

**MEDIA, EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The development of any country mostly depends upon its growth of education in society. Education is a premier instrument for achievement of all aspects of development. Progress of a society is possible only when its citizens are dynamic, resourceful, enterprising and responsible. Without such citizens, progress of country cannot be achieved in any field. Any nation's march towards progress and prosperity will remain a dream, its aspirations will be unrealized till the women actively participate in all the developmental activities and therefore today education has a tremendous task to cope with, the destiny of a nation is moulded and fashioned through women education. Women constitute about 48.5 per cent of population of our country as per the 2011 Census of India. But they are not well represented in social, political and economic life as per their numerical strength. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble. The constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Swami Vivekananda, great reformist of India, had said that there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is only possible if status of women is upgraded through empowerment and properly represented in all walks of life. Therefore, the need of the present era is to make the women fully independent and empowered through education. Mass media can be a useful tool for the spread of education which will lead to social development and awareness among the masses and eventually lead to women empowerment. Media has been highlighting and time to time discussing about the gender issues and has been raising its voice against social evils towards women such as illiteracy, dowry, rape, female foeticide, domestic violence, occupation segregation, gender disparity, etc. Educational attainment and economic participation are the key constituents in ensuring the empowerment of women. The economic empowerment of women is a vital element of strong economic growth in any country. Empowering women enhances their ability to influence changes and to create a better society. The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment, and the mother's education is usually more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children. Educated mothers are more likely to be in the job, allowing them to pay some of the costs of schooling, and may be more aware of returns to schooling. And educated mothers, averaging fewer children, can concentrate more attention on each child. This paper focuses on the concept of women empowerment and its indicators. Problems of women education in India have been underscored in this paper. This paper also highlights how media is advocating education and women empowerment.*

**Key words:** Media, Education and Women Empowerment.

**Introduction**

Women constitute about 48.5 per cent of population of our country as per the 2011 Census of India. But they are not well represented in social, political and economic life as per their numerical strength. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble. The constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Swami Vivekananda, great reformist of India, had said that there is no

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chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is only possible if status of women is upgraded through empowerment and properly represented in all walks of life. Therefore, the need of the present era is to make the women fully independent and empowered through education. Mass media can be a useful tool for the spread of education which will lead to social development and awareness among the masses and eventually lead to women empowerment. Media has been highlighting and time to time discussing about the gender issues and has been raising its voice against social evils towards women such as illiteracy, dowry, rape, female foeticide, domestic violence, occupation segregation, gender disparity, etc. Educational attainment and economic participation are the key constituents in ensuring the empowerment of women. The economic empowerment of women is a vital element of strong economic growth in any country. Empowering women enhances their ability to influence changes and to create a better society. The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment, and the mother's education is usually more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children. Educated mothers are more likely to be in the job, allowing them to pay some of the costs of schooling, and may be more aware of returns to schooling. And educated mothers, averaging fewer children, can concentrate more attention on each child.

The development of any country mostly depends upon its growth of education in society. Education is a premier instrument for achievement of all aspects of development. Progress of a society is possible only when its citizens are dynamic, resourceful, enterprising and responsible. Without such citizens, progress of country cannot be achieved in any field. Any nation's march towards progress and prosperity will remain a dream, its aspirations will be unrealized till the women actively participate in all the developmental activities and therefore today education has a tremendous task to cope with, the destiny of a nation is moulded and fashioned through women education. A woman is the mother of the race and guardian of future mankind. It is imperative that enough attention has to be given to reduce the gross number of female illiteracy in our country. Central Government and State Governments have taken a number of steps to stimulate the education of women.

National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) says that "Women's equality in power sharing and active participation in decision-making in political process at all levels will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment. All measures will be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in decision-making." If the access of education is provided with right spirit, a kind of awareness can be generated among women and it will directly influence the status of women.

#### **Status of Women Education in India**

The Sanskrit Shaloka, "*Yatra Poojyante Nariastu Ramante Tatra Devtah*", means that in the ancient past there was great respect for the women. The women were very high in morals and in performance of duties. No yajna could be completed without the presence of wife. It is said, historically in early times women in India enjoyed equal opportunities like that of men. Women in the Vedic ages not only received their due recognition in society but also got equal treatment in the matter of educational training. Many women were composers of Rig Vedic hymns. Gargi and Maitreyi, for instance were looked upon as the leading philosophers of the time. At the end of the Rig Vedic period the social status and position of women came to be degraded. This is clearly evident from most of the shalokas in Manusmriti. According to the injunctions of the Smriti literature a woman was reduced to a dependent role in relation to men. Men folk were now callous about women's education; what they deemed to be important in women

was their capacity to bear and rear children. Only among the women of Vaishnava community academic pursuits were still considered to be of great significance.

Due to the changed political, social and economic situation in the medieval India, the status of women received a great setback and consequently the opportunity for the education. Education of women remained somewhat neglected during the British period. With the dawn of independence there ushered a new era with regard to the status of the women. Today the Indian woman has equal rights with man to individual and social status, right to education, right to work with adequate wages and security of tenure, right of freedom of association, right to property and right to health and leisure. The Article 39 of the Constitution lies down.

1. The citizen's men and women have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
2. There is equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

According to a report, "After independence social and economic justice has progressed in this country and so has education of women. The Muslim women are now participating in ever large numbers. The reform movement like Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj, and the Congress movement had created a situation in which education of women received a lot of attention ever from before independence. As a result of this private and governmental effort, education among women has registered distinct progress. Thus while the percent of literacy among women was only 7% when the British left as against 25% among men, it has advanced to about 65.46% now among them against 82.14% among men. (Census of India-2011)

### **The Concept of Women Empowerment**

Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their capacities. Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- Having decision-making power of their own
- Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision
- Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- Having positive thinking on the ability to make change
- Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.
- Ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means.
- Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated.
- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma.

Women's groups, non-governmental development organisations, activists, politicians, governments and international agencies refer to empowerment as one of their goals. Yet it is one of the least understood in terms of how it is to be measured or observed. It is precisely because this word has now been one of the fashionable concepts to include in policies/programmes/projects that there is a need to clarify and come up with tentative definitions.

#### ***1. Definition***

The nature of empowerment renders it difficult to define. On the one hand, it is often referred to as a goal for many development programmes/projects. On the other hand, it can also be conceived as a process that people undergo, which eventually leads to changes. Nelly Stromquist (1993) defines empowerment as "a process to change the distribution of power both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout

society” while Lucy Lazo (1993) describes it as “a process of acquiring, providing, bestowing the resources and the means or enabling the access to a control over such means and resources”.

## **2. Indicators of Empowerment**

Understanding that empowerment is a complex issue with varying interpretations in different societal, national and cultural contexts. A tentative listing of indicators has been given below:

*At the level of the individual woman and her household:*

- participation in crucial decision-making processes;
- extent of sharing of domestic work by men;
- extent to which a woman takes control of her reproductive functions and decides on family size;
- extent to which a woman is able to decide where the income she has earned will be channeled to;
- feeling and expression of pride and value in her work;
- self-confidence and self-esteem; and
- ability to prevent violence.

*At the community and/or organisational:*

- existence of women's organisations;
- allocation of funds to women and women's projects;
- increased number of women leaders at village, district, provincial and national levels;
- involvement of women in the design, development and application of technology;
- participation in community programmes, productive enterprises, politics and arts;
- involvement of women in non-traditional tasks; and
- increased training programmes for women; and
- exercising her legal rights when necessary.

*At the national level:*

- awareness of her social and political rights;
- integration of women in the general national development plan;
- existence of women's networks and publications;
- extent to which women are officially visible and recognized; and
- the degree to which the media take heed of women's issues.

## **3. Facilitating and Constraining Factors of Empowerment**

Empowerment does not take place in a vacuum. It comes as a result of “a combination and interaction of environmental factors”. The conditions/factors that can hasten or hinder Empowerment have been discussed as follows:

### ***Facilitating factors***

- existence of women's organisations;
- availability of support systems for women;
- availability of women-specific data and other relevant information;
- availability of funds;
- feminist leadership;
- networking; favorable media coverage;
- favorable policy climate.

### ***Constraining factors***

- heavy work load of women;
- isolation of women from each other;

- illiteracy;
- traditional views that limit women's participation;
- no funds;
- internal strife/militarization/wars;
- disagreements/conflicts among women's groups;
- discriminatory policy environment;
- negative and sensational coverage of media.

#### **Problems of Women Education in India**

Various committees on the development of women such as *The Committee on the Status of Women in India*, *National Plan of Action for Women*, *National Policy on Education-1986* and *National Perspective Plan-1990* analysed that the major problems related to poor women education in India are:

- Domestic Duties;
- Helping in the fields;
- Death in the family;
- Social problems;
- Inadequate facilities;
- Lack of qualified female teachers;
- Teacher's unfair behavior;
- Sex bias in curricula and policies;
- Economic problem;
- Dropouts;
- Lack of transport facilities;
- Lack of hostel facilities for girls;
- Fear of sexual harassment;
- Fixed schooling hours and
- Popular perception in rural areas that educating a girl child is a waste of money and resources as there is no immediate gain from education. (Pandey, Das and Joshi, 2011)

#### **Media Advocacy on Education and Women Empowerment**

##### ***Efforts done through the use of Media (Progressive Side)***

The media is instrumental in defining what we think who we are and what is one's place in the society. Media advocacy is the strategic use of the mass media as a resource to advance a social or public policy initiative (Jernigan and Wright, 1996). Mass media has been used in various ways for bringing about education, information and development of the society such as radio has been used to lead green revolution, one-way and interactive television for rural development in some of the most backward districts, Gyan Darshan was launched in January, 2000, with three completely digital 24x7 TV channels dedicated to education. In November 2001, Gyan Vani, an FM radio station was launched through different FM stations in the country. Vidya Vahini was launched in 2002 by the Indian government to provide for IT and IT-enabled education in 60,000 schools in India. EDUSAT was India's first dedicated education satellite launched on September 2004.

Time to time and very frequently media has advocated for female education through the popular advertisements such as '*Parega India, Tabhi toh barega India*', '*School chalein hum*' of *Sarva Shiksha*

*Abhiyan (SSA), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)* to enlighten the various schemes of government for the development of women, children and girl child. Many radical documentary filmmakers, largely women has been making films on gender issues show casing in Doordarshan as there are no other platforms. Gyan Vani, FM channel by IGNOU telecast programmes on gender disparities; same are NGOs such as Voice based in Bangalore, SEWA in Ahmedabad and SERC in Tilonia trains women to make films reflecting the reality of women.

***Limited Coverage in Media (Lagging Side)***

Newspapers cover women's 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 and their families. But this coverage is very limited with the rest of the space occupied by cinema actresses, models, video jockeys (veejays) and the rich women and their hobbies. Many of the women's magazines are devoted to fashion, glamour, beauty aids, weight reduction, cookery and how to sharpen 'feminine instincts' to keep men and their in-laws happy. There are comparatively fewer articles on career opportunities, health awareness, entrepreneurship, legal aid, counseling services, childcare services and financial management. A study (Ray, 2008) in this regard was conducted in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. Two regional newspapers and two English newspapers were selected for the study. Prominent newspapers only publish 5% of women related issues and 8% are published on main page and remaining are placed inside. Study showed no importance is given to development issues of women. In the television serials women are the central characters, but they are portrayed largely as tormentors or the victims while the men very often take sideline and just seem caught in a web of unfavourable circumstances. Television culture has portrayed a breed of weak, indecisive men ensnared by sexy women when in reality men also play an active role in oppressing women in various ways including subjecting them to physical assault, rape, pushing them into the sex trade and even abandoning them. It is only desirable that serials should be close to reality and give message to the viewers where and how the society is going wrong. This portrayal of women in media has led the National Commission for Women to recommend amendment in the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act), 1986. The NCW wants to include new technologies like MMS and the electronic media and some which were left outside the ambit of the Act like posters and TV serials which perpetuate stereotypes of women.

Explaining the reason for including soaps in proposed amendment in the Act, National Commission for Women has stated that "women are either being portrayed as Sita (Ramayana) or as Kaikayee (Ramayana) and there seems to be nothing in between the two extreme characters being shown in Soaps. Divorces, adultery are highlighted frequently in Soaps where characters break the law without repercussion."

Negative images or just portraying reality is not enough. In fact, it can often be harmful. It has been observed that sheer duplication of the dark side of life can often lead to apathy and passivity. This can be avoided by depicting the positive images or success stories of women in whatever sphere they happen. There is need to produce programmes that talk about income generating schemes for women. Unfortunately, in these kinds of ventures typical "womanly jobs" like papad-making, sewing, embroidery, pickles making etc. are propagated. Stress should be given on non-traditional skills which can break the myth that women are suited to certain kinds of jobs only. A systematic survey of the existing schemes (Government/non Government) and presentation of the analysis and changes needed to upgrade the schemes which would make them more purposeful is essential.

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. Thus the media should take into consideration the following points:

- i. The media must project the working women in the unorganized sector as worker and not merely as performing the duties of wife/daughter. They being major earners, they must be projected as producers and not merely consumers.
- ii. The media should make deliberate attempts to not only project the problems of women in poverty, but should monitor in such a way that conflicting role models are not depicted, nor derogatory references to their work are made.
- iii. To improve content and coverage, coordinated efforts for increased interaction between NGO's, women's social action group, research organizations, institutes of mass communication, and the media personnel should be developed.

Ray (2008) finds extremely appropriate to refer to the recommendations made by the Joshi Committee regarding positive portrayal of women on Doordarshan. But these recommendations are equally relevant to all form of media. These recommendations, if followed in letter and spirit would certainly go in long way in enhancement of women's empowerment and facilitate drastic reduction in cultural biases as well as gender biases. They are:

1. The women's issue one of the utmost significance to the country as a whole and there is need for a widespread understanding that the nation cannot progress, as long as women are left behind as the lesser half of society. Therefore, the improvement of women's conditions, status and image must be defined to be a major objective for media channels.
2. The Government must at the earliest formulate clear guidelines regarding the positive portrayal of women on television. This portrayal must take note of women in all facets of their lives: as workers and significant contributions to family survival and the national economy: it must further endeavour to integrate women on terms of equality in all sectors of national life and the development process. These guidelines must emphasis that the "women's dimension" must from an integral part of all programmes and not be merely confined to Women's Programmes, nor to isolated attempts to discuss women's issues.
3. The number of commercial formula films screened must be drastically reduced, the cheap song-and-dance sequence totally eliminated and the content of such programmes carefully scrutinized in terms of their portrayal of women.
4. Women must not be portrayed in stereotyped images that emphasis passive, submissive qualities and encourage them to play a subordinate secondary role in the family and society. Both men and women should be portrayed in ways that encourage mutual respect and a spirit of give and take between the sexes.

5. The foreign exchange resource should be spent on importing worthwhile educative programmes, particularly those that show the roles, lives and struggles of women in neighbouring and other Third World countries so that a greater understanding and a shared perspective on problems is built.
6. It is necessary to ensure that a large number of rural women gain access to TV. Therefore, in the placement of community TV sets preference should be given to the meeting place of Mandals; Mahila Mandals should also be involved in the community viewing arrangement.” Everywhere the media has the potential to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. They can create self-regulatory mechanisms that can help to eliminate misleading and improper gender based programming.

Media, which wields immense power in a democracy - a power which is only expanding and not diminishing, needs carrying out a focused attention about women- related issues and the portrayal of women. It is, perhaps, necessary that the stabilizing force of women must be brought home to the Indian people. In every family and society, there is an ethical and spiritual space, which has been traditionally dominated by women. The principal character in Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* bemoans, ‘why can’t woman be like man!’ The media can play a salutary and a liberating role to give to the women the distinctive and the exclusive space, which must belong to them to enable them to generate the ethical and moralizing impulses for the entire society.

### **Conclusion**

Mass media can play a vital role in the spreading women education and empowerment through various social and public advertisements of developmental schemes such as NREGA, NRHM, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Media play a crucial role in the wider implementation of women’s welfare programmes by highlighting the traditional and modern roles played by women. Mass media can bring change in the people’s thinking and perception of events in favour of women for the greater development of the society only if it gives more importance to education. Media has a pervasive role in the aspects of women’s affairs which includes it should highlight women’s efforts to emancipate from the men’s clutches, case studies of successful women professionals and managers. The potential for overcoming from discrimination against the women in the media is there only when women have complete access to the media for self-expression and mass communication, when women would really share their control over the means of production with the men and equally establish ‘female gaze’ as a part of popular culture and present their point of view in all intriguing dimension, when women would believe in their own self and consider themselves as the makers of the history and an individual at par with man. And this can only happen when women are educated and in all sense empowered. Similarly, the issue of empowerment of women is only possible with her active participation in Indian Polity, economic affairs and every walk of life. Though Indian women has been empowered with the law of equality and considered at par with man but this is theoretical and limited to books only, the reason behind is women are not educated in true terms through media. Media should time to time educate people about the rights. Media has more to do for the women empowerment, at the same time should be more reciprocate and authentic towards the women’s problems, raise and fight against all such odds. And lastly, media should encourage more women participation such as more of women journalists, directors, producers, advertisers, etc. Until and unless women are not educated and not empowered with equal position in the society, the nation cannot be developed.



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