

Women's Issues in India: Role and Importance of Media

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Abstract

Women's are the wealth of India and they have contributed in almost every field and made country feel proud at every occasion. They are in front, leading the country, making mile stones and source of inspiration for many. However, another reality of Indian society is that there is systematic discrimination and neglect of women's in India, which could be in terms of inadequate nutrition, denial or limited access to education, health and property rights, child labour and domestic violence etc. The fear of sexual violence has been a powerful factor in restricting women's behavior and sense of freedom. The struggle against violence is actually the struggle against the unequal distribution of power both physical and economic between the sexes.

Media is the mirror of society and media reports are reflection of happenings in the society. Media has immense power to influence the masses and communication and IT revolution has further increased its importance. Unfortunately, nowadays media is wavering from its actual role and giving biased information which makes development of the society more difficult. Portraying women as equals in the society is a subject that has been given low priority by the Indian media. The Indian media needs to be sensitized to gender issues and now must focus on women issues in a decisive way as their role is detrimental for the women empowerment in India. In the light of these facts, the present paper focuses on women's issues in contemporary Indian society and role of media in addressing the issues.

Introduction

In the 21 st century India is fast emerging as a global power but for half of its population, the women across the country, struggle to live life with dignity continues. Women are facing problems in every sphere of life whether employment, access to health care or property rights. The attention required is still not being paid to the issues that concern this section of population. Women empowerment in India is still a distant dream. There still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programs and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other hand. India is fast developing but women's in India continue to be discriminated. The declining sex ratio in India amply portrays the discrimination shown towards women at the stage of birth. Women may be have stardom in any stream but are getting harassment every day by their surroundings. They are victims of crime directed specifically at them, rape, kidnapping and abduction, dowry-related crimes, molestation, sexual harassment, eve-teasing, etc. Around 40 per cent of married women in India are victims of domestic violence. The increasing violence against women shown in television and films and their vulgar portrayal as objects of sex is also an important contributing factor in the escalating violence against women in India. The crimes against women in India are growing at a rampant speed. Women, irrespective of their class, caste and educational status, are not safe. The lack of any serious effort to rectify the weaknesses in dealing with the crimes against women further compound the situation and result is that the conviction rate remains abysmally low.

The resurgence of women's issues resulted in U.N. declaration of 1975 as women's year and the period of 1975-1985 as women's decade due to the international recognition of the problems faced by women's all over the world. The appointment of the national committee on the status of women in India in 1972 and the publication of the report highlighted that despite constitutional guarantees the roles, rights and participation of women in all sphere of life were limited. In spite of constitutional and legal safeguards, the women in India continue to suffer, due to lack of awareness of their rights, illiteracy and oppressive practices and customs. A steep decline is evident in the male- female ratio in India over the last century. It declined from 972 females for every 1000 males in 1901 to 927 per thousand in 1991 and 921:1000 (921 females for 1000 males) according to the census of 2001. The northern states in India show even poorer

ratios than the national average. From cradle to grave there is a systematic discrimination against women. Nutrition, health care, education are all withheld or provided grudgingly to daughters. Son preference is expressed in deep rooted cultural mores, blessings and rituals at a marriage, foods prescribed for pregnant women, condolences at the birth of a girl child.

Women Empowerment in India

According to Cambridge English Dictionary 'empowerment' means 'to authorize'. In the context of the people, they have to be authorized to have control over their own lives. When applied in the context of development of the particular segment of population, the women have to be 'empowered' to have control over their own lives to better their socio-economic and political conditions. Thus, women empowerment can be interpreted as totality of empowerment including political, social, cultural, and other dimension of human life as also the physical, moral and intellectual. Empowerment of women unlocks the door for modernization of any society. Participation and control over resources of power are critical indicators in the process of development. Women especially in rural areas possess the least proportion of these resources and are therefore dependent. Thus, the question remains that who will empower them and how to empower them. Ideally speaking no one empowers any one and the best way is 'self empowerment'.

However, this segment of population is handicapped both structurally and culturally to empower themselves without any outside help and affirmative action by the state and others. At the same time, it's also true that as long as they don't make any effort at self-empowerment, it would be long and difficult task and process for the outsiders to empower them. Instead of remaining passive beneficiaries, they must have to become active partners.

After independence, Government of India took several initiatives, programmes and policies, apart from constitutional and legal safeguards for the empowerment of women in the country.

Constitutional provisions in India

The Indian constitution grants equality to women and also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women to neutralize the cumulative socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by them. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of the Indian constitution. Article 15 of the Indian constitution forbids discrimination on grounds of caste, religion, sex, race and place of birth, whereas Article 16 ensures equal opportunities of employment. Some of the provisions of Indian constitution safeguarding the women rights include: Equality before law for women (Article 14); State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (1)); State to make special provision in favor of women and children (Article 15 (3)); Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16); State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally, the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); Equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)); To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A); State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42); State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46); State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health (Article 47); To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)); Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3)); and not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to be

reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T 3) etc.

Legislative provisions in India

The government of India has enacted several women-specific legislations to uphold the constitutional mandate and to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and also to prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of sati etc. The 'crime against women' under various legislations of government of India could be broadly classified within two categories: First, the crimes identified under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which includes Rape (Sec. 376 IPC); Kidnapping & Abduction for different purposes (Sec. 363-373); Homicide for dowry, dowry deaths or their attempts (Sec.302/304-B IPC); Torture, both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC); Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC); Sexual harassment (Sec. 509 IPC) and importation of girls (up to 21 years of age). Secondly, the crimes identified under the Special Laws (SLL) which are though not gender specific, but some do have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests. It includes The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948; The Plantation Labor Act, 1951; The Family Courts Act, 1954; The Special Marriage Act, 1954; The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; The Hindu Succession Act, 1956; Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956; The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995); Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971; The Contract Labor (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976; The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1979; The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983; The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1986; Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986; Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987; and The Marriage (Amendment) Act, 2001 etc.

The constitutional and legislative provisions in India not only grants equality and protection to women, but also empower the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. In India, within the framework of a democratic polity, laws and development policies, programs have been aimed at women's advancement in different spheres of life. From Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards, there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues in India, from welfare to development of women. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committed to secure equal rights of women. Important among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993; The Mexico Plan of Action (1975); the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985); the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome document adopted by the UNGA session on Gender Equality and Development & Peace for the 21 st century titled 'Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action ' have been endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.

Government Policy in India

The Government of India had ushered in the new millennium by declaring the year 2001 as 'Women's Empowerment Year' to focus on a vision 'where women are equal partners like men'. The objective of government policy in India has been to bring about development, advancement and empowerment of women in the country through active participation of all stakeholders. The government has attempted to create an environment through positive political, economic and social policies for complete development of women. Government policy has been to promote women's participation in political, social and economic life of the nation and identical access to health care, quality education, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc. The objective has been also to strengthen legal system aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and changing the societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.

Five Year Plans

In the first five year plan, the issue to provide equal status to women in India was focused. In fact the first four five year plans were focused on organizing various welfare activities for women's with priority to

women's education. The fifth and sixth plans witnessed a shift in approach from welfare to entire development of women in India. The seventh plan laid stress on efforts to identify and promote beneficiary oriented programmes with the intention of extending direct benefits to women in India. The eighth plan made a significant shift from development to women's empowerment. It recommended 30 percent reservation for women at all levels of government. The Ninth plan ensured that a minimum of 30 percent of benefits or funds flow to women from all ministries and departments of the government. As the result, some positive indicators of women's development in India can be seen in the female literacy rate, which rose from 8 percent in 1947 to 54 percent in the 2001 census. In the same way life expectancy rate rose from 40.6 years in 1861-1971 to 58.1 years during 1981-1991 and to 64.9 years in 2001. The total fertility rate has also come down from 5.97 in 1951-1961 to 3.3 in 1997 and to 2.97 in 2001, signaling a comparatively greater acceptance of family planning and late marriage norms. Women presence in parliament has also increased from 4 percent in 1952 to 8.9 percent in 2001. At the village and district levels, nearly one million women are heads and members of the local self-government institutions.

There is no doubt about the fact that development of women has always been the central focus of planning since Independence. However, a clear vision is needed to remove the obstacles to the path of women's emancipation both from the government and women themselves. Efforts should be directed towards all round development of each and every section of Indian women by giving them their due share.

Education

The Government policy has been to ensure equal access to education for women and girls. Special measures were taken by the government to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupational, vocational and technical skills of women in India. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education and gender sensitive curriculum is the focus area of government

Health

Women must have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care. A holistic approach to women's health which includes both nutrition and health services with special attention to the needs of women and the girl at all stages of the life cycle is another priority of the government. The reduction of infant mortality and maternal mortality, which are sensitive indicators of human development, is a major concern. The government policy reiterates the national demographic goals for Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) set out in the National Population Policy 2000. Measures have been taken by the government to enable women to exercise informed choices regarding their reproductive rights, vulnerability to sexual and health problems together with endemic, infectious and communicable diseases such as malaria, TB and water borne diseases as well as hypertension and cardio-pulmonary diseases. Government is also focused on to tackle the social, developmental and health consequences of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases with a gender perspective. Spread of education, compulsory registration of marriage and special programs like BSY and delaying the age of marriage so that by 2010 child marriages should be eliminated are other focus area of the government. In view of the high risk of malnutrition and disease that women face at all the three critical stages of life cycle viz., infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase, government is focused on meeting the nutritional needs of women and widespread use of nutrition education to address the issues of intra-household imbalances in nutrition and the special needs of pregnant and lactating women.

Economic

Women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line in India and given the harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination, macroeconomic policies and poverty eradication programs is the focus area of the government to address the needs and problems of such women.

Government intends to implement the programmes which are women oriented with mobilization of poor women and convergence of services, by offering them a range of economic and social options, along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities. In order to enhance women's access to credit for consumption and production, the government has proposed the establishment of new and strengthening of existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institution so that the outreach of credit is enhanced. Other supportive measures include the adequate flow of credit through extant financial institutions and banks, so that all women below poverty line have easy access to credit and to include women's perspectives in designing and implementing macro-economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in such processes. Government also intends to recognize their contribution to socio-economic development as producers and workers in the formal and informal sectors (including home based workers) and initiate appropriate policies related to employment and working conditions.

Legal System

Government intends to make legal and judicial system more responsive and gender sensitive to women's needs, especially in cases of domestic violence and personal assault. It intends to enact new laws and review the existing one to ensure that justice is quick and the punishment meted out to the culprits is commensurate with the severity of the offence. The government policy aims to encourage changes in personal laws such as those related to marriage, divorce, maintenance and guardianship with the full participation of all stakeholders including community and religious leaders so as to eliminate discrimination against women. The evolution of property rights in a patriarchal system has contributed to the subordinate status of women. The government policy aims to encourage changes in laws relating to ownership of property and inheritance by evolving consensus in order to make them gender just.

Institutional Mechanism

Government of India intends to strengthen the institutional mechanisms which exist at the Central and State levels, through provision of adequate resources, training and advocacy skills to effectively influence macro-policies, legislation, programmes etc. to achieve the empowerment of women in India. Government initiative includes the formation of the National and State Councils to oversee the operationalization of the policy on a regular basis. The National Council to be headed by the Prime Minister and the State Councils by the Chief Ministers with broad in composition having representatives from the concerned Departments/Ministries, National and State Commissions for Women, Social Welfare Boards, representatives of Non-Government Organizations, Women's Organizations, Corporate Sector, Trade Unions, financing institutions, academics, experts and social activists etc. the government also intends to establish National and State Resource Centers on women with mandates for collection and dissemination of information, undertaking research work, conducting surveys, implementing training and awareness generation programs, etc with link up with Women's Studies Centers and other research and academic institutions through suitable information networking systems. The government proposal also includes strengthening of institutions at the grass-roots and district level. Government intends to organize and strengthen women's into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) at the Anganwadi/Village/Town level through its programmes and help them to institutionalize themselves into registered societies and to federate at the Panchayat/Municipal level. These societies will bring about synergistic implementation of all the social and economic development programs by drawing resources made available through Government and Non-Government channels, including banks and financial institutions and by establishing a close Interface with the Panchayats/ Municipalities.

Indian government's special initiatives for women

Special initiatives were taken by government of India for building confidence and self dependency across Indian women. Some of them include: (i) National Commission for Women was set-up as a statutory body in January 1992 with specific mandate to study and monitor all matters related to constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.

(ii) Reservation for Women in Panchayats & Municipalities (Local Self Government): The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was passed in 1992 to ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas.

(iii) The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000) to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child.

(iv) National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) to bring advancement, development and empowerment of women in all spheres of life through creation of a more responsive judicial and legal system sensitive to women and mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process. The strengthening and formation of relevant institutional mechanisms and implementation of international obligations/ commitments and co-operation at the international, regional and sub-regional level was another commitment.

(v) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005: It provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected herewith or incidental thereto. It provides for immediate and emergent relief to women in situations of violence of any kind in the home.

(vi) Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) was created in January 2006 and is the nodal Ministry of the government of India for the advancement of women and children.

(vii) Implemented ESCAP Project on Improvement of Statistics on Gender Issues during 1994-96 by

organizing the first National Workshop on Improvement of Statistics on Gender Issues in 1994 followed by Second National Workshop in 1995, at New Delhi. These workshops laid the foundation of identifying various relevant issues including data requirement, data gaps in the field of gender statistics and indicators on gender issues. Started bringing out the regular Annual publication "Women and Men in India" since 1995.

(viii) National Plan of Action (NPA) was prepared in 1998 for Improvement of Statistics on Gender to bridge the data gaps. In a meeting held at Rome in December 2007 in wake of Global Gender Forum, it was decided by IAEG that India would chair an Advisory Committee for capacity development in Gender Statistics.

Women Issues in India: Current Perspective

Women's are the wealth of India and they have contributed in almost every field and made country feel proud at every occasion. They are in front, leading the country, making mile stones and source of inspiration for many. In politics, President Pratibha Patil, Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar, UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Chief Minister of UP Mayawati and Delhi Sheila Dixit, bureaucracy, Nirupama Roy, in socio-cultural field, Medha Patekar, Arundhati Roy, Shobna Narayanan, Lata Mangeskar, Anjolie Ela Menon, Rekha, Meera Nayar and many others, in sports, Sania Mirza, Saina Nehwal are some of the names at the top. Women's are also playing important role in national growth and economic development through corporate houses. They are not only working at grass root level but participating in decision making. Jyoti Naik, President of Lijjat Papad, Kiran Mazumdar, Chairman and Managing Director of Biocon, Naina Lal Kidwai, Deputy CEO of HSBC, Ranjana Kumar, Chairman of NABARD, Ritu Kumar, CEO of Escolife, Priya Paul, Chairman of Apeejay Park Hotels, Indira Nooyi, Chairperson & CEO of Pepsico, Roshani Nadar, CEO of HCL are some of the pioneers in their respective field. At present women's are contributing and participating in every sphere, politics, business, education, science and technology, media, sports, art and culture etc.

However this is the one face of coin and on the other side of coin is the hard truth of the Indian society. There is systematic discrimination and neglect from early childhood of women's in India, which could be in

terms of inadequate nutrition, denial or limited access to education, health and property rights, child labour and domestic violence. The fear of sexual violence has been a powerful factor in restricting women's behavior and sense of freedom. The struggle against violence is actually the struggle against the unequal distribution of power both physical and economic between the sexes. It is important to address the root cause for the subordinate status of women in the Indian society. Hillary Clinton, US secretary of State, addressing the Delhi University students on 20 July 2009 said that "women's roles and rights are as important as any issue we can list. Women are the key of economic growth. It's been established through research". Men should perceive women not as subservient being but as empowered individuals who are equal partners. The issues need to be seen in the context of a patriarchal social framework and a value system based on 'son preference', such as the son being responsible for the carrying forward of the family name, support in old age and for performing the last rites. Further, the practice of dowry and the tag of 'Parayadhan' translate into daughters being considered an economic liability. Women's are not only entitled for survival but also to a life with dignity, grace and equal opportunities so that they can grow to their full potential. There is an urgent need to pay attention to the issues that concern this section of population. The focus should be on poverty reduction, gender justice, health, nutrition, sustained awareness of rights and redressal, eradication of social evils etc.

Political Issues

Women's equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making, including decision making in political process at all levels will ensure the achievement of the goal of women empowerment. Government of India through 73 rd and 74 th Constitutional Amendment Acts reserved the one-third of seats in all local elected bodies for women as a sign of political empowerment. Over a million women have actively entered political life in India through the Panchayat Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. The percentage of women in various levels of political activities in India have risen considerably, however women are still under-represented in governance and decision-making process. Their power is restricted, as it the men who wield all the authority. Their decisions are often over-ruled by the government machinery. It is crucial to train and give real power to these women leaders so that they can catalyst change in their villages regarding women. In recent years there have been explicit moves to increase women's political participation at top level. However, the Women's reservation bill is a sad story as it is repeatedly being scuttled in the parliament. All this shows that the process of gender equality and women's empowerment still has a long way to go.

Economic Issues

Women professionals in India are facing a range of problems. Women have extensive workload with dual responsibility of profession and household and they have to balance household demands with those of their profession. Development policies and programs of the country tend not to view women as integral to the economic development process. This is reflected in the higher investments in women's reproductive rather than their productive roles, mainly in population programs.

Women are engage in economically productive work and earn incomes though their earnings are generally low. Most of the women work in agricultural sector either as workers, in household farms or as wagedworkers. It is precisely livelihood in agriculture that has tended to become more volatile and insecure in recent years and women cultivators have therefore been negatively affected. The government's policies for alleviating poverty have failed to produce any desirable results, as women do not receive appropriate wages for their labour. There is also significant amount of unpaid or non-marketed labour within the household. The increase in gender disparity in wages in the urban areas is also quite marked as it results from the employment of women in different and lower paying activities. They are exploited at various levels. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in society. There is urgent need to improve women's economic status because they are fundamental to the process of economic development of the country.

Social and Cultural Issues

The socio-cultural attributes in society have left a deep mark on women empowerment in India. Parents depend on sons for support in old age and looked to them as potential builders of family prestige and prosperity whereas daughters are considered to destine for others. Women's in India need and expect equal access to education, health, nutrition, employment and productive resources. In fact they are fighting for their rights to decide their own path for development.

Education

The female literacy rate in India is though gradually rising, it's lower than the male. According to the National Survey data (1997), only the states of Kerala and Mizoram have approached universal female literacy rates. The gender gap in education is far greater in northern states of India. Although in states where enrollment rates for girls are higher, many girls drop out of school after a few years of education. Factors such as inhibition on education being imparted by male teachers to girls once they reach puberty, is responsible for drop out. Consequences are that early marriage and child birth pronounced in families of lower socio-economic status.

Health and Nutrition

The socio-cultural practice of women eating last in the family has eminent effect on her health especially if it is a household in low economic status. Most direct effects of poor health and nutrition among women in Indian society are high mortality rates among young children and women of child bearing age. A women health and nutrition status influence her newborn's birth weight and chance of survival. Post neo-natal death is generally caused by infectious diseases. The incidence and severity of most of this disease are affected by controllable factors such as immunization, health care and nutrition. Due to gender biased, these factors are not controlled equally for male and female children. Maternal mortality in India estimated at 437 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, result primarily from infection hemorrhage, obstructed labour, abortion and anemia.

Crimes against Women

Crimes against women are of various natures. It include crimes involving sexual exploitation for economic gains like prostitution & trafficking, adultery, abduction, rape, wrongful confinement, and murder etc on the one hand and crimes related to women's property like dishonest misappropriation, criminal breach of trust, domestic violence, dowry extortion and outraging the modesty of women etc on the other. These crimes are not only injurious and immoral for the women but for the society as a whole.

Domestic Violence

In Indian society, it is widely accepted that within the family the man is the master and women is the inferior and subordinate partner and societal pressure force women to maintain this status quo. Wife beating is the most prevalent form of violence against women in the Indian society and it is viewed as a general problem of domestic discord. According to National Crime Report Bureau, 1.5 lakh crimes against women are registered annually out of which nearly 50,000 are related to domestic violence in their homes.

Female Infanticide and Feticide

This is playing a significant role in lop sided sex ratio in India. Poor families in certain regions of the country sometimes resort to killing baby girls at birth, to avoid an unwanted burden on family resources. Sex selective abortion has also been common in the country. It's dangerous to abort the foetus after 18 weeks of pregnancy and quiet harmful for mother too at such a late stage. Various techniques of sex determination and sex pre-selection have been discovered during the last fifteen years, such as sonography, fetoscopy, needling, chorion biopsy and the most popular amniocentesis have increasingly become household names in India. Amniocentesis technique is used in the small town and also in some

cities of states like Gujrat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Tamilnadu, Rajasthan etc. Mumbai and Delhi are also the major center for sex determination and sex pre-selection tests

.Dowry

Dowry remains the major reason for discrimination and injustice towards women in India. When dowry demands are not met, it precipitates into serious consequence for the young bride. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 marks the first attempt by the Government of India to recognize dowry as a social evil and to curb its practice. The act was modified with the Dowry Prohibition Amendment Act of 1984, which has again been modified with Dowry Prohibition Bill 1986. Women's organization have played key role in this process of change. The 1961 Act define dowry and makes the practice of dowry- giving and taking, a punishable offence. However, i t is ridiculous to see that even among highly educated sections, the articles of dowry are proudly exhibited in the marriage as a status symbol. The dowry abuse is increasing in India. The most severe is 'bride burning', the burning of women whose dowries were not considered sufficient by their husband or in-laws. Most of these incidents are reported as accidental burns in the kitchen or are disguised as suicide. Dowry is one of those social evils that no educated woman will own up with pride, still many are adhering to it. Practices of dowry tend to subordinate women in the society. Women should be more economically empowered and should be educated properly regarding the various legal provisions such as Section 498A CrPC, protection from domestic violence etc., only then this evil menace could possibly be eradicated from Indian social system.

Rape

Rape is the fastest growing crime in India compared to murder, robbery and kidnapping. According to the report of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), every 60 minutes, two women are raped in this country. A total of 20,737 cases of rape were reported in the year 2007, registering a 7.2 percent increase over the previous year. According to NCRB, 19,348 rape cases were reported in the year 2006. The biggest number of such crimes was reported from Madhya Pradesh. One-quarter of the victims were minors, 75 percent of culprits were known to victims and 10 percent were relatives. These figures are underestimations as many incidents go unreported due to fear of stigma and non awareness of rights. There are also the countless cases of eve teasing, indecent gazes, pinching, brushes and comments that infringe upon the rights of women, especially in overcrowded spaces and public transport buses and trains. Major cities in the country have become the hub of misdemeanor because of technological reach. Mobile, cyber café, car, beach, mall, restaurant, hotel have become popular apparatus for the criminals. What precipitates the problem is that the incidents of rape, sexual molestation and harassment have been followed by dubious attempts by perpetrators and law enforcers to arm-twist the course of justice. There is a need for a drastic change in attitudes and mindsets towards such incidents. Poor investigations, harsh cross examination of victims, senseless adjournment of cases and faulty assessment of evidence and furnishing of evidence by victims in presence of culprits are areas that need reforms.

In the year 2007 for which the latest data is available from the National Crime Records Bureau, seven of the ten fastest rising crimes in India were those against women. While the incidence of all cognizable crimes under the Indian Penal code rose by under 5 percent over the previous year, dowry deaths registered an increase of 15 percent, cruelty by husband and relatives 14 percent, kidnapping and abduction of females 13 percent, importation of girls 12 percent and sexual harassment by 11 percent. Rape and molestation cases grew by a more modest 6-7 percent, but even that was higher than the average rate. Despite the increasing cases of crime against women, they would appear to be not in priority list of the investigating agencies. The NCRB data shows that investigation starts within the same year in only one out of 10 sexual harassment cases and only two out of ten cases of molestation or cruelty by husband and relatives. Similarly, only three out of ten rapes and dowry deaths are investigated within the same year. A comparative study of the data available about these crimes suggest that there were rise in the crimes against women in 2008 compared to the previous year. While a total of 1,012 cases were registered for kidnap of women in 2007, the number went up to 1,494 in 2008. Similarly, the number of incidents related to dowry death rose from 1,226 in 2007 to 1,233 in 2008. Similarly, cases of

atrocities perpetrated for dowry rose to 2,230 in 2008 from 1,493 in 2007. Cases related to eve-teasing and molestation shot up to 188 during 2008, 20 more than those recorded in the previous year. Also incidents related to kidnapping of women increased from 1,012 in 2007 to 1,494 in 2008. The fact remains that there is sufficient information about crime against women that calls for appropriate remedial actions.

Role and Importance of Media

Media is the mirror of society and media reports are reflection of happenings in the society. Media has immense power to influence the masses and communication and IT revolution has further increased its importance. The role of media has become very important in shaping present days society. Media is the part of the life, all around, from the shows one watches on television, music on the radio, the books, magazines and newspapers. It educates people about the current issues and influences the public opinion. The common people rely on media to know about happenings in the society. Media is often considered as the 4th pillar of the society and democratic medium of information. Media has the power to pressurize and criticize the drawbacks of democracy. It is instrumental in bringing about unity among the masses and is backbone of the nation. The reach of media to common people has increased and undoubtedly media has attained the role of a very powerful organ in virtually all spheres of life. The electronic media, particularly television, has become the most influential medium of mass communication in India. Television has a myriad of different goals, which range from entertainment to education. Various confines of education and entertainment are depicted in television. It's often looked at as a babysitter for children. The viewing of television can entertain the young and old alike for great amounts of time.

Nowadays media is wavering from its actual role and giving entertaining or biased information which makes difficulties for development of the society. In the present era of globalization and liberalization, media has become more responsive towards global market and commercial gains. Today, newspapers and television channels are trying to make fast money by cashing on the news in wrong sense and wrong way. The result is that news is available in various interesting colour. Instead of giving important information and educative programmes, media is giving emphasis on sensationalizing the public. In the race to become more popular and to make more money, they have broken all the limits which they must follow while serving to build a healthy and progressive society. They have virtually no respect for the sentiments and ethics of the people and the land that they serve to.

Portraying women as equals in the society is a subject that has been given low priority by the Indian media. They have been interested in conveying to the public a particular kind of message regarding women. One can flip through the pages of popular magazines and news papers, watch television programmes and commercial films to get the content of them loud and clear. The Indian media loves to see women as home-makers and as an avid consumer. For them, the woman is the one who buys without end and her hair, dress, shoes, each bears the stamp of the latest, the most expensive products. Though the media purports to project them as modern and liberated woman, but in actual endorsed them as consumers.

Though television has become a pervasive and powerful medium of communication in India but the portrayal of Indian women on the television is derogatory to their image and is slightly linked with their real concerns. Given the fact that the majority of women workers are housewives, there is hardly a glimpse of every day adjustments women have to make in the home, the burden of housework, their contribution as housewives and mothers. On the other hand they are portrayed as housebound and tradition bound passive persons whose major concerns are domesticity. There are instances of stereotyping and discrimination. The news, sponsored TV serials and reality shows dealing with real life situation and character on television has huge TRPs. The Indian soap operas (TV serials) like Hum Log, Khandan and Buniyad of 1980s, revealed more clearly what one could expect from television's portrayal of women and strengthened the belief that no matter how vast the variety of women portrayed, the message they conveyed did not fill one with any hope. Even today on Indian soaps, women are portrayed quite badly, perhaps worse than before. In view of such observations, the P. C. Joshi committee (1985) recommended a system of regular monitoring of the portrayal of women on television.

The popularity of films in India makes one speculate the magnitude of the social consequences of such media portrayals even more. The portrayal of women in Hindi films reveals the sheer quantity and variety of violence directed towards them. Women in Bollywood films are often portrayed as hysterical bimbos. Screaming, yelling and crying are part and parcel of woman's reaction to stressful situations. There are number of movies where women who assert themselves are considered 'bad' while men, even if they tease and hit women are considered 'heroes'. The Hindi film industry is a profit oriented business and the dictates of the patrons, to a large degree, limits the choices of the directors of the movies. The Indian audience also must be partially blamed for the acceptance of such mistreatments of women in movies.

There are many instances of mistreatment of women by Indian media and not much has changed regarding portrayal of women. Interviews of men in newspapers usually focus on their work and hardly ever mention their marital status or their dress sense. By contrast, women achievers are subject to irrelevant and distasteful queries. Take for example the interview of banker Tarjani Vakil by a leading daily. The interview treated the reader to colourful details about her appearance, personal life such as her penchant for beautiful sarees, her decision to stay single and her living in an extended joint family with emphasis on her feminine qualities like her soft voice. Another example is the television interview of the senior police officer Kiran Bedi in which she was asked if she likes to cook. The media does try to establish a woman feminist, especially if she is a successful woman. Other examples of media biasness are also there. When the issue of reservation of seats for women in panchayats was discussed on television, it was men who did the talking while women sat as silent spectators. When women were shown leading dharnas against the Dunkel Draft, not even woman parliamentarian like Margaret Alva was approached for her views.

Media Coverage of Women Issues

Media implicitly rank the importance of the public issues according to the amount of press coverage devoted to an issue. Lack of appropriate media coverage of an issue leads to the implication that the topic is not important. Public awareness is significantly lessened if a story is not reported. Violence against women is a global pandemic and the consequences of media ignorance and bias are horrific. In India, the amount of coverage in mainstream media is inversely proportional to the actual prevalence of the kinds of violence and gives a false impression. Most disturbing is the disproportionate coverage of sensationalized violence. Invariably, rape stories get far more coverage than domestic violence stories. In all likelihood, this is because rape stories usually focus on one individual woman. If she is attractive, she is a very marketable victim. It is no accident that rape is a frequent theme in pornography. The sexual brutalization of women is a highly marketable business and a profitable story for the news media. For example the Indian media, be it press or the broadcasters, choose to highlight the rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl rather than to report about the success of women in recent panchayat elections in the country. The media have no time to show the actual problems of real India at the grass root level, its culture, traditions, faiths and beliefs and so on. They usually show only those handpicked stories which sells and increase their TRPs.

Even the amount of media coverage women get overall is much less than men do. Men are provided with a larger number of opportunities to present their viewpoints and shown in diverse roles in all areas like administration, law, business, science and technology. While representation of women varies from negligible to total exclusions and are interviewed and talked about only in certain accepted professions such as educationists or doctors. If they are interviewed for achieving success in a 'male' profession, then it often goes to great pains to point out her 'feminist'.

Indian media needs to be sensitized to gender issues. It should play proactive role in inculcating gender sensitivity in the country and should ensure that women are not depicted in poor light. It should devote special slots for crimes against women in India and discuss all proactive aspects. The challenge before media is to move beyond clubbing what happens to women with routine crime briefs, on the one hand, and sensational stories, on the other. Media should take a proactive role in creating public awareness on the rights and privileges of women. Constitutional and legal rights should also be advertised and discussed regularly. The latest rulings and judgments are discussed so that the public are made aware of

these rulings. Press Council should be given more teeth so that they could intervene effectively to counteract objectionable publications. There must be mechanisms to sensitize Censor Boards and bring about a working dialogue between members of the Censor Board and citizens groups.

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

Government Media Policy

The government in India is striving for removing demeaning, degrading and negative conventional stereotypical images of women and violence against women in media. The government attempt is to involve private sector partners and media networks at all levels to ensure equal access for women in the area of information and communication. The government of India policy is to encourage media to develop codes of conduct, professional guidelines and other self regulatory mechanisms to remove gender stereotypes and promote balanced portrayals of women and men.

Conclusion

Though the status of women in India, both historically and socially, has been one of the respect and reverence, but the hard truth is that even today, they are struggling for their own identity, shouting for diffusion of their voices and fighting for their own esteem. Every day, they cross among the fears and fraught for individuality. Despite the constitutional guarantee of equality of sexes, rampant discrimination and exploitation of women in India continues. The incidence of bride-burning, woman battering, molestation and ill-treatment of women are on increase. It is high time now that women should get a respectable and dignified position in the Indian society. Awareness in the women as well as society should be created and their equal rights should be effectively implemented. Crimes against women should be made punishable and a research should be done on every crime which comes to the light.

In the era of globalization and with revolution in means of communication and information technology, the media role has become more crucial for women empowerment in India. The Indian media now must focus on women issues in a decisive way as their role is detrimental for the women empowerment in India. It is essential that media should devote a good percentage of their programmes to create awareness among women and the society at large, give information about women's rights and machineries to approach for their all round development . Programmes to strengthen women development should be enforced and news adversely affecting their development should be censored or banned. Thus, the distant dream of women empowerment in India can be realized with the support of media, government and NGOs. As

Swami Vivekananda rightly said that "The nation which doesn't respect women will never become great.....". Therefore, in pursuit of making India a great nation, media should work towards giving women their much deserved status.

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