

# Women and their portal in Media

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**Abstract:** *The media has been described as a mirror to society, which implies that the way women are portrayed and represented pretty much mirrors their status in society. Its reach to people at large has been instrumental though not to the extent desired in supporting the movement for women emancipation by focusing neglect and marginalization of the position of the women in society. This article describes role of media in women's portrayal supporting by various government laws meant for media which are yet not followed by the media and portrayed women's images which actually needs the attention.*

**Key words:** *Women, Media, Portrayal, Laws.*

“There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.” - **Swami Vivekananda**

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The most significant and longest social movement continuing is movement for emancipation of women. Though the primary goal for women empowerment is to improve the quality of life of women but it has also deep ramifications in social, economic and political scenario of body polity.

The last few decades have seen tremendous changes in the lifestyle of men and women across all over the globe and particularly so in our own country. Globalization, market economics and above all, fast strides in technology have affected virtually all facets of life be it religion or education, politics or employment, fashion or health care.

The term media is widely used as a short hand for ‘Mass Media’. The word media is the plural form of medium. Conceptually, the media are those technological agencies which are engaged in the creation, selection, processing and distribution of messages among the people. As a logical connotation, the mass media deal with the day to day problems of the nation and especially of the general people. It contributes towards the emergence of mass society and mass culture. Mass Media in India, like every modern and advanced country, comprises of the Print media and Electronic media which are composed of the Radio, the Television, the Film, the Press, Publication and Advertising. Among these media, the television, films, Advertisements, photography, animation, paintings etc. are regarded as the visual media.

Media in India, which until a few years back used to comprise of the morning newspaper, the radio broadcasts and the sole television network screen images of “doordarshan”, comprises today of a dazzling and at times mind boggling array of communication devices. The media, which was earlier merely a reporting device, is today a vibrant means of shaping, molding and influencing public opinion.

However, in spite of all these changes, the media has not managed to overcome the typical stereotypes that are associated with women in India. While there are certain departures from this, the fact remains that by and large, there is a huge potential for better and a more realistic projection of women. It does not require any detailed analysis to conclude that the media is in a state of confusion and are perhaps unsure of the way they want to see women. On the one hand they still have this eternal image of a woman who is confined to the boundaries, duties and responsibilities of her home and her family.

The media has been described as a mirror to society, which implies that the way women are portrayed and represented pretty much mirrors their status in society. Sharma K., Dr.Sanjeev, (2005), “Depiction of women in Indian media-A case of introspection for media planners” Samaj bigyan shodh Patrica, Amroha, Vol.1, no.1 April-Sept. pp.32-36, Dr.Sanjeev Kumar Sharma criticises the ways how Indian media both print and electronic are portraying women in the era of globalisation. The issues relating to women's are not discussed in media; rather women are used as a commodity relating to women's are not discussed in media; rather women are used as a commodity and sex object. For we live in a world where it is already predetermined by your sex how you should act, what you should wear, and how you should look. These ideals are coming directly from the media. As a woman if we see everywhere women are skinny, big busted, small waisted blondes, displayed looking happy, beautiful and half naked, how could you not associate beauty to being like them. women in bikinis, ten in mini skirts and about thirty that are just legs, butt and breast with no face since it was cut off completely, guess their brain didn't make the

director's cut. It is the continual exposure to these composited, false images of female perfection that can lead to eating disorders, aggressive dieting, low self-esteem, and so much more. Newspapers give no place to crime, politics, scandals, serious debates and discussions on issues related to women. Most of the newspapers publish only the gossips about the TV serials or film actresses. In Television also there are various serials where women are shown involved in conspiracy, premarital, extramarital affairs, wearing costly, heavy golden and diamond jewellery, little care about anything else than the individual matters. In most of the advertisements in India be it newspapers or television or magazines, the main ingredient is women and these depict the picture of women as vulgar and cheap. Roy, S.S., (2012) "Portrayal of women in Indian Media-In the era of neo-liberal economy", Global Media journal, June, Vol.3, No.1. It is true that media has brought to light, as never before, certain misdemeanours against women but in a very subtle manner it also perpetuated the stereotyped image of woman as a householder and an inconsequential entity in the traditional value system. Generally, women's problems never figure on the front page of a newspaper unless it is a gruesome murder or a case of rape. Newspapers even on women's page does not usually address relevant issues for women empowerment but reporting is concerned with beauty tips recipes, fashion syndrome etc. Newspapers cover women's problems drawing the attention of policymakers to issues requiring immediate attention such as the adverse sex ratio, infant and maternal mortality, crime against women and the effects of poverty on women and their families. But this coverage is very limited with the rest of the space occupied by cinema actresses, models, video jockeys and the rich women and their hobbies. Many of the women's magazines are devoted to fashion, glamour, beauty aids, weight reduction, cookery and how to sharpen 'feminine instincts' to keep men and their inlaws happy. There are comparatively fewer articles on career opportunities, health awareness, and entrepreneurship, legal aid, counseling services, childcare services and financial management.

At one end of the continuum is print advertisement, brief, often single-paged combinations of text and imagery to sell a product. At the other end is pornography, sexually explicit imagery created to arouse in print, television, film, and the Internet. Where does power fit in between these? Women in both these forms of mass media are repeatedly depicted in submissive, silenced, and even victimized roles. Newspapers even on women's page does not usually address relevant issues for women empowerment but reporting is concerned with beauty tips recipes, fashion syndrome etc. The media through its reach to people at large has been instrumental though not to the extent desired in supporting the movement for women emancipation by focusing neglect and marginalization of the position of the women in society.

## 2. From time to time Government has passed Government laws and legislatives like :

### **The Indian Penal Code 1960**

Section. 292 (sale of obscene books) which deals with the sale of obscene books, pamphlet, inter alia representation which shall be deemed to be "lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest", which can include obscene advertisements. Including Indian Penal Code as safety legislation to prevent the indecent representation of women in advertisements, because of one logic: "indecent representation of women can be obscene", which means that a law curbing obscenity can come of help.

### ***Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act***

The ***Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986*** was passed long back but What constitutes 'indecent' is also not defined precisely. So far the police consider only pornographic materials as 'indecent'. A case decided by the Bombay High court requires mention here. The film 'Pati Parameshwar' which portrayed a wife accepting violence from her husband as being normal was challenged on the ground that it violates the guidelines under the Act and amounted to 'indecent' portrayal of women. Under the guidelines, portraying women in positions of servility was defined as 'indecent'. These guidelines were successfully used and the court held that the portrayal of women accepting rape and violence by her husband as being legitimate did violate the guidelines. This case remains an isolated success. Much advertising that we see today can be characterized as 'indecent' for portraying women in positions of servility.

Given the growth of 24x7 television channels, there is a need to regulate the media particularly on the portrayal of women as sex objects.

The NCW recommended that Section 2(b) of the Act be modified to read as "Derogatory representation of women means the depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form of body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being derogatory to or denigrating women and is also likely to deprive, corrupt or endanger public morality or morals." As per the above definition depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form or her body or any part thereof would amount to indecent or derogatory representation if it has:

- The tendency to present a woman as a sexual object.

- The tendency to present a woman as a sexual commodity for man's pleasure.
- The tendency to glorify woman's subordination to man as an attribute to womanhood
- The tendency to glorify ignoble servility as an attribute to womanhood
- The effect of being indecent or being derogatory to or denigrating women.
- It is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure public morality or morals.

In spite of the law, gender concerns in the media is a serious concern today as the problems of women's portrayal in the media, have been agitating the mind of the Civil Society and an attempt is being made to curb this growing problem continued incidences of obscene depiction of women in television and in the media in general call for a debate on the need for effective laws against them and proper implementation of the existing legal provisions.

### 3. Important for society can cover by media like .....

Mass Media communication must be used for creating social awareness among women regarding this menace. Mostly women are not aware of their legal rights. They should be taught to lead a dignified life which is their fundamental right through media. One of the major role media can play is also to sensitize people about the above mentioned laws and to create awareness among people. Since Media is considered as the media authorities should therefore, assume equal responsibilities with parents in creating conditions that enable projection of women in a decent dignified way and promote violence free programmes.

- (i) The media must project the working women in the unorganized sector as worker and not merely as performing the duties of wife/daughter. They being major earners, they must be projected as producers and not merely consumers.
- (ii) The media should make deliberate attempts not only to project the problems of women in poverty, but should monitor in such a way that conflicting role models are not depicted, nor derogatory references to their work are made.
- (iii) To improve content and coverage, coordinated efforts for increased interaction between NGO's, women's social action group, research organizations, institutes of mass communication, and the media personnel should be developed.
- (iv) Newspaper circulation is the first mass media content to affect the way people considered their role in society. An informed public translates into an involved public. Newspapers helps to build communities. Mass media should perform on a new role in the form of radio and television, exposing the general public to sights and sounds which they never would have previously had access to.

It is essential to enlist the support of policy makers and Parliamentarians on the appropriate policy and guidelines for the media to ensure that there is no negative portrayal of women.

### 4. SUGGESTIONS:

- Empowering of women through education should be the primary concern of every civilized society. It is only with the help of education that we can make this weaker section of society a stronger one, to fight against this social evil of society.
- Woman has the human right to be a woman. She has right to live with dignity and respect because being a human being, this right cannot be alienated from her. She really wants to live a dignified life.
- The self-regulating agencies like Advertising Standards Council of India, Press Council of India, Central Board for Film Certification etc need to strictly adhere to their guidelines in respect of indecent representation of women.
- We need to have awareness generation programmes to spread awareness amongst common people and society writers, publishers, internet and mobile service providers, film makers, lyricists, advertisers etc for any wrong representation about women and also about the penalties which could be imposed on them in case of violation of the legislation.

### 5. CONCLUSION:

Everywhere the media has the potential to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. They can create self-regulatory mechanisms that can help to eliminate misleading and improper gender based programming. 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 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.

It is noticed that more and younger graduates are joining the journalism degree and diploma courses, with an ambition to make a mark in the profession, and quite a good proportion of them are girls. With the rapid expansion, almost a proliferation of the electronic media through satellite channels, with the popularity of the FM on the radio and with the growth of the print media, notwithstanding the electronic media, now there is a good scope for absorption of both men and women qualified journalists in various media outlets. The society, therefore, must make arrangements to provide adequate security to the vulnerable section of women in the media to promote their participation at all levels. We find extremely appropriate here to refer to the recommendations made by the Joshi Committee regarding positive portrayal of women on Doordarshan. But these recommendations are equally relevant to all form of media. These recommendations, if followed in letter and spirit would certainly go in long way in enhancement of women's empowerment and facilitate drastic reduction in cultural biases as well as gender biases. They are:

- There is need for a widespread understanding that the nation cannot progress, as long as women are left behind as the lesser half of society. Therefore, the improvement of women's conditions, status and image must be defined to be a major objective for media channels.
- The Government must at the earliest formulate clear guidelines regarding the positive portrayal of women on television.

Attempts to remedy gender inequality in the media are seen as key to creating an "enabling environment" for the progress of women everywhere. Gender inequality in the broadcast news and popular media takes two main forms: the stereotyping of women, and the lack of women in leadership positions within the media industry. Studies have shown these two trends to be linked – fewer women making decisions in this industry results in fewer diverse, positive, and healthy images of girls and women.

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