

Knowledge: a multidisciplinary e-journal

ISSN: 2581-3471

Website: <https://www.vivekanandacollegeforwomen.org/ejournal>

Portrayal of women in the Indian print media

Debolina Banerjee

Guest Lecturer, Vivekananda College for Women, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

E-mail: debolinatutan@gmail.com

Abstract:

Media has always been an intrinsic medium of control. It acts as a social control in determining the role of genders in our Indian society at a large extent. And, our society being comprised of men, women and the third gender make an important element of study, how these genders are being portrayed and understood by the media. It is a matter of concern to see how media especially print media portrays women and their related issues. Women's issues are shown differently and are presented from a different perspective with a bit spicier ingredients to add up for the story. Women folks are always treated as an object of commodity and are being subjected in the market as products. This paper will focus on how the women are being portrayed in the print media in front of the society. The relation between women and the print media along with how the concept of feminism is taken into consideration by the print media will also be reflected in this paper.

Keywords: *Feminism, portrayal of women, commodity, sex objects, print media*

Introduction

Media is all pervasive throughout the Indian society. It helps us to gather information and knowledge at the same time. It is also a medium for entertainment. The media's impact on our lives is a point which doesn't have to be laboured any longer. Television, films, radio, and the printed words in the newspapers and magazines/journals reach all of us in every part of the world. By gradually shaping and constructing personal beliefs, public opinions, and people's self perceptions through the process of socialization is highly influenced by the media, where it strives to shape the ideology and thinking process of the public in general and individuals in particular. The power of creating "media reality" is concentrated in the hands of few people for which there is a distortion in creating them in every level. Media in the present time can be divided into two broader categories, namely:

- a. Electronic Media- This includes television, radio, films, internet accessibility such as social apps. It carries more immediate weight by focusing on various day-to-day issues.
- b. Print Media- This comprises of newspapers, periodicals, newsletters, magazines, journals and other channels which are relied by the reader as credible sources of education, information and entertainment. It has a persistent and lasting effect on its readers.

Society comprises of men, women and the third gender, where till date the discussions on the third gender have been critical and negative mainly in our Indian society who are always belittled as well as looked down upon and humiliated by the major population. Although, the women's issues are a bit different from the third gender, where the women are considered as part of the society but unfortunately women have always been subjected as weak, passive, listeners and receptors whereas the men are encoded with terms such as power, active, speakers and actors of the society. Sex stereotype roles are very much prominent in the media. The way women are been projected in the print and electronic media is a reflection of the society itself.

Rationale for the Study

The present study will focus on how the women are represented in the print as media as commoditized object for the market. Women are considered as subservient and submissive in relation to men. The portrayal of women in the print media is a cliché issue and had not been given that much importance. Alongside, the women are sensitized, commoditized and projected as sexual objects by the press. Even the women's issues are not given a proper coverage. There is gap being noticed between the Indian print media and the women centric issues.

Relevant Review of Literature

The functioning of media is very subtle in our society. It plays a crucial role in dissemination of information. Media has an essential part to play in community development. Mass media had played a great role in saturating the industrial world. Thus, it is rightly called the fourth pillar of democratic polity. In this age of information all the printed words, films, television, radio reach all of us and become a perfect mode of communication. Communication is

extremely important for women's development and welfare where mass media plays an important role (Chopra, 2008; Sharma and Justice Roy).

WOMEN AND MEDIA

The Indian society comprises of different traditions, culture and beliefs. The role of the media is to bind together all these complex cultures and act as a social constructor and binder (Chopra, 2008). The distance between women and media not only deprives the former of their rights to information and knowledge but also keeps them in the dark regarding the misuse done towards them by distorting the truth (Justice Roy). Women don't get much accessibility in the media. Media is confined to the women of upper, higher and middle classes mostly belonging from the urban areas, precisely as passive consumers. Due to lack of education and proper facilities of schooling in the rural areas, these women have lesser access in media (Dabral, 2012). Though most women are getting involved and making their careers in the communication sectors but very few of them have attained positions in the decision making levels (Sharma and Chopra, 2008). In the modern times media acts a vehicle to information as well as entertainment in the public.

THE COVERAGE OF WOMEN'S ISSUES IN THE PRESS

Hard news sell and so does violence, which is primarily considered as a hard-news value. Information is heavily commoditized nowadays. The hard news-values are rapidly driving the news business such as the nature, cause and brutality of violence specially done against women by the male perpetrators of the Indian society (Das, 2012). Women appear in newspapers mainly in relation to human interest stories, domestic settings and to give emotional eye witness accounts. Women generally get recognition as unusual and freaks but doesn't have the equality with that of men who are taken seriously in the news analysis section. It is observed that women are found in news pages as passive victims of public events. Issues regarding women's movements are totally absent from the news till date (Bathla, 1998). The press mainly focuses on crime/violence stories. Violence as a dominant theme is not at all surprising in the press, where violence/crime against women had been a major issue on the feminist agenda for more than a decade. The abuse related issues in the newspapers mainly includes suicide, dowry-death, abduction, rape, molestation, atrocities, unnatural death, female infanticide, abortion, prostitution, trafficking of women and so on. Many such stories are collected from hospital and police records which are published in the

everyday newspapers. And such stories are investigated more genuinely if the victims have a strong economic and political background (Bathla, 1998).

Women's news is totally absent from the cover pages of the popular and renowned English newspapers, like The Telegraph, The Times of India, The Statesman. For, the women do not have an authoritative position and power of dominance in the Indian society (Joseph & Sharma, 2006). It can be concluded that women made news are of two kinds, firstly, the "sensational news" related to violence/crime and secondly, the "reformatory news" dealing with official activities. Both the kinds of stories develop from regular sources, are factual in nature and lack analytical perspective (Bathla, 1998).

Portrayal of Women in the Indian Print Media

The media promote two popular versions of feminism in the institutional context of the print media, 'feminism by choice' and 'a traditional feminism'. The Indian society is a patriarchal society where the patriarchal behaviours, norms and arrangements are considered as moral and normal. Feminism is represented in the print media as unnatural, excessive, anti-men, irrational and berserk, where feminists are considered as rabble rousing, dogmatic, West-Oriented, close-minded, anti-family and pro-divorce. The stories emphasizing about women and their struggles remain on the surface of the land are not covered fully. The actual message is same as it was in the earlier days. Women's liberation is till date opposed by the Indian society (Chopra, 2008; Chaudhuri, 2000).

Although the press is not considered as the most important means of communication in a country like India because of its large illiterate population, however, written words carries substantial weight to influence the prevailing power structure mainly dominated by educated section of the society. Hence, the ability of the press to influence the attitude and thinking of both ordinary readers as well as policy makers cannot be undermined. The press has played a key role in influencing Indians since the day of struggle for independence. Many eminent leaders had used the print media to reach out to common people for greater cause. Gandhi in his Young India and Harijan and Tilak in his Kesari have used the press very wisely for reaching to a larger section of the society. The projection of women in print media is a reflection of the perception of women in society. The print media depicts well educated women as arrogant, insensitive, self-centred, whereas an economically independent woman is that of dominating, ruthless and the main cause of suffering around her (Chopra, 2008; Joseph & Sharma, 2006).

Research shows only 7-10% women's issues are covered by the print media, half of which are related to sex, prostitution, glamour, entertainment and crime. News related to women have improved and occupied important slots like editorial, feature news, front page news, etc., but they still predominantly dwell in the before mentioned domains only. Stories of women's ability to make up their life along with some informative pieces informing about their legal rights and political activities are largely missing. Print media is found guilty of sexism, distortion of women's image and propagation of sex stereotype roles such as submissive, passive, and dependent, mothers, etc. The print media portray women as market commodity for men (Bathla, 1998; Chopra & Sharma, 2008).

Women are portrayed in two different types of Print Media, namely:

1. NEWSPAPER- Papers are considered as anti-women organizations (Chaudhuri, 2000). Empirical evidences suggest that there is a lack of gender sensitivity in the media and the print media is no exception to that. The changing role of women in the society is hardly reflected in the newspapers (Chopra, 2008).

Generally the Indian newspapers exhibit some common features while covering issues on women:

- Women's success stories are stereotyped to the world of music, beauty pageants and highly successful sports personnel.
- The image of an independent woman as an active, assertive successful woman is completely missing from the major pages.
- Women are always portrayed as victims of poverty, social injustice, domestic violence and organized crime.
- Women activists working for women's political empowerment and individual human rights faces as systematic backlash in the form of rude jokes and open verbal aggression (<http://www.media.ba/mediacentre>).
- Women are seen as endorsing for products and are many times turned into a commodity for the benefit of the market.

Women are always projected and widely accepted in the role of beautiful creatures, submissive mothers, efficient house-keepers but nothing more than the patriarchal society (Chopra, 2008).

2. MAGAZINES AND JOURNALS- "Women's magazines occupy a peculiar position in the media world" (Joseph & Sharma, 2006). Magazines are different from newspapers in content, methods of concept and time element. Magazines are

published on a weekly or monthly basis, while newspapers' are daily printed for the readers. The subjects in the magazines deal with greater depth on any issues than newspapers. The magazines have an influential impact on the personal lives of the readers. They have more niche readers than that of the newspapers. Like all other forms of print media, magazines have also depicted women as sex objects, consumers and slaves but failed to depict them as intelligent beings. Women's magazines and journals are sexist and elicits in nature. The readers of such magazines belong from the urban upper middle classes. Most of the women's magazines consistently seek to direct women's energies into narrow channels and define their concerns, pre-occupations and aspirations within an arbitrarily imposed 'Feminine Frame Work'. There is a consistent effort to make women fit into the male dominated society through their choices of clothing to accessories. Even the women who make news are showcased in prettified settings mostly giving their opinions on home and domestic matters. Some of the National and International magazines popular in India are Eve's Weekly, Cosmopolitan, Elle, Femina, Women's Era, etc are some examples who portray women as commodities (Chopra, 2008: Joseph & Sharma, 2006).

Methodology

The present study was done with the help and usage of secondary sources like books, journals, articles and website. A Secondary analysis is a study where secondary resources are used for carrying out the study and primary data are not collected directly from the respondents. This is popularly known as Content Analysis. It is an analysis of the content of communication.

Analysis

The findings are an integral part of any study which is been carried on as it gives a general understanding of the topic been studied. From the preceding literature review the following analysis can be drawn out regarding the portrayal of women in the Indian print media:

- The media acts as a social constructor and there still exists a gapping between the media and the women. The issues of upper middle class women residing in the urban areas are covered to a limited area by the print media, where the treatment shown

towards the female folks are narrow minded. The print media reinforces stereotype gendered role and acts a socializing agent of the society.

- The news business is driven by hard news-values such as the nature, cause and brutality of violence and abuse done against women by the perpetrators of the patriarchal society. Women in the print media are recognized as freaks and unusual.
- Print media portrays women in the way men have always wanted to see them like docile, submissive, sexually attractive and passive recipients. Stories in the magazines are also based on gender stereotyped roles.
- Feminism is always looked down upon by the media and mostly women's movements are intentionally avoided or not given proper coverage by the media. The print media resists those women who raise their voices against the patriarchy and call them by different names, such as anti-family, close-minded, pro-divorce.
- The projection of the women folks in the print media is a reflection of the women in the society where most of the time they are turned down as an commoditized object for the market.

Conclusion

“There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing”- Swami Vivekananda. In order to enhance the status and position of women in the Indian society, a changing attitude in portraying the gendered specific role need to be taken into consideration. Government should take few necessary steps in implementing such views of uplifting the status and positions of women. Media should balance to show non-stereotype role which are not gendered role specific and gladly accept the working culture of women both in the rural and urban areas. For the society's abiding benefit media must nurture and transmit human values of civilizations.

Women being an integral part of the Indian society should be given proper importance and equality along with the men. Women should be given equal opportunity in every aspect of life, be it personal, politics, economic, etc. The very process of egalitarianism should start from the basic and most vital institution of the society known as the family, through the process of proper socialization. In this respect the media should play a necessary role in implementing egalitarian roles for all the genders in the society, which will lead to better tomorrow for all.

Limitations

Paucity of time has been one of the major limitations for carrying out this study along with the availability of limited number of secondary resources which acted as a hindrance too. More information could not be collected as there was no field work done nor any survey work was carried on for doing this study, and only secondary sources were available in limited number.

References

- Bathla, S. (1998). *Women, democracy and the media: Cultural and political representations in the Indian press*. New Delhi: Sage Publications
- Chaudhuri, M. (2010). Feminism in print media. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 1-27. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ijg>
- Das, R. (2012). Representation of violence against women in Indian print media. *Global Media Journal*, 3 (1). 1-24. Retrieved from <https://www.caluniv.ac.in/global-media-journal/Students'%20Research/SR1%20RUPSAYAR.pdf>
- Joseph, A. & Sharma, K. (2006). *Whose news? The media and women's issues*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Joshi, U., Pahad, A., & Maniar, A. (2006). Images of women in print media. *India Media Studies Journal*, 1 (1), 1-13.
- Roy, S.S., (2012). Portrayal of women in Indian Media-In the era of neo-liberal economy, *Global Media Journal*, 3(1), 85-92.