SOCIAL MEDIA AND ISSUES OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

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ABSTRACT

Women in India are the large segment of aggrieved people who are facing agonizing problems such as domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment and intimidation against women and prove to be barriers during the course of their all around development. Mostly, they are mistreated, exploited and abused as well as unable to enjoy equal status and rights in the mainstream of society. Today, social media as a powerful mace of the society has come in front to bring revolutionary changes and spread awareness among people in the society as a whole. It has provided the platform to the people in the form of Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram etc. to discuss on gender issues like equality and their socio-economic and political empowerment. Social media has proved to be a powerful weapon for bringing issues regarding women's rights to the attention of a wider public, galvanizing action on the streets of cities around the world and encouraging policy makers to have remarkable steps to gender equality. In this background based on the secondary data paper focuses upon the contribution of social media to women empowerment enabling to get their rights. The paper also likes to conclude that despite the positive contribution of social media, women are not able to fully utilize the new media due to lack of literacy, cybercrime, cyber bullying, etc which are the barriers for women in having equal rights resulting into social exclusion in spite of their actual social inclusion.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Women Empowerment, Women Discrimination, Social Issues, Crime, Gender Equality, Human Rights, Social Inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is very essential for the development of the country. It refers to the process of social, economical, political and educational strength of women involving the building up of a society to guard from all forms of violence against women. It creates the environment wherein women can breathe without fear of oppression, exploitation, discrimination and general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places and do not have equal rights and status with men in all walks of life. Despite government efforts to improve the status of women, even today, they are discriminated in private and public spheres and sometimes merely treated as slave in Indian society. As the 4th pillar of society and democratic medium of society, media is playing the important role to improve women's socio-economic status and tries to bring them into the mainstream of society helping in getting their basic human rights. Since few decades, the media has dramatically changed with social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and online discussion blogs supplementing traditional media such as magazines, newspapers and television programmes. Thus, social Media is a forum to exchange people's views and feelings with the objective of molding public opinions or participation in the process of development.

As an agent of change, Social media is changing the ways of communication with the people all over the world. Now–a-days social media has become an immense platform for mobilizing attention of a wider public on accountability to women's rights, challenging discriminations and stereotypes against women animating policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality. As a result, social media pave a way for discussion on unfavourable issues against women as well as has played important role for all around empowerment including the ability to have rights. Along with the explosion to knowledge of new technologies and various forms of application, social media has inevitably brought remarkable changes in women status and quotient. But the other side of flip concludes that moreover illiteracy, computer skills, cybercrime, technological peripherals and affordability, cyber bullying, non-availability of vernacular language over social media etc. are the hindering factors for women not to fully utilize new social networking sites notwithstanding the positive contribution of modern media.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WOMEN'S ISSUES: THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

As a matter of concern, several scholars examine the role of social media in women empowerment and providing a platform to raise voice for their fundamental rights in different perspectives. *Subrahmanyam (2011)* suggests that social media is a key of empowering the status of women which can be achieved by encouraging the people

for maximum enrolment of girl students in schools. In their study, *Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman (2005)* focus on the role and effects of SHG on women participation through which they are able to exercise the control over decision making both in family matters and in public sphere activities. The study of *Moghadam (2007)* investigates that media has raised burning issues of women and their rights in the society. It has also tried to change people's opinion regarding the rights of women. *Ray (2008)* finds the media as very useful tool for transmitting information to people at large scale and as a way of bringing changes in peoples' behaviour. *Khan and Moin (2013)* report that the access to internet at homes enabled women to participate in daily affairs of state ranging from household work to education, health and governance. According to *Sharma (2014),* social media helps to mobilize the public attention on women's rights increasing the visibility of social issues. The increasing use of this new media by women may be helpful to call for public accountability towards gender equality. *Langman (2005)* argues that people who have acquaint computer knowledge, know the use of internet and initiate various activities like demonstrations, public protest etc., can widely spread the information in a short time through social media. *N.S. Muthukumaran* says that the world has now-a-days become a global village and new social media through its various networking sites is bringing people closer together. It has become a helping hand them to interact and share their opinions within the group on issues and rights of women.

Furthermore, *Masih Alinejad* states that human right is not an opinion about the majority on social media but it is a platform to make the issue successful. There are many women who are excluded from family, society, rights and even living. With this regard, social media throws light on their issues to be solved. *Narayana and Ahamad (2016)* reveal that social media has a great potential for the empowerment of women, however the overall use of new media by women is very low due to illiteracy. They suggest that the women should be supported and further explored about powerful and positive role of social media to know how media can increase the participation and access of women to decision-making. *Schurgin (2011)* explores that social media has provided liberty to women in order to develop their own space and presence on web to the same degree as men. *Subashini (2015)* examines that social media has made larger contribution to the development of women by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technology. *Kirik (2000)* highlights the impact of social media on Indian villages where social media is used to have news and information for entertainment, amusement and for the exchange of ideas. *Das (2013)* states that social media is a signal for post human future without the traditional limitations of time, space and openness of information and communication but women are still facing lots of challenges to prove their potentialities. *Sachdev (2011)* examines that the impact of social media on the women's life finding the uses of social networking sites for women. His study reveals that social networking sites are also useful to manage the basis of ethical considerations and responsibilities. Reporting the role of social media in empowering women, the study of *Jenson (2011)* reveals that social media is not only used

for the purpose of human development but also it is used to educate and make active participation of women's in academic, social and economic development activities.

On the basis of researchers' views, it can be said that the influence of social media to raise the voice of aggrieved women on their issues of rights among wider public across the globe is high. Thus, it is an indication that women are very much aware of the clout of social media which can lead them towards their all around empowerment.

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Social Media is playing a vital role to accelerate social, economical, political and educational empowerment of women. Through social media, women in modern society feel free to express their ideas on social issues against them and thus have achieved all around empowerment in more extant. Women in Indian society, traditionally, are confined to domestic environment which has adversely affected their empowerment outcomes. The freedom of press in the country is a blessing for enhancing women's rights and to strengthen the role of women in decision making. Media have always unconsciously affected and influenced the thinking and behavior of society. As an important agent of socialization, media is shaping the gender roles and enable projection of women in a decent and dignified way promoting respect and dignity to women avoiding negative portrayal of women. Later on, new innovative decent presentation of women, based on Indian culture and society through media has been introduced which is known as social media. It is an umbrella term for electronically communication providing an electronic podium to communicate, share, discuss and exchange the information, views, opinions, ideas, skills, approaches and perspectives to the people who are using this platform. By using different social media applications such as blog, twitter, facebook, instagram etc., uses are interacting and communicating with friends, family members and also using for business purposes.

Social media as an alternative media is providing a strong platform to share and raise the voice of women on gender issues happening in the society. It has transformed communication widely at local and global level creating electronic dais for women to discuss, voice their opinion and organize campaigns for their rights and gender equality by encouraging policy makers and government. The subject of empowering women is now being linked to social media as it is emerging as a powerful tool for portraying awareness among people and taking actions against injustice. For a long time, voice of women is controlled and restricted which has been made loud through social media. It has become very important tool for socio-economic empowerment of women helping women to get rid of the tag of being a burden on others. Online presence in social media is providing freedom, uncontrolled environment and empowerment to women which they never get before. It provides all possible helps to women offering more opportunity to empower themselves. The role of social media to know in what extant it is

successful to empower women, to provide rights to them and helpful in social inclusion can be better understood by knowing the benefits of social media for women.

Through this new media, individuals including women have become able to share their perspectives and to get the word out about protests and various social issues happening in the society. The group 'Women's safety' on social media after the infamous incident of Delhi gang rape is a big example which attracted public attention and created platform both for women justice and women empowerment at global level. In the face of such incidents, social media has become the voice of people for sharing, tweeting, #hashtaging their views and to demand justice on social media pasting campaign picture with absolute support as seen in Delhi Gang Rape case having a simple black dot with a white background. Such incident forced the government to take strict actions against the culprits passing a powerful law to prevent such incidents further in future. Thus, social media has proven potential for mobilizing attention and accountability to women's rights challenging the existing discriminations and stereotypes. It has been proved as a powerful weapon for bringing women's rights issues to the attention of a wider public, galvanizing action on the streets of cities and encouraging policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality.

The #hashtag movements on social media are proven strong plinth to stop or end violence and discrimination against women. It is a new frontier to organize campaign by women activists to fight for rights and gender equality. There are some following #hashtag movements across the world which has paved a way to fight for women's rights, gender equality and stop violence against them. Through *#MeToo movement* on social media by sharing her experiences of sexual assault, actress Alyssa Milano raised her voice for sexual harassment happened with her in the film fraternity. It has shaken the prominent and renowned journalists, actors and artists accused of sexual assault and harassment. *#IShapeMyWorld* is a new trailblazer to empower women and inspire changes. Under this, mass of the society started to support the women who shaped their own world and brought changes by breaking stereotypical attitude of the society. Social media movement *#LahuKaLagaan* i.e. tax on blood is another which shows women's empowerment. This movement was for exempting 12% tax on sanitary napkins by the government of India. The campaign attracts the attention of famous celebrities at broad level such as Aditi Rao Hydari, Cyrus Broacha, Mallika Dua, Vishal Dadlani etc. who tweeted on Twitter and forced the government to made tax-free sanitary pads. As a result, government had to declare sanitary napkins tax-free after widespread criticism. The other movement *#PadManChallenge* provided rights to women to live with dignity by breaking the taboos related with menstruation. *#SelfieWithDaughter* movement is a campaign to post selfie on social media for empowering girl child. Selfie with Daughter campaign become soon a global level movement against female and sex selection. Through this, it is urged to parents to promote girl's education leading to gender equality consequently. With the agenda for empowering women, under the *#GenerationeQuality* some effective

strategies have been made including economical support, voice for human rights, fight against violence, eradication of poverty, ensuring better health and sustainable environment. It has empowered women to grate extant by providing opportunities in every sphere of life and made them able to get equal rights to men. *#HeForShe* is a solidarity movement for women inviting people of all genders to create a bold, visible and united force for gender equality. Through #HeForShe on social media, it was tried to take commitments from people to strive for gender equality and stop gender based discrimination. This movement created a strong forum for discussion on various issues such gender stereotypes, gender biasness, discrimination and violence against women which are harmful for the society.

Accordingly, it can be noted that the explosion of social media and unprecedented use of new technologies by women represents opportunities to bring gender equality and issues of women's rights in front of policy makers and media. Apart from discussion on social issues, social media platform also plays an important role to empower women economically by provided financial support through online business or e-commerce. In this regard, Ukpere, C.L. and Slabbert, A.D. (2014) find that social media has financially helped the women through digital marketing giving chance to women job seekers to become job creators. Rani, U. and Sripriya (2013) state that social media plays the significant role in creating new opportunities. Their study of women entrepreneurs in Kancheepuram District shows the growth of women by e-commerce businesses. It has thus increased their living standard, attitude and self confidence ensuring their liberty. It is now becoming a women's empowering tool and info guide. Social Media focuses on women empowerment covering diverse spheres such as health, knowledge, lifestyle, education and so more.

Governments across the world are also taking actions against the incidents happening with women through awareness among people of the society with the help of social media. Due to existing of new media, women are now aware about their equal rights as men have in every sphere and about powers that every woman holds as a member of associated society. All these optimistic changes are now elicited to only increase their pace with time due to internet and new media. However, cybercrimes are creating hurdles in women empowerment and due to which they are unable to fully utilize the benefits of IT revolution. With the beginning of new technology, cyber crime and persecution of women are more increasing which is a major threat to the security of a woman. Although, India has enacted IT Act 2000 to combat cyber crimes, still the concerns related to women are remaining untouched in this Act. The Act has covered certain offences for example hacking, publishing of obscene materials in internet, tampering data as punishable offences. But the serious threat to the women's security in general is not covered fully by this enacted Act. Various cyber-crimes committed specifically against women at large are such as cyber-stalking, harassment via emails of different applications, cyber bullying, cyber defamation, morphing, and email spoofing. It is hard to believe that over 75% of the women are victims of cyber-

stalking. Most of the women are also facing cyber-bullying i.e. a typical type of online harassment including hurling harsh, rude, insulting, teasing remarks through the message box or in open forums targeting one's body shape and structure, educational qualifications, professional qualifications, family, gender orientation, personal habits and outlook. The other threat to women is cyber pornography which provides a medium for the facilitation of crimes including pornographic websites, pornographic magazines in the form of publish or print material and the internet which provide platform to download and transmit pornographic pictures, photos, writings etc. Overall, it is observed that women are under threat of cyber-crimes against them but on the other hand through social media they are able to get their rights and is proven as a helping hand for women's social inclusion.

CONCLUSION

The discussions conclude that social media has empowered women who are being deprived of basic human rights and life chances. By creating a platform to connect with people, social media has made the discriminated women capable to talk on gender issue leading consequently to have real social inclusion. Women are now having many opportunities in the field of online education, internet based job etc. apart from this, people of the society are now breaking shackles of ruthless traditions and speaking for what is right and what types of changes the society needs to bring. Women are breaking traditional thoughts and today they are on the leadership positions due to important role of technological evolution. Social media forms are creating an alternative culture for great mobility and acceptance of women in public spaces. Undoubtedly, the all around development of women has always been on prime focus of planning since independence and the government is continuously making efforts to remove all the obstacles existing on the path of women emancipation or empowerment through the use of social/mass media. But due to lack of awareness, illiteracy and cyber crimes, government is not fully success to combat the various challenges posed on women by the new era in the society and thus women are also unable to fully utilize this new space. Therefore, more action oriented programmes and policies are needed to inculcate in understanding the various technicalities and prospects of media keeping into consideration of women's empowerment which is a must need of the today's society. As a consequence, the study suggests that there is a immense need to train women to make greater use of information technology so that they may ensure their equal participation in all fields of society and may highly advocate the role of social media for women empowerment, human rights and their fully inclusion in the society.

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