
UNIT 8 REPORTING SOCIAL ISSUES

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8.0 INTRODUCTION

In a developing country like India, reporting issues having social relevance is very important. Issues like health, poverty, education, disability etc. are critical topics which require the attention of government and common public through media. This unit will help the learner to understand several dimensions of social issue reporting. The unit is designed keeping in mind a logistic view of social problems. In the Indian context, such issues are multi facet and interlinked. This unit will focus more on the issues of the larger population which has a common thread across all socio-economic classes like old age and disability.

Recent years have seen rise in the understanding of the significance and centrality of social issues among the public. The increase in number of requirements around the world seeking the disclosure of social metrics and information has given way to more serious reporting on these issues. The understanding of common public about the social issues is also evolving with time.

8.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After working through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand broadly the social issues of Indian society;
- describe the role of media as an element of social change; and
- analyze the need and kind of media coverage required for social issues.

8.2 MEDIA AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

India is a country with diverse background. People here belong to different color, cast, creed and culture. With diversity, comes lot of challenges that the country has to face. Be it over population, poverty, education and health & hygiene etc, social issues have always been a matter of concern for our country. Media plays an important role in bridging the gap between common people and the policy makers. In a democracy, media have the power and responsibility to inform and inspire people to political action. However, to achieve this one requires a deep understanding of current social problems and how the policy is formulated. Also, a journalist reporting on social issues needs to have the ability to raise the issue in a storytelling manner, that drives public into action.

According to a recent UN report on “Population”, India remains the second most populous country of the world after China. However, the report suggests that around 2023, India is projected to overtake China as the world’s most populous country. Some of the reasons for increase in population quoted by UN are fertility rates, increasing longevity and international migration.

With increased population come various other issues like poverty, health and education. A journalist reporting on such issues need to be sensitive towards the problems he/she is highlighting in his/her report. To bring out empathy among the readers and policy makers, it is important that the journalist himself/herself is sensitive enough. Among the several problems our society is facing, economic problems occupy an important position. Poverty is the reality of our society and a big number of families have income far below the level, which would ensure a reasonable standard of living. As people live longer and into much advanced age (75 years and over), they need more intensive and long-term care, which in turn may increase financial needs. Inadequate income is a major problem of elderly in India. The most vulnerable are those who do not own productive assets, have little or no savings or income from investments made earlier, have no pension or retirement benefits, and are not taken care of by their children or live in families that have uncertain low incomes and many mouths to feed.

8.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL ISSUES

The penetration of online media has increased to manyfold after the outbreak of COVID 19 and things going online in India. Many people, including those who aren’t very tech-savvy, have started using social media aggressively, be it social networking platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or messaging app WhatsApp. These sites allow users to share pictures and other information with more people conveniently. A large population is connected through social networking. For many, social networking is a way to connect with people, however, not just building relationships, but also social media help to bring all the current topics to our knowledge and discussions. Several online platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, provide us with overall awareness about our current societal issues. A socially relevant picture or a message from any of the user can circulate to mass population in just fraction of seconds. Even though social media is majorly used as a tool of

citizen journalism, its potential towards main stream journalism cannot be ignored.

8.4 MEDIA'S ROLE IN SPREADING AWARENESS

Based on the existing diversities in the social issues, media needs to pay greater attention to the increasing awareness on these issues and its socio-economic effects in order to promote the development of policies for dealing with them.

The unbiased reporting of social issues like old age will call for the concerted efforts of the Government, Non-Government organizations, religious institutions and individuals not only to understand, but also to solve or at least mitigate the whole gamut of problems resulting from a greying society so that the aged people can lead dignified and meaningful life.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: 1) Use the space given below for your answer

2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. How do you think social media can help in tackling social issues in a developing country like India?

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8.5 SOCIAL ISSUES AND MEDIA COVERAGE

Media coverage is invaluable for publicizing the issues and difficulties faced by people such as- health and hygiene, poverty, education etc.

8.5.1 Health and Hygiene

In India majority of the population has to spend from their pockets for an illness. One major health stroke in a family may wipe out the entire family's savings of a life time. It is the time media through awareness campaigns wakes up the government to completely revamp the health care in India for the elderly. Improved health care facilities, advanced equipments, geriatric wards in hospitals must be made easily accessible to the poor in rural areas with the yearly allocation of state funds. Government needs to make detailed and tangible action plan for the various schemes launched and a definite time-line for their implementation. The challenge for India, as for all countries over the world, is not only to add further years to life, but more importantly to add life to years and to ensure that the elderly are able to live full, enriching and productive lives and for this to be possible, good health is the key. It is the prime responsibility of the journalists reporting social issues to highlight such problems being faced by the public. Bridging the gap between the common people and the government is the role of news media.

In order to provide better sanitation and hygiene facilities to the public, the government takes various measures at the national and international level.

International organizations like The World Bank, United Nations, etc. play significant role in highlighting the significance of basic amenities and social infrastructure to address right to health and other human rights. 73rd Amendment to the Constitution (243G of Eleventh Schedule) assigns rural housing, sanitation and drinking water inclusive of 29 duties to Panchayats. Issue like open defecation is a matter of concern for almost all organizations in India. The international organizations UNICEF and World Health Organization (WHO) regularly collect data on open defecation and publish. The term ‘Open Defecation’ is used throughout the world for throwing faeces in the open field, roadside, agriculture field, forest or any available space. Government of India formulates plans and policies related to sanitation and implemented through State governments and Local body institutions.

The outbreak of corona virus in 2020 brought challenges to not just the survival of human beings but also to media covering every bit of it. A need or more credible and authentic news stories were felt. It was felt that media doesn’t need to scare people of the mishappenings taking place around the globe because of COVID-19. Here, the reporter was supposed to be sensible enough to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. It was seen that lot of fake news and rumors circulated through social media and we know that social media do not have any gatekeeping process. Journalists need to understand their responsibility of providing credible, useful and authentic information in such types of adverse situations.

8.5.2 Media and Education

The importance of education has been discussed about since ages. According to the great philosopher Swami Vivekananda, “education as the manifestation of perfection already in man. Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in mind. The suggestion is the friction, which brings it out.” Mahatma Gandhi suggested that “By education, I mean an all-around drawing out of the best in the child and man’s body, mind and spirit.” According to Greek philosopher Plato “education develops in the body and the soul of the pupil all the beauty and all the perfection he is capable of. Education is the creation of sound mind in a sound body.” Education is a broad concept and has played a crucial role in the development of the society from the ancient times till today.

The social issues a country is going through are all interconnected. Education is considered as an essential component/factor from eradicating poverty and sustenance of fair democratic processes in today’s societies. Literacy is the vital for the overall development of individuals and for the social and economic development of a country. Education is one of the three dimensions of the Human Development Index (HDI). Considering the importance of education in a developing economy, media has the responsibility to act as a bridge between government’s education policies and people. Media has role to play in letting the people know about the advantages of being educated, and also about the problems they may face by being uneducated. A number of experiments are taking place now a days in the era of online education. A number of open learning platforms like ePathshala, SWAYAM, etc. have been launched to promote education in the semi-urban and rural areas. A number of initiatives in higher education have been launched by the

government with the help of ICT.

8.5.3 Media and Environment

Environment is an important social issue that needs to be addressed by the media. In a progressive society, it is inevitable that environment and development go hand in hand. Humans are part of nature and environment is an inseparable part of life support systems. Climate change is one of the major issues of our time. Many UNESCO programmes in the science, education, culture and communication contribute to creating knowledge, educating and communicating about climate change, and to understand the ethical implications for present and future generations. With a drastic climate change observed from past several years, it becomes a matter of concern. To understand the co-existence of humanity and environment, and to deal with the climate change, several organizations are working including United Nations, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) etc.

The rapid expansion and breakthroughs in the arena of science and technology have ushered human race into a new age. Media plays a crucial role in forming public opinion and influencing policy decisions. An ordinary citizen gains confidence and capacity to become effective agents of change when aware of environment and development related issues. Media works as the information disseminator among the people. It also works as an agent of change. Brings about change in the society by altering the mindset of people. Also, mass media activates latent attitudes, promoting people to take action. It helps in mobilizing the masses for collective action by appealing to people's conscience to participate in various environmental conservation and support activities like promoting use of cloth bags instead of poly bags, throwing the garbage in dustbin and not littering it on road etc.

8.5.4 Media and Children/Women

Reporting stories on children and women needs to be carefully tackled. Several social issues such as child labour, female feticide, dowry, early marriage etc. revolves around the broad spectrum of women and children.

UNICEF has worked a lot to develop proper guidelines for journalists to cover children's issues. They are also working to create awareness among the media professionals about responsible way to cover children related issues in news media. They developed six overarching principles, six guidelines for interviewing children, and seven principles for reporting children related issues in media. You can see these principles and guidelines on website of UNICEF by clicking this link : <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/ethical-guidelines#:~:text=Six%20guidelines%20for%20interviewing%20children,-Do%20no%20harm&text=Ensure%20that%20the%20child%20or,when%20possible%2C%20for%20documentary%20photographs.>

One more guideline has been developed for responsible representation and reporting of violence against children and women. It was developed by UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women in the Asia-Pacific and South Asia region. It was an output of a joint working group to enhance and prioritise messaging and communications on violence against women and children

amid and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to UNICEF's official website, *"These guidelines promote responsible and effective representation and reporting of violence against women and violence against children for public advocacy purposes, such as media coverage and awareness raising campaigns. While the causes, risk factors, prevalence, patterns and consequences of violence against women and violence against children may differ, many of the considerations for ethically, safely and effectively communicating these issues are crosscutting.*

These guidelines are intended for media practitioners, United Nations country offices and other development and civil society organisations communicating about violence against women and violence against children."

The guidelines suggest that while reporting violence stories against women or children, a reporter must keep a survivor-centred approach. Content should ideally provide calls-to-action, including information about locally available support services. The content should be produced in the languages of the target populations and sensationalising violence by depicting violent acts in detail should be avoided in all types of content, whether visual, audio and written. Also, a journalist should avoid 'victim-blaming' or suggesting that survivors are responsible for causing or provoking violence. In a developing country like India, violence against women and children is common. However, that doesn't make it an easy to go story. A journalist should always be mindful of these guidelines issued by UNICEF in the public interest.

8.5.5 Media and Senior Citizens

Media has an important role to play in highlighting different social issues. Journalists should identify the emerging social issues and by giving adequate coverage to them, they can finally help in finding out solutions too. Issues faced by elderly people in the present society also require media attention. It should restrain from creating fear psychosis by responsible reporting, promoting intergenerational bonds and informing individuals, families, groups with appropriate information on ageing process. Resident Welfare Associations should encourage people to speak about such issues at special events organized by local government, which the media can attend. RWA's can run media awards for the best coverage of these issues. RWA's should organize an eye-catching event with older people, such as dramas or demonstrations.

Journalists can work on new angles for everyday stories such as a child being looked after by his grandparents who has excelled in his school exams. Plans, policies and accomplishments for the elderly by the government may be highlighted on ear marked days and anniversaries. Journalists may also highlight unusual or touching stories about amazing individuals such as an older man caring for his sick son/daughter or an older woman who has set up an older people's club where they can all meet to pursue their hobbies like reading, playing cards, watching movies and so on. Young people often think old age is something they do not need to think about for a very long time, but actually everyone needs to consider it as we all have a part to play in the way in which age and being old is treated in society.

Based on the existing diversities in the ageing process, media needs to pay greater attention to the increasing awareness on the ageing issues and its socio-economic effects in order to promote the development of policies for dealing with an ageing society. The unbiased reporting of social issues like old age will call for the concerted efforts of the Government, Non-Government organizations, religious institutions and individuals not only to understand, but also to solve or at least mitigate the whole gamut of problems resulting from a greying society so that the aged people can lead dignified and meaningful life.

The media should continue to spread awareness amongst people regarding the legal rights they have in hand for fighting against the atrocities they are subjected to. Under these rights parents cannot be evicted from a house without due process of law if they have been staying there from before. They can also demand maintenance from children in the same way that a wife can demand it from her husband. The domestic violence act too provides parents with the right to seek relief from any kind of abuse. Nationwide programmes in schools and colleges through media should sensitize children and young adults towards ageing and the needs of elderly people. In the present scenario of nuclear families, awareness about social value of senior citizen needs to be created. These days a large section of the senior citizens is living alone as either the younger generation does not have the time to take care or consider it a burden. Many of them now prefer to be independent in their own homes or want to lead a hassle-free life in senior citizens homes. The trend of appointing care takers to give company to elderly is fast catching up. People should be given training to become professional care takers of elderly.

Now old people are mustering courage to speak up and report about painful legal battles over property and other crime and abuse against them by their own children and families. Innovative campaigns along with media coverage can help them regain their lost esteem and assets. Road traffic accidents have been a cause of death for those aged above 60 years partly by fast moving vehicles and partly on account of badly designed roads. The disabled or aged persons are not in the thought process of people in-charge of redesigning urban infrastructure to make it elderly friendly. Footpaths should be statutorily arranged and adequate speed breakers should be provided to protect pedestrians from road accidents.

With increasing options and services available for post-retirement life, one should plan old age with excitement so that it is hassle free and secure. The elderly should try not to depend on children or have any expectation from them as non-fulfillment of these expectations will only lead to misery. The elderly at one time used to be the most respected members of the family and taking care of them was the responsibility of their children. However, the growth of individualism, materialism among the youth in today's modern and fast paced life coupled by western influence has led to their alienation and isolation from the families. Migration from rural areas also resulted in the growth of nuclear families in the towns and cities.

Media can definitely help in bring about a change in society's attitude by continuously highlighting the emerging issues and areas of action for elders.

The correct and right portrayal of elderly people in the mass media influences the viewer's explicit and implicit attitudes and beliefs towards them and old age. The most important deterrent in senior citizen's mobility is the lack of safe and convenient public transport. For those who would like self-driving, the chaotic dangerous traffic conditions frighten them. Journalists should not shy away from covering and highlighting the non-availability of age friendly, barrier free access in buses, bus stops, railway stations, airports and transportation within the airports, banks and hospitals where they have to stand in the common queue and do not have a separate seating area in parks, places of worship, cinema halls, shopping malls and other places that senior citizens and the disabled frequent.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: 1) Use the space given below for your answer.

2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What is the importance of media coverage of social issues like healthcare, education and environment?

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8.6 LET US SUM UP

Media is considered the fourth pillar of democracy in India after the judiciary, legislature and executive. There are many responsibilities on its shoulders. Media is influential and has the ability to shape opinion of its audience on any issue. Due to its such characteristics, the media remains powerful in a developing country like India, which is grappling with many social issues. The media has capabilities to make the public aware about illiteracy, over population, poverty, old age, pollution and various ill effects of social evils like child labour, dowry etc. A reporter's job is to fearlessly report the truth. Every day the Central Government, Governments of various states, various government departments and ministers inform the public about the various development works going on in the country. This is done through press releases, handbooks, newspapers, yearbooks, reports or press conferences etc. Journalists reporting on social issues should always disseminate this information to the public so that they can be made aware of it. However, the duty of journalists reporting on social issues is not only to provide information about various development policies and programs to the public, but also to describe the impact on the lives of the people related to the proposed development.

Senior citizens need immediate attention. What they need is understanding, love and care, not our pity. Media and educational institutions have a huge responsibility on their shoulders to make youth aware about the rights and privileges of senior citizens. It is our responsibility, both individually and collectively, to ensure that these rights are fulfilled. Don't make them feel irrelevant, rather make them feel an integral part of our lives.

In India, unlike many western countries, parents live with their children even after the age of 18 (of course there are exceptions). They are ready to bear the responsibility of their children for a long time. But after a long time, many times parents just want to relax and want their kids to take care of them too. Every parent wants to see their child grow and succeed but no parent wants their child to consider their responsibilities towards them as an unnecessary burden. It is our duty to see that they do not spend the last years of their lives in isolation, pain and suffering. Therefore, elderly persons require critical support that will maintain important aspects of their lifestyle while improving their overall quality of life.

Therefore, it is necessary for the media to not only examine the policies and programs launched by the government, but also see that their implementation is within the time limit. Apart from this, it should be ensured that there is no unnecessary economic burden of taxes and medical treatment on the elderly. And most importantly, the media has to do its best to sensitize today's youth to accept their responsibility towards their elders so that old age is a boon and a blessing to be enjoyed and lived to the fullest. It should be clear to all of us that we all have to face this stage.

8.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Responsible representation and reporting of violence against women and violence against children, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/documents/responsible-representation-and-reporting-violence-against-women-and-violence-against-0>

Dhandekar. K.-The Elderly in India New Delhi. Sage publications.

Gurmurthy K.G. – The Aged in India New Delhi Reliance Publishing House.

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Ageing in Rural India perspectives & prospects. Delhi. Indian Publishers Distributors,

Various other articles from newspapers like Hindu, The Times of India, Hindustan Times.

8.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

Refer to 8.3

Check Your Progress 2

Refer to 8.4.1, 8.4.2, 8.4.3