

The Representation of Women in Mass Media.

Dr Rana Indrajit Singh

Associate Professor

I.S.S.S. Government Degree College, Pachwas Basti

Media is one of the most pervasive and powerful tools for viewing and projecting new images and messages. Media insinuates its messages into our consciousness, many of which perpetuate unrealistic, stereotypical, and limiting perceptions, e.g., women's images. Media is not only a mirror of society but also an instrument of political, economic, cultural, and social change. It should be used to attack social evils and help in the fight against various kinds of socio-cultural inequalities present in our society. Although the form and content of mass media have changed dramatically over the years, the mass media have played a decisive role in reinforcing gender stereotypes and in reinforcing patriarchal culture by constructing new meanings and images and by setting an agenda for the public for opinion through selective themes and viewpoints.

Women for long have been excluded from playing an important role in various kinds of media. But with the advancement of women's rights and feminist movements women have gradually started contributing to the outside world and empowering themselves. Today around 24- 35% of the total population of women contribute to the media(in India). With the increasing contribution, the portrayal of women in the media is changing but the pace is plodding. Media that influences all sets of people through newspapers, television, films, and others has provided a wider social change. But doesn't have changed the way women are portrayed by the male gaze. Women have been portrayed daily in the media as commoditised objects, advertising their bodies to sell the products of all MNCs and local companies. In films, women given important roles are quite less. In media coverage some specific gendered vocabulary is seen being used to showcase masculine and feminine issues, there is a presence of sexism in media. Although there is a positive shift still much work is needed to eradicate women's treatment as the inferior sex and having inferior status.

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISEMENTS:

We all are living in the age of advertisements. Advertisements are called "*the cave art of the 20th century*". When you step out, just take a quick look around and you will lay eyes upon at least one advertisement in whichever form. In today's modern world of trade and business, advertisement plays an essential role. All traders, big and small, make use of it to advertise their goods and services. Today all forms of media are flooded with advertisements generating huge revenue but having little to do for the cause of feminism and other gender-sensitive issues. The language of advertisements is more about the consumer than the object to be consumed.

Gender stereotyping in the media, where women are under-represented erroneously implies that men are the cultural standard and women are insignificant or indiscernible. It propagates patriarchic hegemonic ideology. The portrayal of women in media, across the globe, to sell various products to the consumers with a female face or images though the target product users/consumers could be male or female both have been extensively used leading to gender stereotyping. Women's face or body images have been predominant factors to draw the attention of the consumers to capture the market because such imagery has an impact on individual and family decision-making and ultimately on the sales of consumer goods and services. Such gender-based promotions of products are the most common strategies of advertisers to establish strong connections with brands.

These adverts also implicitly but effectively eclipse the image of "another world" of Indian men and women—poor and battered, tribal and peasant, working-class and Dalit—from public discourse. Most of the present-day media has become highly profit-driven. Within modern advertisements, gender is probably the social resource that is used most. Typically men are portrayed as active, adventurous, powerful, aggressive, and largely uninvolved in human relationships. Whereas images of women as sex objects that are usually young, thin beautiful, passive, dependent, and often incompetent and dumb. Female characters devote their primary energies to improving their appearances and taking care of homes, family, and friends, enmeshed in relationships or housework. The media relays the cultural image of women as dependent, ornamental objects whose primary functions are to look good, please men, and stay quietly on the periphery of life. Although women feature in various categories of commercials, they tended to be prominent figures in the commercials for grooming aids, household goods, and food; while men were prominent in the advertisements for medical aids, and agricultural, industrial, and electronic goods. Women are featured predominantly as housewives. On the other hand, men are either depicted as professionals (scientists, doctors, executives, etc.) or their occupations were unspecified. The latent messages of these commercials are more demeaning than their manifest messages.

The matrimonial advertisements of various famous websites are also seen promoting commodification and colourism through the kind of menus they provide, and their 'success stories' visually reinforce the invalidation of dark-skinned women.

Another important distinction is the face-ism phenomenon in the commercials, which consists in showing the entire figure in the case of women and close-up shots in the case of men. The first method lowers the receiver's estimation of the intelligence of the person being shown. The second more often evokes positive associations. This gender stereotyping further goes on under a few processes, e.g., commoditization of gender, commercialization, glamorization, or objectification of women's bodies and images.

According to a recent UNICEF study, 49.6% of characters in Indian advertisements are women, they make up 59.7% of screen time and 56.3% of speaking time but when we put some context into it the story changes. Women in Indian ads are nine times more likely to be presented as "*stunning*", six times more likely to be shown in *revealing clothes*, four times more likely to be depicted *partially nude*, and five times more likely to be *sexually objectified*.

These trends in advertisements promote the negation of the 'real women'. The woman which we see in media advertisements portrays not the real but an image of a woman that suits popular and dominant perception (males' viewing) and simultaneously helps in capturing a lucrative market. Such reconstruction of women's bodies and image when in the media is a contradiction to her reality, the fact is, women, emerge as a "*commodity in the market of popular culture*".

Though the post-global market economy claims to have openings for gender parity and economic empowerment and liberty for women, stereotyping of women's images and bodies through media has resulted in dangerously marginalization, categorization, and selection of gender in Indian society. Media instead of taking the risk of bringing gender equality tends to conform to and reinforce dominant patterns of patriarchic demands of visual pleasure and acceptability.

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN FILMS:

It could be said that without women there is no cinema at all. But their representation in films is highly limited. They are mostly used as a piece of glamorous attraction. Most of the women shown in Indian films are depicted as gentle, heartless, ruthless, subservient, and glamorous, with mostly fewer speaking lines compared to male characters. The item song culture is still highly popular with girls dancing to meaningless vulgar songs like "*Gandi Baat*", "*Choli ke peechey kya hai*", etc. in tight revealing dresses as sexual objects.

Also, it is often seen that aged male actors act with actresses who are far younger compared to them but it is rare to see vice versa. Cases of casting couch are also highly popular in the cinema world. Female actresses are highly impacted by ageism and they are also generally paid less compared to the male actors accompanying them. The ratio of movies passing the **Bechdel test** is still not satisfying.

Although a positive shift is visible with increasing female representation in films (like *Pink*, *Dangal*, *Lipstick Under My Burkha*) with important speaking roles, better portrayals; having more opportunities with the advent of independent OTT platforms, the cinema world is still dominated by the male gaze. The cinema audience is also highly responsible for this slow shift as we see that it is very difficult for feminist movies to make the list of the top-grossing movies at the Box Office.

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN JOURNALISM:

Journalism has always been a male-dominated field. Although feminist movements and increasing awareness has increased female contribution in the field of journalism, female reporters and journalist still have to deal with a lot of prejudice against them. Sexism still persists in new media. We still see that *hard topics* such as war, politics, sports, and economics are male-dominated and *soft topics* such as lifestyle, entertainment, and spirituality are female-dominated. The current reporting culture also promotes male domination.

A clear prejudice is visible when we see the reporting of 'gendered' subjects such as rape, heroism, war, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. It's often seen in the case of reporting sexual assault against women that there is intentionally or unintentionally, an implicit narrative of victim-blaming with tendentious reporting. But it is not visible in the case of assaults against men.

We often observe that women's success stories don't get adequate place and coverage in news and media reporting. Women achievers usually are subjected to irrelevant even distasteful queries asking them colorful and spicy details about their appearance and personal life, such as their penchant for beautiful sarees, visits to spas, etc. to emphasize their feminine qualities, not achievements.

I believe the journalists fostering feminism need to be more vocal and critical about the way females are being portrayed in journalism and should make the world believe that they are not liabilities and that they can also report and present what their fellow male journalists are doing.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the media world still represents women in a prejudiced manner to cater to the dominant mass ideology instead of trying hard to challenge it in the best way possible. We need more vocal and aware people to raise their voices against these issues. There is a need for stronger laws, plans, and organizations to improve women's representation in media. The tendency of presenting women as a sexual commodity for satisfying men's pleasure or the glorification of women's subordination to men as an attribute of ideal womanhood needs to be countered in a proper way. Currently, the highly competitive commercial culture is preventing the media to act as the "real mirror of society". Media is often seen promoting popular perceptions with very few exceptions. While men are represented as brand ambassadors, women are shown as brand commodities. This type of representation is not only consolidating gender stereotypes but extending them across generations.

REFERENCES

- [1]. www.Wikipedia.org
- [2]. www.wionews.com
- [3]. <https://khabarlahariya.org>
- [4]. Chaudhuri, Maitrayee. "Gender and Advertisements: The Rhetoric of Globalisation."
- [5]. Jha, Sonora, and Mara Adelman. "Looking for love in all the white places: a study of skin color preferences on Indian matrimonial and mate-seeking websites."
- [6]. www.arcjournals.org
- [7]. Ahmad, Fareed. "REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN T.V AND FILMS IN INDIA."