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# REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN MASS MEDIA

***Dr. Rupali Debbarma***

***Assistant Professor, Department of Law, Gauhati University***

## ABSTRACT

*Media's role towards women is becoming the growing concern, basically regarding participation, performance and portrayal of women. A larger part of individuals 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. There is no uncertainty about it that media have an immense socio-cultural influence on the general public. However, as we probably aware that Indian society is male dominated and this dominance can be seen everywhere and unfortunately media is not the exception to that. Female bodies have been exposed to a maximum possible extent through print and visual media. The physical impression of women body has been utilised to sell several consumer products, for example food to floors, from cars to creams, from perfume to popcorn. The standards of beauty being imposed on women by external sources are much contested and complicated process and need to be understood within the age-old socio-culturally milieu. In addition, the political economy of 'women image' and its commercial exploitation by selling and purchasing 'beauty' and consumption of it also requires serious concern. Hence, this paper endeavours to give a worldwide image of portrayal of women in the mass communications. Furthermore, this paper examines representation of women in the media through feminist critical discourse analysis in order to explore dominant ideas of gender and femininity embedded within discourses that restraint the lived experiences of women. It also features various legal provisions relating to indecent representation of women.*

**Keywords:** Media, Indecent, Representation, Women, Legality.

**ISSN (O): 2584-2196**

## INTRODUCTION

The utmost important and lengthiest social movement ongoing is movement for liberation of women. Though the key goal for women empowerment is to advance the quality of life of women but it has also deep implications in social, economic and political scenario of body polity. The Government, judiciary and social action groups are captivating positive action to provide women true dignity in economic, social and personal areas. In endeavour the mass media have a key role reporting wrong-doing following up remedial action, mobilizing public opinion, bringing about social transformation and highlighting positive developments. The outline of value in any society is reflected in the contents of mass communications. The way subjects dealing with women are treated indicated to a great extent the prevailing attitude of the society towards women.

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 can be both positive as well as negative in terms of the position and views of women as well as a powerful mechanism for education and socialization. In the modern world, the importance of the media cannot be underestimated. The media today matters more than at any other time. It is known as the fourth Estate[1]. Media has proved to be one of the important instruments of social change in Indian society. In the corridors of social change institutions, it is observed that media promotes consumer tastes and values, often alien to Indian culture and traditions. There is far too much sex and violence, portrayal of women is sexists and stereotypical.

Female bodies have been exposed to a maximum possible extent through print and visual media. The physical impression of women body has been utilised to sell several consumer products, for example food to floors, from cars to creams, from perfume to popcorn. The standards of beauty being imposed on women by external sources are much contested and complicated process and need to be understood within the age-old socio-culturally milieu. In addition, the political economy of 'women image' and its commercial exploitation by selling and purchasing 'beauty' and consumption of it also big concern today. Overall, the media treatment of women is narrow and continually reinforces stereotyped gender roles and assumptions that women's functions are that of a wife, mother and servant of men. This is especially so in advertising.

**ISSN (O): 2584-2196**

Portrayal of women in media, especially in advertisements has been an important topic of research and public argument since a considerable time. The present study has been conducted to find out the types and trend of the portrayal of women in Indian TV advertisements. Advertisements are the most powerful means of social communication. It is an important tool used by the marketers or companies, organizations to promote their goods, service or ideas to the perspective customers.

Both Feminist movement and Women liberation movement have also played a major role for redefining the long-established gender roles, especially changing the role and status of women in the society. Unprecedented numbers of women were participated in the workforce and became financially independent. But advertisements though are considered as the reflection of the society; they fail to depict this accomplishment of women that are evolving over the years; rather it prefers to follow the traditional gender stereotypes with the hypothesis that as they are well known to everyone, it will be easy for the recipient to comprehend the content of the message without any doubt. Generally, the main attention of the advertisements is on men: their concern, their actions, their accomplishment, their woes, where the significance of the women are marginalized. Thus, woman with intellect, self-assurance, independently and productively undertaking the responsibilities and contributing efficiently in society was rarely seen in advertisements. Rather the body and body parts of the women are depicted excessively and unnecessarily in advertisements. In India though the gender roles are getting little bit relaxed in household chores, many roles still remain firm.

## STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The status of women in any society and community is the true indicator of its advancement and a factor that helps to define and rank a nation. India has a rich culture, where women were worshiped as incarnation of goddesses. According to Manu, one of the great law givers of ancient India, where women are honoured there resides the God.

The journey of the Indian women from equivalent status in ancient times through the setback of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many social reformers, has been exciting. Although it is generally believed that from 19 th century onwards the status of women has improved, but according to the feminist writers, “modern development paradigm has marginalized women and their status and deteriorated it as compared to the pre-colonial times”. This gives rise to much confusion regarding the status of women in India; as on one hand they are given equal power by the constitution as their male counterparts, the flipside is they still

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have to tolerate silently the social evils like dowry death, female infanticide, eve teasing, rape, domestic violence, low literacy rates, Witch hunting etc. In traditional, patriarchal society like India a woman had a subordinate status; she is identified not by her personality; but by her role as a daughter, wife and mother in a family. According to the first literary treatise, i.e. Rig Veda, though early Vedic families were patriarchal in nature, women were never denied to their rights, they have some control over the household and enjoyed equal status with men.

But in the Post-Vedic period there was a gradual decline in the status and position of women. In India due to the prevailing customs and traditions of the society like child marriage, sati pratha, widow harassment, mainly the patriarchal joint-family system, rules of ownership of the properties, etc. women started losing their status in society, which they had attained in the Vedic age. The patriarchal family became very powerful during this period which began to restrict the activities of women. The majority of women were "looked down upon as a temptation and hindrance in their march towards higher development".

According to Manu, the progenitor of Hindu race, girls are supposed to be in the custody of their father during their childhood, under the custody of their husbands when married and under the custody of their sons as widows; she should not demand for independence. Even the status of woman is assessed as equal to that of a Sudra, the lowest in the caste hierarchy by the society. With the beginning of the medieval period in India, the status of women in India again got a push back. Pardah system not only prevalent among the Muslim women, but also practiced by middle class Hindus. Child marriage and sati also became widespread and polygamy was practiced. Muslim men could divorce their wives easily. The freedom of the women was restricted. The role of an ideal woman was defined by the Muslim writer as “an ideal woman speaks and laughs rarely and never without a reason. She never leaves the house, even to see neighbours or her acquaintance. She has no woman friends, gives her confidence to nobody, and her husband is her sole reliance… If her husband shows his intention of performing the conjugal rites, she is agreeable to his desires and occasionally provokes them.

During the British rule, the position of women in India again underwent a drastic change. Socio-religious movements, started by various social reformers against the social evils that led to the subjugation of women and resulted in various socio religious reforms. The participation of women in the freedom movement of India under the leadership of Gandhi helped the

**ISSN (O): 2584-2196**

traditional house-bound women to emerge as a powerful instrument of political action. Educational institutions for women were set up in major cities. In 1947, with the freedom of India, the numerous provisions of our constitution heralded a new era of equality for Indian women. There came a great change not only in the status but also in the position of women in the society. Women crossed the boundary of domestic sphere and became the career women. The new Indian woman is full of confidence and determination and financially independent. Hardly any aspect of life is left which she has not explored.

But after more than fifty years of independence of India; the perception that women are subordinate to men still persists. According to Arundhati Roy, "as Indian citizens we subsist on a regular diet of caste massacres and nuclear test, mosque breaking and fashion show, church burnings and expanding cell phone networks, bonded labour and digital revolution, female infanticide, and the Nasdaq crash, husbands who continue to burn their wives for dowry and our delectable pile of Miss World". In spite of all the constitutional and legal provisions, the representation of women in parliament is marginal. Still the value of a woman is judged by her outer beauty not by her intellectuality. Over eighty percent of picture appeared in media are obscene and vulgar. Advertisements are omnipresent and Because of their ubiquitous nature the message they convey to the society, especially about the image of women, carries much importance. The main purpose of advertising is making money by selling the images of perfection to its perspective consumers and that perfect images most of the time are women; who believe to have good brand recall value, to grab the attention and provide "desirable" images for the advertisements, irrespective of their relevance to the advertisements or products starting from alcohol to automobiles.

women were mostly shown as sex objects, physically beautiful and subordinate to men, in advertising. They were most often portrayed in home settings and for household products. After the industrialization as women started to work in increasing number, the gender role portrayals in advertisements have changed according to the changing roles of women in society. The image of the ideal woman began to be transformed. Women in advertisements became central characters and were portrayed as working outside the home, in non-traditional, progressive occupation.

**ISSN (O): 2584-2196**

## OBJECTIVES

- Objectives is to examine representation of women in the media through feminist critical discourse analysis in order to explore dominant ideas of gender and femininity embedded within discourses that restraint the lived experiences of women.
- The objective of the study is also to find out the types and trends of different Role portrayed by women in Indian TV advertisements and its impact in the society.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is a doctrinal. The objectives of the paper are achieved largely through the use of secondary sources. The secondary sources relied on comprise of data found over internet, books and journals. It has also been necessary to rely on primary source which includes the statute law and regulations and case laws.

## WOMEN AND MEDIA

During the past decade, advances in information technology have facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, private attitudes and behavior, especially of children and young adults. Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. More women are involved in careers in the communications sector, but few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy. The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in public and private local, national and international media organizations.

## PRINT MEDIA

Indian should be proud of having a free and responsible press. An investigating journalist of a leading daily newspaper proved in December' 98 that women were sold in Andhra Pradesh. The elder of Rajya Sabha were shocked to hear that women were being sold in the market place like cattle even today. Both the Supreme Court judgment on Shah Bano and the Roop Kanwar 'Sati", brought forth a spare of reportage and editorial comments. The heinous act of female infanticide was brought out only through the press. Dowry deaths moved from the confines of the home to the front page. These incidents highlight two major points. One that women are still treated only as commodities that can be sold and bought and thrown away if unwanted a reflection of the damnable discrimination and indignity that women suffer in various parts of

the country. Second, it highlights the role of media in making it public, however only a few sensational issues are flashed in the newspaper. Normally, it is lamented place in the newspaper. A few newspapers carry women's page which is again the beauty tips, recipes and fashion syndromes.

## ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Television is widely known to represent and reinforce the mainstream ideology of contemporary western culture: patriarchy. While television representations of women have changed greatly in the last twenty years alone, in order to accommodate the changing role of women in society, one is led to ask how much the ideology has changed behind the more modern representations of women. Television is regarded by many viewers to be the most 'real' form of media. If this is the case, then it is important for us to question how real the representations of women are on television and how this affects the attitudes of those who watch.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND WOMEN

While discussing the role of women in media sector, it is no women difficult to ignore the contribution of social media, modern tool of citizen journalism, in improving the representation of women. Women, acting as citizen journalist on various platforms of social media are claiming for their rights with firm determination. This process has revealed some excellent trends which are to be introspected carefully. It is certainly a very difficult task to draw a complete picture from these emerging trends but we have recently witnessed some incidents which can serve as reference points to understand the role of women on various platforms of social media in improving their social and political status. First incident was the gang rape case of a twenty-three-year-old girl in New Delhi.

## PRESENT CONDITION OF WOMEN

Building egalitarian societies is one of the priorities of modern democratic states. 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. The media can promote and speed up the reforms in progress, or, on the contrary, it can hamper their implementation.

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A number of international conferences and conventions have voiced and publicized the need to break public stereotypes through change in the media policy. Mass media, however, continue to reproduce discriminatory stereotypes about women and portray them in sexist ways. As a rule, women are portrayed in a narrow range of characters in mass media. If we were to divide mass media into two categories, such as fictional and news-reporting, then in the former, women are often associated with the household or sex-objects, and in the latter category, they lack roles.

Only in a limited number of news programs do women appear as main actors or experts. One of the reasons for this situation is the smaller number of women in these spheres, but even the existing number of women are underrepresented compared to their male counterparts.

In advertising and magazines, women are usually portrayed as young, slim and with beauty that meets the accepted standards. Women with this kind of appearance are often associated with sex objects.

Femininity, as well as masculinity, are not biological, but rather, cultural constructs. Representations and manifestations of femininity differ across cultures, time and societies. Femininity is culturally and socially constructed by the family, education, the public, and to a larger extent, the media. In this respect, the long-term change in women's images in media could help change the perceptions and stereotypes women face in a society.

In the initial stage of its history, media were managed exclusively by men. The media images of men and women were tailored to men's preferences. In other words, men were creating media images of men and women they wished to see in reality.

Fragmental display of the female body and fragmentation of women's body in advertisements promote the objectification of women's bodies. When the TV screen or a commercial poster displays only slender long legs, prominent breasts or thighs, it is difficult to perceive that body holistically and as possessing personality.

In addition, the portrayed female characters are largely influenced by the beauty myth. They have flawless skin, slender stature and embody all components of beauty as perceived in society. As a result of globalization this myth is increasingly generalized across cultures and societies. The standards of beauty as portrayed in media, however, are impossible to achieve, since the models have been transformed into these images through a number of technical

**ISSN (O): 2584-2196**

means. One of the reasons of discriminatory images of women in media is the fact that media products, as a rule, are created by men, in men's tastes and for men. In all areas of media women were still facing problems in achieving equality.

## CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS RELATING TO OBSCENITY AND INDECENT REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

The Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

The Indian Penal Code in Section 292, 293, and 294 IPC mentions laws to restraint obscenity. The terms obscenity, indecent, or vulgar are difficult to define, as they are intricately linked to the moral value in a society. The test of obscenity is whether the tendency of the matter, charged with obscenity, is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall. Obscenity deal with sale, hire, distribution, public exhibition, circulation, import, export or advertisement, etc. of any matter which is obscene. What is important is the need to protect society against the potential harm that may flow from obscene material and to ensure respect for freedom of expression which have to be balanced with free flow of information. In spite of all these provisions, there is growing indecent representation of women or references to women publications, particularly in advertisements which have the effect of denigrating women and are derogatory to women. Though there may be no specific intentions of these advertisements, publications, etc. to have an effect of depraving or corrupting persons.

Therefore, the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986 was legislated to effectively prohibit indecent representation of women through any publication, media or advertisement. The object of this Act is to prevent depiction of the figure, form of body of women in any indecent form which is likely to deprave, corrupt, and injure the public morality or morals.

The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 provides for the regulation of

**ISSN (O): 2584-2196**

representation of women in the media. It prohibits indecent representation of women through advertisements, books, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner. Section 4 prohibits the production, sale, hire, distribution, circulation, sending by post any books, pamphlets, slide, film, writing, drawing, painting etc., which contain indecent representation of women in any form. Yet advertisements showing women in an indecent way are aired day in and day out and hardly any action is taken.

The National Commission of Women (NCW) has suggested modifications in the Act and elaborates upon ways to strengthen it and make it workable so that the objectives can be achieved. The Constitution of India guarantees equality to women and also provides special provisions which empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

(i) Equality before law. (Article 14)

(ii) The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i)).

(iii) The State to make any special provision in favor of women and children (Article 15(3)).

(iv) Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to public employment (Article16).

(v) The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)).

(vi) To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A).

(vii) The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42).

(viii) The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46).

**ISSN (O): 2584-2196**

(ix) The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people (Article 47)
(x) To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)).

## Case Laws:

1. Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharastra (AIR 1965 SC 881: (1965) 1 SCR 65): In this landmark case, a bookseller was booked under IPC for selling unedited and expurgated edition of "Lady Chatterley"s lover" the case laid down what has come to be known as "test of obscenity." It says that obscenity must not be judged by a word, here a passage there. The work as a whole must be looked into and seen as to how it impacts the society, reader as a whole. In the words of the court, "where obscenity and art are mixed, art must be so preponderate as to throw the obscenity into a shadow or the obscenity so trivial and insignificant that it can have no effect and may be overlooked. It is necessary that a balance should be maintained between "freedom of speech and expression" and 'public decency and morality' but when the latter is substantially transgressed the former must give way.

2. Chandrakant kalyandas Kokodar v. State of Maharastra and Ors (AIR (1970) 1396, (1970) SCR (2)80): It was held that there were no fixed rules to determine obscenity. "The concept of obscenity would differ from country to country depending on the standards of morals of contemporary society.

3. Chandra Raja Kumari v. Police Commissioner, Hyderabad (1996 Cri LJ 2725 (Del)): It was held that right to live includes right to live with dignity or decency and therefore holding of beauty contest is repugnant to dignity or decency of women and offends Art.21 of the constitution.

## FINDINGS

If news content is the final outcome of a series of steps involving the participation of a number of individuals, role of women in shaping and determining news agendas become very important. Many efforts are to be put in this direction. Technological evolution has to play a very important role. As we can see, new media forms are creating an alternative culture. Greater mobility and acceptance of women in public spaces is a necessary condition of a healthy and modern democracy. A free flow of information is an essential ingredient of open and democratic societies. There can be no full freedom of the press until women have an equal voice in the news-gathering and news dissemination processes.

## CONCLUSIONS

Women and their concerns are no longer invisible in the mass media. However, the task of changing the media images of women is made far more difficult by the subtle changes in the way mass media portrayed women. Old sex roles stereotypes have continued in new forms. The ideological construction of women in multi media and commonalities in the images indicate the way media structures are a linked to market forces. Nevertheless, women's groups and activists have continued to work towards changing the media images of women and voice their concerns. Women need to be vigilant and struggle against co-option and marginalisation of women's issues in the mass media.

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