

Media Literacy and Women Empowerment: An Evidence from India

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ABSTRACT

In the present times the role of media and its impact on holistic development of the society is a topic of scholastic and as well as political discussions across the globe. The power of media to empower the underprivileged, especially the women is a topic that attracts lot of public discourse. Previous studies have proved that for any society to develop and prosper, its women are to be developed first and development is the outcome of empowerment. The ability to develop self-control, independence, and confidence in the face of a patriarchal culture is women empowerment and studies claim that having access to information is one of the major factors of empowerment. And the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and disseminate messages in a variety of forms is referred to as media literacy.

This study is aimed at understanding the relationship between media literacy and women empowerment in the context of India. The study highlights the scope and challenges of Indian media and its treatment towards women related issues in India. Further, an attempt has been made to identify the disconnect between the various facets of Indian society which has widened due to the media's distorting of reality with special reference to women.

Keywords- Women Empowerment, Media Literacy, Indian Media, Status of Women, Development.

"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 Vivekananda

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the media play a more and bigger role in information dissemination. Everyday tasks involve the use of media, whether at home or at work, for pleasure and amusement, education, or a variety of other objectives. The media can be utilized as a tool to empower people, especially women. According to previous studies, media can be used to empower women, though, they must be media literate. Any effort to improve the quality of life for people in developing countries would be ineffective without advancement in the empowerment of women.

According to many scholars (Christ & Potter, 1998; Livingstone, 2004; Sonia Livingstone and Vander, 2010) the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and disseminate messages in a variety of forms is referred to

as media literacy. The capacity to access and operate a computer, the Internet, telecommunications, and electronic media is considered media literacy. People of all ages are taught critical thinking and analytical abilities through media literacy, enabling them to better understand contemporary media culture. In present times, print literacy—defined as the capacity to read and write—is no longer sufficient. Everyone must learn how to "read" visual image messages, such as those in TV, movies, and advertisements, in addition to written words. Studies further claim that a media-literate person need not be able to answers to all questions but must know how to ask the right questions: (a) Who created the message? (b) Why? (c) How and why did they choose what to include and what to leave out of the message? and (d) How is it intended to influence me? In addition to that people who are media literate need to be aware of how these messages

and media might aid in the empowerment process (Aufderheide, 1993 as cited in Hobbs, 1998).

According to Sargant, the following issues are raised in the debate on the concept of media literacy:

1. Does it matter if people are not media-literate? What is wrong with invincible ignorance?
2. Do people know what equipment is available, at what cost? What channels, program and services are available to people in their own homes/area? Via what equipment? At what cost?
3. How do people find out about content or choose what they want to watch, to listen to, or to find on the Internet, from the daily newspapers, the radio, or television? Would a classification system help?
4. Do people understand the techniques used to promote programs? Can they differentiate between the different types of communications: commercial, factual, fictional, entertainment-based, and political?
5. Do people understand how messages are constructed or manipulated? Is it necessary for people to know about production or engage in production themselves? It is, after all, argued in respect of basic literacy that people need to be able to read and write themselves.
6. What role can the media, particularly broadcasters, play in offering or understanding and helping improve media literacy?

The BBC reports that there are hundreds of media outlets functioning in India that are multilingual and have a thriving media environment. There are around 197 million television households, many of which use direct-to-home satellite and cable services. There are about 900 private satellite TV stations operating, with almost half of them specializing in news programming. The public television station Doordarshan runs several channels, including the popular DD1 that attracts millions of viewers. Satellite TV with many channels is very popular. Also, millions of people subscribe to popular platforms. A free-to-air platform called DD Free Dish is run by state-owned Doordarshan. There is a sizable audience for Over The Top (OTT) streaming platforms. There are many FM radio stations that play music. However, only the free All India Radio can create news programmes. Over 99 percent of the population can be reached via AIR stations. The viewers now have a wider range of options to browse, especially when it comes to TV, thanks to the rising media proximity. The effects and affects of media are today felt on a global scale, across social and cultural divides. Furthermore, broadcast vicarious influence has supplanted direct experience in many areas of daily life, according to Albert Bandura (1986). Life gradually imitates the media, whether it is through thought patterns, character traits, or conduct patterns.

The media can affect people in many ways. These could be short-term or long-term. Five categories of media effects are listed by Potter (2005). The following fall under this category: cognitive, attitudinal, emotional,

physiological, and behavioral. The learning of knowledge and the retention of that information in either short- or long-term memory are cognitive effects. Media through information and images has a variety of effects on attitudes, including encouraging evaluation, shifting presumptions, or supporting officially held dispositions. Publicists make extensive use of this to promote their products. Over time, people who are exposed to a certain issue repeatedly start to place value in what is being shown. According to Ross's 2003 study, 52 percent of young people who watched movies with smoking performers started smoking because of what they saw onscreen.

Advertiser-approved content grows at the expense of less lucrative, audience-friendly programming and high-quality news for citizens as mainstream media merges into ever-larger multinational corporations. The resulting union produces the most powerful institutions of our time, a combination of Big Media and Big Advertisers that dominates society, the economy, and politics. This is the "Wal-Martization" of the world's information, which is larger than governments, funded by multibillion-dollar advertising budgets, and staffed in droves by lobbyists (Robert McCannon, 2009).

Literature review suggests India and other developing countries are experiencing the same problems. Large global aggregates own shares in a number of Indian media outlets, but those that are still locally owned are part of even larger corporate structures. Because running media associations requires a lot of money, benefit thinking has taken centre stage, and the promoting division typically has more influence. Recent studies have claimed that media scope and tempo are determined by advertising, market research, and media planning, including ownership patterns and journalistic tendencies. In general, business media has gained momentum on public service media. This has resulted in publicity, progress, and sponsorship that are persistently influencing people in the larger social and political discourse.

II. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

It is a process that enables women to develop self-control, independence, and confidence in the face of a patriarchal culture. The major tools for empowering women are independence from others and economic freedom. Some fundamental barriers to women's empowerment include lack of confidence, inferiority complex, limited options, and all sorts of deprivation. Women's empowerment is therefore a change in a woman's life that increases her potential to living a full human life. Most current definitions of empowerment in the development literature draw upon Amartya Sen's articulation of "Development as Freedom" (1999) where development is about expanding people's choices. For example, Bennett (2002) defines empowerment as "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold

accountable the institutions which affect them.” Sen (1993) defines empowerment as “altering relations of power...which constrain women’s options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being.” For Batliwala (1994) empowerment is “how much influence people have over external actions that matter to their welfare.” Kabeer (2001) defines it as “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.” Hence, control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial, Kabeer 1994) and ideology (values, beliefs, and attitudes, Batliwala 1994) is one of the most important dimensions of most definitions. The second dimension shared by most definitions is women’s agency, i.e., that women themselves have a right to make choices and should be involved in determining which choices make the most sense for them and their families (e.g., Kabeer 1999). Third, since empowerment implies a move from being without power to having power, most definitions also imply that it is a process that involves change over time. Finally, empowerment is also understood as outcome, such as improvement in education, health, and economic and political participation. The most common indicators of women empowerment measure capabilities, education and health in particular, and control over economic and political resources and decision-making.

III. STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

For any country to prosper one crucial factor to consider at all times is the status of women (Nath, 2001). In order to talk about women’s empowerment, you must first address how women are currently treated in India. The status of women was rather desirable in ancient Indian civilization (Seth, 2001). Due to globalization and corporate avarice, the role of women has recently undergone some significant changes. By speaking, writing about it, and performing on stage, most social reformers aimed to revive and stimulate women’s brilliance. Among them are a few well-known reformers, like Ramaswami, Duragabai Deshmukh, Jyotiba Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Iswarachandra Vidya Sagar. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was successful in getting the monarch of William Bentick to declare the sati structure illegal through his emissary. The law of Manu about the role and behaviour of women has been rigidly upheld in the man-centric household and culture of our country for a sizable amount of time (Chandrakala Halli et al., 2016). Women were required to engage in all social activities during the preceding decade and were not seen as essential family leaders. Literature review suggests, the conditions for women in rural and provincial areas were far worse. Regardless, women are involved in activities that generate income in the modern world. Despite making up half of the world’s population, women have inferior social, economic, and political position than men. They have also been exposed to oppression and abuse of a particular kind for a long time, and this is still the case

today. It was natural for states to anticipate equal rights for men and women because to deny these rights to half of the global population would amount to criminal activity and would also be inconsistent with human poise, political sturdiness, and social homogeneity.

India had 121.06 billion people as of the 2011 Census, with 48.5 percent of those being female. The sex ratio (number of females per 1000 males) in India as a whole in 2011 was 943; the corresponding figures for rural and urban areas were 949 and 929, respectively. In 2017, the mean age of women getting married across all of India was 22.1 years, while the corresponding figures in rural and urban areas were 21.7 years and 23.1 years, respectively. According to the National Sample Survey (July 2011–June 2012), households with a female head of home make up 11.5 percent of rural households and 12.4 percent of urban households. Males are expected to have a life expectancy at birth of 68.37 years, while females are expected to have a life expectancy of 71.46 years. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has decreased from 167 in 2011–13 to 122 in 2016–20. According to the 2011 Census, 64.63 percent of males and 80.9 percent of females in India had a literacy rate of at least 64.98 percent. The rate of literacy improvement for rural girls has increased the most during the past ten years (24 percent). According to the NSS 75th Round, which covered the period from July 2017 to June 2018, 41.2 percent of girls in the age range of 3 to 35 years are currently enrolled in school, compared to 46.2 percent of men in the same age range. In the age range of 3 to 35 years, 11.0 percent of men and 16.6 percent of women are never enrolled. According to PLFS (2017–18), the unemployment rate for women in rural regions was 3.8 compared to 5.7 for men, while it was 10.8 and 6.9 for men and women in urban areas, respectively, for those aged 15 and over. In both rural and urban areas, the average wage/salary earnings of female employees on a regular wage/salary still lag behind those of male employees. The average daily wage received by casual workers working outside of the public sector showed a similar trend. According to data from Basic Statistical Returns of Scheduled Commercial Banks in India, women own about 34 percent of bank accounts in semi-urban, urban, and metropolitan areas compared to 37.03 percent of accounts in rural areas. The percentage of money stored therein is higher for urban females than for the female population of other locations, at 32.77 percent.

IV. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

When the weak have more sway over ideology and resources, it is said that they are empowered. It has been linked to concepts like autonomy, power, position, and agency. The Indian Constitution has very clearly stated that women have an equal opportunity to succeed and has given authorities the authority to create rules and regulations to protect the right. The definition of women’s

empowerment is the transformation in a woman's life that gives her more ability to live a fulfilling existence. Women's empowerment is not just a catchphrase; it is a must for a family's, society's, nation's, and the world's best chance of overall progress (Sen and Batliwala 2000). Affirmative legislation, plans, and programmes launched by the government, NGOs, and corporate sector in India through their Corporate Social Responsibility over a very broad spectrum, starting with the Indian constitution to development in recent years, according to studies, are helping to empower women. Gender parity in educational attainment has improved, political engagement has improved, but there is a worsening tendency in economic participation and opportunity, as well as in the health and survival segment. Even among SAARC nations, it is worse in terms of health and survival. In order to attain gender parity, the government must put more of its attention on these two sectors as we have fewer than ten years to complete the SDGs. Reevaluating India's affirmative action policies is urgently needed, along with fresh encouragement for girls' and women's empowerment through traditional education as well as support for skill development, equitable economic opportunity, and access to appropriate medical care and healthcare. The findings bring up several channels for policy debate and intervention in favour of women's empowerment.

V. HOW MEDIA LITERACY CAN HELP FACILITATE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

Mass media play a vital role in communication, which is crucial for the development of women. It should be emphasized that the expansion of women's education and their access to the workforce has aided in the development of the media. Women play a crucial part in every aspect of life, whether it's reducing population increase, promoting literacy, or enhancing living conditions for large populations. However, women may be counted on to take on this role once they realise their strength and are not purposely sidelined by male supremacy. Therefore, the media may play a vital role in educating women about their ability to be the driving forces behind societal change (Narayana & Ahamad, 2017).

The media in India is more interested in publicizing sex-related crimes by way of sensationalizing news of atrocities against women than it is in addressing real concerns like exploitation and unequal treatment of women in various fields. So, rather than spotlighting the exploitation of women, they become one of the factors contributing to an uptick in violence because their coverage frequently tends to exalt crimes against women. While it is true that the media has made some crimes against women more visible than ever before, it has also subtly maintained the stereotype of the woman as a housewife and a non-essential part of the conventional

value system. Unless there is a horrific murder or a rape case, women's issues rarely appear on the top page of a newspaper. Even on the women's page, newspapers rarely discuss relevant issues for women's empowerment; instead, they focus on topics like fashion, beauty tips, and cooking recipes (Kushwah & Garg, 2014).

The Indian media should adopt a more comprehensive perspective on crimes against women and undertake social audit of the factors driving up crime rates. It must play a significant role in raising public knowledge of the causes, characteristics, and preventive measures of women related crime. Also, media must be incredibly factual and empirical when addressing these concerns (Adhikari, 2014).

It seems clear that the rape victim's name should not be revealed as the only rule governing sensitive reporting on this subject. A graphic report is provided for everything else. The wording and spirit of the law are frequently flouted by the citation of the victim's family name and residence. Even though a small number of newspapers are committing a large portion of this illegal activity and malpractice, others are encouraged to copy them and keep up with the sensational trend. Another excellent illustration of media irresponsibility and exaggerated reporting is the Aarushi murder case. The grisly death of a teenage girl has been the main driver of higher TRPs for news channels for days. The press, both print and electronic, has a moral and legal obligation to refrain from sensationalising news about crime victims. Justice G.N. Ray states that while reporting on crimes against women and children, the Press Council of India has previously developed standards on the subject and urges the media to adhere to them strictly.

The coverage of women's concerns in the media helps policymakers focus on problems that require immediate action, such as the disparity between the sexes, newborn and maternal mortality, crime against women, and the effects of poverty on women and their families. However, this coverage is quite restricted, with the remainder of the space being taken up by wealthy ladies and their hobbies as well as actors and models from the film industry. Numerous women's periodicals focus on fashion, glitz, beauty products, losing weight, cooking, and how to hone one's "feminine instincts" in order to please their husbands and in-laws. Articles about employment opportunities, health awareness, entrepreneurship, legal help, counselling services, childcare services, and financial management are quite rare. In Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir, a study on this topic was carried out. The study included two local newspapers as well as two English newspapers. The percentage of topics relating to women that are published by notable newspapers is only 5%, with 8% appearing on the front page and the remainder inside. Justice G.N. Ray further states that women's developmental difficulties receive no attention while women are the main characters in television serials, men are frequently relegated to

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