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“DIGITAL MEDIA: A STRATEGIC TOOL FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT.”

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I. INTRODUCTION:

We all are aware that the Constitution of India gives equal rights to men and women. The moment for gaining equality for women has a history of more than two centuries. However, due to the effort of various social reformers, innumerable social movements and finally, with the enactment of the Indian Constitution, hurdles to women’s liberation has been removed. But, the literal emancipation of women has still been a dream.

With the advent of technology, we can say that the world today has become a global village and digital media is one of the products of such a global village. To put it very simply digital media serves as a platform where people can communicate electronically. Digital media is the medium with which communication is made with the data transformed into numbers and with devices such as mobile phones, social **media** platforms, websites and e-mails.¹

This paper is an attempt to analyze how digital media has helped in true emancipation of women and thereby fulfilling the dreams of the constitutional makers of an “Equal India”. It shall start with tracing the status of women in Indian society at different points in time, then it will analyze the concept of women empowerment and the need for women empowerment, then it will go on to discuss how the digital media is acting as a boon or bane with respect to empowerment of women in the Indian Society.

¹ *What is Digital media*, <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/new-communication-technologies/7668>, (December 4, 2019).

II. STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY:

It is important to analyze how women were treated in the past so that one is in a better position to understand their present position. From the available data, it is evident that in the ancient period was characterized by total equality between men and women. No religious and social activity was complete without the participation of women. Women also had access to education. They had the freedom to choose their life partners. Birth of a daughter was not considered as a liability by the family. Then came the age of Dharmasastras i.e a body of secular literature, compiled in 500-200 BC. Dharmasastras were basically code of conduct, prescribing certain norms specifically for women. It regulated not only family life but also life in society at large. This period saw that women were excluded from both economic and religious spheres. Since education was denied to women, they became totally dependent on men. The whole concept that women are inferior to men gained importance and women were in an utter state of confusion and agony.

The two most authoritative code of this period were Manusmriti and Yagnavalkya Smriti. Manu's view was that a woman is incapable of having any independent existence. When she is young, she has to be dependent on her father, when she is gets married, she has to be dependent on her husband and when she gets old, she has to be dependent on her son. However, Manu has also given contradictory views when Manu has also said that "where women are respected, there the God's delight." This statement is in clear contradiction with the one in which it was written that a woman cannot have an independent existence.

Yagnavalkya laid that parents would be committing an unpardonable sin if they did not get their daughter married before they attained puberty. Hence, this gave rise to the practice of child marriage. Girls were married at a very tender age; however, males had the liberty to get married whenever they want. Men could also resort to physical violence if their wife did not obey them. Widow marriage was frowned upon.

The 11th century saw the emergence of Islam, which further deteriorated the status of women in Indian Society. The period was characterized by the Purdah System. Women of all classes were required to follow this practice. The strict observance of purdah system led to the

seclusion of women from the world outside. During this medieval, period the practice of sati, purdah system, polygamy, child marriage which was already there in the period of Dharmasastras gained further momentum. The modern period began in the 19th century. Social evils of sati, child marriage, lack of education for girls, violence against women remained unchecked. However, with the dawn of the 19th century, the new era began for women. Efforts were made by the Britishers and some section of the progressive society to put an end to such evils. As a result, the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, and Sati Prevention Act, 1987, were passed.

The period after Independence saw the making of the Indian Constitution which provided equal opportunity to both men and women. Several laws were also formulated for the emancipation of women like Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, The Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 etc.

III. NEED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Women constitute half of the world's population. Life cannot take place without a woman. However, as we have seen women were given an inferior status to that of men. This practice of degrading women is not only followed in India but throughout the globe. Women throughout have suffered at the hands of men and they continue to so even today. Women empowerment in very simple terms means that giving the woman the freedom to decide whatever she wants to do in her life. A woman is made powerful so that she becomes capable of deciding for themselves. It includes raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy. Making them strong not only financially but also mentally and emotionally.

The UN defines women empowerment as a women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic

order, nationally and internationally.² There is a need for women empowerment because by empowering women one will be able to improve countries economy. Women contribute to half of the total population. Women empowerment is good not only for the business, for the economy, for a country's happiness and for men. A confident and empowered woman would bring happiness and general wellbeing.

As Manu said, "where women are respected, there God's delight". To this, it can now be said that where women are empowered, there God's delight. Women are more vulnerable to environmental degradation and climate change but also have different perspectives, concerns and ideas for change. Women help in bringing a different perspective. Until these are taken on board, with women empowered to play a full part in decision-making at all levels, environmental sustainability will remain a distant goal. Yet women's empowerment must not mean simply adding to their burdens of responsibilities or building expectations of women as 'sustainability saviours'. Diane Elson, an adviser to UN Women, argues in her contribution that "the disproportionate responsibility that women bear for carrying out unpaid work is an important constraint on their capacity to realize their rights... Both women and men need time to care for their families and communities, and time free from such care".³

IV. ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA:

As the discussion about women's empowerment intensifies, the Internet is simultaneously emerging, developing, and expanding around the world. Of particular note is an intense questioning of whether the new communication infrastructures afforded by the Internet may offer to empower potential for women's liberation.⁴ As long as a woman is financially dependent, the scope for growth and entrepreneurship is limited. The advent of digital media power has changed all of this. E-entrepreneurship is present everywhere now and the vast digital landscape is dotted with success stories of women who braved hurdles and made it

² *Women Empowerment*, <https://medium.com/@MakeSenseorg/why-all-of-us-need-women-empowerment-6c3d70f9b903>, (December 3, 2019).

³ Jenny Hawley, *Why women's empowerment is essential for sustainable development*, <https://www.iied.org/why-womens-empowerment-essential-for-sustainable-development>, (December 3, 2019).

⁴ Xiao Han, *Women's Empowerment in Digital Media: A Communication Paradigm*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327335117_Women's_Empowerment_in_Digital_Media_A_Communication_Paradigm/link/5b8897ea4585151fd13dc8dc/download, (December 3, 2019).

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big. Some examples of this would be Shantala Bhat of Gamatics that is making big stories in the field of sports health or that of Kanika Tekriwal of JetSetGo who has set up a marketplace for hiring helicopters and private jets. These are only a couple of success stories. There are many, many more.⁵ Reference was made earlier as to the various Acts that were passed by the Parliament for the empowerment of women like the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, The Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 etc. A woman who was initially not aware of her rights that were provided to her is now aware of her right to an extent and the digital media has played a pivotal role in this. Initially, all these Acts were there but the women were not aware of them. But now because of the digital media, she can easily get to know about these Acts which empower her. To an extent she now knows that a man cannot touch her casually or pass lewd remarks and if he does, he can be put behind the bars if the woman wants to.

Women are now also getting more knowledge about their rights and powers that every woman in a society holds, with equal rights as men in every respect. All these positive changes are now triggered to only increase their pace with time due to Internet and Social Media. Digital media is helping women across the world to get noticed more than ever before. Many women are carrying their ideas to fruition with support from digital media. For instance, a homemaker could share her tasty recipes on YouTube and a lot of people are now subscribing to her channel. Digital media provides multiple business opportunities that allow women to explore and make profits from. In the end, it seems to be the safest means to nurture and realize their dreams for a better future. Simple ideas are now being turned effectively into major brands because of the new digital media.

Whenever Triple Talaq, marital rape, and domestic violence reared its ugly head, digital media has played a vital part to help women raise their voice when the injustice of this sort happens. Topics like menstruation, sexual autonomy etc that were once considered a taboo in the patriarchal society, digital media have given a platform to a woman to talk and express their views on such topics. Thus, it is obvious that digital media has been a powerful driver of change. It has been able to bring out talent, nurture ideas and turn them into mega enterprises

⁵ Women's Empowerment Through Digital Media, <https://www.thoughtfulminds.org/womens-empowerment-through-digital-media/>, (December 3, 2019).

and egg creativity at a furious pace. This has made women a powerful and confident force and one to be reckoned with when compared to their male counterparts.⁶ No doubt that digital media is contributing to women empowerment but due to cybercrime, cyberbullying basically because of misuse of technology women are not able to fully utilize the new space because of this virtual gender gap.

V. MISUSE OF DIGITAL MEDIA:

Whenever there is a thing it has its positive as well as negative sides. Digital media is also not left without its misuse. With the advent of technology and the world becoming a global village where people can fly from one continent to another in a few hours, cybercrime has also become a global phenomenon. Cybercrime and security of an individual especially a woman is at a dangerously high level. Cybercrime is a crime where a computer is used as a tool to commit an offence. India is one of the few countries which has enacted IT Act, 2000 to combat cybercrimes. There are various types of cyber-crimes committed against an individual, society at large, even government, cybercrimes that are committed against the women are such as Cyber-stalking, Harassment via emails, Cyber Bullying, Morphing, Email spoofing and Cyber Defamation. While Cyber Stalking affects both men and women, women are disproportionately targets. Issues with respect to the grave threat to the security of women remain untouched in the IT Act, 2000. But after the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013 the issues of cybercrime with respect to women could be covered under various provisions of this Act.

For instance, Cyber Bullying is a typical type of online harassment, which can be defined as 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. Harassment through e-mails is not a new concept. It is very similar to harassing through letters. Harassment includes blackmailing, threatening, bullying, and even cheating via email. E-harassments are

⁶ Supra 4

similar to the letter harassment but create problem quite often when posted from fake ids.⁷ Cases of these kinds could now be covered under Section 354 A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860. Section 354 A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 makes sexual harassment a punishable offence. Sexual Harassment covers verbal, mental, and physical or any gestures that make a woman uncomfortable. Any kind of physical contact, showing pornography, any demand or request for sexual favours or any other sexually colored remarks would be covered under Section 354 A of the Indian penal Code, 1860.

Section 67 A of the IT Act, 2000 punishes transmitting sexually explicit content through electronic form. The matters of cyber pornography are covered under this section under the title of sexually explicit content and sexual acts or conduct. Liability: Up to 5 years imprisonment and up to Rs.10 lakhs fine and on subsequent conviction, up to 7 years imprisonment and up to Rs.10 lakh and fine. Cyber pornography is the other threat to the women which include pornographic websites; pornographic magazines produced using computers (to publish and print the material) and the Internet (to download and transmit pornographic pictures, photos, writings etc). The internet has provided a medium for the facilitation of crimes like pornography.

Section 66 E of the IT Act, 2000 this section punishes the act of capturing, publishing or transmitting the images of a person's private areas without such person's consent. Here the terms capture, transmit, private area etc. have all been specifically defined. Thus, one can see that we have enough laws on paper to tackle whenever anyone misuses the media. Proper implementation and awareness among the masses is the need of the hour.

VI. CONCLUSION:

Women have been deprived of their basic human rights from time immemorial. There is no doubt that after Independence the primary focus of the Government has been to empower women through various Schemes and Programmes. The advent of the technology and use of media has given the confidence and the power that the women needed. Use of digital media

⁷ Dr Ranjan Vardhan, *Social Media and Women Empowerment: A Sociological Analysis*, 5 IJEBR, 117-121 (2017).

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makes us connect and collaborate in a broader way. The impact of this heightened use is beneficial to both individuals and society. The increased use of digital media is changing people's everyday lives and the way they connect and collaborate in the broader societal context, at work and in civil society. Much of the impact of this heightened use is beneficial to both individuals and society. It is enabling unprecedented levels of communication, social interaction and community building across boundaries of time, place and social context. But as it is said that all great things come at a cost. The same is with technology also. Humanity is acquiring all the right technology for all the wrong reasons.

The various challenges posed by the new era have forced us to provide concrete and developmental aspects alternative in lieu of empowerment of women through the possible available digital media. Action-Oriented Programmes and policies which inculcate the various technicalities involved and prospects of media in keeping into consideration women's empowerment a must need of the society is the need of the hour. As already discussed, we have enough laws on the books which if implemented in their letter and spirit can counter all forms of harassment against women.

Certainty in the implementation of the law is the surest way of securing the interests of the victims. We should try to invest resources in institutional, governance and social reforms. There is a need to train women and create awareness among the masses so that they can make greater use of digital media for communication.

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