed societies. Modernization of a traditional society involves a multidimensional process. It signifies the evolution of a political community where individuals, emancipated from parochial loyalties of caste, community and kinship, project their allegiance to a progressively larger entity, the Government. Earlier, tradition and

modernity were viewed as contradictory to each other or a pair of opposites. But it has now been shown that tradition and modernity may not only coexist but may be complementary to each other (Sharma, 2009). Many of the programmes telecasted in television are proved significant in maintaining traditions, norms and values along with the modernity.

Many of the instances emphasized the importance of mass media for rural women empower. The success story of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, its approach which emphasizes the creation of enabling conditions in which every human being may have the opportunity to carve out dignified ways of living for herself/himself, has been an inspiring illustration for the developing countries. Grameen Bank in recent years has not only expanded its credit operations which are targeted at the poorest of the poor in rural Bangladesh, it has also rapidly diversified its activities. Grameen today is the focal point of a global network of institutions and individuals who provide micro-credit to fight poverty. Within Bangladesh, the Bank has undertaken major investment initiatives in those sectors where the poor have the comparative advantage in terms of their skills, enterprise and productive capacity. It has recently begun a scheme to provide mobile phones to women in every village. This shows that women can easily adapt themselves to the new communication technologies and use them for their family and economic survival. In India, the Self Employed Women Association (SEWA) has shown the way by the using video technology for articulating grievances of women construction workers, vegetable sellers and other such self employed women who had no forum for collective social action. It has gone a long way in innovating several self help programmes like opening bank accounts for the illiterate women account holders. These women workers also learnt to operate and handle video camera and other audio-visual equipment (Gupta, 2001).

Self Help Groups (SHGs) has emerged as the most vital instrument in the process of participatory development and women empowerment. The rural women are the marginalized groups in the society because of socio-economic constraints. They remain backward and in the lower position of the social hierarchical ladder. They can lift themselves from the morass of poverty and stagnation through microfinance, Information and Communication Technologies and formation of Self Help Groups. So credit is a crucial input for socio-economic development of rural poor, but the institutional sources of credit to rural poor are still inadequate. As a result the moneylenders and landlords provide credit to the needy borrowers and particularly the depressed sections of the society charging an exorbitant rate of interest. This non- institutional source of rural finance has various exploitative practices. The debtor-creditor relationship gives birth to master-slave relationship as the debtor mortgage his labour with creditor. The lack of knowledge further added the fuel to the fire. In a country like India, more than 90 per cent women constitute the SHG groups. They lack knowledge in the proper channelisation of their products and selection of entrepreneurship. Through various development projects financed by the

international developmental organizations, banks and the government of India supported their cause. But taking into account their poor knowledge and illiteracy level, most of the SHGs failed in the womb before seeing the light. But in southern India, like Andhra Pradesh and Kerla, SHGs in Tamil Nadu is progressing as per the objectives. To support their cause, various organizations have started the use of ICT for their further development.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are for everyone and women have to be an equal beneficiary to the advantages offered by the technology, and the products and processes which emerge from their use. The benefits accrued from the synergy of knowledge and ICT need not be restricted to the upper strata of the society but have to freely flow to all segments of the female population. The gamut of areas in which ICT can put a greater control in the hands of women is wide and continuously expanding, from managing water distribution at the village-level to standing for local elections and having access to lifelong learning opportunities. ICT in convergence with other forms of communication have the potential to reach those women who hitherto have not been reached by any other media, thereby empowering them to participate in economic and social progress and make informed decision on issues that affect them.

The mass media has the potential for information, inspiration, and instruction for rural women. From the definition of rural dwellers, most will be illiterates and few literates, engaged in the production of food fibre and raw materials. Those engaged in agriculture would no doubt require information on specific supplies required on their farm. They need to know where, when and how to begin to plant seeds, use pesticides, use mechanical equipment, etc. They also need to know the process, names of suppliers and how to satisfy the conditions for obtaining them. People who are engaged in rural non-farm economic activities need information on food processing, banking, textile, weaving, raffia work and tailoring, among others. They also require information on wood works, metal work, repair services for radio, vehicles and watches and other miscellaneous activities like soap making. Rural people also need information on the importance of good source of drinking water and the prevention of common diseases. Mortality and malnutrition of children are particularly prevalent in rural communities; therefore, a lot of information on childcare is required. Rural dwellers also require information on social participation in any programme for rural development.

CONCLUSION:

Entertainment is major purpose of almost all the respondents in use of different types of mass media. But still, many of the women are aware about the advantages of mass media in education, training, gaining knowledge on different occupations, social welfare, politics, social trends, health, nutrition, child rearing, recreation, physical

fitness, yoga, meditation, devotion, etc. Many of the women are hesitate to use internet at public places as the views of public are not good in visiting such places and there are also family and cultural restrictions to use internet in their houses. It shows the gender inequality in use of mass media. An overwhelming majority of women are not at all using social networking web sites.

Overall, impact of media is very good in use of modern items such as cosmetics, clothes, practicing lifestyles, education, knowledge, culture, etc. On the other hand, there is also degradation of culture, traditions and social values due to impact of mass media. For few of the women still there are cultural restrictions, restrictions to use only few programmes in television and complete restrictions to use all types of mass media. In this way, women are suppressed and restricted to use mass media in some families.

Women have got increased awareness on health, well being, nutrition, etc as advantages from mass media and on the other hand, but as expressed by many respondents, mass media increased dependency and addiction and also created problems of lower vision. It is surprising to note that as agreed by women, mass media decreased morality, ethics and social values and increase in crime and violence. To a greater extent, mass media has become entertainment media for children and spoiled their education.

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