

Representation of Women in Media

With special reference to Indian women

ASHIMA AHMED SAIKIA

Abstract: Democracy is a system of government where people can control political power and media constitute the backbone of democracy. Media, the forth pillar of democracy is a communication channel through which news, education, entertainment, data or promotional massages are disseminated. But even in the globalization era media is not free from the so called socialization process of the society. Like the western feminist such as Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet, Bretty Friedan there are also various Indians feminist writers like Ritu Menon, Kamala vasin, Kiran Prasad who have criticized the role of media towards women and representing them.

Media's role towards women is becoming the growing concern of the feminist writers, basically regarding participation and representation of women. The problem is not only deal with the representation of women in media but also the women journalists who deal with the women's problems. Being a part of so called Indian patriarchal society the male journalists dominates the whole world of media to that extent that female journalist cannot concerned about the real problems of women. These problems are concerned in every type of media including Government control media, community centered media, or commercial media.

INTRODUCTION

“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

India, the 2nd largest democratic country of the world with 121, 08, 54,997 population and among which almost half of the population 58, 64, 69, 174 is female and to the welfare of our country it is very much important to improve the condition of the half of the total population i.e. women. The primary goal for women empowerment is to improve the quality of life including socio-political and economic sphere and communication is extremely important for women's development. Mass media as the forth pillar of democracy

has already proved to be an effective means to reach millions of people in India with a range of development message.

The media is a vehicle used to inform as well as entertain the public. The media is a carrier of information, ideas, thoughts and opinions. It is a powerful force in influencing people's perceptions on a variety of issues. The media has played an important role in highlighting women's issues. For the feminist researcher it is very much important to deal with the representation of women in media. Because for the empowerment and development of the women section, it is very much important to give them proper environment where they can raise their voices against the inequalities and the gender-gap they are experiencing in our male dominated or patriarchal societies. Along with the western feminist like Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet, Betty Friedan there are also various Indian feminist writers like Ritu Menon, Kamala Das, Kiran Prasad who have criticized the role of media towards women and representing them.

OBJECTIVE: To critically analyze the media's role in constructing the images of women in India.

METHODOLOGY: Data for this study collected from the secondary sources of data. The secondary data includes books, magazines, journals, periodicals and different websites.

DATA ANALYSIS: During the past decade, advances in information technology have facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and made an impact on public policy. Media as a part of civil society creates public opinion. It plays an important role to raising consciousness through its power. But in reality even in the era of 21st century media is not free from the so called socialization process of the society. Though the mass media is considered as the watchdog of the society, but in contemporary time mass media under various pressures have become the commercial channels only and failed to reflect the social problems. Media as the modern corporate organizations are still dominated by the male and in all the higher posts men are employed and by controlling the whole system of media they try to depict the picture of women as weak and inferior in front of the whole world. Print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. The portrayal of women in Indian media, be it films, television programmes, visual advertisements or newspaper and magazines is becoming an area of great concern to the people having interest in social research and studies. There is an on-going trend in today's media, both electronic and print, to portray women as commodity, sex objects and sometimes as victims. In a male-dominated profession, and working in some of the most violent, unstable and patriarchal societies, the dangers to women journalists might always be present. For instance a young female

photojournalist was gang-raped in Mumbai in August 2013. These problems are concerned in every type of media including Government control media, community centered `media, or commercial media. For instance in the commercial media advertisements play important role in promoting different products. Every day we are introduced to a number of advertisements through various media vehicles like newspapers, magazines, radio, television, internet and various outdoor media. But there has been much criticisms against advertisements as these are portraying women as sex objects. Women are generally found in advertisement for home products, baby items, cosmetics and food items and they are also seen in non durable products then durable products. The gender role portrayal differs from the type of products also. For e.g., Women are generally portrayed stereotypically in advertisement of entertainment, cloths and cosmetics but are not portrayed non stereotypically in aids for tobacco, travel, food and financial services. Another example is advertisement of a leading Indian youth fashion brand which created controversy for using the girl in the advertisement as 'sex-object' by showing nudity and her outfit with the word in it 'sale' as she is the product. The whole thing appears in such a way that the girl is for sale and it is disturbing. The 1974 Report of the Committee on the Status of Women (Joshi Committee Report) found that 'women are represented as wives and mothers in most TV and other media programmes. Although 36% of them are agricultural workers, women are predominantly projected as non-producers, with a decorative function, being marginal to national growth and development.

Besides the advertisements, Cinema is also one of the most important and cheapest visual medium of entertainment in contemporary India. But the commercial film industry, which is a purely profit based industry, cares little about the image of women they portray to the public. In bollywood, it is generally seen that some dialogues gain a somewhat landmark status. We have all heard the famous dialogue such as '*ja choodiyen pehen k baith ja*' (go wear bangles and sit down). It implies that a woman is incapable and useless and it resonate the message that women are intellectually and socially inferior to men. Another very common women's stereotype in bollywood is the 'Item songs' where the actresses dancing to the tune of vulgar and these actresses are classified as '*Item girls*', as the term *item* is a disrespectful slang referring to a vulgar women. Such as *Sheila ki jawaani*, *chikni chameli*, *pink lips* etc. and these item songs celebrates the sexuality of women. Because of such issues most of the feminist writers have come forward to study about the present status of women in Indian media. The world wide feminist movement has pointed out that the portrayal and employment of women in media are in a most derogatory position. American feminist Betty Friedan's work "The Feminine Mystique" (1963) where she argued in the 2nd chapter named "The Happy Housewife Heroine" those happy housewives which image was created by the magazines, television, advertising and other parts of media. Friedan shows that the editorial decisions concerning women magazines were being made mostly by men, who insisted on stories and articles that shows 'The Happy Housewife Heroine' means women is either

happy as housewife or unhappy careerists. By creating the idea that the women were naturally fulfilled by devoting their lives to being a housewives and mothers.

In India there are some feminist such as Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin who claimed in 'The Committee of portrayal of women in the Media' rightly that it is not only the physical exposure of women that is derogatory but also the reinforcement of their stereotypes that are more damaging to image and the dignity of womanhood. Shabana Azmi, renowned actress and activist said, "A matter of grave concern is that, when it comes to films, women are shown to be completely dormant, totally subservient persons. It reinforces the notion that Indian women are supposed to be that. I think the only way in which we can counter these images is to portray a woman not just as a body but also an intelligent being".

According to Raja Rao one of the biggest obstacles to women's access, participation and control of the media is the patriarchal structure of societies where men continue to see women as subordinate to them. Patriarchal attitudes of governments and media are manifest in their being predominantly male institutions which tend to view women as an undifferentiated mass of low status of society. Gender biases and gender-based discriminations therefore result in stereotyped attitudes, sexual harassment, pay inequities, discriminatory treatment in assignments and promotions, traditional gender hierarchies, including a premium on family responsibilities, lack of support mechanisms for working women and low education that deter women from joining the media or assume decision-making positions.

Feminists criticize that media fulfils the needs or represent the interest of the incorporate class elites, patriarchs and women have no space in it. The success stories of women and women's contribution to the society rarely get proper recognition in the newspapers selected for review. The important issue of women's concern such as – rise in societal violence on women like dowry, prostitution, rape, trafficking, domestic violence etc. receives extensive coverage in comparison to other issues related to women through the intensity in general is low and are issue based with low follows and in depth investigation. Moreover most of the new stories are collected from police sources and presented in the newspaper. Women's issues rarely create headlines and also failed to find a proper mention in the papers but get space only in inner pages which stand to remain invisible.

The creation of special sections for women as further marginalized the women issues as there issues were not read by the way leaders. It hampers women by treating women's problem not as a part of societal malice but excluded from it.

Further there are certain positive impacts of media such as today's media is multimedia in nature, there has been tremendous technical development which enable the news to be focused in no time, good print quality of newspaper as well as visuals which have the multimedia professionals the most challenging and demanding job sector. As a result more and more women are seen in occupying jobs in media houses. But at the same time, another contradictory picture is observed i.e., sex division of labour in the media houses and lack of women's representatives in the managerial desk. Due to the patriarchal indoctrination organization set up is to gendered and programme folios disturbed among male and female are seen to be designed. According to hierarchical task i.e., hard task to men (political news coverage, criminal page, sports news coverage) and soft touch Page 3 coverage women's columns and advertising column including children column.

As an impact of globalization more and more emphasis is seen on sensualism news related to violence against women in publishing visuals of news item. Commercial uncensored advertisement and uncensored clippings of models, film stars, sport stars are seen for sale ability of the paper by objectifying women.

The trend of transforming the news confines from information to a mere matter of entertainment and lack of news items covering women due to non marketability of gender issues is observed in today's media coverage. In print media more spaces provided to advertisement relegating the important news items to inner spaces. To the welfare of our society as well as the country, it is very much important to abolish such kind of negative representation of women in media as it is considered as the forth pillar of democracy and to reform these there are some recommendation for today's media which is discuss in the below-

- The state must formulate clear guidelines regarding the portrayal of women in media and for this purpose steps should be taken by women groups and organizations and NGOs to sensitize the public in regard to the problem of women.
- More emphasis should be cover news of women's success stories and there worth to the society.
- A wider change in the social outlook need to be brought by education, media journalist, sensitization public feedback on newspapers reporting on women issues etc. Without people's awareness to these problems the patriarchal norms would never accept media's projection.
- The rights and privileges of women's journalist in their workplace must be protected. A considerable number of women should be repeated in the media houses and adequate provisions should be made for their safety and security in their workplace.
- The wage of the journalist should be equal irrespective of their gender.

Though there are various reasons behind low projections of women in media house such as lack of women in managerial task of media policy and sexual division of work, sensualism created by the over emphasis on violence military, political clashes has over shadow women's issues, inherent lacunas of socialization process where a women has the tendency to overlook there domestic violence and private sphere activities and try to cover up due to the societal taboos associated with certainty obstructed the media coverage and finally lack of social feedback, lack of critical mindset in media houses etc.

CONCLUSION:

The presence of women in the social and public life of India has been noted for at least a century and a half now, even if they have only been intermittently and sporadically visible and insufficiently acknowledged.

The mass media in India has not made adequate efforts to discuss serious issues concerning women and prepare the women to play their rightful and equal role in society. The overall effect of the portrayal of women in media is to reinforce rather than reduce prejudices and stereo types.

Earlier authors have focused a negative portrayal of women in media, but things have improved over the years. Human tendency is they want to connect themselves to something positive. Media or the advertisements show women neatly dressed, family bound and persuading women to have aspirations and achieve them etc. Off late the media has realized that the women are the most respectable personality in India then in any other country. The way they are projected in recent tv ads is different and has changed over the years. The visual thoughts of audience has been caught by advertisers and project women as expected by audience, the mere base remaining the same i.e., to persuade audience to buy their products.

Depiction of women in media has changed and it is becoming healthier over the time. In most of the advertisements in media in recent times a women is projected as confident, extrovert, dominant and having go getting attitude rather than just portraying them stereotypically as being a homemaker.

The projection of women in media has always been controversial and a matter a debate. The way women are portrayed in media should be positive. Women should be presented in different roles; she should not be projected as only a product user but also a product maker. In advertisements portrayal of women should not be vulgar but rather then she should be shown as confident, independent and empowered individual. This portrayal of women in media has led the National Commission for Women to recommend amendment in the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act), 1986 to prohibit any representation of women indecently via advertisement or writings, paintings, figures or publications or in any other manner and for such related matters. Though this act is enacted by government of India, unless the common people, corporate sectors,

advertising company and the women who represent herself in media will not practice the various aspect of the law in real sense the question or the debate regarding women's representation will not be end.

REFERENCE:

1. Menon Ritu (ed), "*Women who Dared*", pub: National Book Trust, India. 2008. p.p 1-25.
2. Friedan Betty "*The Feminine Mystique*", pub: ww.Norton and co. America 1963.
3. <http://lawyerslaw.org/the-indecent-representation-ofwomen-prohibition-act-1986/>
4. <http://cwlsc.wordpress.com/2013/11/17/unrealistic-and-sterotyped-portrayal-of-women-in-indian-cinema-sagun-sing-ba-llb-2012/>
5. Ceulemans Mileke, Fauconnier Guido, "Mass Media: The Image, Role and Social Conditions of Women; A collection and analysis of research materials", pub: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Paris 1979. p.p 16-32.
6. Protibaad, "Protesting violence against Women" voll.issue 4 , Aug 2013.

Declaration

I hereby declare that the article has not been submitted to any other publisher for publication.

Ashima Ahmed Saikia,
Sivasagar