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Projection of Women's Image in Media: How Realistic and Inclusive the Picture is?

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Abstract: Reality or truth both contemplate philosophical connotations. While social sciences take a different stance and agree on the term social reality rather than truth or reality. Another very familiar term that comes to mind is social construction coined by Peter Berger. We not only construct but live in this social reality. As the modern era can be recognized as a time of information and technology (IT), the use of social media and rapidly growing other online platforms also aid in constructing and changing social reality. A very well said quotation goes like one is not born woman but becomes one. This statement is not an exaggeration because women's life gets impacted by society more than men's lives. In the modern age, the impact of society on women's lives has been slightly replaced by the impact of traditional and social media. The role, contribution, and participation of women in society; problems, issues, and challenges faced by them; and the image of women and associated stereotypes are some relevant topics on which the media plays a significant part. The present review analyses the image of women in various Indian media contents such as news, TV serials, Movies, etc. The main findings suggest that as the image of women has changed in recent decades from housewife to working woman, the media has done a great job portraying the image of working women. Along with it, the traditional gender roles of men and women has still dominantly picturized in most advertisements, tv serials, and movie content. Future insights can be picked up from this review such as objectifying women is an important issue that requires more attention, especially in the context of social media and online platforms. Some Dos and Don'ts has also been suggested at the end that could be followed by traditional and social media to make the image of women more inclusive and representative of ground reality.

Key Words: Gender roles, Stereotypes, Objectification, Social reality, social construction, IT, Realistic .

Introduction- "One is not born a Woman, But Becomes One" Philosopher Simone De Beauvoir in her book titled "The Second Sex" This quotation perfectly presents the real picture of womanhood which is not innate but being attained. The word mentioned here becomes is important. This becoming involves certain things. Female do not construct themselves rather this work is done by the society. What society simply means is a kind of social and cultural norms that makes us unite and different from other groups of people in preliminary observations. While saying society constructs women implies all the idealized characteristics, behavior, and image of a women. The biological characteristics a female possesses is the thing that makes her different from the male is determined by her sex.

Although gender of a female is totally being decided by the society. From the very beginning period of life what she should wear, how she should walk, talk, sit, eat, what colour of toys she should play with, which kind of skills she should acquire all of them mostly decided according to societal norms. This discriminatory behavior led females to think about themselves more deeply that they were certainly very different from men not just in biological traits but in other ways also. Thus, society not only makes a clear demarcation between male and female but highlights the gender roles as well and tries to stick with it. These must be followed norms and roles decided by society for a particular gender leads to stereotyping of females which is full of biasness and prejudices.

Recent social and technological developments have changed human life heavily. These changes have touched almost every aspect of life from making survival easy to exploring various aspects of life which seemed impossible some decades ago. Media has played a very strong role in human life specially in Indian societies. Print media has



been replaced nowadays with online and social media. We were primarily depended on TV, Radio and Newspapers to gain the knowledge of the outside world. Today, all the latest news and issues are instantly available on the social media, be it Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc. Entertainment related contents are also easily available online. These recent developments also have their impact on the image of women. The present analysis discusses the issue how media has influenced the portrayal of woman's image by the society and is it coinciding with the reality of women's condition in current Indian Scenario. The entire discussion has been arranged in two sections, first part talks about the representation of women in various media contents and what image of woman media has been portraying; and the last section comprises the current scenario of women in India and what are the similarities and differences in it with the image of woman as being portrayed by Media.

Women as represented by Media- Representation of women in print media, TV serials, Advertisements and movies will be the main focus of this section. Print media includes the newspapers, magazines, etc, and it has been witnessed that their role has significantly decreased as people have smartphones in their hands. Patowary (2014) has analysed the content of print media, TV channels and other reports thoroughly and concluded in such words it can be said that there is an on-going trend in Indian Media to portray women as busy and concerned with beautifying herself, choosing make-up, new fashions, jewellery, cosmetics, constantly watching her weight, worried about good figure and skin colour, proud of advertising and selling latest products. She is hardly portrayed as having social commitments, capable of intelligent decision making, or as capable leaders and policy makers.

Daily soaps were the best options for women to spare their extra time until the age of social media came into existence. *Kyunki Saas bhi kabhi Bahu thi, Ye Rishta kya kehata hai, Kumkum Bhagya, Naagin*; etc are prominent Indian TV serials that had been broadcasted over years and were top rated for all the time. All these tv serials had their women lead characters all dressed up, wearing luxury jewelries, full makeup, and doing almost none of household works as a housewife and had no professional life or career at all.

Along with these TV serials we have Bollywood movies as well that have glorified either the image of *sanskari* & decent girl carrying the image of a good to be housewife, especially the movies of 2000s such as *Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham, Devdas, Vivah* or the image of a careless and independent girl struggling most of the time for carrier or settled up career and not being fit in society. No matter how the role of women has been shown it has always been a supporting character for the male lead roles. A few exceptions can be seen in recent decades where female lead character is a hero in movies, such as *Mardani, NH 10, Manikarnika, Begum Jaan, Panga, Dhakad*, etc, but such movies are very less in count. Yakkaldevi (2014) reported that, the portrayal of women in the Indian media oscillates between these two extremes: the mother India and the glamour girl image. The status of women in India is indeed paradoxical and contradictory. On the one hand, urban women in India have achieved great heights breaking the proverbial 'glass ceiling' of a rather patriarchal male-dominated society. On the other hand, there is also a severe civic outrage over issues of domestic violence, rape and molestation, dowry deaths and female foeticide, to name a few. But, there also exists a significant group of women in the ether India whose stories struggle to find space in the media, driven as it is by market dynamics.

Third comes the advertisements which portray mostly the female lead characters in the advertisement of products such as makeup or skincare products, jewelries, clothes, furniture, grocery items; while male lead characters can be easily seen in ads of Banking investments, property or house building, automobile products, and all such fields which are assumed to be served by men. Advertisements based on relationship-oriented themes such as ads of chocolate, washing powders, grocery items etc., have the female lead characters and supporting male roles. Whereas advertisements based on investment and decision-making oriented themes will have the male lead characters and supporting female characters. Another trend of picturizing women in professional roles such as doctors, teachers, air-hostess, etc. has come into practice in recent decades. According to Sukumar & Venkatesh (2011) a shift in the



portrayal of the woman in advertisements can be seen from a mere housewife to a career-oriented and professional with the independent identity and multiple identities, who is a super woman successful in balancing her personal and professional life.

Women whom we encounter in day-to-day life Dr. Amitava Ghosh and Swati Saksena Jha (2022) published a book titled Women in Contemporary India covering almost all the issues related to journey of women from Vedic period to modern India. This book provides a large amount of significant data which helps us to realize the actual situation of women in today's world. A report published by Outlook India on this issue highlighted some important global statistics on the women of the Indian as well as global society from the book: . Of the 1.3 billion population in the poverty bracket, 70% are women. Women earn three-fourths that of men in the non-agricultural sector. . Women occupy only 10% of the parliamentary seats and only 6% of cabinet positions in 55 countries around the world Of the total burden of work, women carry an average of 53% in developing countries and 51% in industrial countries Of the world's 900 million non-literate persons, 65% are women due to the lack of educational opportunities Worldwide, 76 million more boys are enrolled in primary and secondary school than girls.

These data are just glimpses of male dominated world and societies. Even today while talking about women empowerment we don't have the basic schooling completed by all the girl child. This one cause leaves them far behind and impact their whole life and even next generations as well. Analysing the Picture presented by Media Women whom we see in our daily life specially in urban areas are completely different from the image of woman showcased by Media. Indian woman from rural areas are mostly involved in agriculture and some of them are involved in learning new skills or producing homemade products, doing other government services under the schemes of Government of India. We have example of various successful business women and artisanal entrepreneurs such as Avipsha Thakur, founder of Bunavat, a for-profit social enterprise that makes contemporary sarees through traditional, sustainable weaves that needed to be preserved; Shilpi Sharma and Satya Nagarajan, the duo founded the Indie Project Store (IPS) in 2016 that sells locally made and environmentally conscious clothes which also helps independent artisans, weavers, and small businesses; Surbhi Agarwal, her startup, The Art Exotica works with artisans in rural areas of Rajasthan to manufacture home decor products, showcasing unique Indian handicrafts and textiles and exports them internationally; Vanishka, popularised the artform and provide women artisans a platform by starting Label_Vanshika; and Sugandha Kedia, works with around 50 weavers across Kashmir and sells handwoven and fabric shawls and stoles, priced between Rs 2,500 and Rs 10 lakh. These women are not only successful and creative in their own ways but living their dream and passion which came to be true through their hard work. But the stories of them or numerous such women never came across to a large population because of its little coverage by media. True inspirational stories of women in India are far away from the reach of general population. Only after the Tokyo Olympics 2021 most people of the country became aware about the Indian women's hockey team. These women also are the part of India and their struggle somehow reflects the true picture of India. Girls who are struggling to make a successful career whether from rural or not much developed urban backgrounds can easily associate themselves with these pictures. On the other hand, what media and social media is showing the image of woman is very unrelatable for girls and women belonging to non-metropolitan cities specially. In social media contents specially in YouTube; the type of clothes women wear, the kind of language they use and the ongoing realities and situations around them seem alienated sometimes. As a large part of India is still living in poverty or facing lack of basic living resources. Various institutes and colleges from remote village areas and even urban areas don't have the appropriate washroom and sanitisation facilities. While it is a crucial necessity. Living in such background leads females to have more health issues than males. These challenges are only the part of some small campaign of political parties or NGOs and they do not get a place in main stream media. According to Justice Ray (2008) "By and large the media scene in India is that media does not address serious issues about exploitation and unequal 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 than not tend to glorify the crime against women. Being a homemaker is a tough job in itself and it is no less important than a paid job but media has never shown such images of men who can completely take the responsibility of home as women do. Most of the household product advertisement picturize women taking the responsibility of home while men in supporting character. These traditional gender roles are still being presented by media. These roles are further internalized unconsciously by the persons who are buying or selling such products. Again, what media is projecting the image of housewife in TV serials and movies are completely objectionable as very few of us can recognize or identify with these reel life characters in our real life. A few points can be drawn on how TV serials, Bollywood movies and advertisements stereotype the character played by women . All the soft skill works from house chores to public relation management in offices are being done by women; . If one is a working woman, she will do all the work from office to home and take the responsibility of child also; . Boss lady character is always shown up with rude attitudes and having complains all the time, the same is not true for male boss characters; If woman is single and independent, she must be having issues with her family and struggling with backlash from the society; and A housewife is always portrayed as calm, understanding and caring in nature, dealing with all the responsibilities without any complain.

On the other had men are portrayed as free and decision makers in most of the content showed by media.

Dr. Deepanjali Mishra (2015) concluded it in very impactful words as overall effect of the portrayal of women in media is to reinforce rather than reduce prejudices and stereo types. None of these women were self-defining, powerful characters who decided for themselves and chose for themselves. They were always deciding and choosing and doing as per the norms and values of family, culture and society.

What can be improved- Ray (2008) gNewspapers cover women 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 fs magazines are devoted to fashion, glamour, beauty aids, weight reduction, cookery and how to sharpen efeminine instincts to keep men and their in-laws happy. There are comparatively fewer articles on career opportunities, health awareness, entrepreneurship, legal aid, counselling services, childcare services and financial management. Media must realize its accountability for the betterment of society and this is very indispensable for Indian media. Stereotyping of female characters must be prevented and a more realistic and inclusive picture of a woman should be portrayed by the media. A picture of a woman that assimilates the struggles of Indian women, the grace of our cultural heritage, and realistic scenarios faced by them in their daily lives. A very good example of breaking these stereotypes has been presented by a dishwasher bar called 'vim'. The latest advertisement for 'Vim' has introduced its product in new black color packaging as a representation of an additionally intense product. The advertisement of this product is unique in two ways as it has been introduced to be used by men and it had male lead characters in it. These small steps can help to break the stereotype and gender roles that prevent us to evolve as a human and a fairer society. Such exemplary work should be heightened by all media platforms.

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