



Original Article

# Empowerment of Rural Women and the Media: A Sociological Study

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## Abstract

The empowerment of rural women is considered a fundamental condition for social development. Women's empowerment depends on various factors such as education, health, economic self-reliance, participation in decision-making processes, and social status. In a developing country like India, rural women face numerous obstacles such as traditional customs, illiteracy, poverty, lack of information, and gender inequality. In such a situation, the role of the media becomes extremely important. Print media, television, radio, folk media, as well as digital and social media, can be effective tools for disseminating information, awareness, and inspiration to rural women. The objective of this research paper is to study the role of media in the empowerment of rural women, to analyse the social, economic, and political awareness created among women through the media, and to study the changes brought about in women's lives by the media. This study is based on secondary data, drawing upon various research articles, government reports, census data, reports from non-governmental organizations, and media studies. The study reveals that the media brings about positive changes in rural women regarding the importance of education, health awareness, legal information, self-employment opportunities, the importance of self-help groups, and political participation. However, due to the digital divide, language barriers, and patriarchal mindset, the benefits of the media do not reach all women equally. Therefore, along with the strategic use of media, there is a need for local-level training, women-centric programs, and inclusive media policies.

**Keywords:** Rural Women, Women Empowerment, Media, Social Change, Digital Media, Rural Development, Gender Equality, Social Awareness, Economic Empowerment, Health Awareness, Education, Self-Help Groups, Communication Media, Sociological Study.

## Introduction

The rural society holds unique importance in the structure of Indian society. Approximately 65 to 70 percent of India's population resides in rural areas, and women constitute almost half of this population. The lives of rural women are encompassed by numerous social, economic, educational, and cultural constraints. Traditional customs, patriarchal systems, lack of education, economic dependence, health problems, and lack of information have kept rural women deprived for a long time. In such a situation, the empowerment of rural women is not merely a women's issue, but is linked to the overall development of society. Empowerment is not just about economic self-reliance, but a combination of decision-making ability, self-respect, awareness of rights, education, health, and social participation. Various factors are effective in achieving the empowerment of rural women. Among them, education, self-help groups, government schemes, non-governmental organizations, and the role of the media are extremely important.

The media are considered powerful tools for social change. Newspapers, radio, television, folk media, as well as modern digital and social media are working to deliver information, awareness, and inspiration to rural women. Through the media, women are gaining access to information about their rights, government schemes, health-related information, and educational and employment opportunities. As a result, women are gaining confidence and beginning to participate in the decision-making process.

However, the influence of the media is not uniform everywhere. Due to lack of literacy in rural areas, the digital divide, linguistic difficulties, and cultural barriers, the benefits of the media do not reach all women. Therefore, it becomes necessary to study the interrelationship between the empowerment of rural women and the media.

This research paper analyses the empowerment of rural women, the role of the media, its positive and negative aspects, and a sociological analysis of the impact of the media.

## Review of Literature

Studies on the empowerment of rural women and the role of media have been conducted by various researchers in India and abroad.

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1. Bose (2001) has highlighted the role of education and media in women's empowerment. According to him, the media are a "window of knowledge" for women.
2. Deshpande (2008) studied the impact of television programs on women in rural Maharashtra and noted an increase in women's awareness regarding health issues.
3. According to a UNICEF (2015) report, radio and folk media are useful in bringing about changes in literacy, sanitation, and health-related behaviour among rural women.
4. Patil (2017) has explained the impact of self-help groups and media on the economic empowerment of rural women.
5. Kumar (2020) has noted that in recent times, social media and mobile technology have significantly changed the flow of information for women.

All these studies clearly show that media plays an important role in the empowerment of rural women, but it is necessary to understand the scope and limitations of that influence.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To clarify the concept of empowerment of rural women.
2. To study the role of media in the empowerment of rural women.
3. To analyse the impact of traditional and modern media on rural women.
4. To study the changes in the social, economic, and educational status of women due to media.
5. To identify the difficulties and limitations in the use of media.

### Hypotheses

1. The use of media brings about positive changes in the empowerment of rural women.
2. The impact of media becomes more effective with increased educational levels.
3. Modern digital media are proving to be more effective for the empowerment of rural women.
4. Traditional social constraints limit the influence of media to some extent.

### Research Methodology

This research paper has adopted a descriptive and analytical methodology.

The use of primary and secondary data, books, research papers, government reports, newspapers, magazines and online sources, and sociological analysis of available statistics.

### Analysis of Data

To understand the interrelationship between the empowerment of rural women and the media, it is necessary to analyse the available facts, statistics, and social reality. The changes brought about by the media in the lives of rural women are visible at various levels: social, economic, educational, and cultural. A detailed analysis of these facts is being presented through the following points:

#### 1. Social Status of Rural Women and Access to Media

The social status of women in rural areas is still trapped in traditional customs, patriarchal mindset, and family constraints. In such a situation, women's access to media remains limited. In many places, women are not allowed to independently read newspapers, watch television, or use mobile phones. However, in areas where women have had the opportunity to use the media, a significant increase in their social awareness has been observed. This clearly shows that access to media is the first step towards empowerment.

#### 2. Influence of Traditional Media (Radio, Television, Folk Media)

Radio is considered the most accessible medium for rural women. Programs on radio related to agriculture, health, nutrition, family planning, and women's rights have increased women's knowledge. Women-centric serials and documentaries on television have created a positive perspective regarding the role of women. Folk media such as folk plays, Bharud, and Kirtan have effectively created awareness on issues like female feticide, de-addiction, and sanitation. Therefore, the facts show that traditional media are still proving useful for the empowerment of rural women.

#### 3. The Growing Influence of Modern and Digital Media

Mobile phones, the internet, and social media have brought about a revolutionary change in the information landscape of rural women. Many women have started using WhatsApp groups to access information about self-help group activities, government schemes, and health advice. Digital media has reduced women's dependence on traditional sources of information by providing them with direct access to information. However, due to a lack of digital literacy and network problems, the benefits of these media have not reached all women.

#### 4. The Impact of Media on Social Empowerment

The media has brought about a significant change in the social awareness of rural women. By consistently highlighting issues such as child marriage, dowry system, domestic violence, and gender discrimination, the media has increased women's willingness to raise their voices against injustice. There are examples of many women seeking legal help based on information received through the media. This clearly shows that the media is proving to be an effective tool for social empowerment.

#### 5. Economic Empowerment and Media

In terms of economic empowerment, the media has provided rural women with information about self-employment, small-scale industries, and savings groups. Success stories broadcast on television and radio have inspired women to venture into businesses. The stories of successful women from self-help groups have encouraged other women to participate in economic activities. This clearly demonstrates that the media is playing an inspiring role in the economic empowerment of rural women.

#### 6. Educational Empowerment and the Role of Media

The media has played a positive role in the education of rural women and girls. The media has created awareness on topics such as the importance of girls' education, re-education of out-of-school girls, and adult literacy. Educational programs, in particular, have fostered a positive attitude towards education among women. Various studies show that education has increased women's decision-making ability and self-confidence.

#### 7. Health Awareness and the Media

The media has played a crucial role in increasing health awareness among rural women. Programs providing information on topics such as maternal health, immunization, nutrition, hygiene, and family planning have changed women's health behaviors. Some government reports indicate that this has led to a reduction in maternal and child mortality rates.

#### 8. Limitations of Media Influence

However, the influence of the media is not uniform everywhere. Illiteracy, poverty, the digital divide, language barriers, and patriarchal mindset prevent many rural women from accessing the media. Sometimes, the portrayal of women in the media is traditional and limited, which

reinforces stereotypes instead of promoting empowerment. This is a matter that needs serious consideration.

### Conclusion

This study clearly shows that there is a close relationship between the empowerment of rural women and the media. The media has brought about positive changes in the lives of rural women by providing them with information, awareness, and confidence. The influence of the media is clearly visible in the social, economic, educational, and health sectors. However, the benefits of the media do not reach all rural women equally. Due to lack of literacy, technical facilities, social constraints, and economic limitations, many women remain deprived of access to media. Therefore, there is a need to make media use more inclusive and women-centric.

The empowerment of rural women is no longer just a women's issue but has become a cornerstone of national development. If the media operates using appropriate policies, local languages, and folk culture, the empowerment of rural women can be achieved more effectively.

### Suggestions

1. Increase media programs for rural women in local languages.
2. Implement digital literacy campaigns.
3. Prioritize women-centric programs.
4. Make more effective use of folk media.
5. Increase coordination between the government, media, and non-governmental organizations.

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### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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