

## WOMEN'S PORTRAYAL IN MEDIA: HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

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### Introduction

Media reflects the society as a whole and through this media, people in every nook and corner of the world comes to know what is happening in the world daily. In other words, media is the mirror through which a society could get whatever information they want. It is a powerful tool which can create a radical change in the society. As it is influential, it can bring modification in the life and status of women also. It may consider the difficulties suffered by women and point out the solutions.

Indian society is a male dominated one. We can see this in every aspect of life, be it in household, industry or in any field. Media is not an exception to this. As a result, it tries to portray women as feeble and nether. Media's positive approach in portraying women is necessary to overcome this situation. Women have the same status, equality and dignity as men. By spreading this message, media can bring a substantial change in the attitude of society.<sup>1</sup>

Media can be categorized mainly as Print Media and Electronic Media. Print media consist of newspapers, magazines, etc. Electronic media include radio, television, films, internet, satellite and cable television networks, etc. One of the important factor included in both type of media is advertisement. The day to day affairs of media is running from the income collected from these advertisements. So, we can say that without advertisements there may be no existence of media at all.

### Print Media

Print media include both newspapers and magazines.

### Newspaper

Newspaper has become the part and parcel of common man's life. Nowadays, technology has developed a lot. Through the invention of internet and all, just a click on the fingertip is enough to get whatever information we needed. Still, newspapers did not lose its credibility. Many have the tendency to believe whatever is written or published in newspapers. Because of the male domination in this field, news articles published in the news papers relating to women are very rare such as a rape incident or an obituary. Rare instances are there when some newspapers come out with issues regarding women in sports page or in page 3. Otherwise, it mainly deals with politics, regional news and business. Majority of the newspaper readers are men. On the other hand women may not be having time to read newspapers after all their household works.

Newspapers are interested in printing those items which can create a sensation and thereby increasing their copies. This was what happened in the Nirbhaya case<sup>2</sup>. On the other side, media's stand up for justice for Nirbhaya has created a spur and as a result of this, the Government and police were aroused and brought the criminals before the court straight away. Even judiciary was also acted quickly. This was what happened in Jisha case,<sup>3</sup> Jessica Lal murder<sup>4</sup>, Priyadarshini Mattoo<sup>5</sup> etc.

All these incidents shows that the attitude of press towards women is changing. Nowadays, prominent place is there for issues relating to women also. Articles by women authors, topics relating to women empowerment, etc. are finding space in newspapers. This is a positive sign and by continuing this woman's problem can be solved to some extent.

### Magazines

Women's presence in magazines is somewhat higher when compared to those in newspapers. Some magazines are specifically for women only, however, in the case of general magazines, women's

participation is still less and it mainly deals with politics, business, etc. The magazines which are specifically for women deals with cooking recipes, fashion tips, modelling, novels and others.

This trend is also changing nowadays. Vanitha, a fortnightly women's magazine, which is in Hindi and Malayalam deals with women, contains articles of women achievers who had suffered severe hardships in order to attain their position. This may be an inspiration for those ordinary women. Similarly, another monthly magazine in Malayalam language 'Sambhadyam' (Savings) which deals with business matters contains reports on business initiatives of women entrepreneurs who have succeeded in both business and family matters. Most of them are ordinary housewives, who with or without the help of their family have achieved greater heights. This may be an encouragement for those ordinary women to come forward and start some business according to their ability. This is a welcoming trend. Popular magazines like India Today, The Week, Outlook, etc. are also having articles dealing with women empowerment, business women, essays of women writers etc.

### **Electronic Media**

This is the age of technological development. With the advancement of electronic media, we can observe online what is happening in the world at the particular time. Like every other medium, electronic media have its own merits and demerits. Television and internet are the main constituents of electronic media.

### **Television**

The most widely accepted medium by people all around the world is television. Different varieties of channels are there dealing with History, Geography, Wildlife, News, Health, Movies, Serials etc. It is upon the viewers to select whatever they want to see. Among these varieties, the most preferable for women are serials. According to them, what is flaunting in serials is experiencing in their daily lives. But the reality is vice – versa. Serials are highly exaggerated real life incidents. Most of the stories may be mother – in – law, daughter – in – law relationships. The characters will be wearing heavy costumes and all. Most of the women will be watching these serials in order to know what dresses or what costumes these characters will be wearing. In reality, watching serials is a sheer wastage of time.

T.V Serials like Balika Vadhu, Punarvivah etc. had shown women empowerment. Balika Vadhu deals with child marriage and in Punarvivah it is widow remarriage. Still, most of the serials women are portrayed like subservient and their only job is to take care of her husband, in laws and children. There has to be a change in these types of portrayal. Now a day's women is in equal parity with men in all fields. So, serials has to be in touch with reality.

### **Films**

Films are one of the most important visual medium for entertainment. It can influence the society in such a way no other medium has. For example, as a result of the release of film 'Dhoom', so many robberies happened in the same manner.<sup>6</sup>In the same way the portrayal of women in movies may also have an impact on the society. Almost 90% of the movies are male centric. The heroine does not have any role other than singing, dancing around the trees with the hero.

In most of the movies, they are delineating the rape victim as a shame to society. Men may not be ready to marry her. Everyone visage at her as though she is some sort of an untouchable. These many misconceptions they will be portraying through the movies. They were making viewers compelled to think that a rape victim's life will be a total desolate. A real life rape victim who sees these types of

movies may also think in the same way. This may force her to end her life. So not only obscene scenes or dialogue had to be curtailed but also these types of portrayal have also to be controlled.

Now a day's women centric films are also gaining importance. Courageous directors are there who are taking this risk in this male centric industry. Vikas Behl's 'Queen', Sujoy Ghosh's 'Kahani', Madhur Bhandarkar's 'Heroine' etc. are some of the hit movies which come under this category. However, these types of movies are very rare when compared to the male centric commercial masala movies. Films like 'Dirty Picture', 'Hate Story', Ragini MMS series of movies, etc., the portrayal of women were so indecent and vulgar. Still, it got permission from the Censor Board for exhibition. Proper implementation of legal mechanism is essential to curb these types of movies.

### **Internet**

The most recent development in the field of electronic medium is the Internet. Today we can't imagine a world without internet. That much influence it is having in our daily lives. Like its use, its misuse is also higher.

The most important and indecent portrayal of women in internet is through pornography. It is the most extreme expression of the use of women's bodies as objects of desire, fantasy and violence.<sup>7</sup> It depicts vulgarity and indecent representation of women. Persons who were watching these types of videos may be addicted to this. This may lead to the increase in rape cases. In order to satisfy their sexual desire, they may attack any women who come in front of them. This was what happens in Jisha's case.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, morphing is another way of committing indecent representation of women. Morphing means altering one image into another through a seamless transition.<sup>9</sup> Through this, a person who is having some vengeance towards a woman may use her photo and change it with the face of other women who may be a porn actress. So, if a person who does not have any knowledge about this may think that it is the same woman he knows. In reality, the face is only hers and the body will be of others. Doing this type of illegal activity is in order to defame the woman. So many incidents are reported as part of this morphing. Actress Mona Singh's case is an example<sup>10</sup>. Usually actresses are the victims of this type of illegal activities. This does not mean that common women are escaped. They are also suffering a lot from these types of activities.

The Information Technology Act, 2000 is the most important legislation enacted by the Parliament to curb these types of illegal activities. Stringent punishments are prescribed in the Act in order to control these types of menace. The most important difficulty in the proper implementation of this Act is the extra – territorial operation of the internet. The State must discuss this in detail in order to solve this problem.

### **Advertisements**

Advertisement is an important part of mass media. The main agenda behind advertisement is to catch the attention of the viewers to the product advertised. The role played by women in these advertisements is very important as they play dual roles as consumers and influencers. Women's portrayal in Indian advertisements is entirely different from those in the western media. In case of advertisements regarding western media, women's portrayal is sexy in all aspects. Their main aim is to attract the consumers.

In India, women were featured in advertisements regarding household items, nutritional supplements, fairness cream ads, clothes, jewellery, etc. This was the condition from 1980 – 2000.

But now women were featured in almost all ads without considering whether she is needed in that ad. For e.g. In men's fairness cream ads or aftershave lotion ads also we can see a woman either as mother or girlfriends. Most of the women showing in these ads were slim bodied and fair. This can create an inferiority complex in the mind of women viewers who does not have a fair complexion. In the ad of one fairness cream, we can see that the father of the girl is compelling her to marry the boy who is having his own house, well settled and having a job. The girl seeks the advice of her friend and she is suggesting the cream. After applying the cream, she became fair and beautiful. Then she tells her father that she will marry only after attaining equal status with the boy. These types of ads may create an impact on the mind of young girls who were dark skinned. This may led them to think that they are not beautiful at all and they have to obey what others will say. They could not achieve anything because they are dark skinned.

In another advertisement of a soap, a woman reporter who is using that particular soap is selected by the VIP from the crowd to ask questions. She is selected for the reason that her skin is glowing and she is clearly visible from the crowd. All these ads create a bad impression in the minds of young women. In order to become slim they may not eat anything at all. This can leads to even health problems.

This is not the case of all ads. Advertisements which show women empowerment is also there. In the ad of Viva N Diva, acid attacking victim Laxmi is the model<sup>11</sup>. Acid marks on her face is not an obstruction to the brand to portray her as their model. Another is the ad of JSW Steel. Wrestler Geetha Phogat has acted in it. It shows how she has achieved greater heights in her life. So with the changing time and circumstances ads are also changing and giving the same importance to women like men.

### **Legislative Enactments**

Different legislations are there in order to prevent the indecent representation of women in different types of media. The most important among them is the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986. It prohibits the indecent representation of women through advertisement, publication, writing, painting or in any other manner. It covers both print and electronic media. Next is, the Information Technology Act, 2000. Section 67 of the IT Act prohibits indecent representation of women in electronic media. This section gives stringent punishment also. Another enactment is Section 292 of IPC, which deals with the prohibition of sale of obscene books, pamphlets and advertisements. The next one is Young Person's (Harmful Publications) Act, 1956. It punishes harmful publications. Then the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995. According to this Act, women must not be portrayed in a manner that emphasizes passive, submissive qualities and encourages them to play a subordinate, secondary role in family and society. Next is Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees life and liberty to all citizens. In addition to this the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, The Cinematography Act, 1952 etc. are other acts which deal with the prohibition of indecent representation of women.<sup>11</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In a democratic country like India, we could not underestimate the power of media. In the same way the media does not have any unrestricted power. Whatever is published in the media can be subjected to the scrutiny of the court. Media as a powerful medium must divert from its stereotypical representation of women. Now a day's woman has achieved equal status with men in all fields. So a positive portrayal of women is necessary to encourage those common women who want to achieve something in their life. Media must act as an influencer rather than a negator.

**(End Notes)**

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