

WOMEN AND MEDIA IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

Media is the buzz word of the era of globalization. In fact, the rapid expansion of term and the concept of present form of globalization have been made possible only through the information revolution throughout the world. It has been widely recognized that media can play a substantial role in promoting and disseminating information and are key players in the social and economic development of women. Therefore, media largely reflects the life styles, socialization patterns, participation levels, cultural boundaries, political maneuverings, religious manifestations, educational standards, social hierarchy, and of course, society images of any given group. Globalization is a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary topic in its broadest reaches. It includes not only economic topics, but also political, social cultural and ideological ones.

INTRODUCTION

The depiction of women in Indian media is simply shoddy and at times vulgar. Commodification of women as a sex object has been relentlessly portrayed in audio-visual media. The overtones of sexual equation are much more explicit these days in our media. The orthodox presentations and the conventional inhibitions seem to overpower the orientations of media planners. The women in Indian media are depicted generally as scrupulous, religiously intolerant, craving only for their own family, politically naïve, socially inevitable and culturally ultra-modern. Some criticism of advertising using women as sex objects can be seen in letters to the editor and very mild criticism of the cheapness and vulgarity in the display of women in advertising can be found in our literature on media. Often the criticism of the advertising stems out of big business game, believing the advertisements, rising prices and creation of artificial needs.

The T.V. Channels have plenty of young, good looking, smart women (most of the times girls in their teens) either as news presenters or as reporters. These channels keep on changing their presenters in pursuit of fresh faces. And one may very easily assume that these girls have been employed mainly because of their face value. Because so many times the homework, the pronunciation, the background knowledge, the language and the overall presentation gets shoddy. Nonetheless, T.V. new channels appear to be a female-friendly medium. But unfortunately there also serious debates and discussions on real issues facing the women in India are completely missing.

In one advertisement of a deodorant spray young two-piece bikini clad females start flocking the man who has used that spray recently. In another advertisement two girls are using the telescope to watch, admire and get fainted out of infatuation by looking at the man wearing only a particular brand of underwear. Another advertisement of an underwear shows a young man kissed in almost every party of his body by the infatuated young girls in the ladies toilet. These are only some of the examples prevalent in our media these days. The depiction of women in these and other advertisement is actually insult to the women in general but we are used to enjoy them with little concern about the female respect and dignity, which used to be the salient feature of our ancient tradition. The advertisements in the hoardings, posters and wall writings are no less offending.

Although the Press Council of India has clear guidelines on the way the media should report on an depict women, there is a lot of controversy regarding this and many newspapers are not clear in their own guidelines while tackling such sensitive issues. The fact that crime briefs are reported as simple events mostly unaccompanied by any analysis conveys a sense of media apathy and indicates the inherent belief that violence against women is a daily feature of life and does not require analysis. Some part of the blame can be attributed to the system of education has played a central role in moulding the process and patterns of uneven development and disenfranchisement in post colonial India. At the societal level, English-medium education has played a critical role in producing a modernized techno managerial elite that continues to have disproportionate influence in shaping the discursive terrain of development and thereby policies and programmes that affect the social fabric of the country. Less visibly, English medium education widens social fractures in Indian society by creating and reinforcing a social, cultural, economic, and discursive divide between the English educated and the majority.

WOMEN AND MEDIA IN INDIA

Women Journalist in Media

Women Journalist in Media In such a rapidly changing environment, women in media have a large responsibility in not only changing attitude towards women but also shaping public opinion. With women holding responsible position in newspapers or electronic media, their competency should extend to a wider area and a range of issues. More importantly, a woman journalist is expected to show more sensitivity to issues relating to women and to more meaningful insights and perspectives. Like most professions, in the media too, women have struck out boldly, beating a path, which is both impressive and inspiring. The last five years have seen them pouring out into the mainstream, acquiring hitherto unattainable positions and proving their mettle, be it the print or the television media. In short, women have become indispensable in the field. Women's organizations and media groups must play an active role in promoting this change. It is heartening that a wide variety of women's media initiatives are making a positive impact. Women have been latecomers in media profession owing to social, religious taboos which operated as social sanctions. The employment of women in media assumes crucial importance at this juncture of our economic development. Beside Independent Public Corporation of Media (DD&AIR), 13 the private owners of TV channels with ownership of Terrestrial outlets and satellite up linking facilities in country itself have flourished. This has brought a boom in employment thereby increasing the percentage of women media professionals.

The rough estimates however show that although the number of women in both the media has increased in absolute terms, their ratio to men has more or less remained static. A deliberate policy for ensuring adequate representation of women both in the public and private sectors of the media is therefore a must, not only for giving women a source of livelihood but also to ensure their adequate and effective representation, and to make the media truly national and representative in character. A significant number of women journalists are very successful in magazines dealing with various problems of women and child. With sensitivity and skill for analyzing events in depth, issues such as women abuse and exploitation, harassment of women at workplace and the trauma of HIV infected women, female infanticide in rural areas find a prominent place in such magazines.

Media, which wields immense power in a democracy - a power which is only expanding and not diminishing, needs carrying out a focused attention about women- related issues and the portrayal of women. It is, perhaps, necessary that the stabilizing force of women must be brought home to the Indian people. In every family and society, there is an ethical and spiritual space, which has been traditionally dominated by women. The principal character in Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion bemoans, 'why can't woman be like man!' The media can play

a salutary and a liberating role to give to the women the distinctive and the exclusive space, which must belong to them to enable them to generate the ethical and moralizing impulses for the entire society. The subject Women and Media is quite relevant in the present day context. From this platform the discussion on the subject is being initiated. The debate on this issue is being proposed to be discussed at the State level and the Press Council is keen that seminars and workshops on this subject are organized at different States and at different levels. I sincerely hope that this initiative will be fruitful. Let this beginning be auspicious.

WOMEN IN TELEVISION

In the era of cable and satellite television has become the part of everyday's life in almost every level of socioeconomic strata. It is one of the vast and widely accepted media in the developing world. The development of satellite television in 1991 revolutionized the content and context of television. There are a number of channels with specific content of programmes like cartoon channels for kids, health channels, devotional channels and channels especially for daily soaps (Zee TV, Colors, Star Plus.). These channels showing daily soaps basically targeted the housewives sitting at home in the afternoon. Women watch more daily soaps than man (Jyotin, 2002). But the popularity of these daily soaps is not limited only to this category of women; many working women and male also watch these serials regularly. The striking features of these serials is that it portrays women either as vamps planning some conspiracy or an ideal women who keep herself busy in performing household chores, whose main aim is to make everyone happy over sacrificing herself. But it has no relationship with reality. Though in few serials like "Balika Vadhu", "Punarvivah", "Diya and Baati" has came up to raise the bold tabooed issues related to women such as child marriage, widow remarriage and women education. But being based on these themes ultimately, they portray the submissive and sacrificing image of women simultaneously. It is also been shown in these serials that when women possess the power or excel in professions, the ego of males get hurt and gets webbed into all sorts of insecurities and inferiorities. (Karthika, 2005).

These serials exaggerate a selection of real life circumstances and assumptions. These types of programme create a world which seems very real and viewers are unable to differentiate between the contrived world and the real one. Television serials have a definite impact on thought pattern of society. Women have been portrayed as men would like to see them- beautiful creatures, submissive mothers of their children, efficient house keepers, but nothing else. Impact of television is more on the young children and adolescents. It may have an adverse impact on the attitude and behavior of adolescents. The present scenario demands of taking initiative on the part of women in making sure of presenting positive ideals of both men and women in the society by altering portrayal of damaging stereotypes (Gahulant, 2002).

WOMEN IN PRINT MEDIA

The print media include newspapers, periodicals, newsletters is one of the oldest media and has been relied upon by the people as credible source of information. The print media are known for fearless criticism and service. Print media not only reflects the values prevailing in the society but also provides platform for dialogue and discussions on issues leading to social change (Kumar. P. 1995). No doubt that electronic media broadcast the issue immediately but print media creates a more persistent and lasting effect. It has been observed that women issues generally do not get a chance to come up on the front page, unless they are rape cases, crime, sexual harassment, abuse of women or other atrocities. Even in news on issues related to women they are presented as passive victims or passive reactors to public event in news media. Visibility of women in news is widely covered on some specific days like Mother's Day, Women's Day etc. On other day's news related to women generally occupied with sensational stories of glamour, sex, domestic violence and other forms of violence. Besides Sunday and Saturday special glossy editions on women's leisure, fashion, beauty and other luxurious news items with erotic photographs are issued from time to time by daily newspapers (Dhar, Pattnaik ;1996). The presentation of women in media has changed the perception of perfection especially among adolescents. Perfection means being skinny beyond healthy standards, and fit and beautiful for today's adolescents. Ultimate impact of identifying themselves with these models of media contributes to the growing rate of eating disorders among young women. Many women now feel the need to be skinny and do so through drastic measures, such as anorexia or bulimia (Morgan S, 2012).

WOMEN IN FILMS

Films are the most complex way of communicating which may include all aids like visual, sound and drama it has an advantage over the print media and impressive impact well on illiterate audience, the movies are made on different spheres like family social drama, romance, religious stories and affairs of family and society. It's the most influencing medium with whom the audience often gets carried away and any immoral interpretation can have unethical impact on the society. The fact cannot be denied that film has bought the change in perception of society to some extent but still there is a dearth of awareness in society regarding the real status of women. There has been a shift in depicting women in film story from dancing around tress, making love with men, taking care of everyone in the house, and bounded to behave like an ideal daughter, wife and daughter-in law. Over 75 years a change has emerged in feminists across the respective time "a new wave' in the cinema has leashed Rao)1989). In the last decades many women role oriented films have come in which women are shown breaking the

barriers of stereotypical role such as in ‘Mardani’, ‘Lajja’. Many real life crimes against women are also depicted through movie such as “No one killed Jessica”.

The films like ‘Mary Kom’ depict the success story of women. But these kinds of movies are so meager that they can be counted on finger and they do not come in the list of crossing 100 crores like a commercial film showing women in songs, dance, in a situation of asking for help and men fighting to protect women. This shows the stereotypical mindset of the audience where they enjoy men and women in their traditionally defined roles. Women are hardly shown as a working unless compelled by the circumstances. She sits at home or show doing shopping even though she is highly educated. Even if shown working then the areas get specified like teachers, lawyers and receptionist. Working women often shown encountering sexual harassment and reinforces masculinity by media.

Modern women shown in films is a complete transform of patriarchal tradition women who is well educated beautiful independent but still needs a hero to save her to save her from petty thieves. New cinema and the portrayal of women may lead to myth in society. It is a prejudice mind-set that women directors must create a film related to some feminine problems.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF WOMEN ISSUES

Media implicitly rank the importance of the public issues according to the amount of press coverage devoted to an issue. Lack of appropriate media coverage of an issue leads to the implication that the topic is not important. Public awareness is significantly lessened if a story is not reported. Violence against women is a global pandemic and the consequences of media ignorance and bias are horrific. In India, the amount of coverage in mainstream media is inversely proportional to the actual prevalence of the kinds of violence and gives a false impression. Most disturbing is the disproportionate coverage of sensationalized violence. Invariably, rape stories get far more coverage than domestic violence stories. In all likelihood, this is because rape stories usually focus on one individual woman. If she is attractive, she is a very marketable victim. It is no accident that rape is a frequent theme in pornography.

The sexual brutalization of women is a highly marketable business and a profitable story for the news media. For example the Indian media, be it press or the broadcasters, choose to highlight the rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl rather than to report about the success of women in recent panchayat elections in the country. The media have no time to show the actual problems of real India at the grass root level, its culture, traditions, faiths and beliefs and so on. They usually show only those handpicked stories which sells and increase their TRPs.

Even the amount of media coverage women get overall is much less than men do. Men are provided with a larger number of opportunities to present their viewpoints and shown in diverse roles in all areas like administration, law, business, science and technology. While representation of women varies from negligible to total exclusions and are interviewed and talked about only in certain accepted professions such as educationists or doctors. If they are interviewed for achieving success in a 'male' profession, then it often goes to great pains to point out her 'feminist'.

Indian media needs to be sensitized to gender issues. It should play proactive role in inculcating gender sensitivity in the country and should ensure that women are not depicted in poor light. It should devote special slots for crimes against women in India and discuss all proactive aspects. The challenge before media is to move beyond clubbing what happens to women with routine crime briefs, on the one hand, and sensational stories, on the other. Media should take a proactive role in creating public awareness on the rights and privileges of women. Constitutional and legal rights should also be advertised and discussed regularly.

The latest rulings and judgments are discussed so that the public are made aware of these rulings. Press Council should be given more teeth so that they could intervene effectively to counteract objectionable publications. There must be mechanisms to sensitize Censor Boards and bring about a working dialogue between members of the Censor Board and citizen's groups. This is the time to rethink and revisit the country's mass media policy. There are many issues which should be discussed threadbare to have an unbiased and healthy media policy in the country. But before that materializes, the stalwarts of Indian mass media should exercise prudence and restraint, show the truth, unadulterated, untutored and unbiased news and views, unbiased analysis and non-denationalization of events or incidences whether big or small.

CONCLUSION

Media is the mirror of society and media reports are reflection of happenings in the society. Media has immense power to influence the masses and communication and IT revolution has further increased its importance. The role of media has become very important in shaping present days society. Media is the part of the life, all around, from the shows one watches on television, music on the radio, the books, magazines and newspapers. It educates people about the current issues and influences the public opinion. The common people rely on media to know about happenings in the society. Media is often considered as the 4th pillar of the society and democratic medium of information. Media has the power to pressurize and criticize the drawbacks of democracy. It is instrumental in bringing about unity among the masses and is backbone of the nation. The reach

of media to common people has increased and undoubtedly media has attained the role of a very powerful organ in virtually all spheres of life.

Today, newspapers and television channels are trying to make fast money by cashing on the news in wrong sense and wrong way. The result is that news is available in various interesting colour. Instead of giving important information and educative programmes, media is giving emphasis on sensationalizing the public. In the race to become more popular and to make more money, they have broken all the limits which they must follow while serving to build a healthy and progressive society. They have virtually no respect for the sentiments and ethics of the people and the land that they serve to.

The popularity of films in India makes one speculate the magnitude of the social consequences of such media portrayals even more. The portrayal of women in Hindi films reveals the sheer quantity and variety of violence directed towards them. Women in bollywood films are often portrayed as hysterical bimbos. Screaming, yelling and crying are part and parcel of woman's reaction to stressful situations. There is number of movies where women who assert themselves are considered 'bad' while men, even if they tease and hit women are considered 'heroes'. The Hindi film industry is a profit oriented business and the dictates of the patrons, to a large degree, limits the choices of the directors of the movies. The Indian audience also must be partially blamed for the acceptance of such mistreatments of women in movies.

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