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WOMEN IN MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

A majority of people in India consciously or unconsciously tend to believe that movies, or for that matter media in general, are often said to be the reflection of the society. Whether the media truly reflect the society or not, there's no doubt that media have a big socio-cultural influence on the society. As far as showing women in advertisements is concerned, things seem to have only worsened over time. There has been much criticism of Television advertising of some commercial products like cigarettes, laxatives or articles of intimate wearing apparel on moral grounds. These advertisements arguably encourage sexism. The depiction of women in Indian media is simply shoddy and at times vulgar. Both men and women should be portrayed in ways that encourage mutual respect and a spirit of give and take between the sexes. The media can play a salutary and a liberating role to give women the distinctive and the exclusive space to enable them to generate the ethical and moralizing impulses for the entire society. Before empowerment of women can be achieved it is necessary to enable women to give voice to their experience, their sufferings, and for society to understand them as human beings and respond to them with sensitivity.

KEYWORDS :

Media's Role in empowerment of women in India

Communication is extremely important for women's development and mass media play significant role. It is to be noted that the growth of women's education and their entry into employment have contributed to the growth of media. In all spheres of life whether for controlling population growth, spread of literacy or improving quality of life for vast masses, women have crucial role to play. However, women can be expected to play this role when they become conscious of their strength and are not deliberately marginalised by male domination. In this context, media has an important role to play – to create awakening in women to achieve their potential as the prime movers of change in society. In today's world, print and electronic media play a vital role in effectively conveying a message that needs to be conveyed.

The depiction of Women in Indian media, be it films, television serials, news, media, visual advertisement, or modernized traditional media, is indeed an area of great concern for people having interest in social science research and studies. In most of the advertisements of recent times too, a woman is either washing clothes and utensils, cooking, serving food to family members or trying to make her husband feel better who's at that time reading a newspaper or suffering from cold. Comments in newspaper articles have found some of them objectionable and violating the requirements of good taste and sometimes offensive, some objections have also been made to the appearance of scantily clad women in some commercials.

By and large the media scene in India is that media does not address serious issues about exploitation and inequal treatment to women in different spheres but is keen in reporting sex related incidents by way of sensationalizing news of atrocities on women. Thus instead of highlighting the exploitation of woman they end up becoming one of the reasons in increase of violence, as their coverage more often tend to glorify the crime against women. It is true that media has brought to light, as never before, certain misdemeanors 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 (veejays) 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 in laws happy. There are comparatively fewer articles on career opportunities, health awareness, entrepreneurship, legal aid, counseling services, childcare services and financial management. Prominent newspapers only publish 5% of women related issues and 8% are published on the main page and the remaining are placed inside. Study showed no importance is given to development issues of women.

In the television serials women are the central characters, but they are portrayed largely as lady villains or victims while the men very often take sideline and just seem caught in a web of unfavourable circumstances. Television culture has portrayed a breed of weak, indecisive men ensnared by sexy women when in reality men also play an active role in oppressing women in various ways including subjecting them to physical assault, rape, pushing them into the sex trade and even abandoning them. It is only desirable that serials should be close to reality and give message to the viewers where and how the society is going wrong. 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. The NCW wants to include new technologies like MMS and the electronic media and some which were left outside the ambit of the Act like posters and TV serials which perpetuate stereotypes of women.

Negative images or just portraying reality is not enough as it can often be harmful. It has been observed that sheer duplication of the dark side of life can often lead to apathy and passivity. This can be avoided by depicting the positive images or success stories of women in whatever sphere they happen. There is a need to produce programmes that talk about income generating schemes for women. Unfortunately, in these kinds of ventures typical "womanly jobs" like papad-making, sewing, embroidery, pickles making etc. are propagated. Emphasis should be given on non-traditional skills which can break the myth that women are suited to certain kinds of jobs only. A systematic survey of the existing schemes (Government/non-Government) and presentation of the analysis and changes needed to upgrade the schemes is essential to make them more purposeful. The distance between women and media not only deprives the women of their right to information and knowledge but also keeps the women in the dark regarding the blatant misuse of the female and the distortion of the truth. Although the images of women as reflected by the different mass media in the country are not very different, it will be an interesting exercise to study how these images feed and reinforce the stereotypes The distortion of realities by the media has increased the gap of understanding between the different sections of society.

Effective informative communication is one of the most important channels for the growth and development of women in the informal or unorganized sector, as without information regarding services and benefits available through legislation, government schemes, banks and voluntary organizations, women can hardly take advantage of them. 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. Various studies were undertaken on the women and media to ascertain how the media portrays women and how the women related issues are presented, how much significance is given to them. Such study has revealed that issues pertaining to development of women are never emphasized adequately. Women are portrayed not for feminine beauty and artistic portrayal but for infusing sex appeal more often than not entering the arena of obscenity. It is necessary to have dispassionate in-depth study by social activists and media to ascertain why obscenity has risen so much in media. Unless there is any change in the social perception of women, it will be difficult to curtail obscenity in media.

Under these circumstances, women in media have a large responsibility in not only changing attitude towards women but also shaping public opinion. With women holding responsible position in newspapers or electronic media, their competency should extend to a wider area and a range of issues. More importantly, a woman journalist is expected to show more sensitivity to issues relating to women and to more meaningful insights and perspectives. Like most other professions, in the media too, women have struck out boldly, beating a path, which is both impressive and inspiring. The last five years have seen them pouring out into the mainstream, acquiring hitherto unattainable positions and proving their mettle, be it the print or the television media. In short, women have become indispensable in the field. Women's organizations and media groups must play an active role in 'promoting this change. It is heartening that a wide variety of women's media initiatives are making a positive impact. A significant number of women journalists are very successful in magazines dealing with various problems of women and child. With sensitivity and skill for analyzing events in depth, issues such as women abuse and exploitation, harassment of women at workplace and the trauma of HIV infected women, female infanticide in rural areas find a prominent place in such magazines.

Journalism is no more a male domain. This new trend has also led to a change in the portrayal of women in the media in general and newspaper in particular. It will not be out of context to mention here the success of 'Khabar Lahariya'. A group of eight women belonging to backward class bring out this paper from the Bundelkhand region. This paper which is being funded by an NGO was started with an aim to encourage women to fight for their own rights. Such kind of initiative are required in every nook and corner of our country, so as to empower the women at grass root level. In remote rural areas a woman journalist and particularly a reporter is a novelty, not easily accepted and assimilated in the social milieu. The result is media women have to work almost in isolation particularly at the ground levels. The cases of sexual assault and harassment of women reporters are very often reported. It is noticed that more and more young 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, there is a good scope for absorption of both men and women qualified journalists in various media outlets. Women, young and old, are prepared to weather the risks. 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.

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 condition, status and image must be defined to be a major objective for media channels. Women must not be portrayed in stereotyped images that emphasize passive, submissive qualities and encourage them to play a subordinate secondary role in the family and society. Mass media play a unique and important role in the shaping of a society where men and women enjoy equal rights. Raising women's legal awareness is important for the creation of an egalitarian society. This is reached through several means, including psychological, social, economic, philosophical, awareness of human rights, political and so on. The role of media is important for being successful in all the mentioned spheres. Both men and women should be portrayed in ways that encourage mutual respect and a spirit of give and take between the sexes. The media can play a salutary and a liberating role to give women the distinctive and the exclusive space to enable them to generate the ethical and moralizing impulses for the entire society. Before empowerment of women can be achieved it is necessary to enable women to give voice to their experience, their sufferings, and for society to understand them as human beings and respond to them with sensitivity.

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