
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MEDIA EDUCATION: TRANSFORMING SPECTATORS TO CHANGE MAKERS

Dr. Yuki Azaad Tomar

*Assistant Professor, Department of Development Communication & Extension,
Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi*

Bableen Kaur

*Assistant Professor, Department of Development Communication & Extension,
Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi*

Abstract: The current paper studies the role of media education on women empowerment. The first part of the paper tries to understand the content of media education and the later part focuses on how this content can lead to empowerment. Several studies have been conducted to understand the role of media in women empowerment but this paper attempts to decode the role of media education in women empowerment. The study has been conducted with women students of journalism in various colleges and tries to understand how studying media subjects leads to empowerment. The findings highlight that learning the use of various traditional and new media like print, radio, television and internet enables women sharpen their power of observation. They gain an access to information, analyse it, construct their own viewpoints and form conclusions. Findings ascertain that media education plays a pivotal role in transforming women from mere spectators to social change makers.

Keywords: Media Education, Women Empowerment, Social Change.

Introduction: Media Education is a technical course. Production being an indispensable requirement for completing the courses in media, it makes the students think, structure and create content for print, audio and visual media. This paper tries to understand how does media education affects the cognitive ability of people.

Media education impacts the ability to think, analyse and form conclusions. Various media sources convey values, information and messages. Media education recognizes the role of human agency in the construction of media texts. The values, beliefs, perceptions and opinion of the encoder impact the information we receive. The paper tries to understand the content of media education and the influence it has on the minds of students. Being media educated involves an awareness of the right to access information and the importance of using information and technology ethically and responsibly to communicate with others.

As Marshall Mac Luhan said the world is converted to a 'global village', the reach of messages has been increased; intercultural dialogues have been gaining prominence in this global village. With the boundaries between virtual world and reality constantly blurring, it becomes important to make more and more people educated about the media. An informed user makes better choices. Media education reduces the chances being way laid and using media for the benefit of the society. Hence the need for creating messages responsibly and ethically is indispensable. Media education imparts in learners a responsible use of media and technology.

India's Position in Global Literacy Scenario: Literacy levels are the basic indicators for the development of a country. As Kofi Annan said, "Literacy unlocks the door to learning throughout life, is essential to development and health and opens the way for democratic participation and active citizenship." It is an indispensable tool for measuring social economic progress.

According to Census 2011, Literacy rate in India is this 74.04 %. The male literacy rate is 82.14% and female literacy rate is 65.46%. Literacy of females is vital not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation. Level of literacy and educational attainment are important indicators of development of any given society (K Singh, 2015). The gap in the literacy rate of men and women shows lower accomplishment on female literacy front in the country. According to 2005 Global Education Monitoring Report, which incorporates the 2001 census data, India's rank is 106th out of the 127 countries surveyed. Educational institutes act as a platform to narrow this gap and contribute to the development and welfare of women.

Hence the objective of promoting women education becomes significantly important. It is a prerequisite to build inclusive societies. The need to communicate, to express one's opinion, consult and exchange information, all these are integrated into the process of media education. It provides women the power of thinking critically about the events of the world. This empowers them to express themselves with confidently and hold the decision making roles in their personal social lives

What is Media Education? : Media Education recognizes the impact of media on our personal lives and democratic societies. It encourages the rights of an individual to communicate and express his or her opinion. It enables one to seek and impart information in efficient ways. It encourages the evaluation of media and information sources based on how they are produced, the messages being conveyed and the intended audience. (UNESCO)

In a democracy like India, media and information play a pivotal role. They help shape individual perceptions, attitudes, opinions and beliefs. Thus are central to citizen's participation in the process of development. At the heart of media education lays the need to empower citizens with essential knowledge of media functions. Content of media education imparts knowledge about various types of media like radio, television, mobiles phones, internet etc. It includes understanding the impact of various media on audience. The content encourages practical activities for mass communication by making products such as flannel graphs, bulletin boards, newsletters, puppet shows, audio visual aids, digital stories, fiction and non-fiction films, documentaries, multimedia presentations etc.

The term media education is synonyms with media Literacy. Media literacy is defined as the ability to understand, analyse, and evaluate media messages. It sharpens one's skills to understand and frame messages impact the audiences efficiently. Due to increasing use of internet, there is an upsurge in the user generated content. Media education provides users competencies and skills to develop quality content. It also strengthens their engagement with media systems through critical thinking. This encourages citizens to socialise and play active roles in the society. Individuals with high media literacy lead to an increase in the media quality because such individuals require more realistic messages of higher quality (AH Ulas).

Media Education As An Academic Discipline: Media Education is a judicial mix of theory and practical aimed at producing practitioners with a critical and analytical mind. It is an interdisciplinary branch that lays strong theoretical foundation and experiential learning. "The curriculum is focuses on imparting technical skills in various areas of mass communication and mass media, theoretical knowledge and perspective which determine their nature and use, and a historical and social understanding of their dynamics, which is so important in metamorphosing, unequal, globalized world where the power and ownership of the means of communication may change the fate of nations." (Babli Moitra Saraf,2010)

Education in media equips students with the demands and rigours of bringing out developmental changes in the society. It seeks to fill them with a sense of vocation which empowers them to extend themselves beyond careerism. It addresses the needs of the family and community for mobilization and participation of masses, gender equity, women's empowerment and sustainable development through its interdisciplinary training and multi-faceted programmes. Media Education also involves the ethical use of media, information and technology, as well as participation in democratic and intercultural dialogue.

It is both a content area and way of teaching and learning; it is not only about the acquisition of technical skills, but the development of a critical framework and approaches. (Wilson Carolyn, 2012)

The key components of the discipline are community media, communication for development, participatory communication, Gender and Development, Extension approaches, Media Ethics and the law, Media, Gender and Human Rights, modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as well as the traditional, local and folk media as tools of communication. The students plan, script and produce a variety of communication material for edutainment and infotainment such as radio programs, short films, documentaries, digital stories, photo features, newsletter, audio-visual shows. Traditional media such as educational games, flip charts, flash cards, street play and puppetry are also developed. They are encouraged to participating in community outreach programmes like “Each One Teach one” which gives them a first-hand experience of training unlettered and semi-literate adults.

Methodology: To get a better understanding about the role of media education in empowering women, the methodology used is Focussed group Discussion. Students of final year of the course Bachelors of Arts (Honours) Journalism and Bachelors in Science (Honours) Communication and Extension participated in the Focussed Group discussions in groups of 6-8 each.

The two colleges selected for this study are Institute of Home Economics and Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi. Each year, approximately 1800 students from various socio economic backgrounds enrol for media education in these colleges. Spending three years at these educational institute harbours in them a sense of responsibility towards their surrounding communities. They volunteer for causes like education of girl child, teaching vocational skills of underprivileged women, training school drop outs and semi-literate adults which strengthen their skills and knowledge.

The following questions were asked during the focused group discussion:

1. Does being a media student make you look at the world in a different way?
2. Does the course of media education help you keep informed?
3. What are the skills that you have imbibed through this course?
4. How has it impacted the decisions and choices you make?
5. Are you contributing towards the contemporary issues of the society. If yes, how?
6. What are the rights guaranteed to women in India?
7. What medium do you use to share your perspective with the world?

Findings: The answers obtained during focused group discussion are:

1. Does Being A Media Student Make You Look At The World In A Different Way?

Students answered that media education does provide a different perspective of the world. While watching news or reading articles they try to understand all aspects of the story. This sharpens their observation skills and makes them vigilant observers. For instance, during a group discussion on recent controversy around the film Lipstick under my Burkha (Dir. Alankrita Shrivastava, 2016), they shared thoughts about the freedom of expression and speech. They opined that if films that celebrate male sexuality are considered as entertainers, why is there so much objectification around films that celebrate female sexuality.

It was inferred from the students’ response that they no longer are contented by the face value of news rather seek clarity through a deeper understanding on the issue.

2. Does The Course Of Media Education Help You Keep Informed?

Yes, the discussion and deliberations about current affairs in tutorials exposes them to multiple points of view. This expands the horizon towards solving a problem. Students discussed that development parameters gave them a broader view about India’s recent position in Human Development Index (131 out of 188 countries) as per United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Report, 2017. Understanding about development measurers gave an insight about the amount of work that needs to be done for a developed India. Students mentioned the examples from recent class discussions on student unrest at University of Delhi and growing episodes of intolerance in the state.

The documentaries screened in the class expose us to the issues like Alzheimer's disease, gender disparity, the hierarchy conflicts between labour and management etc.

3. What Are The Skills That You Have Imbided Through This Course?

This course enables students to plan, script and produce a variety of communication material for edutainment and infotainment such as radio programs, short films, documentaries, digital stories, photo features, newsletter, audio-visual shows, and multimedia presentations. Traditional media such as educational games, flip charts, flash cards, street play and puppetry are also developed. Students also learn various audio and video editing softwares like; nuendo, avid, Final cut pro etc. has made us adept at audio visual modes of storytelling. They have imbibed holistic techniques for storytelling through media. As taught in the class, the skills of a journalist mirror those of today's media consumer which is why news literacy is a critical skill to be a responsible citizen. Like journalists, their practical assignments require them to gather information; and to hone the skills for analysing it, or writing about it.

4. How Has It Impacted The Decisions And Choices You Make?

It made them question the prevailing stereotypes. Through the group discussions, it emerged that students understood the notion of women empowerment as not just a sacrificing character Radha from "Mother India" (Dir. Mehboob Khan, 1957). Actors like Smita Patil performing a bold scene on screen during the cinema of 1980's can also be termed as empowerment. Screening of various films, documentaries exposes them to a broader view of the world. The discussions inferred that media education makes them stand for what they feel is right, enables them to take responsibility of their decisions and believe in themselves. They are taught media skills in classes; to critically examine research and make intelligent decisions about it. This makes them confident to write for the web and comment on important issues so they feel empowered to participate and voice their opinions.

5. Are You Contributing Towards The Contemporary Issues Of The Society.If Yes, How?

They share their opinion with others through various media. produced under the curriculum of media education. They have conducted research on media consumption like portrayal of women in advertisements, youth choices in new media, popularity of web series, you tube etc. Publishing their thesis makes them add to the existing database of knowledge. They have made short films on gender stereotypes, femininity, child labour, seclusion of old aged people in the society, the declining art of handicrafts etc.

6. What Are The Rights Guaranteed To Women In India?

Students were well informed about the rights guaranteed to women by Indian Constitution. They mentioned the following rights:

Women have the right to freedom of expression. They are also entitled to share a part in the familial property after marriage. They have a right to be paid equal to men at workplaces. they have a right to deny to stay back at office after 8 pm. Constitution also gives them protection against harassment at work . They have right to visit their children at crèches in their offices four times a day. They have a right to free legal aid as well.

7. What Medium Do You Use To Share Your Perspective With The World?

They work for print, broadcast and new media. They make radio programmes, documentaries and written research articles on the current socio political issues. They use tools of print media like magazines, newsletters, articles, poems, blogs power-point presentations, broadcast media like radio and new media for social networking platforms such twitter , instagram etc.

Results: Media education acts as a tool for self-reflection and formation of one's ideas and opinions. The education programmes help women achieve greater ownership and control over their lives. It acts as a platform to bring one's ideas to the fore ethically and responsibly. Media education is a powerful tool to frame messages effectively and gain higher acceptability. It equips viewers to respond and not merely react to social and economic issues and concerns. It opens a holistic view of problem and

transforms students from mere spectators to change makers. Media education provides awareness to the right to access information. It enables individuals to participate in intercultural dialogue as a member of global village. Thus it ensures a responsible use of media and information tools while connecting with the world. Media education is a positive step towards bringing a change in the society. Media education makes one be in constant touch with the media, to observe trends in the society. It develops the ability to ask questions, seek knowledge and develop an understanding of going beyond what is provided in the media. They feel confident to voice their concerns and opinions which makes them empowered to play greater roles in the society.

References:

1. Terry Bénédicte “Measuring Literacy in Developing Countries from an International Perspective” (PDF) UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Retrieved on 21.01.2018 from <https://iase-web.org/documents/papers/isi54/TerryB168.pdf>
2. Media Education UNESCO, Published in 1984 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, ISBN 92-3-102204-0, Retrieved on 19.01.2018 from
3. Ulaş AH, Epçaçan C, Koçak B. (2012) The concept of “Media Literacy” and an evaluation on the necessity of media literacy education in creating awareness towards Turkish language. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 2012;31:376–84.
4. Womens Literacy in India- Issues and Challenges (2015) Chandan Kumar Singh, *Global Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, G.J.I.S.S., Vol.4(4):41-44, ISSN: 2319-8834
5. *Latin American Scientific Journal of Media Education* ISSN: 1134-3478 / DL: H-189-93 / e-ISSN: 1988-3293
6. Ulaş AH, Epçaçan C, Koçak B. (2012) “The concept of “Media Literacy” and an evaluation on the necessity of media literacy education in creating awareness towards Turkish language.” *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*.31:376–84
