

Mass Media: Nourishing Modern Feminism

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ABSTRACT

Feminism in India is so vast that it is maybe difficult to transgress its course with a great amount of accuracy. However, it has been omnipresent since years past. Advocates of human rights like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Kamini Roy and Rani Lakshmi Bai were the brave human right activists who demonstrated exceptional courage against the social evils taking place in regards to women, wishing this deprived gender to stand at par with their opposite sex. Their methods were quite different when compared to contemporary feminists. They issued sermons, travelled all over the country to spread their idea and held Sabhas. 'Feminism' is not just a term but a movement for defining, laying the foundation and defending the equal rights of women in every sphere of life which would be at par with her male counterparts.

This movement can be further divided into three-phases, with the first phase involving the abolition of child marriage and getting the allowance for widows to remarry and own property. The second phase was the period until the Indian Independence which involved women being accepted and acting as crucial elements in India's struggles against the colonial rule, before the year 1947. The third phase is one which is continuing until the present. Its the era of mass media, the period of globalisation and ease of communication where women are more liberal than ever. Feminism, as a concept, has gained a strong stance in the last ten years. The contemporary world has offered a welcoming hand to it and a large part of this acceptance is the mass media. Mass Media which involves broadcast media, television, radios, films, music and even social media. Earlier, when information and inter-personal communication was restricted by the movement of the slow-moving postal system which would take days and months to transport, the mass media of today facilitates this contact with the ease of technology.

This Interpretative paper will employ a case study method to elaborate on how Feminism is greatly supported by the fast-paced technology of media, in the present world. To supplement this thesis, I would be mentioning incidents and people from different sectors of the media with a brief mention of the positive and negative impacts of the same.

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BODY – Mass Media's Role in Modern Feminism

The feminism of the contemporary world is vigorous and energetic with several people come together in solidarity for a single social cause. Men and women are harnessing the strength of media in various ways to further women's rights. The film industry of India, Bollywood, has a large role in perceiving the females under a different light. Earlier they were majorly restricted to either supportive or domestic roles, however, the actresses of this generation are playing liberalistic lead roles like Sridevi who avenges her daughter, in the 2017 thriller 'Mom', or Kangana Ranaut in the movie Queen, where she refuses to conform to the society's vices after her fiancée abandons her. Similarly, several other movies like Mary Kom, Padman and English Vinglish have come on the big screen that has helped enhance the concept of womanhood in the Indian mindset and aligns itself with the feminist agenda for equality.

The trending online streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon and Hotstar have further enhanced the humanistic agenda. Shows like "She" deal with female sexuality in a non-restrictive manner along with "Leila" which canvasses a woman in search for her lost daughter.

Journalistic Media

Mass media can also be in the form of journalistic newspapers, radios, broadcast, etc. These have likewise played a major role in supplementing feminism. The journalistic media's responsibility is to inform the public of global ongoings and do an honest reporting of incidents all around the world. Moreover, both broadcast and electronic journalism is available in a distinctive array of regional languages which is the essence of a multi-cultural country like India. This assists people in even the most remote areas to be aware of important information. With issues like rape, sex-trafficking, domestic violence and gender discrimination at professional and other spaces being mentioned on these mediums, people's awareness regarding such topics has increased resulting in a feminist unanimity. For instance, the Times of India story "70% can't afford sanitary napkins, reveals study" ¹talks about the socially tabooed topic of menstruation or the survey by The Hindu "Coronavirus lock-down | Women's access to menstrual hygiene products hit, says survey" ²talks about women's

1 Kounteya Sinha, *Times Of India*, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/70-cant-afford-sanitary-napkins-reveals-study/articleshow/7344998.cms> (Jan 23, 2011)

2 *The Hindu*, <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/lockdown-hits-womens-access-to-menstrual-hygiene-products-survey/article31697210.ece>

needs and health in a generic manner creating an environment of acceptance and development in regards with such caste-away topics.

Financial independence of women is a very important step towards seeing women at equal par with the men. It has been witnessed through the years that working women are more likely to be seen as equal in society. The globalisation of information due to the extensive reach of different branches of mass media has led to Indians becoming more aware of the Western culture where women are treated much more copiously when compared to the age-old Indian culture. This Western influence has led to the economic emancipation of the females who now hold important offices in the business sector and are an equivalent source of sustenance for their families. They are no longer expected to only perform domestic duties. Even when it comes to clothes wear, Indian women have westernised their sense of style. Their wardrobes have expanded from Sarees and Salwars to include western wear consisting of T-Shirts, pants, dresses and so on.

Social Media

Besides, Social media has a crucial hand to play in the development of feminism as it is today. Apps like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, etc are the leading forces for the public to put their point forward. Hashtags are extensively used on these platforms which aid in micro-blogging.

“After a prominent fatal sexual attack in India, the mobilization of activists through online organizing progressed through several stages and some users privileged #delhirapecase or delhigangrape – which protected the private identity of the victim – while others made her into a public martyr by using her proper #jyotisinghpandey. Many also used a series of pseudonyms, such as #damini or #amanat. This study focuses on the informational labour of two specific activist groups in India - - Breakthrough and Blank Noise -- and how careful hashtag use reflected their policy decisions and deliberative activities about metadata management, which is becoming an increasingly important aspect of transformative social movements that bring citizens out into the streets.”³ (Elizabeth Losh, University of California, Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective, 2014)

³ Elizabeth Losh, Hashtag Feminism and Twitter Activism in India (2014), <https://social-epistemology.com/2014/11/03/hashtag-feminism-and-twitter-activism-in-india-elizabeth-losh/> (ac cessed 30th June 2020)

The mobilization of people based on movements on social media and information provided by the print and broadcast media has led to riots and silent marches all over the country. During the infamous Nirbhaya rape case of 2012, the entire nation came together to revolt against the atrocities of the rapists and demanded equal recognition of women in the Indian Constitution to protect them from such acts of violence and abuse prevalent in the country since years. This particular incident attracted an extremely vast media traction and the social media flooded with feminist mottos. This public uproar led to The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 (Nirbhaya Act) to be passed in the lower house of the Indian Parliament, Lok Sabha, against such crimes like sexual harassment, acid attack, voyeurism and stalking which turned out to be a remarkable milestone towards feminist rights.

The social media is a notable and indispensable platform for furthering social issues, the popular Me Too movement of India which affected lakhs in the country, occurred in 2018 against the sexual harassment of women. It spread like wildfire with the help of these online mediums. The strength of this movement took a toll over the government, media itself and even the Bollywood. The stronghold of social media while defining modern feminism can be witnessed here. This movement had priorly originated in America and henceforth, spread to India. Film Personalities from Salman Khan to Nana Patekar all came under scrutiny as women from varied fields rose to revolt against the sexual abuse of women. In the political sphere, **MJ Akbar**, India's Minister of State for External Affairs along with the Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi, were accused of harassment charges during the Me Too movement. Even among the general population, women and men spoke up about the importance of feminism and Me too as several guilty names came up.

The fear of social media exposure has risen as people have become more outspoken about their rights. While earlier, the guilty were able to walk free and mostly unknown to the world, the presence of media and communication during these advanced times has created an atmosphere of fear for the abusers. The derogatory comments made by the sensationalised cricketer, Hardik Pandya caused his reputation to take a downfall as the media flooded with coverage of his statements made in a chat show. The newspaper, 'Feminism India' wrote angry posts about the "misogynistic" Hardik Pandya as they called him, "...your sexist and misogynist gaze is *not* a symptom of any kind of 'blackness' you associate yourself with, don't shift the blame, it's all you, Pandya ", the reporter further commented.⁴She has strengthened the article by using audience

⁴ [Saumya Malhotra \(2019\)](#) *The Utter Failure Of Karan Johar's 'Brew-mance'*, FeminismIndia

posts and comments on forums like Twitter and Facebook demonstrating to the audience how the general population is violated by the occurrence.

Radio

Underprivileged people who do not have access to the internet, social media or televisions have another easy way of accessing information and becoming aware of women rights movement taking place in the country. All India Radio is a broadcast medium which informs, educates and entertains people living even in the remote areas. As of 2020, there are about 251 community radio stations in India. Hearing women hosting radio shows confidently in regional languages is quite empowering when compared to the backward expectations people have from women during earlier times. The fast-paced and liberal attitude of women and the open-minded conversations of issues related to them manages to reach the consciousness of people of secluded areas further supplementing this globalisation of feminism.

Shanta Koshti who was previously a poorly paid "beedi" worker is now influencing people through the community radio. *"At present, my entire focus is on motivating people to stand up for their rights. On average, I spend three to four days every week travelling around various villages and everyone in my family is supportive of my decision,"* she shares.⁵

Disadvantages of Mass Media and Modern Feminism

However, the current feminism leads to certain impacts which can be quite negative too. Misandry is a very vital social evil that arises at times as men are disliked in a generalised manner without considering any clear-cut distinctions of their character. The ideology of equality of all genders which is the eventual aim of feminism is often forgotten as people try to pull down the male to have the feminine above all.⁶ Reports of misinformation and misguidance during the feminist movements like Me Too showcases another dark side of taking advantage of this social call. It becomes quite easy for people to fabricate stories and misuse their right when placed behind computer screens or radio forums where they can keep their identity completely secret. These mishaps often lead to feminism losing its true meaning and often being misunderstood by people.

5 Bhanu Priya Vyas (2015) *4 Women Who Are Using Community Radio To Bring Change In Rural India*, The Better India

6 Quora *What are the downsides of feminism?*, Jalen Hutchinson, <https://qr.ae/pNKDGs> (accessed 4th July 2020)

Conclusion

However, irrespective of the consequences, Feminism is a necessary call of the present. It will continue to be so until women's rights and equality are completely accepted and are at par with the men, whether it be socially, professionally or even domestically. The needs and outcomes of it are overpowering because it was because of this movement that the basic freedom towards clothes, work, thought, property and such were won by the women.

The outcome turns out to be that Mass media has indeed supplemented and led to the development of modern feminism as it is today. It has helped strengthen the voice of the unheard and reached with its ideation to people in the country who are completely unaware and uneducated of such notions. Through the assistance of various patterns, I hereby provided elaborate supporting arguments for the hypothesis that whether it be the broadcast media, print, television or films, every medium has collaboratively assisted in the road to an enhanced and powerful Feminism.

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