



WOMEN AND MEDIA

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WOMEN COULD BE THE CAUSE OF NEXT WAVE IN MASS MEDIA'S GROWTH IN INDIA

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Limited Reach of Mass Media

Our research over the years convinces that the next wave of expansion of mass media in India would come with women in the forefront both as purveyors and subjects of news. Today there is a big gap in both respects. At present reach of media among women in most States is too low, and far below that of men. In fact, in some States like Rajasthan, Bihar, Chattisgarh and Orissa, even Uttar Pradesh, the reach of media among women is much less than 15 percent. The opportunity for mass media to accelerate their own growth rate is far more from women (than from men). More importantly, "expansion" of media will be more than in the last decade. The growth rate of media among women must therefore catch up with that among men. The critical variables for triggering this process is, content priorities of mass media and their relevance to felt needs and aspirations of women in both rural and urban areas.

Not only do women need mass media support, media too need women as readers and viewers. Media could build women's capacity in so many ways. Has our media taken such a view and a gender – sensitive approach in its coverage?

Reach of Media among female population

(Percent rounded)

	National		Hindi Belt States	
	Urban	Rural		
Expose/ Reach	Female	Female	Rural + Urban Female	Rural only Female
Press (frequency in a week)	27	7	16	6
TV (frequency in a week)	74	35	27	15
Radio (frequency in a week)	26	25	26	24
Cinema (frequency in a week)	30	20	15	11
(IRS 2007)				

Bane of contention

As journalists, women can make a difference in the content priorities of media. One gets the impression of late, seeing so many women as anchors and reporters in so many TV channels/ programmes that women have a say in the content priorities. How far programming structure or content composition supports such an impression? A study sponsored by Women's Commission two years ago, for example, has indicated that despite increase in the number of women in journalism, their role has not changed. Nor has the tenuous nature of their employment in media enterprises. Today, there are hardly a couple news dailies with women as editors. Mrinal Pande stands out as the only prominent

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editor. Malini Parthasarathi, Barkha Dutt, Neerja Choudhary, could be mentioned as some recent exceptions. But neither in any of the journalists unions or in publishers society have women played any prominent role. Hardly a couple of names could be mentioned like Ms. Shobana Bhartiya, in Delhi, Ms. Parulekar in Pune, Ms. Subramanyan in Kolkata and Saroj Goenka in Chennai. In fact, Saroj Goenka has been at the helm of The Indian Express (South) for a couple of decades now. We need more women at the helm of media as entrepreneurs, editors, content producers, etc.

The growth rate in the exposure to media among women is low and rather slow unlike the case of entertainment media and in comparison to male population – even more recently since the boom in the media. We need to be concerned about and also do something about narrowing the divide between men and women, rural and urban and particularly between urban women and rural women. And, of course the divide between the States in this regard.

Growth rate between 2003 and 2007 in the mass media reach

(percent)

	Male	Female
Any Publication	31.6	22.7
Any TV	14.7	19.0
Any TV and C&S	41.6	38.1
Any Radio	30.0	40.0
Television Channels of		
News & Current Affairs	29.5	44.7
Serials	30.7	41.1
Film	29.1	33.7
(IRS 2007)		

Growth rate between 2003 – 2007 in readership of any publication

(percent)

	Rural	Urban
Male	39.2	25.9
Female	26.7	17.8
(IRS 2007)		

Last fortnight (October 2008), an Indian Express sister publication “SME World” (Oct 2008) confessed in its editorial that “in the retrospect, we happen to realize that unintentionally the magazine has not given women entrepreneurs their due”. The editorial further observed that “we are witnessing a scenario where a number of women entrepreneurs who possess capabilities of influencing board room decisions are finally making their presence felt on business horizon?”. It quoted a study by a research outfit claiming that “10% of business start-ups were being launched by women entrepreneurs, thus reiterating the fact that

Indian women are willing to take on challenges of the competitive business world". More than newspapers, television has made deliberate efforts to reach out women as could be seen from the growth rate in the viewership.

But, on the other side, in the same week a British report which examined the positions of women in business, politics and the public sector found that "women are losing the battle for gender equality in work places after years of progress". The Equality Commission's assessment found that the proportion of women holding key positions in British life had fallen in 12 out of the 25 categories surveyed in 2006.

Has the boom in media triggered women in media?

To what extent and in what way (adversely or advantageously) has the recent boom in media affected women in India. It has certainly opened new vistas for employment, enhancement and empowerment of women and children. However, while on economic aspects the impact of media has been somewhat positive, on social aspects involving women there is no such evidence. What difference the boom in numbers has made?. What has been their influence and impact?. Do we have any evidence?. Correlations are negative in the context of development processes; social development and crime and violence.

Market Concerns

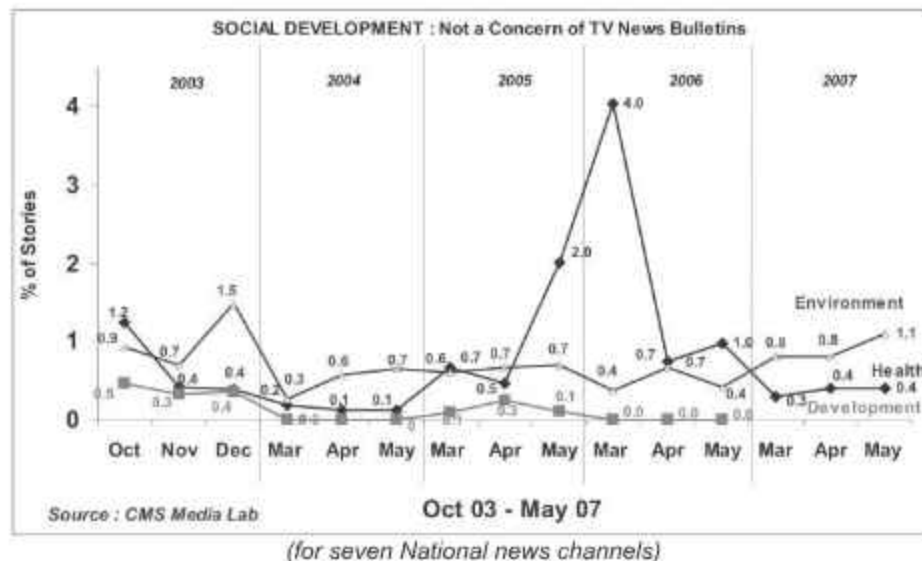
One of the reasons for limited view of women is perception about women in the context of "market" forces. Consumerism gets its momentum more from women. Women are prime targets of consumeristic campaigns world over. If media are cause and effect of consumerism, neither can be sustained without the active role of women. It is not in the interest of consumerism to have women outside the purview of mass media. In fact, it is the extent of women's involvement, which determines the growth momentum of both. And, as every one knows the ultimate interest of advertising is to sustain and push consumerism further. No wonder, women-centric advertising has increased substantially in the last decade. More recent efforts of advertisers to tap the "potential markets" should give boost to the reach of mass media among women.

An intervening variable in this process however is perceptions of advertisers on the identity of "decision makers". That is, women are generally being viewed more as "home makers" rather than as decision makers. But, in the new "life style" phenomena sweeping media, women too have emerged in so many different ways. With one million elected Panchayat representatives, several self help groups in rural India and many in "white collar" jobs, the outlook of "media planners" should change if not shift towards encouraging better coverage of issues of concern to women in media. Not just in metros and not just of "life style" topics but basic needs and concerns of women. Another dimension of changing India is increasing girls' enrolment in schools and colleges. The media need to gear up to these emerging opportunities. All this means tapping growth opportunity among women. National tasks are challenges of media

The Global Gender Gap Report of 2006, a survey of 115 world economies, ranked India 20th in empowering women politically, with 8 percent women in Parliament. This was five years after the Government of India declared the year 2001 as "Women's Empowerment Year" and after passing of the 73rd and 74th Amendments much earlier. In fact, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution - in its Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles. And towards that Parliament had passed many Acts. What has been

the situation on ground?.

Each of the Eleven Five Year Plans has addressed the issues of women in special ways. Starting with "welfare" of women programmes to a more comprehensive "development" schemes and then to "economic development" of women to now "empowerment" efforts for inclusive development has been the objective of these plans. How much of this has been accomplished?. What has been the role of mass media?. Media has the potential to positively contribute in these processes. Beyond "awareness" what has been the support?. Going by the visionaries who propounded television for India, whether it is Indira Gandhi or Vikram Sarabhai, intensity of issues on gender and social development would have eased. To what extent some of the national tasks and concern of such large sections of people have been a priority of our media?. And, equally important, what has been the approach in the contents in covering these various issues?. Bits and pieces of field research on "effect of television" on social development issues do not indicate encouraging insights. But there are no systematic research and analysis. What the Government has been concerned about is to create awareness, not the outcome and triggering the processes towards achieving goals.



(What would be the percentage of women among journalists in the country?). What has been the role of mass media particularly television channels, whose number has proliferated all over the country in recent years?. Have they eased the problem in any way or added to the problem however unintentionally. Going by certain trends one wonders about their role. But, a more detailed study is needed on these trends.

The incidence of crimes against women has increased considerably since 1999. According to a Police report, every 26 minutes a woman is molested, every 34 minutes a rape takes places, every 42 minutes a sexual harassment incident occurs; every 43 minutes a women is kidnapped and every 93 minutes a women is burnt to death over dowry. Worse, one quarter of the reported rapes involve girls under the age of 16 and the vast majority are never reported.

Nutritional discrimination causing high levels of malnourishment, especially in rural areas, has been a problem. India has high maternal mortality. The proportion of pregnant women aged between 15 and 49 years old with anemia continues to be high.

Six Factors

Six important developments could be cited as reasons for those in the media and their "gatekeepers" to take women a lot more seriously and be concerned of their issues and concerns. These are;

- Educational level among women has been on the increase; slowly but steadily girls enrolment is catching up and dropout rate is on the decline.
- Entry barrier to women's employment market is disappearing. Women are all over and their numbers are increasing much faster
- Political representation/ participation has been on the increase as never before envisaged, not just in Panchayats but all across the polity.
- Economic role of women has always been there but it is more visible now and acknowledged much more - thanks to self-help movement and entrepreneurial schemes.
- Mobility of women from one line of work to another and from one place to another has on the increase.
- Mindset, or determination of women of all ages, to carve out a niche for themselves. Mass media to a great extent has expedited this process, incidentally or otherwise.

Four pronged efforts are needed to expedite a more active role of women in media.

1. Content in news media on, and related to women and their concerns have to increase much beyond the present levels. This can happen only when there are deliberate efforts.
2. Such deliberate efforts will be facilitated with more female journalists taking more active responsibility that at present.
3. These efforts should not be restricted to women in urban and their interests but the women in rural across the country as well should receive special attention.
4. Serials, general entertainment channels and news channels should each have a special drive, initiate campaigns for States like Rajasthan, Orissa, Bihar, Assam and Uttar Pradesh.
5. "Reforms" in market concerns.

