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EFFECT OF NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES
ON DEMOCRACY AND WOMEN IN ASIA: INDIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effect of New Communication Technologies on Women and Democracy

The communication and information technologies have not only generated great hope for speedy development but posed as a precondition. There are evidences available of positive effect on Indian development such as rural development through radio and television, telecommunications system for north eastern hilly regions of the country and satellite communications for disaster warning system.

However, a lot of dissatisfaction is found among the largest section of the society that of women specially about the media. As far as television is concerned the situation is worse since it has entered into homes but still beyond control of the women. The entry of PC has been welcomed by women so far it has not created a similar situation.

Women Empowerment:

The status of women in India though improving, it is limited to middle class urban society. The progress is still slower in the lower strata. It is essential to remove gender inequalities to achieve democracy in true sense.

Since 1975, government have started administrative and legislative measures aimed at removing the injustice to women. As an ultimate step the reservation has been declared in civic administration to encourage women’s participation in politics and thus as a move forward the reservation in parliament is also under consideration.

Another important force which is striving for egalitarian and balanced society is voluntary organisations working for the empowerment of women. Their main focus is on poor and rural women who otherwise are left behind.

With this background the study has been planned to see the role of new communication technologies in empowerment of women and ultimately strengthening the democracy. The national profile of new communication technologies was prepared from the literature survey to gauge their spread in the country. The different sections of the society are covered by conducting questionnaire survey for middle class
women, case study of voluntary organisation for poor women and interviews of people's representatives and also a symbol of power that of elected women. Three different states and in each three locations were selected to carry out the study.

National Profile of New Communication Technologies:

The Print Media:

The print media in India are 41 centenaries old. There were 1557 newspaper establishments in the country in 1993. The circulation of newspapers/periodicals as on 31st December, 1992 was 6,36,67,000. As the publishing industry in India is highly competitive, the newspaper and magazine industry have absorbed the modern technologies into their establishments and are avid users of modern communication technologies.

The print media enjoy full freedom with only general legal provisions applicable to them. A press council has been set up to safeguard freedom of the press, maintain standard of newspapers and news agents.

Radio:

The broadcasting service in India is run by the Central Government known as All India Radio (AIR). It covers 90 per cent of area and 97 per cent of Indian population with 104 million homes having a total of 111 million radio sets. The AIR provides services in 21 major languages and 246 tribal and other dialects. In external services AIR now reaches 54 countries all over the globe.

Television:

Doordarshan, the public television network of India, covers 86 per cent of the population. It reaches to 270 million home viewers through its various national and regional channels. 1275 hours per week of programme output is done by 40 programme production centres. The prime channel of the country (DD-1) telecast national, region specific and educational television programmes. The programmes are produced and telecast with the objective of information, education and entertainment.

Cable Television:

The cable and satellite distribution reaches out to 18 million homes. The remote control can access to almost 52 channels. The Indian today at an estimate is spending at least three hours in front of the television set everyday. Experts opine that Indian television is passing through a transitory phase that the developed ones had faced earlier.
Broadcast media are controlled by general provisions in law applicable to them. There are specific norms also set to check the content. But with the speedy expansion the situation has drastically changed and it is demanding well thought out media policy. The media planners have felt the urgency and are seriously engaged in the task.

Telephone:

Indian Telecom services are emerging as the third largest telecom market in the world. India has now achieved a network of more than 19293 telephone exchanges with capacity of 10.5 million lines and 8.8 million telephone connections (as on December 31, 1994). According to the 8th plan (1992-97), it is envisaged to achieve provisions of additional 7.5 million phones in 0.36 million villages, STD facilities to all exchanges by April 1997 and one PCO (Public Communication Office) for every 100 households in urban areas.

Cellular Phone:

Cellphones are the tools for business promotion but for some they are simply the newest toys. Cellphones have expanded from metros to cities like Ahmedabad and Bangalore. The average cellphone subscriber across the country consists of traders, businessmen and self-employed professionals such as lawyers and doctors. The success of mobile service in India will depend on the price of hand sets and quality of telecom network services.

Fax:

Fax service has become as common as regular telephone service in metros and cities but it has not got rooted in the rural sector yet.

Pager:

Being a non-existent concept till the beginning of 1995, pagers at the end of first quarter of 1996 were around twenty thousand. The figure is expected to rise to fifty thousand at the end of the year. The Department of Telecommunications (DOT) has given licenses to about 15 operators in 27 cities. The users of pagers include professionals, self-employed businessmen, housewives and children.

Computer:

Computer made its entry in India in 1951 but its development caught momentum in the seventies. It became common device in eighties and in the current decade computer has become so crucial that it has ceased to be a product and has become a service. It is estimated that personal computer in India would
touch the three million mark in the year 2001. Computer education has become a norm in state run as well as private schools. Introduction of bilingual computers has proved useful in the government departments as well as educational field.

E-mail:
Started in mid-1992, electronic mail initially went slower in its penetration but later struck up the growth rate of 35 to 40 per cent. In India the ultimate control over E-mail services lies with the government owned Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd. E-mail in India is seriously challenged for the first time as Internet comes in with free E-mail as a part of its package. The individuals are expected to utilise Internet for their messaging needs while the corporates and heavy users will stick to dedicated E-mail services.

Internet:
India's first high speed information highway was set up in 1994. India now has several significant networks like ERNET, SIRNET, NICNET, INFLIBNET, INSDOC etc. which have connectivity to Internet either directly or via other International Networks. At present India has less than 50,000 users of Internet. The Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd. enjoys monopoly over the Internet services. Despite VSNL's efforts to improve its operations the growth is sluggish compared to the rest of the globe's development.

Technologies in Gujarat:
During 1993-94, 6,58,224 telephone connections were given in Gujarat. In Ahmedabad 2,57,721 telephones are working through 14 different exchanges.

With 35,000 subscribers Gujarat stands fifth in the country in paging services.

Cellular phone has been introduced from January 1997 in Ahmedabad. It marks the entry of mobile phone in Gujarat.

The region has four major radio stations. A high power 10 KW FM service has been introduced from March 1997 in Ahmedabad.

There are 3.55 million television homes and above 50 per cent television homes have cable connections. Gujarat is considered to have maximum number of cable connections per household in India. Through Ahmedabad Doordarshan there is a 59 hours of transmission per week.
Gujarat Samachar, Bombay Samachar, Foolchhab, Saurashtra Samachar and Sandesh are the leading vernacular and Times of India and Indian Express are the leading English newspapers of the region. Gujarat Samachar is one of the highest circulating language newspapers.

**Case Study Of Voluntary Organisations Working For Empowerment Of Women:**

The aim of this study was to find out the effects of NCT on the organisation which works for the upliftment and development of women, the dependency of organisations on them and the effect of NCT on its efficiency. Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) from Gujarat, Basic Awareness for Knowledge Utilisation and Liberation (BAKUL), Ankur Yuva Chetna Shivir and Mahila Antarang Club from Uttar Pradesh and Madhyam Communications from Karnataka states were included in the case study.

The following points have emerged from the case study:

- All the interviewees were well aware of the New Communication Technologies (NCT), such as, print media, television, radio, telecommunications and computers. However, all did not avail all these facilities in their organisation, e.g. Mahila Antarang Club did not own a computer whereas Ankur Yuva Chetna Shivir and SEWA had an extra facility of EPABX. No organisation had the facility of Internet. SEWA and Madhyam Communications had an E-mail.

- All the voluntary organisations used NCT in fields as well as in their offices. Mostly all the organisations used newspapers and magazines for the purpose of gaining knowledge and gathering data relevant to social issues. SEWA, BAKUL and Madhyam Communications took out their own publications.

- Television and video were used to show films in rural areas on various social issues. No other NCT were used directly for the target audience. Telecommunications were used to communicate between office staff. It was also utilised for networking purposes with their branches, other voluntary organisations and funding agencies. They rely on inter-personal communication only, while communicating with rural as well as urban poor women. Pagers were used by Lucknow based voluntary organisations more often. Finally, everybody used computers to process and analyse data and make project reports.

- Everybody stated that NCT saved time and energy. They made the work faster and more efficient. Only one interviewee found it a waste of money. Rest all found the investment in NCTs worth.
The frequent interruptions in electricity was found to be the major problem while operating NCT. The problems of maintenance and repairing and learning skills were also evident. NCT were expensive and at the same time there was reluctance on the part of the employees to adopt them more so with women employees.

Two interviewees believed that NCT affected negatively on the society. Television increased women's exploitation by showing vulgarity and reduced the reading habits among children.

The respondents did not find any clash between traditional communication channels and New Communication Technologies. The traditional channels were more closer to the people whereas NCT had a wider reach and scope.

However, it was also felt that NCT were not useful among low income group people because such people were not able to relate themselves to them. NCT benefited only the rich, urban and educated class of society. It is also controlled by politically and economically powerful people.

NCT can bridge the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged provided it is planned and used for the purpose.

SEWA stated that their organisation wished to acquire more latest equipment like offset printing machine, VCR, television sets, Internet and more computers. Madhyam Communications also planned to start electronic bulletin on E-mail so as to disseminate more information to women.

Regarding the future, everybody found it bright and promising. But feared that in future human beings would become completely dependent on NCT. However, at the same time NCT made work more enjoyable and convenient for them. However, NCT have brighter future in corporate sector than development sector.

Women were more active as a voter in politics than as a candidate. Women till today were greatly influenced by their men folk, even as a voter. And as a candidate a women had no say. The Project Officer cited the example of women sarpanch (village head) who were puppets in the hands of their husbands.

Women have been discouraged to enter in the politics after gauging the corrupt and valueless politicians. NCT have played very important role in exposing such politicians and creating
awareness among the common mass. Therefore, the participation of women have actually decreased due to the exposure provided by NCT.

Interviews of Elected Women:

Interviews of elected women were conducted to gauge their rapport with NCT and role of NCT in their lives as political workers and women. The respondents were drawn from different bodies of the three states such as legislative council, municipal corporation and taluka/village level self-government.

The following points suggest the utility of new communication technologies for women:

- Newspapers, magazines, radio, television and telephone were the commonly possessed communication technologies. Television was the highly possessed among all the technologies, followed by telephone. Ownership and use of latest new communication technologies like fax, pager, computer and cellphone were rare and scattered. Thus the spread was very less among these elected women. The responses indicated that mass media were used more by the elected women. Perhaps, their field required more of these kind of technologies in order to reach out to a larger population at a time.

- The opinion of the respondents differed on the most helpful NCT for development. The city, town and rural respondents of Gujarat found telephone, television and newspapers respectively to be the most helpful. Respondents of Uttar Pradesh gave more or less equal weightage to newspapers, radio, television and pagers as tools for development. While the respondents of Karnataka found telephone the most effective tool. However, only one woman from Gujarat village had real rural bias in her operation and response.

A majority of respondents from all three states believed that overall NCT were beneficial to the country in terms of providing faster communication, overcoming problem of physical distance and information dissemination. While the opponents believed that they were burden to the country as NCT were unequally distributed and they have not reached effectively to the deprived sections of the society. Also the technologies should be properly controlled and monitored to check their undesirable use.

- There was no clear cut indication that to whom the NCT had helped more - men or women. But a considerable number of respondents believed that NCT were equally helpful to both the genders.
Barring a few, all the respondents found NCT helpful in providing empowerment to women. To them, empowerment was mainly in terms of providing information. They were not able to recall or relate any examples of empowerment.

NCT facilitated exchange of information at various levels in government. As NCT save time and labour, government tasks have become a bit easy. It also publicised government activities. Technologies like computers helped in planning by providing various analysis and helped preserve records for a longer duration.

Due to NCT like television, radio, newspapers and magazines which kept an eye on government activities, government had to be more alert and answerable.

NCT activated political propaganda. While NCT helped in maintaining secrecy, an inevitable element in politics. Using NCT politicians strove to create desired images on the minds of people.

Common people can keep in touch with political scenario with help of NCT. It monitors political activities, making politicians conscious of their performance. One of the corporators received messages over the pager regarding civic problems and in turn she could respond quickly by providing assistance and thus could function efficiently.

Due to live transmissions of Parliament and legislative sessions people have become aware and representatives conscious of their performance and participation in the house. It was not possible in absence of NCT particularly the electronic ones.

NCTs have helped in educating voters for a fair and transparent election process. Mass media have aided voters to make better judgements by constantly exposing them to different political trends. Results of elections were analysed and sent across the country swiftly using NCT.

All the respondents favoured NCT over traditional channels mainly considering the speed of reaching out to people.

The responses suggested that NCT had played a positive role in development of all sections of society. But the stronger sections of the society have definitely gained more due to their early and continuous exposure to NCT. NCT were gradually reaching out to other weaker and less privileged sections.
According to the opinions, NCT had helped the respondents most in their overall progress and to some extent in management of home and office. NCT sometimes provided direct help to carry out their political activities efficiently but the respondents said that they would not like to depend on them.

The respondents found the future of NCT bright provided appropriate infrastructure could be built up for their expansion. They foresee increased dependency on NCT in the near future.

The Questionnaire Survey:

The survey was conducted on 291 respondents (166 women and 125 men) from two states covering urban and semi-urban areas. The respondents were well educated, economically better-off and possessed one or more new communication technologies. The data analysis highlighted the following points:

Accessibility and Exposure

- The study mainly covered middle class, educated men and women from urban and rural areas.

- Doordarshan (Indian Television) had highest spread in the country, then came radio and language newspapers respectively. FM radio, local television channel (other than Doordarshan), ISD telephone facility, pager, cellular phone, PC, E-mail and internet had less than 50 per cent availability. Within this FM radio, cellular phone and internet were further on a lower end.

- The NCT were mostly available at home. However, ISD, fax, pager, cellphone, E-mail and internet were more often either provided for the official purpose or available at the office premise. Telecommunications were available easily around the street corners at Public Communication Office (PCO).

- Women had greater exposure of foreign television channels and STD facility, while men enjoyed rest of the technologies more frequently.

Middle class married women are more often migrated from their original place of birth for marriage purpose which might have necessitate the frequent use of STD.

Pager was more popular with the women from Uttar Pradesh though the number of telephone lines are limited in the state.
There was noticeable difference in the use of newspapers and magazines whether they were in local language or English. However, the difference was greater in English ones. Otherwise the recent technologies like PC, fax and pager were used in equal proportion by both the genders.

Utility and Attitude:

- Both the genders received equal amount of information on different issues such as social, political, economic and cultural from the mass media.

- Television and radio more often guided the women's action and helped in skill development while telecommunication cultivated and maintained social relations. The assistance in skill development and information on development opportunities, however, was available from newspapers and magazines to both the genders.

- Interaction and communication skill of an individual was enhanced and hampered by television and radio. Telecommunications also had shown the same trend for understanding of the environment in case of women. But overall both the genders found communication technologies useful.

- Newspapers and magazines have played the role of liaison between people and the support system. Women used telecommunications for co-ordination and networking more often than men.

- The overall viability of NCT was doubted by all the respondents, within this telecom was found most viable since it did not require electricity and face certain environmental problems. At the same time no special skill needed to be developed for its use. Though the print media has its obvious limitation, women had a feeling that they had started penetrating into rural areas.

- Women were ardent critics of television. They felt that it mainly provided entertainment. The foreign programmes were imposed upon us which had bad impact on our culture, value system and children. Television had also affected their household work as they started spending more time on it. In comparison, men were more positive. However, both the genders overall accepted the fact that media was necessary for progress and they also had positive impact on the society.
NCT were used by both the genders equally. However, they more often catered the need of men and mostly controlled by them. They also created gap between poor & rich and urban & rural.

In the direct question again the respondents expressed that the NCT helped in bringing about equality in the society and made the communication more efficient.

General Impact:

Television, radio, newspapers and magazines generated more thought out responses as they were used by the respondents over a fairly long period of time. The respondents were able to evaluate the effect on the society more critically.

The availability of telecommunications and computers was very limited. Therefore many respondents found it difficult to express their opinion. However, those who accessed the technologies were profound user and positive. This was more true in case of computers.

Women were more close to telecommunications while men were attached to print media. Television and radio had equal utility to both the genders.

Overall all the respondents were quite positive towards the new communication technologies.

The recent technologies which did not demand skill for use had greater chance to get diffused in the society. The respondents belonged to middle and upper middle class of the society where women did not struggle to lay their hands on new communication technologies.

Summing Up:

The different indicators lead to the following conclusions:

All the respondents from different section of the society welcomed the new communication technologies and accepted their utility in the speedy development of the country. However, the other side of the coin that of undesirable effect was of a great concern, therefore, control and monitoring was emphasised, specially for mass media.

The technologies though did not widen the gap between men and women it did for poor and rich and urban and rural people. On the other hand it also generated equality in the society to some extent.
The recent technologies like fax, pager, cellphone, internet and E-mail were available with very few people. While television, radio, newspapers, magazines, telephones were used by all the voluntary organisations, elected women and about 50 per cent of the common women and men.

The viability of the technologies was questioned as the problems of power shortage, maintenance and unfavourable environmental condition in the India were serious.

The elected women emphasised the role of media on making the political affairs more transparent.

The common women had greater exposure to television, radio and telecommunications hence able to analyse the situation critically. They emphasised on both positive as well as negative points and demonstrated their ability for analytical evaluation of the situation.

Voluntary organisations provided the access of new communication technologies indirectly to poor women by using them for the betterment of the poor section of the society. However, directly only television and video were useful.