

Media and Women

Dr. Chandralekha J.S

Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Dept of Journalism, Davangere University

Abstract:

The omnipresent media significantly shapes societal perceptions of gender, frequently disseminating stereotypes and discriminations. but on the other hand, it offers opportunities for women 's empowerment and challenging age-old patriarchy system and gender bias.

Portray of women in Indian Media

Media being mirror to society, especially electronic media such as cinema or TV programmes reflects its ecstasies, struggles, and intricacies, and its impact on society and popular culture are immense. Media has potentiality to alter the attitudes of people. It is considered as catalyst agent for bringing social and cultural changes too. In Indian society gender biases and inequality are major problem areas. Basically, Indian society is characterised by peculiarities of stereotypical norms that men and women follow and film and TV industry reinforces these norms in their films and programmes too. Indian film industry has rich diversity. The stereotypical portrayal of women in Indian media regrettably, has been a persistent major concern. It has become standard where women are constantly depicted in an objectified and sexualized manner. India as a developing country has undergone massive economic and social transformation despite this progression, the film industry endures to spread gender inequality, misogyny, and patriarchal attitudes. The film industry also portrays women as glorified beauty objects, symbolising sex appeals and entertainment.

Mainstream Indian cinema has restricted itself to define sketches of womanhood dominated by patriarchy. Women receive lesser and stereotypical representation tied to traditional roles of wives, lovers, and mothers. The main protagonist or independent and intellectual role are hardly given to a woman. The objectification and sexualization of women in Indian films have been normalized.

In most of the Indian films, women are shown in provocative outfit and are portrayed as mere sex symbol/object emphasizing that a woman's value lays in her attractiveness and beauty. This depiction not only lessens the worth of women but also strengthens gender stereotypes. Women are not just objectified, but they are also repeatedly portrayed as weak or damsel in distress, which perpetuates the notion that women need to be saved by men. This is how their identity is shaped in films. This has led to harmful trend where women are portrayed as soft target of violent crimes such kidnapping and rape. In mainstream cinema stalking and eve-teasing by male protagonist is depicted and glorified as love. In many mainstream movies, female characters fall in love with these abusers.

In mainstream cinema an "Item number" is a must to be commercially successful. It is a sexually charged song and dance sequence performed usually by women. An item number reduces women to sexual objects. It is also used as a tactic to attract audience.

The objectification of women in films sends a message to society that it is acceptable to treat women as sexual objects. The derogatory portrayal of women in Indian cinema has real-life implications. Due to this

reason women are objectified not only in films but also in society. This kind of glorification of toxic masculinity sexism in media has triggered anti-social activities leading to gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination.

In recent times, portrays of women in Indian cinemas are glorifying hegemonic masculinity, socially destructive behaviours such as misogyny, homophobia and violent domination.

Challenges faced by women in media

In this modern era also, there is still a prevalence of gender bias in an imperceptible latent form. The major concern is women's lack of access to media professions. Women were sternly underrepresented in newsrooms, television and radio stations, film production and ownership of media outlets. Even though women are being given ample opportunities the main challenge women journalists and media professional from media industry including actors face on daily basis is of gender bias. Predominantly the media industry remains male-dominated. Women journalists and media professionals often face discrimination and bias in relation to employment, pay and promotions. The lack of representation in leadership roles are also major challenges women face. The presence of patriarchal media environment is found in Indian media landscape. In such situation women are not only underrepresented in respect to media organization ownership and information production but are also deprived from holding up top decision-making positions. Underrepresentation in news production arose through the U.N. Decade for Women (1976-1985), with leaders pushing the United Nations to fund women's news and feature services in the 1970s and 1980s to increase global news flow from progressive women's perspectives. They also gained funding for research on women and media and generated their own research. Two examples are the Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists and the World Association of Christian Communicators (WACC). The latter of these is among advocacy groups that sponsor research aimed at enabling strategy-building for women's equality in the media. WACC's (Canada) periodic study *Who Makes the News?* focuses on women's representation in news worldwide, while the International Women's Media Foundation (United States) conducts research on women's status in news organizations. IWMF also recognizes women journalists for courage in reporting with an annual "Courage in Journalism" award. Such groups offer workshops to teach media professionals how to include gender angles in news. Women have made slower progress in communications governance and policymaking, at national and international levels, so these remain important areas for critique and action. Programs such as USAID-funded Women's Edition have given women strong foundations for journalism careers.

Gender disparities are more evident in media content too.

Gender discrimination

The key findings of the study reveal that most of the women journalists in Karnataka are involved in doing soft news rather than hard news or hardcore journalism. Moreover, due to prevalence of gender dynamics and security issues, women journalists either need to be content with fewer opportunities than their male counterparts in this field or leave their jobs. Factors such as discrimination in work allotment, poor working environment, inadequate sanitation facilities are some of the difficulties that women have to encounter in their profession. In addition to these the absence of clear guidelines and in-house policies regarding maternity leave also pose problems for married professionals. In the absence of an appropriate institutional frame work it becomes a laborious task for female journalists to consolidate their position within the organization and work towards career growth. Compounded to these, the lack of family and

society's support are some of the bottlenecks that women journalists regularly have to negotiate in Karnataka. Without taking into consideration the factors and issues that ultimately define a woman's entree and position in hardcore journalism, it would be insensitive to claim that journalism is a profession where only men can excel and women are not fit for the profession. In order to make the journalism arena more women-friendly and responsive, what becomes essential is to find out effective measures that could help tackle the issues, which women regularly face as hardcore journalists. Greater media organizational responsibility, proactive initiatives, academic research, policy follow-up and better training in safety and prevention of violence against women could be measures that could help in this regard. In addition to this a little appreciation and acknowledgement for the women journalists, who while working in a challenging environment and amidst difficulties are constantly trying to meet the highest standards of professionalism, could be the first step towards encouraging other women to enter into the field and sustain successfully. With recent proliferation of the modern mass media, women being vulnerable section of the society should be provided with equal opportunities in various media outlets. The society must see to it that womenfolk are provided with adequate security and support to survive in the media industry by promoting their participation at all levels.

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. Plural nature of Indian culture and the diverse roles women play is neither acknowledged nor communicated. These results in stereotyped images and role specifications of women in unidimensional projection of their reality'.

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. If implemented effectively can reduce gender equalities and bias drastically.

The following are the recommendations made Joshi Committee

1. The women's issue one of the utmost significances to the country as a whole and 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.
2. The Government must at the earliest formulate clear guidelines regarding the positive portrayal of women on television. This portrayal must take note of women in all facets of their lives: as workers and significant contributions to family survival and the national economy: it must further endeavour to integrate women on terms of equality in all sectors of national life and the development process. These guidelines must emphasise that the "women's dimension" must from an integral part of all programmes and not be merely confined to Women's Programmes, nor to isolated attempts to discuss women's issues.
3. The number of commercial formula films screened must be drastically reduced, the cheap song-and-dance sequence totally eliminated and the content of such programmes carefully scrutinized in terms of their portrayal of women.
4. Women must not be portrayed in stereotyped images that emphasis passive, submissive qualities and encourage them to play a subordinate secondary role in the family and society. Both men and women should be portrayed in ways that encourage mutual respect and a spirit of give and take between the sexes.

5. The foreign exchange resource should be spent on importing worthwhile educative programmes, particularly those that show the roles, lives and struggles of women in neighbouring and other Third World countries so that a greater understanding and a shared perspective on problems is built.
6. It is necessary to ensure that a large number of rural women gain access to TV. Therefore, in the placement of community TV sets preference should be given to the meeting place of Mandals; Mahila Mandals should also be involved in the community viewing arrangement.”

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 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.

Worldwide, women journalists and professionals face increasing offline and online attacks and are subject to disproportional and specific threats. The gender-based violence they are exposed to implies stigmatization, sexist hate speech, trolling, physical assault, rape and even murder. UNESCO advocates for the safety of women journalists and collaborates with partners to identify and implement good practices and share recommendations with all parties involved in countering attacks against women journalists, as recognized by numerous UN resolutions.

Indian cinema's major concern is of the sexual objectification of women which needs to be coped. There is need for media and film industry to be more responsible in what kind of film they produce and how they depict women in their films. Indian cinema has to promote egalitarianism, which challenges traditional stereotypical roles. It is need of the day too. With this approach the media can help to create unbiased and just society where women are valued for who they are and not just for their bodies.

The main emphasis has to be on the change of mindsets and on addressing issue on diversity of issues such as stereotyping, prejudice, and inequity in the workplace. The media industry on the whole must try and work to identify messages that improve and equalize the stigmatized groups' belonging at work, and to illustrate how mindsets can improve people's responses to and experiences with evident and understated biases at work.

The orthodox attitude towards women working in the journalistic profession is also more. The interest and aim towards journalism to a large extent depends on existing notions and perception about the profession reflected in the society. Many families consider journalism as a risky profession with no timetable. Therefore, it is essential that robust and proper counselling at various levels in order to attract women's entry into the profession is conducted. In this regard, government, educational institutions as well as media organizations could collaboratively play a crucial role in creating awareness that will ultimately lead to change in mindsets so that women are allowed to choose journalism as a preferable career option. Only by addressing issues about gender bias, sexual harassment, work-life balance, lack of representation in leadership roles women journalist can excel in their professional life. By raising awareness of these challenges and working to address them, one can create a more inclusive and equitable media industry for all.

Reference

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