UNIT 7 : MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Mass media and its functions

7.4 Effects of media on marriage and family

7.5 The mass media and Indian family

7.6 Let us sum up

7.7 Further Reading

7.8 Answers to check your progress

7.9 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to –

- know what is mass media
- know the functions of mass media
- know the role of mass media on the larger society

7.2 INTRODUCTION

Mass media has become a significant institution of the social system. Irrespective of the debates about the pros and cons of the institution of media, it has emerged as a strong force of influence in the society in present times. In this unit, we shall learn about the mass media, and it's role in the present society, with particular reference to the institutions of family and marriage in the context of India. .

7.3 MASS MEDIA AND ITS FUNCTIONS

Mass media is defined as the technological means of sending information, ideas, opinions, photographs, etc. through the mass communication devices to a diverse audience. Media is the medium,

something that intervenes; it is the middle state. Media is the plural of the word medium. Information, entertainment, news, photographs, education or promotional messages are transmitted to a wide audience through mass media.

There are various sources of mass media, both old and new, like newspapers, magazines, television, radio, computer, internet, social media, billboards, fax, telegram,videogames,cellphones, etc. that exist in today's societies. Old and new forms of media co-exist with each other. Many of them have made inroads into Indian society as well, even in remote areas. Mass media has changed the way people communicate, especially in rural places.

There are no mass media forms that are bereft of cultural biases and objectives. Most often media texts contain prejudices of class, caste, gender, ethnicity or race. These often influence political and social thought.The print media is older than the radio and the electronic media. Social media is the newest kind of mass media. People from all spheres of life can easily share information, pictures,and thoughts through media. Social media refers to the types of media that help in interacting and content sharing through the internet. It includes web-based technologies such as Youtube, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, etc. Media's power, especially that of social media, is symbolic, in the sense that it is persuasive and has the potential to control people's minds and views, although not their direct actions.

In the two decades of the 1980s and 1990s, there was a debate on the right to communicate and right to receive and send information and ideas of all kinds in developing countries. Education has played a pivotal role in mobilizing the masses through mass media. It is a precondition for the effective use of mass media. The role of mass media is dynamic, and not static. It keeps changing according to how socio-political dynamics change in the society.

The media is also known as the fourth pillar of a democracy as it is supposed to act as a critic of the government and be objective in its judgment. However, the media has been heavily criticized for failing to be fair and being biased, in recent years. Many blame the corporatization and privatization of

the media for this fall in stature from that of a protector of democracy to that of a government ally.The world is in the middle of a media revolution today and this has undoubtedly changed the nature and function of the media.



ACTIVITY ONE

1. Why is the media considered the fourth pillar of democracy? Think.

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Some of the functions that mass media perform in society are–

Agent of change

Mass media has been used as an agent of change. In the Indian context also, there are numerous examples, which elucidate the role of mass media as an agent of change. It is often seen that Governments use mass media to convey public messages, which aim at influencing people's attitudes and beliefs. For example, radio and television have been used by the Indian government to change perceptions and stereotypes about communicable diseases like leprosy and HIV-AIDS. Polio is another disease which was very common in India. However, through special programmes on TV and radio which asked parents to vaccinate their children and take polio drops, polio has been almost eradicated from Indian society.Thus, mass media can play a decisive role in disseminating messages that transform the world and have a positive impact.

Making the world smaller

Mass media has made the world appear smaller, more compact and global. Events, sports or shows that are happening thousands of miles away, like cricket matches, football events, Oscar awards, speeches, etc. are broadcasted live so that people sitting anywhere can watch them. It makes people feel connected and part of the same global community. The speed and efficiency of media has resulted in bringing people across the

world closer. The term 'global village', coined by Marshall McLuhan, is used to depict this shrinking nature and coming together of the world. The internet has brought the people closer than ever before.

Promoter of goods

Mass media is used to promote products by their sellers. Advertisement is a significant revenue source for many kinds of mass media, like TV and newspapers. Advertisers compete with each other for media space and attention to inform their potential and prospective customers about their products. The public gets to know about different goods and can make an informed decision.

Reinforcing identities

Mass media helps reinforce a national identity in the face of addressing a heterogeneous population, as the cases of India and USA illustrate. Forms of mass media like newspapers and television reach out to people from all sections with the same news and events that inculcate a similar feeling. This also includes the diaspora population, whose identity is present in a shared culture from which they may be physically distant but feel emotionally connected. Mass media helps migrants in moving through the unfamiliar territory of a new region and at the same time keeps them updated with information from their home countries.

Medium of communication

Mass media is the fundamental means of communication amongst people today.Means like telephone, internet,and social media are used by people to send and receive messages across regions and countries. As a result, daily communication has become easier, and faster. Also, with the widespread use of the internet on the mobile phones, communication of different kinds has become easily accessible and comparatively less expensive than earlier.

Diffusion of cultures

Diffusion is the spread of cultural attributes from one region to another and mass media has played an instrumental role in doing so. For instance, almost all kinds of food are available in every part of India. South Indian food items like dosa and idli have acquired a national and even a global character.

The spread of Hindi as a language, and Hindi TV serials are also a testament of mass media helping in cultural diffusion of traits from one part to another.

Alternate public sphere

Almost everyone can use mass media, especially social media. It gives ordinary people an outlet to express their opinions and concerns which the mainstream media generally does not provide. It has, therefore, been called an alternate public sphere that gives even people who have been historically marginalized and discriminated, a voice. For instance, the 'Metoo' movement was a result of women voicing their issues and cases of sexual harassment using various tools of social media.

Therefore, some of the functions of mass media are –

- Media provides news and information required by people.
- Media educates the public.
- Media entertains people.
- Media can help in diffusing cultural traits.
- Media gives voice to the marginalized and the backward.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – (A)

1. Name three functions that the media performs.

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2. Why is social media seen as an alternate public sphere?

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3. Why is media power considered symbolic?

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7.4 EFFECTS OF MEDIA ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Media has been playing a crucial role in influencing all kinds of relationships, including marital and familial relationships. Mass media,

especially print media and social media have been used to find marital partners in many societies. Matrimonial ads in newspapers are a regular feature of the Sunday editions in India. However, today, more than ads, it is matrimonial sites like Shadi.com and Jeevan Saathi.com that play a critical role in helping people in finding suitable partners. After the invention of the modern form of the computer, technology, and the social communication systems evolved at an increased pace and various kinds of chatting websites became available. Media also helps in keeping marital and familial relations connected across regions.

However, it is also argued by many studies that social media has a negative impact on the institutions of both marriage and family. Many people post and upload a lot of photographs and statuses about their married lives and relationships which puts other couples under pressure, who might feel unhappy or insecure about their married lives after looking at other couple's happy lives.Therefore, there is a gap between virtual and actual reality that couples have to face and navigate which has the opportunity to create unhappiness and distress.

Many partners also accuse their spouses of spending too much time on their phones and the internet instead of spending time with each other.There are also increasing cases of online infidelity which leads to lack of trust and commitment amongst spouses and rise in suspicious behavior. There are arguments about sharing of passwords of social networking sites amongst spouses. Some people feel that they lose their privacy because of social media and it creates troubles in their married lives. The use of social media by youths has become a part of life. Various research studies have argued that there has been an increase in divorce rate due to an increase in Social media usage.

Another negative impact of media has been that the show-off or display of wealth that happens on marital and other functions finds a prominent place in social media posts. It furthers the divide between the rich and the poor and leads to insecurity and low self-esteem amongst those who cannot spend lavishly on their wedding ceremonies. Thus, social media can lead to both finding marital partners and also creating troubles in marriage.

While this section gives an outline of the impact of media on marriage and family, the next part deals with the relationship between mass media and the Indian family.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – (B)

Q1. How can social media create marital problems?

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7.5 THE MASS MEDIA AND INDIAN FAMILY

Many societies function in such a way that the family is the basic unit of them, and this is especially true for Indian society. The family's primary function is to preserve, protect and promote its generation over the years. They have a common culture and shared values that guide their member's behaviour. In a traditional sense of the term, they are related to each other through blood.

By structure, families can be divided into two types –nuclear and joint families. A nuclear family comprises of parents and their offspring. A joint family, on the other hand, consists of parents, their children, grandparents, or aunts, and uncles. A nuclear family is a small one whereas a joint family is extended. Traditionally, in developed societies, the nuclear family is the accepted norm, whereas, in developing countries like India, joint families were more common.

However, due to processes of urbanization, liberalization, and inroad of mass media, it is argued that even in societies that had a joint family system, like the Indian society, changes are taking place. The common argument is that there is a shift towards nuclear families. However, this does not stand true for all regions. While the nuclear family is more prevalent in metro cities and urban areas, joint family is still the standard kind of family in rural and semi-urban areas.

Be it the nuclear or the joint family, the mass media has impacted various forms of the Indian family in many ways.Mass media was first introduced in India by the British. After independence, the media mostly consisted of newspapers, television and radio. The television and radio were mainly state controlled and Doordarshan and All India Radio were the state TV and radio channels respectively. The main role of the media at that time was to inform, educate and entertain the masses. There were various programmes for farmers, students, etc. that were informational in nature. It was after the arrival of private cable TV channels that the entertainment role of the media took centre stage. The Asian games of 1986 that was hosted by New Delhi changed the TV scenario in India as colour TV was introduced in the country. Cable TV was also gradually introduced and channels like *Star Plus* became widely popular.

In the 1990s after economic liberalization had taken place, there was a shift in the role of the media from informing and educating the masses. Hindi serials like *Hum Log* and *Buniyaad* captivated the audiences in early 1990s. Mythological serials like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* also became very popular and brought the nation together. The role of the media has changed yet again in the last decade or so, as media has become a corporate industry today.

We have outlined a brief historical sketch of the media in India after independence. We will now look at the influence of mass media on Indian society and the family.

- **Bringing family and community together**

  The media has played a specific role in bringing together family members as well as members of the community. Reading the newspaper together in the morning was a routine that many families have, and this was especially true before the advent of the TV. Watching the TV together by families is an extension of this practice. During the 1990s when the serial versions of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* were telecasted, not just families, even members of a neighbourhood would sit together and watch them. Broadcast of cricket matches is another way in which Indians feel connected as

they can even watch matches together that are played by the Indian team.

- **Connecting families**

  In recent times, it has been seen that, many families do not stay together, and members live in different places. Media helps individuals in keeping each other connected through various forms of media. The quantity of people using Facebook has seen a significant growth over the last decade. It is easier to live away from each other and be connected than ever before. In fact, India is one of the countries that has the highest number of internet users and cellular phone users in the world.

- **Family planning and health related issues**

  Mass media has played a pivotal role in the Indian government's family planning program. India was one of the first countries in the world to follow a state sponsored policy of family planning in 1952 to regulate the country's growing population. The state used media like newspapers, television, radio and films to convey the need for having smaller families through various forms like advertisements, posters and billboards. Advertisements before films in cinema halls were used to convey messages about the necessity for family planning and ill-effects of habits like smoking and how that can cause cancer. The media was used in its traditional role of informing and educating the people.

- **Educational programmes**

  The media has also played an instrumental function in educating the masses. This is especially true about television and radio after independence when the media was mostly state regulated. There were programmes like Krishi Darshan that informed and educated farmers about good farming practices, seeds, tractors, irrigation facilities, etc.

- **Time management**

  It must be noted that mass media not only has had a positive impact. There have also been several negative impacts of mass media. For

instance, data says that many children waste more television than what is recommended for their age. In a recent study of TV audiences in three Indian metros, out of 3500 children, 79% of children said that they prefer to watch cartoon network as entertainment rather than any educational programs. It is not just children,mass media occupies a high proportion of even adult's leisure time. On an average they spend 25 hours per week watching TV and they also spend time with radio, newspapers, internet, computers,and telephone. Along with the school, the family and the peer group, the media has become one of the prominent socializing agents for children.

- **Sex and violence**

  One of the most controversial topics that any discussion on mass media leads to is about the sexual and violent content that it can show, especially to children. Parents and elders express concern from time to time about the highly sexualized and violent content that the television and internet contain. They call for media censorship to protect their children from such material. In the Indian context, for instance, some shows are not allowed to be telecast during the prime time. There is also a constant discussion on whether or not to ban pornography.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – (C)

Q1. How has the role of the media changed?

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Q2. Name two activities for which the media has been used by the state.

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7.6 LET US SUM UP

- Mass media is defined as the technological means of sending information, ideas, opinions, photographs, etc. through the mass communication devices to a varied audience.
- There are various sources of mass media, both old and new, like newspapers, magazines, television, radio, computer, internet, social media, billboards, fax, telegram, videogames, cellphones, etc. that exist in today's societies.
- There are no mass media forms that are bereft of cultural biases and objectives. Most often media texts contain prejudices of class, caste, gender, ethnicity or race. These often influence political and social thought.
- Social media is the newest kind of mass media. People from all spheres of life can easily share information, pictures, and thoughts through media. Social media refers to the types of media that help in interacting and content sharing through the internet.
- The media is also known as the fourth pillar of a democracy as it is supposed to act as a critic of the government and be objective in its judgment.
- Media has been playing a crucial role in influencing all kinds of relationships, including marital and familial relationships. Mass media, especially print media and social media have been used to find marital partners in many societies.
- In the 1990s after economic liberalization had taken place, there was a shift in the role of the media from informing and educating the masses. The role of the media has changed yet again in the last decade or so, as media has become a corporate industry today.



7.7 FURTHER READING

1). Banjo, Omotayo. 2002. The Effect of Media Consumption on the Perception of Romantic Relationships.*Penn State McNair Journal*.

2). Mehraj, Hakim Khalid, Akhtar Neyaz Bhat, and Hakeem RameezMehraj. 2014. Impacts of Media on Society: A Sociological Perspective. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*. 6(6): 56-64.www.ijhssi.org.

7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

A

Ans to Q No 1: Changemaker, inform the masses and connect people.

Ans to Q No 2: It gives voice to the marginalized and otherwise differentiated.

Ans to Q No 3: It has the power to influence people's minds even if not actions.

B

Ans to Q No 1: By creating insecurity, low confidence and privacy issues amongst couples.

C

Ans to Q No 1: The function of the media has changed from that of educating and informing the masses to that of entertaining people.

Ans to Q No 2: Family planning and educating farmers.



7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1. Define 'mass media'.

Q2. What is meant by 'social media'?

Long Questions (Answer each question within 300-500 words)

Q1. Write a note on 'mass media and it's impact on the society'.

Q2. Discuss how mass media can be considered as an 'agent of change'.