"I think about how much we owe to the women who went before us – legions of women, some known but many more unknown. I applaud the bravery and resilience of those who helped all of us – you and me – to be here today."

Ruth Bader Ginsburg
Chapter III
MEDIA AND WOMEN

Media is a powerful agent of socialisation. It invariably exhibits societal conventions. Media as a stimulant satisfies the information needed by the people to widen their horizon and this information must be dispersed undiluted.

In the existing world, the social, political and cultural course of the society is highly influenced by the information and communication. It just takes merely seconds for new ideas to reach any corner of the globe.

‘Media and its agencies, especially a newspaper or television channel is a living organism reborn with each news cycles. At its best, it holds a mirror to allow the people to see who they are, what they do and why their actions have consequences. It systematises complex phenomena rooted in human hopes and struggles to help people, communities and the nation to move forward towards better daily lives.’

Media in true sense should be an exact reflection of the entire nation. It should participate as an important character in our present-day society. Media elucidates the common structure of the country and also tries to manipulate by shaping its pattern. In a democratic state, media helps in both political and economic development. It also brings to notice the public opinion of the countrymen.

The whole world is globalised and the Indian society is also feeling the heat. In this context it becomes necessary for the
media to address various common concerns of the country. There is an enduring uprising in today’s world of global communication. With the advent of information technologies, the prospective now subsists for the media to make a notable involvement to the advancement of women.

Media should perpetually reflect the contribution of women for their overall development, instead of considering them as objects for entertainment and embellishment. For the development of any nation, the mass media acts as a medium for social change. Media can surely sensitise the society and in accordance ensure equal rights for women, and also guarantee that they are not treated as object of men. Thus, media has a social commitment as a diligence. Any developing nation cannot downgrade its half population merely as a squander asset.

3.1 MEDIA FROM PAST TO PRESENT

India is a diversified country with over a billion population. The communication through media varies from interpersonal methods of communicating to satellite broadcasting, from a regional two-page newspaper to multi edition dailies, and presently experiencing the internet revolution.

In the field of communication, our country has come a long way. It is evident from the fact that five decades back the level of literacy in India was only ‘18.33 per cent (in 1951); where as in 2001 the literacy level was 64.84 per cent.\textsuperscript{2} In 1952, in a population of 1000 people, newspaper was circulated among eight persons and only 2 persons out of 1000 had radio sets.\textsuperscript{3}
Communication and information wields a great vital power on all spheres of the social, political and cultural course of the society. Broadly media can be divided into two – electronic media (radio, television, internet) and print media (newspaper, magazine, journal).

The Radio Club of Bombay broadcasted the first radio program in India in June 1923. Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC) began broadcasting on experimental basis in June 1927 at Bombay and Calcutta. In 1980 the British government took over IBC and established it as Indian State Broadcasting Service (ISBS). It was renamed All India Radio on 8th June 1936.

‘When India got Independence, All India Radio had six radio stations with 18 more transmitters. There were 280,000 radio receiver sets for 350 million people.’

‘Over the years, All India Radio has developed a formidable infrastructure for radio broadcasting in India. It operates a three-tiered - national, regional, and local – service to cater to India’s geographic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Over 97% of India’s population lives in areas that have access to radio broadcasts, served by 195 AIR radio stations scattered across the country. In 2000, AIR programmes could be heard in two-thirds of all Indian households in 24 languages and 146 dialects, over some 120 million radio sets (AIR, 1996). ‘Radio now covers almost the entire population of India. It has a great ability to inform, educate and entertain the people.’

Television (TV) came to India on 15th Sep 1959 as an experimental educational service in Delhi. The service called Pilot Project was aided by UNESCO. A daily one hour news
bulletin was started in 1965; *Krishi Darshan* was started in 1967. TV is considered to be the most powerful persuasive mass communication medium.\(^{10}\)

‘In 1971 it had an access to five million people. In 1983, 210 million people had an access to TV, there were 30 million TV audience and 2.8 million TV sets. In 1999, around 900 million people had an access to TV, there were 500 million TV audience and 65 million people owned TV sets.’\(^{11}\)

Television got separated from All India Radio on 1 April 1976 and was named as Doordarshan (DD).\(^{12}\) The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) was launched in 1975-76 to promote socio-economic development.\(^{13}\)

A communication revolution is already in its developing stages. The next technology will be the integration of computers, satellites, fiber optics and other technologies.

The internet is undoubtedly the most important discovery of the last century. Right from its inception in 1991 by the Department of Electronics (DoE) it has grown from strength to strength.\(^{14}\) In last decade or so it has become an inevitable part of our lives. It provides an excellent platform for the new generation women to reach out to the outer world to learn of her rights and also to make her voice heard. A wave of protest rose within hours against the culprits of violence against women who dared to visit disco and clubs at Bangalore. It was the power of internet through which such large consensus in a short time could be mustered. There are umpteen websites and organizations which work for the cause of women upliftment and awareness using internet as a medium.
The major advantage the internet has over other mediums is its global reach, fast move of information and freedom of access. If used judiciously it is a potent tool for creating awareness and to deliver a revolutionary thrust to the cause of women empowerment. It is just a matter of time before it actually takes the centre stage in all forms of communication for the voice of women to be heard and make an impression.

Written communication is the backbone and plays a vital role in the success of print media. It is natural to consider that it is more authentic as masses are invariably convinced and has a greater impact on the common man’s psyche. Despite the development of radio, television and internet, newspapers are still a chief source of information.

Newspapers are the first vehicle to provide information to mass audience. It has credibility and retention that no other information vehicle can provide us. They are an integral part of our community inspite of being a perishable commodity.

Julius Caesar in 59 B.C. is given the credit to model a newspaper – *Acta Diuma* – which focused on informing people about social and political activities taking place in the region. The incidents/happenings/events were written on big white boards and displayed at public places for masses.\(^{15}\) The first handwritten newspaper appeared in 8\(^{th}\) century in Beijing.\(^{16}\)

In ancient India, during 3\(^{rd}\) century B.C., Emperor Asoka’s pillar and stone inscriptions were used to inform and educate common people. Happenings and events were drawn on the walls of temples and moral code was disseminated through the art of paintings. During medieval period, with the coming of Mughals,
written matter was circulated and many information offices were set up. Later on Christian missionaries realised that press could be a boon in achieving their goal of spreading Christianity.\textsuperscript{17}

The first printing press arrived in India on 6th September 1556 and was installed at the college of St. Paul in Goa. In 1557, the first book \textit{Doutrina Christa} was printed.\textsuperscript{18} ‘Concluses’ or Thesis of Philosophy was the first matter printed in the country.\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Bengal Gazette} in English was the first printed newspaper of India published on 29\textsuperscript{th} January 1780. It was edited and published by James Augustus Hicky, an employee of East India Company. Shortly other weeklies and monthlies like \textit{Indian Gazette}, \textit{Calcutta Journal}, \textit{Bengal Harakaru}, \textit{John Bull} were started.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Digdarshan} was the first Indian language newspaper. It started in April 1818 by the Serampur missionaries William Carcy, Joshua Marshman and William Ward. They soon started another journal in June of the same year and named it \textit{Samachar Darpan}.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy also brought out periodicals in English, Bengali and Persian.\textsuperscript{21} ‘His memorial for repeal of the press ordinance of 1823 has been called the \textit{Areopagatica} of Indian History.’\textsuperscript{22} Some of Roy’s papers was \textit{Sambad Kaumadi}, \textit{Brahmical Magazine}, \textit{Mirat-ul-Akhbar}, \textit{Bangadoota} and \textit{Bengal Herald}.\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{Bombay Samachar}, a Gujarati daily is the oldest existing paper which started in 1822. It is published from Bombay. During the long struggle for India’s Independence, many major English newspapers served for the national cause.\textsuperscript{24}
Annie Besant’s home rule movement and later non-cooperation Movement by Mahatma Gandhi in 1915-21 saw a complete transformation in the Indian press. In the freedom movement, the press stood in the forefront and valiantly fought with the British government. There were numerous sacrifices made by the Indian journalists for the sake of homeland.  

But after 1947, the scenario completely changed for the sake of nation building and national growth the role of the press multiplied. It is true that the press invariable acts as driving force for political development and socialisation. It acts as mediator for communicating with the masses. The Indian traditional values can hinder the national progress and inspiration but press can surely bring the socio economic change needed for the development of the country. The press safeguards the interest of masses, in a democratic country its role is that of a watchdog. Trustworthiness is the key word for print media.

‘As one of the mass communication media, the contemporary newspaper has three fundamental functions and some secondary ones. The basic one are: (1) to inform its readers objectively about what is happening in their community, country, and world; (2) to comment editorially on the news in order to bring these developments into focus; (3) to provide the means whereby persons with goods and services to sell can advertise their wares. The newspapers less vital roles are: (1) to campaign for desirable civic projects and to eliminate undesirable conditions; (2) to give the readers a portion of entertainment through such devices as comic strips, columnists and special features; (3) to serve the reader as a
friendly counselor, information bureau, and champion of his rights."27

Magazine disseminates a specialised kind of information. They contain articles to varied readers. Magazines may be published weekly, fortnightly or monthly. It has very high quality representation of content and pictures. The content may be a factual reporting to a personal interview. Journal literally means record of daily events. It contains scholarly articles. Periodicals are the publications other than daily.28

3.2 IMPACT OF MEDIA

Media’s impact is altogether different for different sect of people. A politician will have political impact on his mind; a psychologist will feel psychologically and so on. ‘Perhaps the only safe conclusion on effects of the media is that arrived by Bernard Berelson several years ago: Some kinds of communication on some kind of issues brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions have some kinds of effects.’29

In a democratic country, participation of every citizen is important and it is only possible through communication. Gradually, the media is becoming a part of daily life as it directly influences people’s ability to interrelate in social, cultural and political field. In the swift transforming Indian society, print media holds a big contribution in shaping the attitude of women and towards the women.
In a developing country like India, English newspapers tend to please high middle class society as it is maximum read by them. Thus, mass media has a bigger role to play in the attitude and opinion formation of women.

‘The role of media in development of women is two folds. (a) Development through exposure to media by way of programs and printed material. This is a consumer-oriented function, and by the consumer, we mean women. (b) development through the active participation of women in the production of media messages by participating in the decision-making process regarding program content, policies and the projection of a balanced image of women.’

Our newspapers, television and magazines take more interest in unearthing scandals to embarrass politicians or try poking noses in elite society’s personal matter rather than giving voice to women empowerment causes.

The impact of media can have two major functions. One is to make the society aware of the contribution of women to national development and second is to make the women aware of their share of benefits in population control, literacy and employment.

‘The media should be an innocent mirror of the entire nation but it seems to be by the elites, for the elites, about the elites with some conscience salving concern for Indians-at-the-bottom. Modern India can obliterate an entire country with a few bombs but cannot deliver effective health care to India.’
3.3 PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN

In India, the media or the advertisers do not provide a balanced picture of women’s contribution to the society, in a true sense. The commercialisation of media has only lead to exclusion of social goals in general and those of women in particular.

Indian mass media projects women as one of the following – good housekeeper, submissive daughter, wife and mother, if she is a working woman – a vamp, sufferer both at home and office, neglecting children.

The Indian Constitution envisages the ‘right to live’ for all those living in India. But how far is this right true for the Indian girl child where her birth is literally treated as a burden. There is a lifelong discrimination against her which carries on from womb to tomb.

A girl in India is considered to be a transitory member of a family. In fact, she does not have any kind of independence, right from her childhood to the old age. She hardly has any say and lives under a false notion of freedom for her entire life.

The issue of girl child in India starts from female foeticide, wherein the mother kills her own daughter inside the womb, for the want of a male child. For the fear of giving dowry in marriage, parents do kill their daughters, even before they see this world. The girl child is often malnourished compared to her counterparts. They usually have poor health.

Many girls continue to be married off in teenage because of superstitions, social stigma and poverty. Sexual harassment, trafficking, rape of little girls are common in India. Sexual violence, abuse, trafficking, rape - places girl child at a very high
risk of trauma and diseases. The Indian patriarchal norms further bring discrimination against girl child which is the direct outcome of the preference for a male child. The media strengthens it by portraying the typical stereotype image of girl child or woman.

### 3.3.1 WOMEN IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA

The United Nations (UNESCO) study in 1978 on portrayal and participation of women in media found that globally women were portrayed in a poor manner. There was totally under-representation of women in media with earning less than their male colleagues. As stated earlier the main aim of TV and AIR was to inform, educate and entertain people. Different channels both on TV and radio cover all aspects of human life. Basically most of the programs are for entertaining the masses. Analyses of several of these programs prove that prime-time serials, dramas, film-based programs reveal women and their subject in a poor manner. The treatment met to women is mostly presented as docile homemaker, caregivers, compassionate listeners and objects of male desire.

The programs on women are mostly based on lives and customs of urban society which are strongly dominated by male chauvinists. The stress is laid on being equal partners in life, as the two wheels of a cart.

More often, women are portrayed as patient sufferers, decked up all the time and excluded from intricacies of human emotions; while the other half is allowed to express their anguish and ordeal. The image of women as sex stereotype for male’s lust
is well centered. Middle-class women are best shown as dependent’s, homemakers taking care of children and old one’s in the house, listening to husband in youth and doing as ordered by their sons in old age. Women’s freedom is curbed and she is forced to witness social ills of the society.

Very few programs concerning rural women’s problems and plights are shown. Till date they seem to have been completely ignored.

On the other hand, the role of new modern woman as an agriculturist, industrialist or educationist is rarely shown and highlighted. A woman in these roles is only shown during circumstances in the story, like on death of father or husband, wherein she’s forced to take up the responsibility; but never shown as a career oriented woman, working with her own will and desire. She is more often shown as an extrovert, headstrong, extremely sex stereotype with short hair, short dress, and ready to do anything to reach at the top position for her career. Her character as a demoralised individual is often represented without a second thought as what effect it could leave on young minds.

The film-based programs also completely underestimate the image of woman. The subjugation met by her is often highlighted in the movies and programs. The true feelings of a woman are not reflected on the screen, they are just the acquiescent receivers of their fate. Electronic media does give perfect coverage of women but the way it projects women is pathetic. No balanced image is ever presented for the audience and the women force is also never shown as economic contributors to the nation.
3.3.2 WOMEN IN PRINT MEDIA

Woman is armored under traditions, customs and mass media of the society. Mass media mostly presents a stereotype image of women. With the coming of electronic media the print media has become more sensational and commercialised.\textsuperscript{35}

The importance of print media can be gauged back to India’s struggle for independence, when it played a major role in initiating the fire of freedom struggle in the society.

Present day newspapers have some space for women on weekly basis. It is assumed that women are not interested in general happenings and they are more inclined towards their own interests such as recipes, beauty tips, latest fashion, relations, furnishings, luxurious items, new women products.

Out of the total coverage on women issues maximum news reporting is related to violence against women. Such news items are sensationalised to get more readerships. Women in newspapers make their visibility on the first page only if they are politicians, raped, murdered, if they do suicide, or if there is a case of domestic violence. Besides this, stories on glamour and sex can never be missed out on the last pages.

‘The print media portrayed her sporadically, as it were the sexiest bias and in complete disregard of her reality. And when the reality was ever the subject of exploration for the press, it always presented a glamourised version of her situation. The picture that emerged was that of a woman who never produced knowledge or wealth, but always consumed, a sort of hanger on to her male.’\textsuperscript{36}
The issues affecting women, women encouraging stories, information on rights that every woman in India should know, women building their careers from scratch are rarely ever published. Due to which sex stereotype images of being dependent, passive and homemaker is only presented in the print media.

Sensationalism is the key word in the media. Newspapers give catchy headlines to make it more and more sensational. Often such stories are exaggerated and the blame is put on woman without proper investigation. This is all done to increase the circulation of the newspaper. Such reporters don’t even give a second thought as what they are actually doing. Women issues are just taken for granted and not considered a serious reporting. It results in complete distortion of image of women.

The stories of working class women are rarely published but articles on film stars, their fashion statement, sexy photographs predominates women spaces. The images of women in advertisements do not symbolise women at all in a correct manner, these images are demeaning and are simply as a selling object.

Though, the print media in last one decade has seen a gush of growth. So have women issues increased as compared to 90s. The credit goes to women journalists, women movements bought by the government, women groups and NGO’s that have become more active concerning women issues and development and they all make sure that their voices are heard.

Today one can find a lead story, article or a news analysis published on women issues. But still lot needs to be done;
whatever coverage the print media is giving is very less as compared to the population of women - being almost half in the country. The need is to address more positive women related stories for this half population, so that they can contribute at all fronts in the progress of the country.

Women journalists are trying to change the sexy distorted image of women in print media but until and unless developmental stories are given preferences and the readership profile changes, it’s a difficult task ahead and much remains to be achieved.

Politics is considered to be the bread earner of the newspapers. Women politicians are rarely given preference over male counterparts. It is only on the last few pages that performances by female artists, female dancers or painting exhibitions by women artists, hot and sizzling models with erotic photographs are focused on.

*The Tribune* publishes one page in Sunday supplement to women development stories. *The Hindustan Times* publishes a page to women issues once a week. Beside this once in a while sports page publishes news on Serena Williams, Venus William or Sania Mirza. With half the population of women, our media planners and editors are giving a single page once a week to women issues. Is it right? Is this what they are doing in the name of development coverage and for the cause of women empowerment?
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