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Role of media in portaying women in India: With special reference to audio-visual media

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Abstract---Mass media is a prime stakeholder which transmits different sorts of messages to the larger level of society. It has a crucial role in terms of socialization process among the people. Human evaluation has witness about the contribution of Mass-media in mobilization of common people in different revolution throughout the globe. During Indian independence movement role of mass media too played a unique role to create a shape, the outlook about women through several audio-visual sources. In other words media is a way through which it demonstrates the challenges and obstacles faced by women in the society. The women are portrayed as a commodity in patriarchal society by the so called mass media in the era of post capitalism. The popular sorts of mass media such as cinema, advertisement, serials are showing the women as 'Daily Content' instead of a powerful and inevitable stakeholder of social development and prosperity. Therefore it can be attributed to domestic and social violation of women in everyday life. Whenever a woman is victimized then the media again put pressure by expositing her details address, name and physical description too. Till 50's-60's portrayed women as submissive, supportive and a home maker .This research paper is an attempt to analyses role of mass media in shaping the image of women in patriarchal Indian society and its socio –cultural impact in near future.

Keywords---media, influence, woman, patriarchy, violence, feminism.

Introduction

Mass media is the primary means of communication used to reach the vast majority of the general public. The most common platforms for mass media are newspapers, magazines, Radio, Television and the internet. The influence of both print and audio-visual media is tremendous in shaping history. None can be denied of its importance. The role of mass-media in different revolutions like Arab-Spring, American Revolution, French revolution, Indian freedom movement is very significant which helped in shaping the history. Like any other country; in India also media is one of the chief agencies in bringing women's issue into public-sphere. It occurred chiefly during National freedom movement, but the way how those feminine issues were brought into light and those issues are important to consider. No doubt media during that time was dominated by Sita-Savitri model of Gandhiji and focused on arising the militant womanhood. Media portrayed women as being able of caring for both household and country even by being powerful remaining within the confinement of Indian tradition. This trend remained intact till 60's and 70's. However with the advent of audio-visual media in the 80's paradigm of portraying the women has been changed. Therefore, it would be interesting to know the role of media, especially the audio-visual media is portraying women in India in the light of two trends viz. Traditionalist or Revivalist and Liberal or Modern.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this paper as follows

- 1) To highlight the role of media in portraying women in India
- 2) To study the functions of the media from a feminist perspective.
- 3) To figure out the issues associated with women presented in mainstream Indian Media.

Methodology and Sources

The methodology used for preparing this paper is historical and analytical method. The paper is based on the secondary data collected from different secondary sources like publish literature of subject concern, books, website, online Articles, journals, magazine, newspaper etc.

Results

Media has a huge role to play in Society. The common people take up the subject in the same way as one of subject presented in the media. India also has a huge impact of media on every generation. Studies on Women Portraying in Indian media, especially in audio-visual media, have shown certain aspects. These results are

- 1) There are two trend of women's portraying appear in Indian media. One is Traditional and Stereotyping; other is liberal. Women are portrayed in traditional way from the 1970s-80s. The traditional trend was changed since 80s but mainly seen in Indian media depicting women as "Other's".

- 2) Patriarchal hegemony is seen in the Indian media. Media played an influential super-structure in construction of the hegemonic discourse on women.
- 3) In India, the media seems to be playing the role of dominant Consignor. But today a few serials, Movie, short film strongly present the question of women's identity and rights, which is a positive aspect.

Theoretical interpretation of media's representation of women

While analyzing media from feminine perspective it is crucial to know that till now media not only in India but across the globe dominated by men folk and patriarchal ideology. Due to which media is also regarded as a source of women's violence. Now to know why media is like that we need to focus upon John Berger's famous article 'Way of Seeing'. Here he gives a detailed account of how a painting is the reflection of the mentality of painter. Our mindset is so prejudiced by our surroundings that we do not let the objects of our painting to speak naturally, rather it is we who make them speak, and in a way that pleases us. Hence he says all images are man-made. (Berger, 1972)

Thus, when the revivalist or the traditionalists portray women as submissive it must understand that it is the mentality of those media people who are portraying 'their' women as submissive and they are doing it for their own pleasure and interest. It is their intention which gets reflected in the women's nature and not the intention of the women herself. In the patriarchal Society, to maintain male dominance, some discourses are generalized in such way that the women themselves start thinking of themselves as subaltern. Like in case in India, media seems to be played as influenced Superstructure to generalize some stereotype idea about women. Sacrificial nature of women has long been cherished in India but when media project it to be natural. It must understand that it is trying to indoctrinate society in the ideology in which it itself is indoctrinated.

Due to such reasons, post-modern thinker Richard Rorty talked about 'Representational Truth'. What media think to be the nature of women (that is according to traditional loving and according to liberal-rational) is just a represented fact and represented by the men folk. Thus, it represents only what men want from women. In this regard psycho-analytic film-critique Laura Mulvey is very significant who said that 'media is playing the role to enable the men to live out their imagination.' (Mulvey, 2001) Thus, with the help of mass-media, the 'patriarchal ideologists' rather than portraying the true nature of women trying to satisfy their own desires through their ways of seeing women.

Again Lacan's mirror image says that when a child sees a person it feels like seeing its own face as if the person is mirror for the child. (Jacques Lacan, 2001) In the same way media act like a mirror where the nature of women gets reflected and interestingly as the child tries to imitate the person creates self-image or ego formation occurs. But is it really the image of women? Another post-modern thinker Derrida said that relation between mind and reality is not direct rather the relation between the two is mediated. That is which we think to be true may not be true in reality but it has become a truth, for we have adopted it to be true forcefully and this process is result of constant projection of something by

someone from outside. For example, a woman who is very traditional in her way of living but eventually she become a hater of herself for not being able to be up-to-date. She has noticed the way of living through mass-media and since unable to imitate she thinks that she is far away from reality.

Nature of media in portraying women in India

In the year 1987, when science and technology was at its zenith: an astonishing act of 'sati' took place in Deorala, Rajasthan. No doubt the act was barbaric and revivalist in nature but more astonishing was the support it got from both the rural India and the urban India backed by mass-media. The renowned newspapers of India 'Indian Express' published an article written by Asish Nandy named 'The Sociology of Sati' (05.10.87), another newspaper 'Stateman' published an article 'Tyranny of Elect' (05.11.87) written by Patrick D. Harrigan. In these articles sati Roopkunwar was portrayed as 'Rajput Heorlene'. Since all the feminists were severely against the act of 'sati' these writers accused them to be the agent of modernity and cultural imperialism. Here devices of audio-visual media like screen play, tape recorder, loudspeakers, video-cassettes etc., were also used to glorify Roopkunwar sati. Here it should be noted that this act of 'sati' received huge support not only from rural India but also from the national capital, Delhi. So here question arises, the media with its influencing power along with traditional trend of portraying their 'ideal women' can lead to what kind of future?

Media critique C.E. Friedman says that in media women are portrayed as 'daily content' in bedroom, kitchen, sex, baby (as mother) and as homemaker. In India at present the number of movie, serials presented as female self-being is almost 30%. Most of the female characters of books, daily serials, movies use these spheres as women's sphere. By doing content analysis of some Serials arrived from some popular T.V channel of India seems that those serials sending some hegemonic message about women to the society. Serials like 'Kumkum Bhagya', 'Kahani Ghar-Ghar ki', 'Saathiya', 'Sah vhi kabhi Bahu thi' etc., and female characters like Pragya, Tulsi, Gopi bahu etc., and negative characters of serials try to indoctrinate that good women are sacrificial and self-interested are like witch. In most of the serials or movies women are often shown as the main source of any crisis or clash. Those Daily serials are very popular among women and middle age men. So those audio-Visual media defiantly Irony is that these serials or female characters showing sacrificial and submissive nature of women often get rewards. Though in 1952 the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) was established to ban the serials or the movies showing the over-submissive and over-indecisive nature of women but till now the trend is going on and CBFC seems to be total failure.

The worst effect is mirror role of media in Lucan's language. This helps in creating a structure that is violent in nature and it also naturalizes violence against women. Teasing, rebuking, insulting, ignoring, denying, blaming, beating, discrimination etc. are the most common crime against women and media naturalizes these. In this regard view of media critique. Venzoole is significant who asserts that media socializes the gendered characteristics liberating women.

Thus, the second wave of feminism in India is influenced by its contemporary western way of seeing women which is rational, scientific not submissive but decisive and possess personality. Up to this level it is women friendly. But what is the implication of this modern or liberal trend of feminism upon media? How they have adopted this novel understanding of women?

Here comes a very dichotomous role of Indian media. No doubt some perception of this novel trend of feminism was adopted by a portion of media but most often by individual right, media mean that women have the right to dress in any way, short dress or exposure of body doesn't mean that the women is bad right to have sex with anyone that she want etc., instead of emphasizing on women as an 'agency' of social reformation, women in peace-making process, women's contribution in making the world better etc. Internet, social networking sites, movies, commercial news agencies are its main channel. One more ironical fact with liberal trend of feminism and media is that it co-incidentally grew at the time when India was on the edge of globalization. Very soon the liberal trend was co modified by commercial media and thus, this more liberal media tried to be (by portraying women as the sex symbol and then saying that it is result of women's right to sexuality and body) the more violent it became, i.e, more negative consequences it brought. As a result of all these, women today is more and more objectified as an object of sex, more and more as commodity as well as consumer rather than a producer. All these can be best reflected in different kinds of advertisement like beauty products, jewels, washing soap, kitchen, deo, furniture and all other consumptive commodity. Through such advertisements it has been naturalized in the mindsets of people that women's existence has relevance only in domestic household. Like for example, one can observe in few particular advertisement of male's perfume a girl is seen to be seduced by the fragrance of the perfume which is merely not necessary. This is hegemony created by the capitalist class to sell their product and this hegemony protects both the dominance of the capitalist and the patriarchal.

Regarding pornography, Catherin Mackinon said that it is in no way a portrayal of mutually consented and enjoyable sex, rather it perpetuates male's violent attitude towards women.(Mackinon,2005) Although pornography is legally banned in India but with the wide spread escalasation of internet, MMS, and nature of movies hardly keeps and distinction from pornography. Thus, in the name of liberating women, media in India is actually co modifying women. The result is that the government was bound to promulgate Acts like – Indecent Representation of Women (prohibition) Act, 1986 and 2012. These are actually evident of the fact that when women demand right to control over their bodies the patriarchs may use it as scope to project a new 'image' of women which satisfy their interest.

Besides these, another worst feature of Indian media is that on the one hand it support western version of women on the other hand when a woman get humiliated it leave no stone unturned to publically rape a woman by exposing her name, address, family identity even her face and condition of the body after getting raped is exposed. Nirbhaya rape case of Delhi (2012), GS road rape case of Guwahati (2013),Priyanka reddy case of Hyderabad (2019) etc., reveals that media focuses more upon whether the girl was out of home at night, whether she was with a boy, whether she was wearing shorts and drunken. Moreover media reveals

how many men were there while raping, for how much time she was victimized etc., but such suspicious questions are rarely raised against the men committing rape. Their references in news remain implicit. Thus, victimization of women is a source of profit for media. This is the sexual double-standard of Indian media.

Thus, from the above discussion one thing becomes clear that neither the true nature of women is submissive or so much explicit about sexual life as the liberal project. T.H. Green said that independence is the scope to individuals to do good things. It doesn't mean only right to express sexuality, there are many other forms of freedom which women need. Due to such inconsistency of media the old section and middle aged are far away from it because they don't like the ultra-modern trend and the young generation is totally indoctrinated in it. Thus, dichotomous role is both harmful to women and to society.

View women in broader perspective

The Indian media seems to be obsessed with the two definite trend as mentioned above as if there is no escape from it. One criticizes the other and also during emergency one poses the other as the sole alternative. But can the revivalist or traditional be alternative to the modern or liberal and vice-versa? From the practical experience it can realize, if the one is armed with weapons like 'Manusmriti', the other with consumerism none can protect women. That is why a new way of understanding women's image must be there and this process must not be from above to the bottom i.e., it must not be a 'projection' anymore but it has to be an evolution. And in this process of evolution we don't require government backed media or commercial media rather what required is community-media which should be controlled by mentally liberated persons devoid of patriarchal ideology. As post-moderns say that there can't be any universal truth, the time has come to defy the Indian media's insistence on projecting the 'dominant knowledge' (Andrew Hewit, 1992). Moreover a very different fact is seen in Indian media i.e., its distance from the intellectual circle of society. Indian feminism itself is against any western hegemonic knowledge regarding women. Now a days Indian feminism rarely try to homogenize its understanding of women with the west. Rather feminists like Gayatri Spwax, Mahasveta Devi, Vandana Shiva try to introduce women as they are in practical line, keeping the societal influence intact. There are also some movies that have been made; where women are portraying very liberal and independent. for example movies like 'Kahani'(2012) 'Queen'(2014), 'lipstick Under my Burkha'(2017), 'Thapped'(2020). In These movies has question against patriarchal thought and established women as independent human being. Thus, media is accused of separating the common people from the intellectuals. Media in India still observed with modernism while the feminism is at hyper-post-modern era.

Conclusion

Media is considered to be fourth pillar of democracy; thereby the role of media is huge. In a country like India, media plays a vibrant role by portraying a dynamic image of its subject and the people concerned so far. Taking under consideration of the womenfolk of India, media during the time of 50's-60's to 80's portrayed women as submissive, supportive and a home maker. The style of portraying

women in the media has changed since the 80's. there are two ways in which women are portrayed in the Indian media today; Traditionalist or Revivalist and liberal or Modern. However, with the changing era, the role of media projecting women as modernized has been a boon to some but, the one with a traditional upbringing have been outlasted as they don't fit to the notion of so-called 'Modern women' of the generation.

Media is a very powerful institution with its self-image creating Avatar. That's why it shouldn't be at the hands of a person who is of oppressive patriarchal intention. It influences society by influencing women and thus, it should be the property of community not of few individuals. So, while concluding it can be said that media should respect everyone's identity and should take care while using the power they possessed by maintaining some ethics and code of conduct.

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