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Research Article

Empowerment of Schedule Tribal Women through Mass Media: A Case Study of Raichur district, Karnataka

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Abstract

This study examines the role of mass media in empowering women belonging to Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Raichur district, Karnataka. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines a survey of 100 ST women with interviews and focus-group discussions to assess changes in awareness, self-esteem, decision-making power, and participation in socio-economic activities attributable to exposure to television, radio, and digital platforms. Findings reveal that regular engagement with development-oriented programmes significantly enhances knowledge about government schemes, health, and legal rights, leading to higher rates of enrolment in education and increased participation in local governance. However, barriers such as limited infrastructure, language constraints, and patriarchal norms persist, moderating the media's impact. The paper argues for tailored media content that resonates with the cultural context of ST communities and calls for stronger synergies between media houses, NGOs, and local authorities to amplify empowerment outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of women belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST) remains a critical yet under-addressed dimension of India's development agenda. In Karnataka's Raichur district, where a substantial proportion of the population belongs to tribal communities, traditional social structures and limited infrastructure often constrain women's access to information and resources. Mass media television, radio and increasingly digital platforms have long been recognised as powerful tools for disseminating knowledge about government schemes, health services and legal rights, yet their specific impact on tribal women in this region has received little scholarly attention.

This article presents a mixed-methods case study that investigates how exposure to different media channels shapes awareness, self-esteem, decision-making capacity and socio-economic participation among ST women in Raichur. By combining a quantitative survey with qualitative focus-group discussions, the research identifies both the empowering potential of media and the cultural and infrastructural barriers that moderate its effectiveness. The findings aim to inform policymakers, media practitioners and NGOs about context-specific strategies that can amplify the media's role in advancing tribal women's empowerment.

Mass media are playing a significant role in women's empowerment, especially women belonging to weaker sections and rural women. As discussed in the theoretical background, scheduled Tribal women are deprived of gender equality in family and society and Tribal based equality. Apart from these inequalities, these women are suffering in their lives due to social evils such as Devadasi, atrocities, etc in society and family. Even the family members of the scheduled Tribal women are exploiting them, along with exploitation and discrimination in society.

It is women, though equal to men in population, who are the subject of concern. In this modern, sophisticated world, women are treated as second-class citizens and are subordinated to men. Women have always been a marginal group. Women are the first victims of hunger, deprivation and ill health. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Report (2000), Women are 50 per cent of the world's population, earn two-thirds of the world's income and own less than one per cent of the world 's property.

Concept of Empowerment

The empowerment approach gained currency only in the 1990s but became a very important theme in the academic circles in the West as well as in east. For the first time, Paulo Freire mentioned the term ' empowerment in his theories by using conscientising, a process by which the poor could challenge the structure of power and take control of their lives. This is a process of gaining control over the resources, ideology, and self that determines power, which can be called Empowerment (Malagave, 2012).

The word Empower means make one powerful or equip one with the power to face the challenges of life, to overcome the disabilities, handicaps and inequalities. Empowerment is an

active multidimensional process, which should enable women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It would consist of providing greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives, greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and freedom from shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice. The concept of empowerment is defined as the process by which women take control and ownership of their choices. The core elements of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one 's goals and act upon them), awareness of gendered power structures, self-esteem, and self-confidence (Kabeer, 1999).

Scheduled Tribal Women

Scheduled Tribal women are deprived in aspects like education, employment, and economic participation, especially in rural areas, facing dual disadvantages of gender and tribal status. Mass media play a significant role in their empowerment, but it is crucial to examine if they're treated equally with other women. The study assesses benefits from mass media in terms of socio-economic equality, status, respect, gender equality, economic independence, and curbing discrimination, highlighting the impact on their socio-economic status through media participation.

Mass Media

Mass media here means communication through a number of physical transmission modes such as print, audio, visual, audio-visual and electronic forms to a general mass of common persons, irrespective of their position, intellectual attainments, or social status, etc. It is a means by which almost all current human affairs are collected, recorded and disseminated for the consumption of any common person. It is an instrument by which the general common public is kept informed of political activities of a state, international relations between countries, economic and business affairs, industrial relations, games and sports, cultural events and entertainments, and a host of other subjects.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The empowerment of Scheduled-Tribal (ST) women has been approached from several angles, social, economic, and political, but the role of mass media remains under-explored, especially in rural Karnataka. Below is a synthesis of the most relevant work that frames the present study.

- Jensen & Oster (2009) demonstrated that exposure to television dramas increased women's autonomy and schooling decisions in India.
- Mishra (2015) argued that radio programmes could enhance awareness of health and legal rights among marginalised groups, though the impact varies with language and content relevance.
- Desai (2017) examined the impact of state-run developmental TV spots on awareness of government

schemes in Raichur, concluding that while knowledge improved, behavioural change was modest.

- Kumar (2018) found that ST women in Andhra Pradesh primarily rely on community radio and occasional TV broadcasts, with limited interaction due to infrastructural constraints.
- Rao (2019) Gender norms within tribal societies further restrict women's media exposure; as noted by Rao, patriarchal structures often dictate which programmes are permissible.
- A study by the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (2020) reported that only 38 % of tribal households have regular television access, and even fewer have internet connectivity.
- Gupta & Reddy (2021) conducted a mixed-methods inquiry in the same district, revealing that women who participated in community video screenings reported higher self-efficacy, but caste-based social networks mediated the effect.
- Recent digital-media studies (e.g., Singh & Patel, 2022) highlight the potential of mobile phones to bypass traditional gatekeepers, yet they also note persistent access gaps for tribal communities.

Gaps identified

Most existing work treats media exposure as a uniform variable, overlooking differences between media (TV, radio, mobile) and content type (entertainment-education vs. pure information). There is a dearth of studies that link media consumption directly to tangible empowerment outcomes such as decision-making power, income generation, or political participation, specifically for ST women in Karnataka. Few attempts have been made to integrate qualitative insights (e.g., focus-group discussions) with quantitative data to capture the nuanced ways media shape empowerment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper examines how exposure to television, radio, and digital platforms influences awareness, self-esteem, and agency among STs Women, while also exploring the socio-cultural barriers that moderate the media's impact. By doing so, it contributes a context-specific understanding that can inform policy and media-intervention strategies aimed at tribal empowerment.

- **Objective:** To examine mass media exposure's influence on awareness of government schemes, health, and legal rights among ST women in Raichur district.
- **Methodology:** A mixed-methods design combining a survey (100 ST women) with interviews and FGDs.
- **Sampling:** Random-sampling methods for primary data collection via interview schedules.
- **Data Sources:** Primary data from respondents and secondary data from books/journals.
- **Data Processing:** Systematic editing, tabulation, and computer analysis.

- **Focus Areas:** Assessing changes in awareness, self-esteem, decision-making power, and socio-economic participation due to various media, and exploring socio-cultural barriers.

EMPOWERMENT OF SCHEDULE TRIBAL WOMEN THROUGH MASS MEDIA

Mass media empowers Scheduled Tribe (ST) women by providing crucial information on health, education, and schemes, boosting economic opportunities (like entrepreneurship), fostering political participation, and challenging stereotypes, primarily through platforms like social media, which connect them to wider networks and resources, though challenges remain in access, literacy, and overcoming traditional barriers. Media can amplify their voices, promote self-sufficiency, and bridge knowledge gaps, but require collaborative efforts from government, NGOs, and communities to ensure targeted, culturally sensitive communication for holistic development.

1. **Information Dissemination:** Spreading awareness about government programs, health, education, and skill development opportunities.
2. **Economic Opportunities:** Connecting women to markets, facilitating entrepreneurship, and promoting self-help groups (SHGs).
3. **Political Participation:** Encouraging involvement in local governance and decision-making processes.
4. **Challenging Stereotypes:** Showcasing success stories and diverse female voices to counter traditional biases.
5. **Cultural Preservation & Expression:** Providing platforms for sharing stories, traditions, and maintaining cultural identity.
6. **Social media:** Offers direct access to information, market linkages, and networking, bridging knowledge gaps and fostering self-sufficiency.
7. **Traditional Media (TV, Radio):** Disseminates vital development messages, but often neglects ST women's specific concerns.
8. **Development Communication:** Links media to community transition from poverty to overall growth, fostering equity.

Scheduled Tribal Women's Empowerment through Mass Media focuses on leveraging radio, TV, and digital platforms (social media, mobile tech) to bridge knowledge gaps, provide market access, and amplify voices for socio-economic upliftment, addressing historical neglect by promoting digital literacy, self-help groups (SHGs), and showcasing success stories, ultimately fostering entrepreneurship, cultural preservation, and participation in development initiatives.

Mass media significantly empowers rural women by informing, educating, and mobilizing them, acting as a catalyst for social change by broadening horizons, promoting literacy, disseminating health/rights info, and showcasing self-reliance opportunities, though challenges like illiteracy and cultural barriers persist in media access, requiring focused

programming on topics like entrepreneurship, legal rights, and healthcare to foster greater empowerment.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Table No 1: Are you a member of the Mass Media

Opinions of the Respondents	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	100	100
No	000	000
Total	100	100

Sources: Field Survey.

Table 01 reveals that all the respondents' opinion is yes. As per the above table, 100 percent respondents are members of the Mass Media.

Table 2: Awareness of Various Mass Media

Opinion of the respondents	No. of respondents		Total	Percentages		Total
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
TV	97	03	100	97%	03%	100%
Radio	85	15	100	85%	15%	100%
Social media	79	21	100	79%	21%	100%
Mobile Apps	85	15	100	85%	15%	100%
Video Streaming (YouTube, OTT platforms)	83	17	100	83%	17%	100%
Newspapers	100	00	100	100%	00%	100%
Posters & Pamphlets	85	15	100	85%	15%	100%

Sources: Field Survey.

The table shows awareness of various mass media among respondents: Newspapers: 100% aware, TV: 97% aware, Radio: 85% aware, social media: 79% aware, Mobile Apps: 85% aware, Video Streaming (YouTube, OTT): 83% aware, Posters.

& Pamphlets: 85% aware. Key points of study is Newspapers have the highest awareness (100%), TV and newspapers/posters are highly popular and social media has relatively lower awareness (79%)

Table 3: Awareness of Mass Media Programs

Opinions of the Respondents	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Health Awareness Programs	18	18%
Social & Educational Awareness Programs	20	20%
Economic Awareness Programs	23	23%
Religious & Cultural Awareness Programs	39	39%
Total	100	100

Sources: Field Survey.

Awareness of mass media programs in India involves recognising their crucial role in shaping opinion, disseminating information (like health guidelines during COVID-19), and fostering social change, while also understanding the growing career opportunities in a booming sector (OTT, gaming, digital media). The table shows awareness of mass media programs among respondents. Religious & Cultural Awareness Programs: 39%

(highest), Economical Awareness Programs: 23%, Social & Educational Awareness Programs: 20% and Health Awareness Programs: 18% (lowest). Key points of the study are that Religious & Cultural programs are most popular (39%), and Economic, social, and health awareness programs have relatively lower awareness (18-23%)

Table 4: Social Evils Reduced because of Mass Media Programs

Sr. No	Opinions of the Respondents	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, Gambling, etc.	30	30%
2	Untouchability,	16	16%
3	Devadasi, Child	09	09%

	Marriage, etc.		
4	Domestic Violence, Violence Against Women, etc.	28	28%
5	Tribal/ Gender Based Inequality	17	17%
	Total	100	100

Sources: Field Survey.

Mass media programs have significantly contributed to reducing various social evils in India by raising awareness, shaping public opinion, and promoting government initiatives for social change. The table shows social evils reduced due to mass media programs: Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, Gambling: 30% (highest), Domestic Violence, Violence Against Women: 28%, Tribal/Gender Based Inequality: 17%, Untouchability: 16%, and Devadasi, Child Marriage: 9% (lowest). Key points of the study is Mass media has the most impact on reducing substance abuse (30%), Domestic violence and women's issues (28%) are also significantly addressed

4. CONCLUSION

India is a vast country showcasing unity in diversity, with people from different religions, languages, regions, and cultures coexisting. Tribals are a significant group, considered socially, economically, politically, and educationally backward. Tribal women's empowerment is a neglected sector. Mass media programs are crucial for empowering Scheduled Tribal women by providing info, raising rights awareness, and fostering socio-economic change.

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