New Media: A New Arsenal of Women Empowerment

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"To awaken the people, it is women who must be awaken; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves" Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

Empowerment of women has emerged as an important issue in recent time. As per the latest Census in the year 2011, the total female sex ratio in India is 940 per 1000 males. The population of India is more than 1.21 billion and out of this, women constitute nearly 50% of the total population, Women empowerment in India is a much debated topic. The empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a very important aspect for the development of the country. Empowering women aims to inspire them and persuade them to come out from different adverse conditions, be it societal or religious, that have traditionally kept them suppressed and unable to see their true strength, power and beauty. We are living in the modern era, even though; today in the rural areas women are suffering from various problems in different fields of life.According to Gender stereotypical perceptions women are supposed to be dependent, weak, incompetent, emotional, fearful, flexible, passive, modest, soft-spoken, gentle, care takers while men are powerful, competent, important, logical,decision-makers, aggressive, focused, strong and assertive. In India where a patriarchal society flourishes, 'son preference' is an age-old gender bias, in which the male of the family bears the responsibility of 'carrying forward' the family's name. He is supposed to support his parents in old age and also perform their last rites when they die. The fact that daughters are generally regarded as 'Paradhan' or 'somebody else's wealth' and the giving away as dowry to the groom ensure that daughters are often seen as an 'economic liability'.

Gender Differences Seen in Some Situations:

In the society there are some gender differences in many situations, which can be categories as following.

Social situations: The social roles demand that the head of the family is always a male. He is also the main bread-winner while the woman is usually seen as a house-maker, a nurturer and care-giver.
Political situations: Power sharing between men and women is biased. Men are seen mostly at higher level of political field – the national, while women are expected to be at the local level.
Educational situations: There is a definite gender bias in educational opportunities and expectations. It is the boy in the family who gets the resources for higher education. Girls are usually expected to go to less-challenging academic fields.
Economic situations: There is a wide gap between access to lucrative careers and finance between men and women. Credit and loans; land ownership policies etc are more biased towards men.
But with the passes of time some situation has changed and some situation yet to change.

Need and Importance of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is very much necessary in the nation's growth be it economically, politically or socially. The term 'empowerment of women' has become popular especially after 1980s. It refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and gender discrimination. The term "empowerment of women" refers to the process of providing power to woman to become free from the control of others, that is, to assume power to control her own life and to determine her own conditions. The term of "empowerment of women" could also be understood as the process of providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and power positions to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society.

In this contemporary world, women need to gain the same amount of power that men have. There is inequality and vulnerability of women in all spheres of life; they need empowerment in all walks of life. In India, women are still facing different obstacles in male-dominated cultures. However, Indian women are slowly getting empowerment in the sectors like education, politics, the work force and even more power within their own households, there is a need to work at the grass root level to empower them especially in rural areas. Father of the nation-Mahatma Gandhi firmly states that, " the status of the women will not change merely by bringing legislations; it must be supported by change in the women's social circumstances and situations and also men's sexiest attitude to women." Safety for women is an obsolete word for Women in Today's India; they still receive negative sexual attention from males. Indian societies have received notoriety for being unsafe for women. Whereby the fair sex is not only being hassled, stalked and raped but incidents of immoral trafficking also are very high.

Women play an important role in the development of the society and the nation. In this century in various developments process in scientific and technological era the status of women is changing at a fast pace but at the same time, we cannot ignore the part of the society where women are marginalized, discriminated and feel oppressed because of different gender divide issues. Empowerment of women has emerged as an important issue in recent time and the process of development will be left incomplete without the active participation of women. Women are the transmitters of culture in all the societies. The status of women in a society is a true mirror of its social, religious, cultural and spiritual level.

The reality of women's lives remains invisible to men and women alike and this invisibility persists at all levels beginning with the family to the nation. Although geographically men and women share the same space, they live in different worlds. The mere fact that "Women hold up half the sky" does not appear to give them a position of dignity and equality. In the modern time, women in India were given freedom & right such as freedom of expression & equality as well as the right to be educated. Various prestigious positions at this period were held by women. They're enjoying the 'ladies first' facility in different fields. However, some problems such as dowry, domestic violence, sex selective abortion, female infanticide are still prevalent. The women in rural areas are deprived of minimum facilities of enlightenment and education.

New Media: An Instrument for Women Empowerment

All over the world, the impact of new media has been witnessed in recent years, with online platforms becoming increasingly powerful mechanisms for mobilising popular support. Gender researchers and feminist scholars have also become interested in new media as a development which has the potential to break down or flatten social hierarchies (Friedman, 2005) in more general terms. For example, Williamson suggests that digital media have already begun to challenge socio-cultural and political norms in Britain (Williamson, 2009). New media differs from traditional 'old' media in that its structures of ownership and participation are new and directly challenge the monopoly on mass communication possessed by traditional media producers: 'The internet has fragmented and decentralised the context in which communication occurs' (Williamson, 2009). Blogs are used as public diaries where women discuss public and personal issues in their life and development. Storytelling used by women in blogs to introduce their thoughts has been proven to have its major effect (Ayish, 2009). Geniets (2010) also finds that new media provides a potential break with old social hierarchies: 'new technologies give individual producers of media content more freedom, and empower them to expose, interact with and reveal backstage behavior related information about themselves as well as others to a mass media audience'. However, while new media, overall, is identified as an agent for (generally positive) social change, its effects are not gender neutral. People of all ages and backgrounds are online and using new media tools for a variety of reasons such as searching of information and connecting with others.

The term "New media" may be defined as an interactive forms of communication that use the Internet, including podcasts, RSS feeds, social networks, text messaging, blogs, wikis, virtual worlds and more. We take as a starting point the basic definition of 'new media' provided by Google web definitions and Wikipedia which defines it as 'on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation. The rise of new media has increased

communication between people all over the world and through Internet. It has allowed people to express themselves through blogs, websites, pictures, and other user-generated media. New media makes it possible for anyone to create, modify, and share content and share it with others, using relatively simple tools that are often free or inexpensive. New media requires a computer or mobile device with Internet access.

The Characteristics of New Media are:

· *Connect* people with information and services.
· *Collaborate* with other people—including those within your organization or community.
· *Create* new content, services, communities, and channels of communication that help you deliver information and services.
· *Interactivity,* New media is known for its ability to involve the audience. This is known as interactivity. In comparison to other media forms, new media has the most evolved feedback system in place.
· *Narrative* - New Media uses a narrative style of writing. The other special feature of new media is the use of multimedia.

Women Empowerment through New Media

Women's development is now linked with technology. Thus, technological intervention assumes a greater and more vital role, especially when viewed globally. Since, women have limited access to technologies in India However; there are now experiences to show that when women are trained, they show remarkable understanding and control in using technologies effectively. New Media have a huge potential for the empowerment of women, however the overall use of this media by women is very low. New Media has played an important role in empowering the women.
The urban educated women need information mainly on the following things:
· Employment /Job Prospects in India and Abroad.
· Research and Information.
· Educational opportunities.
· Career advancement facilities.
· Beauty and Fashion, Hair care, Health & Lifestyle, Apparel and accessories.
· Matrimonial ads.
· Art and Entertainment, Music videos and films.
· Social Support system for working women.

The urban lower middle class women need information mainly on the following topics:
· Employment /Job Prospects in India /self locality.
· Inexpensive childcare & Healthcare.
· Educational facilities at their doorstep.
· Dowry system, other legal rights like self help violence etc.
· Information about NGO's
· Legal provisions against Sexual harassment, Domestic Violence and Social injustice.
New Media is emerging as a powerful tool for gender empowerment in a developing country like India. There has been a rapid growth in the ICT sector since the late 1980's and the use of ICT has dramatically expanded since 1990's. The Internet has rapidly evolved its ability to inform, connect, enable, and empower. From distance learners and small business owners to democracy activists and music downloader's, the Internet has allowed people around the world to imagine and construct new possibilities for themselves, their families, and their nations. Internet has changed lives of women, empowered them, enabled them and connected them to rest of the world.
In a recent report published by Google, it is clear that Internet is empowering Indian women with easy access to information and helping them to make more informed decisions in their day-to-day life. According to the report released in June 2013 titled "Women & Web Study", out of the total 150 million Internet users in the country, around 60 million women in India are now online and use the Internet to

manage their day-to-day life. With easy access to Internet at homes, cyber cafes, offices and growing adoption of smart phones, the Internet is being used by women for a variety of things, It noted that women who are online are relatively more affluent and younger—75% are in the 15-34 age group, with over 24 million women accessing the Internet daily. In terms of top searched categories by women on Google in India, apparel and accessories were the biggest followed by food and drink, baby care, hair care and skincare.

In terms online activity, email, search and social networking are the biggest drivers for women. Downloading music, looking for educational content, job search, watching videos and consuming news are the other top activities. The report also indicated adoption of ecommerce by women in India, with 1 in 4 shoppers buying baby products online. Apart from music videos, TV shows and film content – beauty & fashion videos were popular among women on YouTube. Education, health and fitness, home care & cooking were also rated among the top 10 video content categories of choice on YouTube. Indian females make for 27% of the total Indian Facebook population on Facebook.

As far as the education among women is concerned internet can create awareness among the women about health issues. Nutrition education is other important component. Through nutritional education, women's health status can be improved. For creating awareness about the Dietary Patterns in Various Age Groups different blogs can be create to add on awareness about dietary pattern among women with the help of nutritional experts and dieticians. Information about Cause of Various Health Problems, such as solutions to problems with reproductive health and fertility, and knowledge about breastfeeding, contraception etc is available on different health and fitness related websites like doctorndtv.com and other health related blogs. There are different Government Facilities as well, this information can be provided among women in the various formats of Internet advertising, and advertisements can be designed in a way to make the women aware of and informed about government hospitals, and various rules and laws on gender. Women, who constitute half of the population, need particular attention of the media for their optimal development - both material and intellectual. Internet can be useful to create in women a sense of self respect, self reliance, economic independence and equality in status with men. Information to educate women about the constitutional and legal rights and the special provision made and measures adopted for their welfare by the Government and other agencies is necessary apart from creating the awareness about the Dowry Prohibition Act, Maternity Right, and other aspects of law. For many women in the developing world, the Internet serves as a gateway to benefits clustered around empowerment connoting a variety of ideas, including self-confidence, autonomy, and the capacity to alter the structures that govern one's situation. Internet use also provides more subtle, longer-term benefits around empowerment, such as increased confidence, external validation, and expression. Empowerment benefits flow from the fact that the Internet permits information, ideas, and perspectives to travel with greater ease. Social networking allows women to enlarge their communities and to retain their old ones.

New media can provide effective tools for women

· document and generate knowledge on important issues like health, education and empowerment
· represent and share their experiences and their knowledge
· Provide a platform to speak out about their lives, needs and the issues they face
· Help them to develop their ideas and creativity
· offer means for self-reflection and self-advocacy
· Improves standard of living
· Self Confidence and Increases social interaction
· Enhance awareness and sense of achievement

Social Media and Women Empowerment

Another most important device of women empowerment is the social media, through which women can share their views about the gender related issues. Actually it is like a platform of various kind of social

injustice which presence in the society. Say for example, Delhi gang rape case and the online responses changed the mindsets of the youth and it seems that people are no longer willing to accept rape and sexual assault as "a simple fact of life." People in India demanded change, and they used the power of modern media to make their voices heard. In Delhi gang rape case Platforms such as the Face book group 'Gang Rape in Delhi' and 'Justice for Raped Girl in Delhi' have united people in expressing their hopes for a future free from similar cases. People raised their voices through Twitter, Face book and other new media, expressing their frustrations against the government and administration. Following news of the case reaching the masses, the huge crowds of protestors taking to the streets provide an indication of the growing strength of the internet and new media in harnessing public support. Perhaps for the first time, internet and new media were utilised as tools to mobilise public support throughout India. People contacted each other and established platforms from which they campaigned for governmental action, with the intention of ensuring justice for the victim and offering protection for all Indian women. This outpouring of public outrage was not accidental; it was organised through new media and other messages which brought people – especially Indian youth – together in support of a cause which they feel has become extremely important in their country. Within 10 days of the incident, Face book groups 'Gang raped in Delhi' created on December 20, 2012 and 'Delhi for Women's Safety' created on December 18, 2012 received 5046 and 4263 'Likes' respectively. Other Face book groups such as 'Another girl gang raped in Delhi – Can we stop it?', 'Delhi Gang Rape – Please Don't Ignore "Must Read" For Damini', and 'Delhi Gang Rape – Protest' emerged as individual fight against such crimes. These groups acted like platforms for justice and empowering women and have given a voice to everyone, even those who want to protest against sexual assault cases in India even if they are out of the country.

Social media could enhance women's participation in economic and political life, and allows them to increase their self expression and promote social change, and this is a strong belief that has risen up in the society (Tomlin, 2012). Social media has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women's rights issues to the attention of a wider public, galvanising action on the streets of cities around the world and encouraging policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality.

Social media has transformed the landscape of how information is shared globally and the relationship between citizens and governments (Shirky, 2011). Beyond its use as a social networking tool, social media allows for the first time any individual to share content and opinions to a global audience, bypassing traditional media or other modes of information transmission (European Parliament, 2013). Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter have allowed activists around the world to retransmit events live to a broad online audience, such as during the Arab Spring movement (Pew Research Center, 2012). Local issues become global concerns; local activists become connected with global citizens.

Below are three areas identified by the Wikigender online discussion and research where social media has enabled women's political activism?

Hashtag Activism Bringing Women's Issues to the Forefront of Political Agendas

Hashtag activism has helped to mobilise public attention on women's rights, increasing the visibility of issues that are under-reported in mainstream media. For example in 2013, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign reached over 1 million tweets, helping to raise awareness of both national and international actors of the need to help rescue the abducted Nigerian schoolgirls (Tomchak, 2014). Before the hashtag campaign's success, the case received little media attention (Dewey, 2014). UN Women's successful and high-profile #HeForShe campaign further highlights the potential of social media to attract new and larger audiences: the campaign engaged with more than 1.2 billion people, putting the global spotlight on the need to engage men and boys to achieve gender equality.

Tackling violence against Women through Social Media Tools

Social media tools have helped female victims to share their experiences of violence with other victims, creating a space to exchange knowledge and information on their rights, legal processes and welfare services. In 2010, Harass Map was launched in Egypt as an online mapping tool to allow victims to anonymously report cases of sexual harassment directly from their mobile phone. This crowd-sourcing initiative maps all the reports and is coupled with campaigns to raise awareness on the scale of the problem in Egypt (Young, 2014).

Public Accountability towards Gender Equality:

Social media has been increasingly used by women's grassroots organisations to call for greater public accountability towards gender equality. Following the 2012 gang rape of a young woman in Delhi, the #DelhiGangRape hashtag campaign brought the scale of gender-based violence in India into the spotlight. The hashtag campaign supported public street mobilisation which saw the government introduce specific anti-rape provisions in the Criminal code (Sharma, 2014). Similarly, in Turkey, the rape and murder of a young woman led to a mass Twitter protest through the hashtags #sendeanlat (tell your story) and #ozceganaslan. Large street protests provoked a discussion among political and civil society leaders about violence against women in the country.

For the emancipation of women in every field self decision making, economic independence and creating awareness in them about their rights and responsibilities is very important. The new media is considered as the most effective and important tool in this regard as it has the power of molding public opinion. All over the world, the impact of new media has been witnessed in recent years, with online platforms becoming increasingly powerful mechanisms for mobilizing popular support. It can work for the development of women and gender equality. Various New Media tools such as blogs, face book, social sites and internet are used for empowering the women by education, information, awareness, economic empowerment and self decision making. Internet can be easily used for empowerment of women.

New Media plays an important and vital role in women's empowerment and its development. Media can create an awakening inspiration to achieve their potential as prime source of change in the society, we live in. Internet has served as a vehicle or as a channel to convey information in a useful and easy to understand manner. This extraordinary revolution is affecting the basic structure of societies, and is raising discussions and debates that are profoundly related to women. New Media is considered as an important source in helping the women empowered. It is helping as the important source and access to speak out against the oppression and marginalization of women at the grass root level. By providing the access of information and platform for the women, new media helping the process of women empowerment.

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