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Media and the Empowerment of Women: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract

Media plays a vital role in the empowerment of women in India by influencing societal attitudes, spreading awareness, and providing a platform for women's voices. Through print media, television, cinema, radio, and digital platforms, important issues such as gender equality, women's education, health, employment, political participation, and violence against women have gained national attention. Media campaigns supporting initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and advocacy efforts by organizations such as UN Women have strengthened public understanding of women's rights and gender justice. Social media platforms have further enabled women to share their experiences, build networks, and mobilize support for social change, making empowerment more accessible and participatory. At the same time, the media has the responsibility to avoid stereotypes, objectification, and biased portrayals that can undermine progress. Overall, when used ethically and responsibly, media serves as a powerful tool for promoting women's empowerment in India by fostering awareness, challenging discrimination, and encouraging social transformation toward equality.

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Introduction

Women in Vedic Period

Women in the Vedic Era (c. 1500–600 BCE) held a respected and relatively equal position in society, especially during the early Vedic period. They had access to education and were allowed to study the Vedas, participate in religious rituals, and engage in philosophical discussions. Learned women known as *Brahmavadinis*, such as Gargi Vachaknavi and Maitreyi, were recognized for their wisdom and intellectual contributions. Women could choose their husbands through practices like *Swayamvara*, and widow remarriage was generally permitted. They were regarded as equal partners in household and spiritual duties, and their role in family life was highly valued. However, in the later Vedic period, their status gradually declined due to increasing social restrictions and patriarchal practices.

Women in Medieval Period

Women in the Medieval Period in India (c. 8th–18th century) generally experienced a decline in social status compared to the Vedic age, as patriarchal norms became stronger and

practices such as purdah, child marriage, and restrictions on education became more common. Their roles were largely confined to household responsibilities, and their participation in public life was limited. However, some women broke these barriers and played significant roles in politics, administration, literature, and religion. Notable figures such as Razia Sultan, the only female ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, and Rani Durgavati demonstrated leadership and courage. Women saints like Mirabai also contributed greatly to the Bhakti movement through their devotional poetry. Despite the contributions of such exceptional women, the overall condition of women during the medieval period was marked by social restrictions and limited rights.

Women during Independence

During the Indian Independence Movement, women played a crucial and inspiring role in the struggle against British rule, actively participating in protests, movements, and revolutionary activities. Leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Kasturba Gandhi mobilized women across the country and took part in major movements

such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Women organized protests, boycotted foreign goods, participated in marches, courted arrest, and worked as volunteers and revolutionaries, breaking traditional social barriers in the process. Their active involvement not only strengthened the freedom struggle but also laid the foundation for greater political awareness and empowerment of women in independent India.

Women Now

Women in contemporary India have made significant progress in education, employment, politics, science, sports, and entrepreneurship, reflecting a steady movement toward gender equality. They actively participate in leadership roles across various sectors, with figures like Droupadi Murmu holding the highest constitutional office and achievers such as P. V. Sindhu and Kalpana Chawla inspiring millions. Increased access to education, digital platforms, and government initiatives promoting women's welfare have strengthened their social and economic position. However, challenges such as gender discrimination, wage gaps, safety concerns, and balancing professional and domestic responsibilities still persist. Overall, women today are more empowered, visible, and influential than ever before, contributing actively to India's development while continuing to strive for complete equality and social justice.

Media in India

Media in India is one of the largest and most diverse in the world, encompassing print newspapers, magazines, television, radio, cinema, and rapidly expanding digital and social media platforms. It plays a vital role in informing citizens, shaping public opinion, promoting cultural values, and strengthening democracy by acting as a watchdog of government and society. India has a vast network of regional and national media operating in multiple languages, reaching urban and rural populations alike. With the growth of the internet and smartphones, digital media has become especially influential, enabling faster communication and wider participation. Overall, media in India serves as a powerful medium for information, education, entertainment, and social change.

Women in Indian Media

Women in Indian media have emerged as influential voices both on-screen and behind the scenes, contributing to journalism, television, film, digital platforms, and advertising. They play key roles as journalists, editors, anchors, filmmakers, and content creators, shaping narratives around social issues, gender equality, and empowerment. Prominent figures like Barkha Dutt and Nandita Das have challenged stereotypes and highlighted women's rights and social justice issues through their work. Indian media increasingly portrays strong female characters in films and television, while digital platforms provide women with spaces to express opinions, raise awareness, and mobilize support. Despite progress, challenges like gender bias, pay gaps, and underrepresentation in leadership roles persist, making continued efforts essential for equality and empowerment in media.

Special Laws

The family courts act 1954

The special marriage act 1954

The immoral traffic (suppression) act (SITA) 1956

The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961

The maternity benefit act 1961 (amended in 1995)

The equal remuneration act 1976

The protection of women from domestic violence act 2005

The marriage laws (amendment) bill 2010

The sexual harassment of women at workplace (prevention, prohibition and redressal) act 2013

Special Initiatives for Women

- National commission for women: In January 1992, the Government set up this body with a specific purpose to study and monitor all matters and issues related to the constitutional and legal safeguards for women.
- Reservation for women in local self-government: The 73rd constitution amendment acts passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all offices whether in rural or urban areas.
- National policy for the empowerment of women, 2001: The department of women and child development in the Ministry of human resource development has prepared a "National policy for the empowerment of women" in the year 2001. The main purpose of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.
- The national plan of action for the girl child (1991-2000): The plan of action is to ensure survival and development of girl child. National policy for children-2013 was adopted by the Government of India on 26th April 2013.

Case studies on Media role in Women's Empowerment

#Mission Shakti 5 Bike Rally: A large statewide rally in Uttar Pradesh organized to promote women's safety, dignity, and empowerment attracted widespread media coverage and social media attention. With tens of thousands of women police officers participating and the hashtag **#MissionShakti5** trending across platforms with millions of impressions, media helped amplify the message of women's rights and safety to a national audience.

Operation Jagriti Awareness Campaigns: Under the police-led *Mission Shakti* initiative in the Agra Zone, awareness drives and workshops using digital tools and social media outreach reached over half a million people, helping educate communities about cyber harassment, crime reporting, and women's rights. Media coverage of these programs strengthened public understanding and participation in empowerment efforts.

Selfie with Daughter Campaign: Although it began earlier, this social media campaign continues to encourage parents to post selfies with their daughters to challenge patriarchal norms and celebrate girls' value. The campaign gained widespread attention on digital platforms across India, helping shift attitudes about daughters and gender equality.

Conclusion

Media serves as a powerful catalyst for women's empowerment in India by raising awareness, challenging societal stereotypes, and providing platforms for women's voices to be heard. It plays a critical role in educating the public, promoting gender equality, and inspiring women to participate actively in social, economic, and political life. While challenges like biased reporting and underrepresentation remain, responsible and inclusive media practices can significantly contribute to creating an equitable society. Overall, media not only reflects the aspirations of women but also drives meaningful change toward their empowerment and social progress.

Suggestions

- Media should focus on portraying women positively, highlighting achievements, leadership, and independence, rather than reinforcing stereotypes or objectification.
- Encourage more women to take leadership roles as journalists, editors, producers, and directors to ensure diverse perspectives in content creation.
- Media can actively promote campaigns on women's rights, education, health, safety, and economic empowerment, helping to reach wider audiences.
- With the rise of social media and online platforms, media should educate women on using these tools safely and effectively to express themselves and access opportunities.
- Showcasing inspiring stories of women achievers in various fields can motivate others and challenge societal norms.

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