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## **Mass Media and Multi Media – The New Age Language Tools for those Voiceless Feminine**

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### **Abstract**

Literature, across the globe, has through various representations depicted the turmoil of women behind the curtains of society. The contemporary world has generated many threats to them; as also opportunities. The power of language wielded through Mass Media and Multi media in education, advertisements, architecture, commercial establishments, corporate setups, medicine, research and media cannot be understated. The potency of Mass media and Multi media, for women in particular, is that they are not merely the new age tools to 'voice the voices' but are also potential opportunities for a reasonable source of income for those who have the freedom to use them and extremely far reaching platforms to voice the saga of those women who do not have that freedom as per the limitations of the society.

**Key Words:** Alice Walker, A Thousand Splendid Suns, Khaled Hosseini, Mahaswetha, mass media, multi media, opportunities for women, power of language, , Sudha Murthy, The Color Purple

"Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it." -Marian Wright Edelman

Communication, "perse", has come a long way from the medium used, to the reach it targets. From allegories of the 12th century to the sms of 21st century, communication has seen several forms and media. With reference to the 'voice of women' in particular, novels, drama, poetry & various genre were and are used to portray the plight of women rendered voiceless and female emotions stifled for a variety of reasons – may it be geographical, cultural, ethical, biological or sheer cynical.

As a sample of cross section of life of the female in her respective society, one may refer to three novels, 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' by Khaled Hosseini from Afghanistan, 'Mahaswetha' by Sudha Murthy from India and 'Color Purple' by Alice Walker from Afro-American milieu.

'A Thousand Splendid Suns' by Khaled Hosseini based in Afghanistan, is a grim statement of how two blossoming 15 year olds, Miriam and Laila, are forced into a life of submission and circumstantial dread through a marriage to Rasheed who is 30 years older to them and made worse by the changing socio-political atmosphere of Afghanistan.

On their marriage, Rasheed presents Miriam with a sky blue burqa. In a matter-of-fact tone he tells her, "Where I come from, a woman's face is her husband's business only. I want you to remember that. Do you understand? (Hosseini 63). The author of this novel Khaled Hosseini, who was born in Kabul states in the prelude to the novel, "This book is

dedicated to Harris and Farah both the noor of my eyes, and to the women of Afghanistan.”

‘The Color Purple’ by Alice Walker is the portrayal of the life of Afro- American woman Celie. The subjugation that this central character faces is due to age-old tradition of the man dominating the women. In fact one of the male characters Harpo says that he has to beat his wife because that is what his father does. In fact he is advised by his father “Wives is like children. You have to let them know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.” (Walker 35).

Indian novels like ‘Mahashweta’ by Sudha Murthy have shown women to be subservient as that is what is expected in a traditional Indian family, where a woman (in the form of an in law ) may become the enemy or energy of the new member. “Men are taught to apologize for their weaknesses, Women for their strengths”, says Lois Wayne. ‘Mahashweta’ is about the very homely and cheerful Anupama. After a fairy tale marriage to Anand, a wealthy doctor, against the wishes of his family, she faces unconcealed animosity in her new household as a poor daughter-in-law.

As she braves against them , she is thrown into an abyss of cruel destiny when she discovers a white patch on her foot and learns that she has leukoderma. An insensitive husband obsessed with beauty, a resentful and uncaring family and the taboos of a narrow-minded indifferent society combine to break her spirit pushing her to the brink of suicide.

In fact her very own father rues, “I do not know why girls are born. They have become millstones around my neck. I am going to retire soon and I do not know what to do.” However the indomitable human spirit emerges victorious and Anupama rebuilds her life and career with great maturity of thought and action.

All the three novels project the women surpassing their tribulations to emerge victorious by themselves through sheer grit and courage- may it be of a home maker who also takes care of an orphanage as in the case of Laila in the Afghan novel, of a teacher and an artist as in the case of Anupama in the Indian novel and of an entrepreneur and business woman as in the case of Celie in the Afro-American novel.

Thus it can be stated that several women all over the world are for the most part rendered voiceless due to cultural, economic, traditional or psychological reasons. At the same time the attribute of rising against all odds is also the forte of woman. In this context two tools that women can utilize to empower themselves and to communicate are mass media and multimedia. Mass media is a platform that reaches to the masses through many channels. These channels are various and varied. The power of mass media is explosive & can affect the mood of thousands & thousands of viewers and swerve them into any flow. The purposes are many, the media of communication are chiefly two - print & electronic (radio, TV, internet, mobile phone) and the goal is one - to touch the nerve of the masses. The personal circuits figure projects the extensive usage of mass media and multi media in the present days whether at work, at home or even when one is on the move.



(figure courtesy - <http://www.liberatemedias.com>)

**Television** that cuts across the country and into the hearts of homes is a powerful media. With numerous soaps projecting the sagas of female protagonists, the voices of women who are spending lives as an undercurrent in the society resonate across living rooms. Lives of woman stifled, of woman fighting back and of woman winning are flashed in the form of interesting entertainment. In fact there are complaints from the male actors that the focus is drawn too much on the women characters and female protagonists that the male characters are relegated to being mere props. The reality shows, interactive programs and News channels not merely focus on the problems of women but also on their strengths. There are several programs that throw light on various issues of women care, such as health, grooming, cooking, investment, legal rights and career counseling. This has allowed women voices to be heard and has led to major awareness about women-related issues.

With relation to **radio**, radio is a very cost effective media as it reaches to both literate & illiterate masses. Though here the visual and print effect is missing as compared to electronic media (TV) & print (newspaper), it is very robust in its mood and flexible in its reachability. Today with FM, the radio culture has come back with a bang. In fact it has become one of the most sought after feature in the electronic audio empowered gadgets & gizmos- regular hand radio to cell phone to i-pod to what not. Radio that has bounced back to life with ten times its energy, has brought the female voice into the foray. T.V & Radio with their numerous women newscasters and hosts are offering opportunities galore for the women to not only raise their voices but also to use them for a dignified source of income in terms of entertainment or infotainment. The fact that the number of female anchors surpasses the male is in itself proof for the dominance of women in these areas.

“It was wonderful being a woman in the Doordarshan TV centre. There were no biases against gender”, says media person Luku Sanyal. Luku Sanyal, an English professor and one of the earliest faces on Doordarshan, has witnessed the birth of television journalism in India. There is scarcely a field of media that Sanyal has not ventured into. Newsreader with Bombay Doordarshan for eight years, anchor, speaker and writer of numerous award-winning newsreels and documentaries, she has the rare distinction of being placed in the A plus category by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

In **Print media**, newspaper is a very powerful media as it not only projects news but also acts as a record of events gone by or statements made on the future. Newspapers, which invite citizen journalists and also are willing to showcase the needs and cause of women are another tool. Woman newspaper columnists, journalists and editors find their voice in this print media and also use their voice to echo the voices of their women counterparts. Many newspapers carry special columns or supplements to patronize women related issues and enhance woman readership. Ammu Joseph, journalist and columnist for prestigious newspapers was congratulated on her being awarded the Donna Allen Award for Feminist Advocacy and was asked the significance of the award in terms of the status of women journalists in India. In her interview by Nirmaldasan in the ‘Journalism Online’ newsletter, she opines about print media,

It recognizes work done to promote the rights, freedoms and interests of women (and minorities) through the media. I presume this refers to both writing on gender-related issues in the media and contributing to women's professional advancement within the media. The fact that Indian media women are increasingly getting national and international recognition probably underscores the fact that female media professionals here are doing good work in a variety of media and subject areas.

Even **movies** that are based on female tribulations hit the screens and create box office records. In fact many of the investors even use the subject as a tool for propaganda. We have heard many a producer claiming that the movie is made especially with ladies sentiment and therefore caters to the entire family. “Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment nothing can fail, without it nothing can succeed” – Abraham Lincoln.

**Cell phones** in the form of the recorded messages that play the female voices into the ears of the users promising an array of services and the sms functions are voice providers in themselves. Telephone / cell phone is a very strong tool in communicating messages and stands as a symbol of confidence during crisis and stress with 24x7 helpline numbers launched for various problems including ragging and domestic violence.

**Internet** is one media that has laid the world at one's feet. News from every part of the globe in a good number of languages has much to offer, whether regional or national or even global, in coverage. Internet with its emailing facilities, blogs, groups, not with standing, internet community and social network portals like Orkut, Facebook, Twitter give a new profile to the voices to be heard, not merely in a particular region but across all barriers including those of gender, caste, country or time.

To add power to the voice of woman, the society should sit straight and take notice of her and for this, mass media is a major tool. Such requirements are taken care of by associations like ‘Network of Women in Media’.



The Network of Women in Media, India, is an association which aims to provide a forum for women in media professions to share information and resources, exchange ideas, promote media awareness and ethics, and work for gender equality and justice within the media and society. Local groups linked to the NWMI are currently functioning in 16 centres across the country. (<http://www.nwmindia.org/>)

**Multimedia**, as the name indicates, is a multiple media platform that provides techno- effective methods to put across an idea, message or presentation. Multimedia includes platform with audio-visual facilities. In common usage, the term multimedia refers to an electronically delivered combination of media including video, still images, audio, text in such a way that can be accessed interactively. Multimedia finds its application in various areas including education, entertainment, infotainment, research, architecture, business etc.

“A woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult. It’s complicated by the fact that in most nations women receive substantially less education than men”, opines Melinda Gates who made a humble beginning with her husband Bill Gates and is today the Chairperson of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation .

If we look at the **multimedia forms** in separate categories, the **audio** system is a time tested one. The numerous C.D-ROMs, e-learning audio tapes and voice-synthesizers available in the market are another platform for an effective presentation of the female voice. The **audio-visual** gadgets that have become quite a familiar feature in a congregational set up are extremely effective in putting across the message. The internet that has opened such vast vistas of information storehouse and access to that information without geographical and time boundaries also allows downloading facilities of information all over the world. This has definitely brought the issues of importance in relation to women to networking circles not only for discussion but also for solution.

The very modern platform of **Tele-Conferencing** is another tool that women should tap to stay connected. The numerous women self-help groups that are staying connected and successful are also beneficiaries of such technology of connectivity. A broadcast may be a live or recorded multimedia presentation. The presentations that one can make with the help of audio-video systems can carry the message to greater levels of understanding and deeper levels of thought.

**Computers** with multimedia facilities are a common feature now used both for educational and entertainment purpose. The opportunities that women get and excel in, in the fields of Software Engineering, Animation Developing, Business Process Outsourcing, Voice Overs, etc. are just a few areas that multimedia computers are used. Education is also made interactive, informative and entertaining with these multimedia facilities creating the word ‘edutainment’.

### **Snapshots of 'EDUTAINMENT'**



**Figure 1 : A Power Point Presentation in progress**

A Power Point Presentation may combine all or selective forms of media content.



**Figure 2 : Virtual Reality**

Virtual Reality uses multimedia content where the boundaries of experience become limitless.



**Figure 3 Multimedia-Terminals**

Multimedia-Terminals have become a common feature now a days which act as self – service providers to commuters and consumers (the one in picture is from Dresden, Germany). (figures 1,2,3 - courtesy: <http://www.wikipedia.org/>)

Use of Multi media in education, advertisements, architecture, commercial establishments, corporate setups, medicine, research and media cannot be understated. The potency of Mass media and Multi media, for women in particular, is that they are not merely the new age tools to 'Voice the Voiceless' but are also potential opportunities for a reasonable source of income for those who have the freedom to use them and extremely far reaching platforms to voice the saga of those women who do not have that freedom as per the limitations of the society. Through Mass media and Multi media, women can make great strides. As Karl Marx said, "Anyone who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without feminine upheaval. Social progress can be

measured exactly by the social position of the fair sex, the ugly ones included.”

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