

Woman and The Media – Gender Based Discrimination

P. Ananda Rani

Ph.D Research Scholar (Edn), VISTAS

Dr. V. Girija,

Research Supervisor, School of Education, VISTAS

Introduction

The Mass Media are important as they intend to reflect daily experience, culture and values. When we talk about ‘Women and Media’, the things that come to our mind is the depiction, coverage and perspectives of women. Women brought a gendered analysis of the mass media to the global stage in the 1970s when a multipart critique was first presented at the 1976 Mexico City conference, which opened the U.N. Decade for Women. Much of the substance of that critique remains relevant today. But women’s fight for equal representation in the media began much earlier.¹ Women outnumber men in media content of every kind. Their image and portrayal leave much to be desired. Women are exposed to media and are consumed of various media products. But the problem here is that they often don’t understand their constitution, interests, influence, motive and application. On the other hand, media/communication is vital for women’s development and the mass media play a significant role in shaping social values, attitudes, perception and behavior.² So media has its positive and negative aspects.

So, as we go through this paper let’s see some of the positive and negative aspects and what is media doing to women and for women.

I. What is Media?

Media means the tool or instrument used for imparting information relating to entertainment, money matters and education. When Media are meant for larger section of people, they become Mass Media.³ Some of the important media tools are newspaper, cinema, radio and television, internet through computers, and videos. “The media can also be educational, promoting understanding and breaking down prejudice by exposure to people and cultures that would not

¹ Carolyn M. Byerly, <https://opentextbc.ca/womenintheworld/chapter/chapter-10-women-and-the-media/>

² Kiran Prasad, *Women and Media: challenging Feminist Discourse* (Delhi: The Women Press, 1968), 4

³ Nirmala Jayaraj, *Women and Society* (Madurai: ISPCK, 2005), 469

otherwise enter our lives.”⁴ It is said that media are basically a means but when used wrongly, it becomes the end.

II. Women in Media

A general perception in most of the Indian towns is that, while men go to work in the public world, women have mainly stayed with the private sphere of the home. However, this has now changed and improved. “The essential mandate of all feminist communication research is to invent approaches to allow us to hear the meanings of women on their own terms, including the observations of the structure that curtains them.”⁵ During the last of the 20th century, the number of women working in the media rose significantly, with female reporters busting in all areas of life. Women In many of their endeavors we find women facing greater obstacles to success than men do. For example, when there is a report crime like rape, the full details with a personal description is asked by the journalist. This is a risk because it’s exposing her to social ridicule. So, the journalist has no right to impose her professional demands upon the lives of individual women and on the other hand she has no right to hold back personal details without which her report will certainly not have any value. Women have a peculiar capacity of smudging boundaries and thinking in shades of grey. It is said that when women get together, what we say, rather than the categories we belong to, stand out in our memories. No matter what the divides are, where they are, or where they’re not, women have the ability to relate to each other and to dialogue. Journalists have to extend this ability to what ever they write.⁶

Just as the media everywhere, the Indian Press, too, has predilection for events, especially dramatic ones that involve or threaten violence or conflict. As a result, here the gender-related issues that routinely receive the most media attention is those that fit into dominant perceptions of what constitutes news. Among these are violent atrocities, such as rape, and dowry-related murder and so on. “The Media’s continuing tendency to focus on events rather than processes often results in the neglect of many important issues concerning women- for example the combination of chronic malnutrition and overwork that threatens the health of millions of women, and the initiation into public life of thousands of rural women elected to institutions

⁴ *ibid.*, 469

⁵ Nirmala Jayaraj, *op. cit.*, 582

⁶ Ammu Joseph, "The Right to information and the Responsibility of the Media," *Voices* 6/1 (May, 2002): 5 of local governance from the mid-1990s onwards. When such issues do not get covered, it is thanks to women in the media, more often than not."⁷

a. Images of Women in the Mass Media

Television programmes have made use of cultural stereotypes to reinforce subservient role models for women that are major obstacles in changing social prejudices and traditions affecting women.⁸ The tele-serials as they are popularly called project the joint family system as an ideal one and an institution to be protected (by women) when in reality they are diminishing and nuclear families are increasingly in vogue (fashion or style). These joint families seen on television are not the happy, harmonious ones but full of intrigue, disharmony and on the verge of breakdown affecting relationships between spouses and other family members. "These family set-ups are the sites of oppression, violence and great distress for women. It is ironical that despite the tyranny of such joint families, women are projected as mainly responsible for the ills and disharmony plaguing in the family."⁹ Television serials do not incorporate women achievers in their stories to raise the aspirations of the viewers. Most of the programmes portray women as satanic creatures out to break their kin's families. Such projections mislead people to believe that these conditions are universal when it is not true.

b. Women and Social Life in the Mass Media

The young women and even the girl children are under great social scrutiny and control from early years. They are expected to express their feminine nature through voice and role to gain social approval. Women are impressed upon to cultivate an emotional and interpersonal relationships than having a rational outlook. Women are seen amid situations wherein their partners are unfaithful and involved in several sexual liaisons. But these situations are projected as of their own making rather than the irresponsible and immoral behavior of men. There is something more surprising than this which is seen on the screen i.e. woman characters are

⁷ Ammu Joseph, "News About Indian Newswomen: The Changing Position of women in the Indian Media Today," *Voices* 6/1 (May, 2002): 4

⁸ Kiran Prasad, *Women and Media: challenging Feminist Discourse* (Delhi: The Women Press, 1968), 6

⁹ *ibid.*, 7

shown as reassuring men that they could go ahead with extramarital affairs with their (wives) full approval. ¹⁰

c. Women in Social Media

Social media has opened a new frontier for women's rights organizing. For one, it encourages solidarity and emphasizes shared experiences.¹¹ Many women are taking to social media to narrate their stories of being groped, molested and jeered at. #MeToo movement brings to light a strain of feminism focused on community and solidarity, which reshapes the feminist project. The movement is premised on the idea that we all share responsibility for eliminating sexism, striving for a world in which no woman has to claim #MeToo.¹² After Nirbhaya case in Delhi, people were on the streets, created a social media revolution, protested. Social media is a powerful tool to express and mobilize communities to bring awareness about the issues and current affairs. However, in the recent times Women in Social media are also stalked, trolled and abused. Open source images (social media images) of women are used to morph obscene content on internet for money or pleasure. Many women who are bold and those who express through social media are stalked, trolled, abused and eventually silenced.

d. Women in Advertisement, film and Music Industry

One of the important modern fields in which women have achieved prominence and perhaps outnumbered men is advertisements. It provides them with a lucrative income, instant fame and glamour. If we take a magazine and choose seven advertisements in which both men and women are represented and analyze, certain things like what the men and women are doing, who's in the background and who's in the foreground, who is dependent on whom, who looks dignified and who looks seductive we understand that many aspects. From this we know that advertisements do not truly value the immense variety and diversity and the entire rich human potential that exist among women. By over-emphasizing their physical features women are

forced into a model of beauty and used as a marketable commodity.¹³

¹⁰ Kiran Prasad, op. cit., 8

¹¹ <https://www.cfr.org/blog/how-social-media-has-reshaped-feminism>

¹² ibid

¹³ Philomena D' Souza, *Women Icon of Liberation* (Bandra, Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2005), 117

“For any advertisement, whether required or not, a woman is displayed in skimpy sexy garments. What has a ‘Bidi’ or man’s vest, or cigarette advertisement have to do with a semi nude woman? Yet she is put there. After a great hue and cry, Indian T.V advertisements have stopped using or displaying a female form in an advertisement where she is not required.”¹⁴

e. Women in Communication

There are a lot of women involved in the, mass media- newspapers, magazines, radio, television channels and cinema. The TV producers justify the trash given out to the views is basing on Television Rating points. Woman mass communicators are still in the process of establishing their own identities and agendas. Therefore the women in media production and mass communication must play a more productive and responsible role in pursuing and highlighting issues that affect women’s lives and status in society.¹⁵ “If Women must move towards equitable future, fundamental changes are needed in the policy-making bodies of the mass media, especially, the press council of India. Censor Boards, All India Newspaper Editor’s conference and various other boards in which women are not members and therefore have no chance to express their perspectives of an event or situation.”¹⁶

III. Women in Media: Opportunities and Challenges

Just like most professions, in the media too women have struck out boldly, beating a path, which is both impressive and inspiring. Even ten years ago we cannot say that women have stormed the profession, preferring as they did to take a backseat, stifling their talents and dynamism. But we find that in the last five years there has been tremendous progress as we see them pouring out into the mainstream, acquiring hitherto unattainable positions and proving their mettle. In short women have become indispensable in the field. In such changing environment, women in media have a large responsibility in not only changing attitude of and

towards women but also shaping public opinion.¹⁷

¹⁴ Vijaya R. Dhoundiyal, Navin C. Dhoundiyal and Aradhana Shukla, *the Indian Girls* (Almora, U.P: Shri Almora Book Depot, 1994)

¹⁵ Kiran Prasad, *Women and Media: challenging Feminist Discourse* (Delhi: The Women Press, 1968), 13

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 13

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 201

Women are said to have acquired and developed certain psycho-social assets during the course of history, through their gender specific socialization within the private sphere of their homes. These traditional psycho-social strengths such as attention to life, capacity for nurturance and body intuition, facility for relationship, connectedness and communication, sensitivity for issues of peace, non-violence and ecology, spirit of sacrifice and sense of commitment, have helped them to contribute to the well-being and maintenance of the family. Women have a lot of opportunities and therefore need to make use of the opportunities. There are still problems at workplace and fields and also problems in many other areas, but the women need to take this up as a challenge. As more and more women come out of the private sphere and participation in the political process, they could utilize these strengths in the public at the service of the world-family. For this we need to have an adequate representation of women who speaks from a women's perspective in the decision-making processes. If there is such participation from women, it could affect the policies and priorities of governance.¹⁸

IV. Positive and Negative aspects of Media

Media plays a vital role in bringing both positive and negative changes in the society as media is an effective tool in communicating to the people and thereby, the thinking pattern, ideas, goals and so takes on a move.

If we look into the positive factors the media has contributed a lot by giving the news of the happenings of the country through TV, Internet, Radio and of course Cinema. By seeing and hearing the challenges that the women of our country face, the women are challenged. Media has also helped in improving education for women. It has encouraged women to at least have a basic education. Women can also contribute through media i.e. Care for life, Promote peace and non-violence, Just distribution of resources, attention for the weak, ecological concern and responsibility towards the future generations. They can make use of their opportunities and promote these areas.¹⁹

On the other hand, there are a few negative aspects too. The negative aspects are exposing women in advertisements, bringing in wrong concept of women in TV serials and cinema and

¹⁸ Philomena D' Souza, *Women Icon of Liberation* (Bandra, Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2005), 178

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 182-183

also in magazines and newspaper. In most of the newspapers, the images of women are taken as commodities for commercialization. For instance, as mentioned above even in an advertisement in which is related to a man, women are displayed. Women models are portrayed at places where it is not necessary or relevant. Women are still exposed to scandals and sexual discriminations. They are also perceived as sex symbols. So, there are many such negative aspects in media.

Conclusion

Women are still underrepresented in traditional media. According to the 2017 Women's Media Center report, women receive only 38 percent of bylines in print, TV, Internet, and wire news.²⁰ Apart from that there is a systemic discrimination based on gender in the Media. There is a widespread commodification of women in the Media which is part of gender discrimination. Social media can become a tool to bring some change in the society on gender discrimination however, this platform has also slowly been used to show male dominance through trolls and stalkers. Finally, the picture is not so gloomy, sensitized media and vigilant watchdogs can bring about the change to rectify the gender discrimination in the Media.

²⁰ <https://www.cfr.org/blog/how-social-media-has-reshaped-feminism>