IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

SUMAIRA ARIF*

*Ph.D. Scholar, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India

Abstract

In India, women are the most suppressed and degraded part of our society. In many other countries of the world, women face a high level of discrimination and discouragement. The situation is so worse because of poverty, lack of education, and societal norms. To solve this problem, there are so many ways to empower women and one of them is communication, if handled properly. Communication aims to provide the knowledge useful to the masses. It has been proved through many studies that communication can play a powerful role in nation building and bring about social change in the desired direction. Communication is not only an essential element to the persistence of social order but to look as it more positively, one may say that communication can be effective means to developmental change.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Empowerment, Communication, Mass Media

Introduction

Women Empowerment

The term ‘empowerment’ has been used and mean different in different situations. Generally, it refers to a process of consolidating, maintaining or changing the nature and distribution of power in a particular cultural context. Thus, the term ‘empowerment’ means giving power to certain unprivileged and oppressed sections of society.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines empowerment as: (i) to invest, legally or formally with power, to license, and (ii) to bestow power upon, make powerful.

Empowerment is the process in which people assume on increased involvement in defining and promoting their own agenda for political and social projects designed to enact change. When used in the context of women’s welfare and development, empowerment is a process that leads to the achievement of gender equality in social, educational, economic and political walks of life. In other words, it is a process through which women increase their ability to shape their own lives and environment and that which results in women’s self-awareness, status and efficiency in social interactions. Empowerment is seen as an answer to eliminating all forms of discriminations faced by women. Empowerment is a process of self-development and not mere acquisition of power on transfer by outside forces and initiatives.
Empowerment is autonomy both collective and individual. It encompasses several mutually reinforcing components but begins with and is supported by economic independence. For women, empowerment is the restructuring of gender relations within both family and society at large, and it is society’s recognition of women’s equality with men in terms of their worth to society as independent persons. Women become empowered through collective reflection and decision making. Its parameters are: building a positive self-image and self-confidence, developing to think critically, building up group cohesion and fostering decision making and action; ensuring equal participation in the process of bargaining about social change, encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society, providing the wherewithal for economic independence. Women empowerment is nothing more and nothing less than increasing women’s control over their own lives.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Since Ancient times, women are the most suppressed and degraded part of our society. In many other countries of the world, women face a high level of discrimination and discouragement. D’Souza stated that “in both the industrially advanced and less developed countries, women are burdened with cumulative inequalities as a result of socio-cultural and economically discriminatory practices. Until recently, they have been taken for granted as though they were part of the immutable scheme of things established by nature.” In India, the situation is worse because of poverty, lack of education, and societal norms. At a place, they are worshipped as Goddesses and at some places, they are being abused just because they are women. They are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalized group of the country. The participation of women in socio-economic and political life is also not approved and encouraged. Even today, all the social and economical parameters of the country show the low level of life expectancy, literacy and socio-economic participation of women. Hence lately and gradually, there came the need for empowering women as much as possible to make them able to lead a well-balanced and healthy life.

To solve this problem, there are so many ways to empower women and one of them is communication, if handled properly. Communication aims to provide the knowledge useful to the masses. It has been proved through many studies that communication can play a powerful role in nation building and bring about social change in the desired direction. Communication is not only an essential element to the persistence of social order but to look
as it more positively, one may say that communication can be effective means to developmental change.

For D. P. Mukherji (1984) “Communication was neither mechanical transfer of concepts and techniques from developed to backward nations, nor was it a passive reception by a subject country of the messages transmitted to it from the mother country.”

Kivlin et al (1968) emphasized that communication behavior of extension personnel has important role in bringing about social change in India.

Pool (1966) emphasized that exposure to the media may have direct and immediate effects upon the individuals such as:

(a) Attention
(b) Saliency
(c) Information
(d) Skills
(e) Tastes
(f) Images
(g) Attitudes
(h) Actions

He further pointed out that changes in each of these may in turn change each of the other; just as changes in one’s attitude may change one’s action. Changes in the information one has, may change one’s distribution of attention or changes in what one attends to, may change one’s information.

Women cannot change and develop without communication, as it is a process of social interaction through which people are influenced by ideas, attitudes, knowledge and behavior of each other. The useful development messages are conveyed to the target groups (farm women) through various communication approaches. This helps masses in acquiring new knowledge required for coping with fast changing society. It helps farm women in adoption of innovation for the improvement of their practices, methods and quality of life. Mass media can raise awareness and public understanding of the social implications of problems such as adolescent fertility, AIDS or drug abuse…Other communication activities can bring about informed processes of change among the audiences they intend to reach. Majority of the respondents have indicated that the communication has contributed in increasing their knowledge.
Hence, exposure of marginalized and suppressed women to communication can help them open up their minds, increase their knowledge, learn something useful, be resourceful and empower them to take necessary steps for themselves. For example, if a woman is facing domestic violence by her husband and she hardly find any way to talk to her dear ones, the mass media can play a major role in educating such women to know their rights and procedures required in such matters. She can read in newspapers, watch on television or listen on radio about how and whom to complain about such matters. And accordingly she can take an action for herself or for anybody else too. Thus, using communication methods frequently, can be very productive and life savers for many. Many studies have proved that women want to be informed of world events. Their immediate concern is to know laws and new legislation which affect their right and privileges. These are the responses of urban women views. As for the rural women, they appreciate programs related to their day to day life. For example, diet during pregnancy, balanced diet, preparation of nutrition food, treatment for boils and small pox, cough and cold.

But the reach of mass media among women in India is much less due to factors like illiteracy, inaccessibility, lack of respite from household chores, inconvenient program timings in the case of radio and TV and traditionally imposed inhibitions retracting the movement of women. The distance between women and media not only deprives the women of their right to information and knowledge but also keeps the women in the dark regarding the blatant misuse of the female and the distortion of the truth.

However, women are slowly emerging out of their centuries old darkness, shaking off their shackles of tradition and man-determined and man-imposed roles and are increasingly raising their voice to demand their rightful place in society and their due from it is economic, political and society life. Women have become one of the most potent forces of change, causing upheavals in the staid, in still waters of smug male-oriented society.

References:
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