

Role of Mass Media in Women's Development

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Abstract

Development is a value-laden concept that improves socio-cultural, economic, material and non-material well being of the society. Though women constitute half of any country's human endowment, they are exploited in every walk of life. Our country is engaged in planned development programs for women since long. Still we have failed in achieving the desired goals. Without making women aware of their rights and duties, no plan of development can really succeed. It is here that the role of mass media becomes important for the development process. Therefore the present study examines the role of mass media involved in development of Maharashtrian women of Pune. Purposive sampling method of data collection was used.

In the present study, more than half of the respondents under study read newspaper, are interested in knowing about the different happenings all over the world whether literate or illiterate that is a significant change. Almost all respondents watched T.V. regularly for news, health, knowledge, cookery, comedy and serials but argued that technology has its positive and negative sides. Almost all watched movies and liked family oriented or educational movies with a social message. Some felt that T.V. was helping in creating awareness among women in some areas of social problems like dowry.

Nearly half of them used computers for getting information, storing data, communication purpose; but felt that due to internet students are losing interest in reading books.

So though media is playing an important role in creating awareness for development of women, nearly half of them felt that T.V. is not helping in liberating the women from the shackles of customs. More than half felt that T.V. has been useful in removal of caste consciousness only up to certain extent. While the process of change has started more needs to be done on the media front.

Key words: Women's development; role of Mass Media; newspaper; T.V programs; movies; computers and internet.

Introduction

L.P.Vidarthi (1981) says "Development means growth plus change" that involves both material and human factors. Development in the wider sense means much more than the growth of material wealth, it also means utilizing material wealth as a means of achieving non-material ends for improving the quality of life. In other words growth should be a means of enriching the lives of everyone,

it should serve as an aid to liberation especially women from all forms of social and economic exploitation.

The U.N. General Assembly adopted the Declaration on rights to Development in 1986. Development is multidimensional, total, human-centered and a value laden concept both qualitative and quantitative in nature. According to Anjali Kurane (2005) "development means increase in material wealth through productivity, increase in social well-being through education, health, improvement in social content of the human life, community feeling, music, art, safety, freedom, opportunity, sense of participation in local, regional and national affairs, depending on the individual interest and preferences".

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Historical perspective of women's development

According to historians the early Vedic period women had the same educational and social opportunities as men. They enjoyed a position of high status and respect. The status of women was lowered in the 'Pauranic' period, pre-puberty marriages came to be practiced, widow remarriage was prohibited, education was denied to women, sati and 'purdah' system came to be practiced, and property rights were denied to her and so on.

Women in the Buddhist period had an honored place in social field but their political and economic status remained unchanged. Padmini Sengupta (1974) says Muslim period was regarded as the black period in the history of women when status of women in India was at the lowest ebb.

During the British rule, a number of changes were made in the economic and social structure of our society and some progress was achieved in eliminating inequalities between men and women.

In the end of the nineteenth century, women in India suffered from disabilities like child marriage, severe restrictions on widows, non-access to education and restricting oneself to domestic and child-rearing functions. The social movements initiated by social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekanand, Jyotiba Phule, Maharshi Karve, Swami Dayanand Saraswati played an important role for equal rights of women and as such these movements succeeded in arousing social consciousness for the liberation and equal status of women.

Thomas. P (1964; 306) "In free India Government is trying its best to provide equal opportunity in social, economic and political fields and several efforts are being made to develop women". Yet social outlook and patriarch psyche of men have not changed and women are in subordinate position in the society Parvin (2005) states that though women constitute half of any country's human endowment, they are brought up in the culture of silence. Women continue to be exploited and marginalized in each and every walk of

life. Efforts to promote gender equality between men and women can contribute to the overall development of human society and the nation's progress.

Role of mass media in women's development

Exposure to mass media is an important variable in large-scale directed social change. The important means of mass media are newspapers, television, radio and computer and so on. The function of the mass media is to open up the large masses of people to new information, new thoughts, new attitudes and new aspirations, creates awareness and this in turn shape the attitudes and beliefs of the people leading to development and new achievements. According to Lerner (1967) the educated people who are exposed to mass media develop a mobile personality with a capacity to identify themselves with new aspects of their environment. This is the reason why Lerner calls the mass media 'the mobile multiplier'.

Pratima kumari (1988) points out that the content of communication at any given time reflects the patterns of values of a society. For example a subject dealing with the problem of women indicates the prevailing attitudes of the society towards its women and this can improve or lower women's status in the society by introducing new, or interpreting old ideas. Therefore the present study deals with the role of mass media in women's development.

The Setting

Pune city was selected for the research as cultural, educational, military, religious and industrial centres characterize it. The interview schedule was discussed with several informants and Pune station, Aundh, Shivajinagar, Kirkee, Pimpri, Yerwada, Nigdi, Bhosari and Chinchwad were selected as research areas.

The Sampling

Purposive sampling method was used for the study, were participants were selected with

known characteristics. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection was used. Six case studies were conducted in the present study were the cases had some peculiarities and typical ness.

Mass media issues in women's development

An attempt has been made in the present study to explore the extent of women's exposure to mass media and the role of the mass media in women's development. Keeping this fact in view the following FIVE indicators were selected for the study.

Reading newspaper

The newspaper is a swift medium for the delivery of news from the four directions of the world. Preeti Kumari (2006) reports in the context of women, newspaper could not rank first because women have no time to go into details of the news and it is so because in India female literacy is at its lowest ladder .

The respondents were asked whether they read newspaper and if so how often? More than half (58.9%) of the respondents read the newspaper daily while some (34.3%) read the newspaper sometimes and few (5.8%) of the respondents never read newspaper. Out of these respondents (1%) said that they do not get time, while (1.3%) of them were illiterate and (3.5%) of them said that they watched the news on T.V.

More than half read newspaper to get information on what is going around at local, national, and international level. Few said that they never read newspaper as they do not get time, few of them were illiterate and few of them said that they watched the news on the T.V. The respondents also felt that the newspaper is less expensive and gives knowledge on all national and international events.

In all it can be said that almost all the respondents whether literate or illiterate are interested in knowing about the different happenings at local, national and. all over the world, that is a significant change

Watching T.V.

T.V. has become today one of the indispensable necessities of life. Television seems to be the most effective and powerful electronic mass media. A study conducted by Krishnan, Dighe and Rao (1986) on representation of women on Indian television indicated certain trends such as 1) News related to women did not exceed 2.5 minutes out of the total 20 minutes. 2) In development oriented news items, women featured as workers in tea plantations, sericulture, poultry farming, etc. and as beneficiaries of welfare schemes. 3) In women's programs the focus was on the woman at home. 4) Where commercials were concerned, the lifestyles promoted were largely elitist; the models in the commercials were light skinned. Women featured in all categories of commercials, but they were dominant in ads for foods, grooming and

household items. 5) In voice-overs, male voices were presented as authoritative, female voices as informative and seductive.

In the present study in order to know the respondents exposure to T.V. they were asked whether they watch T.V. Almost all (78.7%) of the respondents replied that they watched T.V. regularly and some (19.8%) of the respondents said that they watched T.V. sometimes while few (1.5%) of the respondents said that they didn't have a T.V. set so they watched it at the workplace when they had time. All these six respondents worked as maid servants.

Almost all the respondents watched T.V. regularly and some

of the respondents watched T.V. sometimes and few of the respondents didn't have a T.V. so they watched T.V. at their workplace when they had time. The

respondents watched T.V. for news, exercising, for cookery, comedy show. One respondent felt that one should know to select and watch the proper channel instead of blaming the media. And some even felt that everything depends on the angle of viewing.

Impact of T.V programs on women

Men and women also are influenced so much that they try to copy the style of their favorite characters. Media can thus contribute towards the development of skills and images in a society. It is only through serving the interests of women that T.V. would be able to fulfill its role as a development tool.

So in order to see whether the respondents agreed that the T.V. programs had an impact on society and lead to social change, the following SEVEN indicators were selected such as:

a) Liberation of women from the shackles of custom

Traditionally women in our country, seldom enjoy equality with men. But today the changing socio-economic factors have been the product and instrument for changes in the lives of women. Preeti Kumari (2006) reports that 25% of her respondents agreed that TV program have liberated women from shackles of custom.

When enquired whether T.V. has helped in liberating women from the shackles of custom. Nearly half (41.9%) of the respondents said that T.V. has not helped in liberating women from the shackles of custom. Some of (21.1%) the respondents agreed that T.V. has helped in liberating women from the shackles of custom and some (37.1%) of the respondents held a neutral view.

The data shows that nearly half of them felt that T.V. is not helping in liberating the women from the shackles of customs. They also felt that when women are proving themselves in all fields she should be presented as an independent woman having her own identity. While some of the respondents felt that T.V. is helping the women in liberating from the shackles of custom.

b) Development of knowledge

Television has emerged as the most powerful and all pervading cultural force throughout the world. Television plays an important role in educational development also. Preeti Kumari's (2006) analysis reveals

that maximum number of respondents agreed that T.V. helped in development of knowledge.

The respondents in the present study were asked whether T.V. helped in development of knowledge. Majority (77.2%) felt that the T.V. helped in development of knowledge while some (20.5%) of the respondents said that the T.V. didn't help in the development of knowledge and few (2.3%) of the respondents took a neutral stand.

Thus it is seen that majority of the respondents felt that T.V. helped one in developing knowledge by watching channels such as discovery channel, history channel and so on and they also said that serials, advertisements also help in education if one views it from educational point of view, while some felt that T.V. is not helping in development of knowledge as today's children are busy watching reality shows, sending messages to this shows, or answering their questions so that they become rich and famous immediately and if they fail in it, it harms their personality.

c) Knowledge of national and international events

By its reach and impact the T.V. provides a very powerful communication. In a vast country like India it is especially important as a medium of information and education. Hence people get knowledge about the national and international events. Preeti Kumari's (2006) study revealed that all the respondents accepted the fact that they gain information about national and international events through T.V.

The respondents in the present study were asked whether T.V. has helped in spreading the knowledge about national and international events. All (100%) of the respondents replied that T.V. helped in knowledge of national and international events.

The above data reveals that all the respondents agreed that the T.V. is helping in the knowledge of national and international events and they also felt that as these are

shown in all languages even an illiterate can get knowledge of the events. It shows that women are interested in having information about national and international events.

d) Helpful in educational development

Initially the role of Television was primarily directed towards programs of entertainment. But it was felt that television could not remain just a medium for entertainment but should include education. Women and children make two-thirds of the total population so it is through serving the interests of women and children that T.V. would be able to fulfill its role as a development tool. The National Committee on Status of Women (1974) observed that since formal education is costly and a long term process it is essential to exploit the mass media for the eradication of illiteracy and to speed up the spread of education among women and girls.

The respondents were asked whether T.V. is helpful in educational development. Majority of (77.4%) the respondents agreed that T.V. is useful in educational development. Some of (22.6%) the respondents felt that T.V. is not helpful in educational development.

The above data shows that majority of the respondents agreed that T.V. was useful in development of educational knowledge and they said that technology has its positive and negative sides and it depends on the viewer to watch meaningful channels. Some of the respondents felt that T.V. is not helping in development of educational knowledge, they felt that today children are engaged in routine studies so much that when they get time they watch cartoon channels most of the times, so these respondents suggested that the channels watched by children should be presented in an informative and educative way.

e) Helpful in health related knowledge

Women are mostly confined to their homes and family or are engaged in looking and caring for the family members. They have a habit of neglecting their health problems till it

becomes serious. Mira Seth (2001) points out that the family planning program is placing undue burden on women for contraception, over 96 percent of the sterilization cases continue to be women. The mass media can play an important role to inform and bring awareness among women in health related knowledge.

In this context the respondents were asked whether T.V. is helpful in health related knowledge. Majority of (73.1%) the respondents said that T.V. is helpful in spreading health related knowledge and some of (18%) the respondents felt that T.V. is not helping in giving health related knowledge and few of (8.9%) of the respondents gave no response to this question.

The above data reveals that majority of the respondents felt that T.V. is helping in the development of health knowledge, they said that certain channels focused on health issues and provided solutions and some exercises which are helpful to maintain health.

While some of the respondents felt that the T.V. is not useful in development of health knowledge. According to them a doctor's advice is necessary to carry out the exercises shown on T.V. They also felt that any program focusing on health should have the details and in-depth study otherwise it misleads and confuses the viewers.

f) Removal of caste consciousness

Traditional India was characterized by a rigid caste system. Today in spite of advancements in urbanization, industrialization and attitudes one can hear incidences of caste inequalities. The mass media exert a strong influence on shaping the public attitudes. Television can play a crucial role to create awareness and generate public opinion in removal of caste consciousness.

The respondents in the present study were asked whether T.V. is helping in removal of caste consciousness. More than half of (55.6%) the respondents were of the view that T.V. has helped in removal of caste consciousness. Some of (25.4%) the respondents held the view

that T.V. has not helped in removal of caste consciousness while some of (19%) of the respondents had a neutral view on whether T.V. has been useful in removal of caste consciousness

The above data indicates that more than half of the respondents agreed that T.V. has been useful in removal of caste consciousness up to a certain extent as the change can be seen in urban areas in the form of inter caste and inter religious marriages. They also felt that more than caste, class determined one's status. Some of the respondents disagreed that T.V. has helped in removal of caste consciousness as caste is rooted in the Indian culture and Indian tradition since thousands of years. They felt that though the change is evident in cities there is still a caste consciousness in rural areas and villages where inter caste marriages are not allowed and caste wars take place, even

cities come across caste riots. They felt that the government should do more to remove caste consciousness as it controls a section of mass media. And role of family is also important.

g) Eradication of dowry custom

In the ordinary sense dowry refers to the money, gifts goods or estate that a wife brings to her husband in marriage. The importance of the problem of dowry is to be assessed as cases of burning brides is increasing, a good number of girls remain unmarried due to parents inability to pay dowry, which is leading to social problems. In the last few decades due to industrial revolution, spread of democratic values, prevailing socio-economic environment has certainly changed the status of women, but still the custom of dowry continues because of the vested interests. T.V. can play a crucial role as the serials and programs shown are the depiction of society, they can become agents of social change. Preeti Kumari (2006) noted that some of the important serials were helping in removing various types of social pathology. Dowry system has been supported by 43.78% of the respondents of her study.

The respondents of the present study were asked whether T.V. has a role in eradication

of dowry custom. Nearly half of (47%) the respondents replied in positive, they felt that T.V. is certainly helping in changing the attitudes of people with regards to the custom of dowry. And some of (36.8%) the respondents said that T.V. is not playing a role in eradication of the dowry custom. While some of (16.2%) the respondents didn't have any reply on whether T.V. is helping in removal of dowry custom.

The above data shows that nearly half of the respondents held the view that T.V. was playing a role in eradication of the dowry custom and there are some programs shown which are inspiring young girls to stand up against the custom of dowry. There are some serials also which are dealing with the curse of dowry system and creating awareness among women. Some of the respondents felt that T.V. was not playing a role in removal of dowry custom; they said that one has to follow the practice due to fear of losing status in society and girls remaining unmarried. They felt that the media should show more programs on social issues and should infuse confidence among the viewers so that it changes the mindset of people, instead of showing irrelevant, meaningless serials.

The analysis showing the impact of T.V. on the seven indicators listed above shows that nearly half of the respondents felt that T.V. is not showing the women as having an independent identity and is not helping in liberating the women from the shackles of customs. Even today in many serials women are shown fully decked up with heavy make up and performing traditional roles such as keeping the husbands clothes ready, worshipping and fasting for the husbands long life, tolerating troublesome in-law's and so on. It is shown in such a way as if that is the way a woman should lead her life. Today the woman is seen in all fields successful in the office as well as at home, she should be shown as an independent and confident woman and also the way she manages things. But most of the times an economically independent woman is shown as smoking, boozing neurotic. Majority them felt that T.V. is helping

in development of knowledge through channels such as history channel, discovery channel. All the respondents agreed that the T.V. is also helping in the knowledge of national and international events. Majority of the respondents agreed that T.V. is useful in development of educational knowledge, health knowledge and more than half of the respondents felt that T.V. is helping in removal of caste consciousness up to a certain extent. They felt that it depends on the viewer to watch meaningful channels, which give such messages and are educative and informative. A change can be seen in urban areas due to such programs but many needs to be done at the village and rural areas. For some respondents mass media has not been effective in removing the caste feeling as caste is rooted in the Indian culture and Indian tradition since thousands of years. Since we have been brought up in caste culture; role of government, role of the family is important here. While nearly half of the respondents held the view that T.V. is playing a role in eradication of the dowry custom and there are some program and serials shown which are inspiring young girls to stand up against the custom of dowry and are creating awareness among women for the removal social pathology. They felt that the media should show more programs on social issues and should instill confidence among the viewers so that it changes the attitude of people, instead of showing insignificant and boring serials.

Watching movies

The institution of cinema has occupied a position of far reaching influence in modern age. Movies are and will remain a major source of recreation; it reaches millions of people everyday, shaping their ideas, moving their emotions. Even small towns and villages have its cinema halls. Influence of this media on social ideals and mode of behavior is thus a two way process. Shashi Jain (1988) study on middle class educated and married women found that almost all the respondents were cinemagoers. Thus it can be said that movies

have achieved great popularity among women.

The respondents of the present study were asked whether they watched movies. Almost all (97.1%) of the respondents reported that they watch movies. They said that after a hard day's work a visit to a cinema hall or to watch a film of one's choice even at home refreshes the spirits and chases away all boredom. Few of (2.9%) the respondents said that they never watched movies as they were not interested and felt that today's movies were not worth seeing.

The above analysis shows that almost all the respondents watch movies and most of them liked to watch family oriented or educational movies with a social message. The youngsters liked to watch romantic and suspense movies, as they were exciting while the older women liked to watch old movies as they felt that such movies are soothing. Few of the respondents were not interested in seeing movies and they also felt that today's movies were not worth watching.

Using computer

The advent of computers and internet has revolutionized the concept of mass media. According to Lerner (1966:71) "The mass media makes essential inputs to psychopolitical life of transitional society via the minds and hearts of the people. It teaches people by depicting new and strange situations and familiarizes them with a range of opinions among which they can choose. Today most of the homes are incomplete without a computer. Cyber cafes are seen mushrooming on every corner so that everybody has access to computers and internet. Even small kids are computer users. The internet plays an effective role in giving information and in propagation and people are largely benefited by this.

In order to see the extent of the respondent's exposure to computers they were asked whether they used computers. Nearly half of (42.1%) the respondents replied that they used computers for various purposes such as for getting information, for communication

purpose, for storing data and for office work and more than half of (57.9%) the respondents said that they don't use computers as they had no knowledge of computers or they had no facility or it was not needed by them.

The data shows that nearly half of the respondents used the computers for various purposes as getting information, for storing data, for communication purpose and for storing data; they felt that computers have made work easier. But they also felt that computer is a technology and if something goes wrong everything comes to a halt so it is better to have written records also. Some felt that the internet is being misused by many and that students are losing interest in reading books as they can download any information directly from the net which they felt is not a good habit. While more than half of the respondents didn't use computers as they had no knowledge of it or they had no facility or they didn't need it.

Conclusion

The data regarding role of mass media shows that, more than half of the respondents under study read newspaper to get information on what is going around at national and international level and they felt that newspaper covers information from all four corners of the world and is affordable by all sections of society. Those who did not get time to get into the details of a newspaper watched T.V. to know about the things happening around. In all it can be said that the respondents are interested in knowing about the going-ons all over the world that is a significant change.

Almost all the respondents watched T.V. regularly for news, for health knowledge, for cookery shows, comedy shows and serials. Some of the respondents felt that comedy serials are relaxing; some felt that serials are boring and irrelevant and children are getting spoilt. One respondent felt that one should know to select proper channel for watching instead of blaming the media. And some even felt that everything depends on the angle of

viewing.

The analysis on the impact of T.V. programs shows that nearly half of the respondents felt that T.V. is not helping in liberating women from the shackles of customs and felt that she should be presented as a woman having her own identity, but she is still shown in her traditional roles.

The majority of the respondents felt that T.V. helped one in developing knowledge by watching channels such as discovery channel, history channel and so on and they also said that even serials and advertisements are educative. While some felt that T.V. is not helping in development of knowledge and programs such as reality shows is affecting children's confidence levels.

Almost all the respondents agreed that the T.V. was helping in the knowledge of national and international events and they also felt even an illiterate can get knowledge of the events. It shows that women are interested in knowing about national and international events and also because it has no literacy barrier.

Majority of the respondents agreed that T.V. was useful in development of educational knowledge and they said that it depends on the viewer to watch meaningful channels and they also felt that parents should put the habit of watching educational channels in children. Some of the respondents felt that T.V. is not helping in development of educational knowledge, they felt that today children watch cartoon channels most of the times, so these respondents suggested that the channels watched by children should be presented in an informative and educative way.

Majority of the respondents felt that T.V. is helping in the development of health knowledge; as certain channels focused on health topics and they also said that advertisements on various diseases shown are educative and informative. While some of the respondents felt that the T.V. is not useful in development of health knowledge as a doctor's advice is necessary for any illness and to carry out the exercises shown otherwise it misleads and confuses the viewers.

The data indicates that more than half of the respondents agreed that T.V. has been useful in removal of caste consciousness and nowadays class determined one's status and not caste at least in the cities and also the number of inter caste and inter religious marriages is on the rise. Some of the respondents felt that though the change is evident in cities, inter caste marriages are not allowed and caste wars take place, in rural areas and villages and even cities experience caste riots. They suggested that the government should do more to create awareness among the people as it controls a section of mass media.

Nearly half of the respondents held the view that T.V. was helping in eradication of the dowry custom as some serials are dealing with the curse of dowry system and are encouraging young girls to stand up against the custom of dowry. Some of the

respondents felt that T.V. was not playing a role in removal of dowry custom; and are showing meaningless serials. They felt that the media should concentrate more on social problems present in the society to change the mindset of people.

The data on watching movies shows that, almost all the respondents watched movies and most of them liked to watch family oriented or educational movies with a social message, which is a promising change. The youngsters liked to watch romantic and suspense movies as they were exciting while the older women liked to watch old movies as they felt that such movies are comforting and soothing to the eyes and ears. Few of the respondents were not interested in seeing movies and they also felt that today's movies were not worth watching.

Data regarding use of computers by the respondents shows that, that nearly half of the respondents used the computers for various purposes as getting information, for storing data, for communication purpose, they felt that computers are faster and have made the work easier but as it is a machinery they felt that one should always maintain written records also to be on the safe side. Some felt

that the due to the internet students are losing the significance of reading books as they can download any information directly from the net which they felt is not a good habit. While more than half of the respondents didn't use computers as they had no knowledge of it or they had no facility or they didn't need it.

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