Gender Stereotyping and Media: The Need for Media Literacy

MADHU LIKA
Associate Professor
Department of Commerce, Pt. CLS Government College, Sector-14, Karnal (Haryana) India

ABSTRACT

Media as the fourth pillar of democracy as immense power to act as the watchdog of the society. It is the mirror of society and reflects of happenings in the society. It can influence the masses and the convergence of the media has further enhanced its potential as a tool of creating public opinions and values. Television which has become the most important medium of mass communication in India pays an important role in creating public opinion. Mass awareness by using the media on issues of political, social and economic importance holds the foundation of any democracy. Infact, development communication, has developed as a discipline wherein, Media play its role in the development of the nation. It is mostly observed that news on political and economic issues dominate over social issues. Social issues are not given the kind of importance or platform of communication that it deserves. Issues of violence against women and other discrimination against women which basically stems from unequality – both in terms physical and economic power – between men and women is rarely given the importance it deserves. Media's role in a democracy is to bring mass awareness on political, social and economic issues. However, media channels tend to give preference to political and economic news items over social issues, especially the issue of women. This has lead to the issues on women take a backseat Media can play a significant role in sensitizing the society about gender issues. But, before that, the media itself needs to be sensitized in covering women issues. The distribution of power between the two sexes – both physical and economic- is unequal, leading to discrimination against women. Media exerts immense influential power on the masses; this cannot be undermined. Portrayal of women as equal has not been given the priority it deserves by the media. Women issues should be dealt in a sensitive, responsible way by the media. Declining sex ratio, rape, workplace sexual harassment, dowry-related crimes domestic violence molestation, eve-teasing and honour killings are some of the issues that the media needs to sensitize the society about. Total women empowerment can come about only if it includes political, social, cultural and other dimensions of human life. This happens only if development includes women participation and control over resources of power. The electronic media and particularly TV has become the most influential medium of mass communication. It is a disturbing trend when media negatively portrays women as "the weaker sex" who should remain subservient. Most disturbing, however, is the disproportionate coverage of sensationalized violence. Sexual brutalization of women has remained a highly marketable commodity. "Commodification" of women as "sexual objects" in advertisements should be stopped. Media can either be an accomplice to gender based discrimination or it can challenge the gender bias by providing balanced coverage.

Key Words : Media, gender-stereotyping, Commodification of women, Gender sensitization, Media literacy

INTRODUCTION

Media as the fourth pillar of democracy as immense power to act as the watchdog of the society. It is the mirror of society and reflects of happenings in the society. It can influence the masses and the convergence of the media has further enhanced its potential as a tool of creating public opinions and values. Television which has become the most important medium of mass communication in India pays an important role in creating public opinion. Mass awareness by using the media on issues of political, social and economic importance holds the foundation of any democracy.

Infact, development communication, has developed

as a discipline wherein, Media play its role in the development of the nation. It is mostly observed that news on political and economic issues dominate over social issues. Social issues are not given the kind of importance or platform of communication that it deserves. Issues of violence against women and other discrimination against women which basically stems from unequality – both in terms physical and economic power – between men and women is rarely given the importance it deserves. Mass Media cannot operate in a social vacuum; it naturally takes on the form and colouration of the social and political structures within which it operates. According to the Social Responsibility Theory of the Media, the media has to shoulder responsibility for the social uplift of a society (Aggarwal and Gupta, 2002).

The media is different from other business enterprise existing in a society. It exhibits a unique nature according to which every society expects media to play a particularly constructive. It can do this by criticizing government policies, getting rid of social evils, educating people, exposing wrong doings of the society and of course sensitizing the society towards women issues, especially those which have been guaranteed by our Constitution. Media influence has increased to such an extent that an individual finds it difficult to maintain an identity and self understanding without using medias the reference point. The power of the media in shaping the world's perception has increased manifold over the years. Due to the outreach and technological sophistication, Media's role has now expanded and increased beyond the mere supply of information. It can be said, that can now 'create reality'. Media can effectively shape public opinion, influence personal beliefs and even alter people's self perceptions. Ideologies, thought processes and the methods of socializations are greatly influenced by the media. It is time that media becomes highly sensitive to gender issues. There is no doubt that the stereotypical portrayal of women and minorities in India could help to reinforce cultural stereotypes rather than stimulate new thinking about the roles in Society (Kumar, 2008).

The Gender Stereotype:

By 'Gender' we mean the roles and responsibilities that have been constructed by the society, in a given culture or location. These roles have political, cultural environmental, economic, social, and religious factors influencing them. Custom, law, class, ethnicity, and individual or institutional bias also influence 'gender

stereotype'. Within the above framework, Gender attitudes and behaviors can be learned and can also be changed. According to Gender stereotypical perceptions women are supposed to be dependent, weak, incompetent, emotional, fearful, flexible, passive, modest, soft-spoken, gentle, care takers while men are powerful, competent, important, logical, decision-makers, aggressive, focused, strong and assertive. Gender stereotype and gender inequality is so deeply engraved in the long history of social consciousness that it is now believed that only the media with its tremendous reach and power would be the ideal tool in bringing about gender equality. In India where a patriarchal society flourishes, 'son preference' is an age-old gender bias, in which the male of the family bears the responsibility of 'carrying forward' the family's name. He is supposed to support his parents in old age and also perform their last rites when they die. The fact that daughters are generally regarded as '*Paraya dhan*' or 'somebody else's wealth' and the giving away as dowry to the groom ensure that daughters are often seen as an 'economic liability'. A United Nations statistics shows Gender inequality very starkly: Women perform two-third of the world's work but earn only one-tenth of the world's income. They comprise two-third of the world's illiterates and own less than one–hundredth of the world's property. A gross discrimination stands out.

Gender differences seen in some situations:
Social situations:

The social roles demand that the head of the family is always a male. He is also the main bread-winner while the woman is usually seen as a house-maker, a nurturer and care-giver.

Political situations:

Power sharing between men and women is biased. Men are seen mostly at higher level of political field – the national, while women are expected to be at the local level.

Educational situations:

There is a definite gender bias in educational opportunities and expectations. It is the boy in the family who gets the resources for higher education. Girls are usually expected to go to less-challenging academic fields.

Economic situations:

There is a wide gap between access to lucrative careers and finance between men and women. Credit and loans; land ownership policies etc. are more biased towards men.

Women and Media:
Representation in the Media:

It has long been recognized by Feminists all over the world that there is a significant and long lasting influence of the media in either challenging or perpetrating existing constructions of gender. In a broad-ranging analysis, Feminist Media Studies, Liesbet (1994) explores the ways in which feminist theory and research contribute to the fuller understanding of the multiple roles of the media in gender construction in contemporary societies. The book analyses media representations through content analysis and semiotics (Chandler, 2001). Media as a tool for gender sensitization can only be utilized when the full influence of media of media on gender construction is understood. The Fourth Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP 2009- 2010), which is the most extensive research on gender bias and subsequent initiatives in the news media, shows women representation in the media. The GMMP, after gathering insights and information through media monitoring aims to promote a balanced gender representation in and through the news media. It involves voluntary participation of women from grassroots communities to university students and researchers to media practitioners. It was astonishing, as the report shows that less than one fourth (24 %) of the people made visible or heard or read about on Television and print news worldwide is female. That means that for every three males we see or read about in the media, we get to see or hear or read about only one female. This represents just a seven percent increase in fifteen years. In so called the 'News subjects' which rank higher n the media agenda, the visibility of women was even less. Women were represented only in four per cent of 'politics and government' stories and just one percent in 'economy' stories. Further highlighting the gender bias the three percent increase in women in the news between 2005 and 2010 mostly portrayed women as commentators on general opinion and not as experts in specialized fields. Women were generally placed in the 'ordinary interviews' categories while men are mostly seen in 'expert' categories. While almost equal number of men and women reflected the general view of ordinary citizens in news stories, (47 % female, 53 % male), only 19 per cent of those providing expert comments on specialist knowledge or experience were women. Women spokespersons speaking on behalf of organizations were only 18 per cent. The comparison was stark: Less than one out of every five authoritative sources interviewed by news media is female. The GMMP report added, the news presents a world in which men outnumber women in almost all occupational categories. In real life, women's participation in all spectrums of profession is much higher. The media has managed to provide a lop-sided picture in which women in positions of authority or responsibility are almost absent outside the domain of their homes. It was further pointed out that general visibility of women was desirable, in fact it was even more crucial that the news reflected women's presence in every sphere. Only then a more realistic picture of the world would be presented by the media. Stereotypical roles were being strengthened by the media in which women were portrayed in their roles in a family five times more than men. The priorities being considered while agenda setting the distribution of stories, suggests the need for a radical transformation towards more gender-awareness and gender responsiveness. The status of 52 % of the population has to be given a second thought and has to be elevated from a subordinate post to that of equality (Gallagher, 2001).

Women professionals in the Media:

The GMMP report shows women's participation and contribution as in the media profession. Although in the print media the percentage of stories by female reporters has increased since 2005 (to 35 %) and news television (to 44 %), it has decreased in radio newscasts (27 %). Men reporters however continue to surpass female reporters while reporting in all media forms. Men overwhelmingly continue to report 'hard news', like politics and economics while women are restricted mostly to the 'soft' areas of arts, entertainment and lifestyle coverage. Women reporters tend to cover more female-oriented news subjects (26%) while male reporters have only 19% female oriented stories. Female reporters challenge gender stereotypes twice more than male reporters (eleven % by the former compared to six per cent by the latter). Only twelve per cent of news stories were found to highlight issues of gender equality or inequality.

Media Content and Gender Identity:

Correa (2011) in 'The Construction of gender identity in India through television advertisements: A semiotic analysis', investigates how television advertisements in India construct gender identity. Advertisements that appeared during popular Indian television serials were obtained from a local video rental outlet and recorded on a weekly basis for a period of six months . A representative sample was then screened and used for analysis. This study employed semiotics as a method for analysing the ideological messages of Indian television advertisements. Interestingly, Correa found out that all the advertisements involving domesticity emphasised the traditional role of women – as a wife and mother. Through the ideologically constructed messages of the advertisements, the domestic roles of women were made to appear normal while highlighting their traditional bearings. This study is one of the first major studies of the nexus between the media, and the construction of gender-identity in India today. Therefore, this study will be repeatedly referred by the policy makers as well as educators for developing and implementing a media literacy programs which aim at developing students' critical thinking and their capacity to evaluate the role and power of the media in lives. There have been attempts in recent years to project images of women in power and authority. These images ostensibly attempt to erase the established negative gender stereotype and challenge them. They tend to be different from the typical objectification of women. However, on up close, it was found that most of these so-called 'challenging' and even 'feminist' images served only to reinforce the norm and form they were refuting. For example men working in kitchens or using domestic appliances are portrayed as 'stupid' and 'incompetent' and as 'misfits.' We laugh at these 'male stupidity' because we feel it is absurb for men to work in a kitchen. It is the women who should be in the kitchen! The men appear stupid because they do not belong there. We are thus reinforcing the stereotype that women are born to be in a kitchen while men it would be stupid for men to work in a kitchen. In these subtle ways the gender ideology create gender bias in our society. Similarly, women in positions of power and authority often run the risk of appearing 'unfeminine' or even ridiculous in media. These portrayals reinforce gender stereotypes. An authoritative, powerful woman is usually perceived as aberrance in a society and portrayed as one neglecting her family duties. In television serials, an ambitious career woman is often portrayed as 'greedy' while men tend to

be portrayed as 'go getter.' With a few exceptions, the mainstream media usually perpetuate these stereotypical gender divisions. There seems to be confusion regarding the media's perspective of women and her role in the society. The transition from a subsurvient role to an independent one is one which the media is finding hard to depict. A woman still has this eternal image of one confined to the boundaries, duties and responsibilities of her home and her family. Then there exists the uber woman who knows what she wants and gets it. Two very conflicting but not necessary mutually exclusive images of women arise. In an advertisement, the lady of the house is shown doing all the household chores while catering to the beck and call of all the other members of the family. A backache forces her to takes a break from her work. The family acknowledges her presence by passing on a tube of a pain reliever which the husband offers to apply on her. After a short respite she is back on her feet catering to the orders and requests from her family. The message has been rightly conveyed – that of the docile, subservient nature of the woman. She is being reduced to an object for 'satisfying needs. The dangerous consequence of objectifying women has been highlighted by Dr Jean Kilbourne who notes that, "turning a human being into a thing is almost always the first step in justifying violence against that person."

The media, it seems, is loathe to project the image of a woman as a serious partner in decision-making, a successful professional or an erudite politician or leader. This despite the fact that there are a large number of working women, and women representatives are found is all spectrum of professions. There are women in all walks of professional life and most surprising in some media houses, the entire business is run by women. Big IT Companies which have gender equality recruitment policy have almost equal number of men and women working. But when Wipro or Infosys has to advertise, we can be almost certain that it's a male using the computer! Gender stereotype in Advertisements can be exemplified when we see a woman using 'Fair and Lovely' fairness cream in order to choose the profession of a cricket commentator. In order to have a successful and meaningful career and a successful marriage, she has to be 'Fair and Lovely' and wears branded 'Gitanjali Jewellery'. Indian media gives low priority to the subject of portraying women as equals in the society. The message and content of television programmes and commercial films is loud and clear as one flips through

the pages of popular magazines and news papers - The Indian media likes nothing better than to see their womenfolk as home-makers and a compulsive buyer who buys the latest dress, shoes, accessories, cosmetics, mostly at the expense of her husband's money. Although it purports to show them as independent characters, the media actually portrays them as consumers rather than as modern, liberated women. On Television, which is a pervasive and powerful medium of communication in India, the portrayal of Indian women is superficial and is rarely linked with their real concerns. Women have to consistently make adjustments at home, carry the entire burden of household chore, provide constant care as wives and mothers. The massive magnitude of the social consequences of media women portrayal in films can only be speculated given the popularity of films in India. The portrayal of women as sexual objects can be glaringly seen in the various 'Item numbers' which has almost become almost mandatory for a film to become a hit. Hindi films reveals the sheer quantity and variety of violence directed towards them. Women in Bollywood films are often portrayed as screaming, yelling and crying 'types' as they react to stressful situations. Assertive women in movies are often tagged as 'bad' while men, in all shades of character are considered 'heroes'. In a profit driven Hindi film industry, the choices of the directors of the movies is limited to a large extend by the dictates of the patrons. The Indian audience also must be partially blamed for the acceptance of such mistreatments of women in movies. Even in interviews, there is differential treatment for women. Men giving interviews are often made to elaborate on their work and their marital status or their dress sense remains irrelevant. Women achievers on the other hand are subject to irrelevant and distasteful queries - details of her looks, her private life and such trivia as her fondness for beautiful sarees, her decision to stay single or otherwise is scrutinized. According to the media, a successful woman somehow is a feminist. When Phoolan Devi was once interviewed, she was first shown serving food to her husband. Men give most of opinion on exit polls during elections. They were also the ones whose opinions mattered the most on the issue of reservation of seats for women in Panchayats. Women, whose future they were deciding, sat as silent spectators. Our women are paying a price for this contradiction. Media and advertising are compromising women's multiple identities in contemporary Indian society. A woman, it seems, cannot have the best of both the worlds.

Disproportionate Media Coverage of Women Issues:

Media's agenda setting role ensures that we get to see, read or hear what the media deems important. Very often, lack of appropriate media coverage or under-coverage implies that the issue is unimportant. If a story is not reported or not significantly reported, public awareness is significantly lessened. The consequence of media ignorance and bias against women is a global pandemic and is horrific. Disproportionate coverage of sensationalized violence is perhaps the most disturbing. Rape stories, perhaps it focuses on one individual, gets far more coverage than domestic violence stories. Also, a women becomes 'a marketable victim item' if she happens to be attractive. Sexual brutalization of women is a highly marketable business and a profitable story for the news media. For voyeuristic reasons that soar up the TRPs, the Indian media, be it press or the broadcasters, usually chooses to highlight the rape and murder rather than to report about the success of women in the local elections. The actual problems plaguing the real India, its culture, traditions, faiths and facets of 'development communication' usually take a back seat. When compared to men, the overall media coverage of women is much less. Men have more opportunities to present their opinions and are shown in a wide spectrum of professions. Women, however, are either under-represented or totally excluded. Interviews of women are limited to certain accepted professions such as educationists or doctors. Women who have achieved success in a 'male domain' go to great pains to point out her 'feminism'.

Media coverage of women and the Concept of 'Symbolic Annihilation':

The concept of 'symbolic annihilation' was introduced by Gerbner (1972). He first briefly referenced the concept without elaboration as: "representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation." Gerbner used this concept to reveal how representations (including omissions), in the media cultivate dominant assumptions about how the world works and, as a result, where power resides. Symbolic annihilation is a tool which effectively erases 'certain people' from popular communication. Gerbner coined the term to describe the 'absence, condemnation, or trivialization' of a particular group in the media so that

their existence is softly faded or airbrushed away. Symbolic annihilation points the ways in which poor media treatment can contribute to social disempowerment and in which symbolic absence in the media can erase groups and individuals from public consciousness. It is generally applied to women and racial and sexual minorities. Gaye Tuchman, expanded the concept from Gerbner's simple definition of "absence" to include "condemnation" and "trivialization" Tuchman observed, "women are not important in American society, except perhaps within the home. And even within the home, men know best." In her analysis, women may be "represented" and present in the media, be depicted "positively" as good natured and loving, and still be "trivialized" when juxtaposed against the portrayal of men, who are shown as wise and powerful (Tuchman, 1978). Since the 1960s, women's movements have systematically and constantly been critical of media institutions and their roles. Media with its ever expanding role in today's world provides the 'common ground' of information, symbols and ideas for most social groups, has reduced women's position to relative powerlessness by its inferior representation. In many ways a woman has been rendered 'invisible' or inconsequential. The term 'symbolic annihilation' became a powerful and widely used metaphor to describe the ways in which media images render women invisible. This 'mediated' invisibility has been brought about not merely through the non-representation of women's points of view or perspectives on the world, but by the 'manner' in which they are represented. "The representation reflects the biases and assumptions of those who define the public - and therefore the media - agenda. Despite measures to redress gender imbalances, the power to define public and media agendas is still mainly a male privilege" (Means and Yochim, 2008).

How women bias is formed: The Cultivation Theory:

Cultivation theory was an approach developed by Professor George Gerbner. He began a research project in the mid 1960s called the 'Cultural Indicators' in which he studied and how watching television influences viewers' ideas and their perception of how the world is or ought to be. Cultivation theorists argue that television has long-term effects which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant. According to Gerbner, mass media cultivate attitudes and values which are already present in a culture. These values are propagated by the media, binding members of a culture. Television primarily maintains, stabilizes and reinforces attitudes, conventional beliefs and behaviors already present in a society, rather than alter, threaten or weaken. A 'resonance' or a 'double dose' effect boosts cultivation of values and attitudes. If the viewer's everyday life experiences are in congruence with those depicted in television, he experiences a resonance effect which further strengthens his beliefs and attitude.

Distorted portrayals and their impact:

Distorted images of women by the media have a negative effect on the society and its development:

The perpetuation of inequalities at home:

According to studies and statistics, women and girls are more likely to be undernourished and uncared for than men and boys.

Creating a distorted self-image:

Media influences the social image and the self-image of women. Media affects the choices they make, what they eat and what they wear. It influences their behavioral attitude, their learning process, and ultimately what they become. Media has clearly discouraged the emergence of a new confident, assertive woman. Such differential media treatment increases their isolation, disempowers them, weakens them. They remain unheard, unrepresented and 'incommunicable.'

Reinforcing biases in development plans:

In its conservative way, Media ignores economic participation and contribution made by women, especially rural women. Instead of challenging the obscure view that women are inferior, subservient, unimportant, media has reinforced it. The man is always the opinionated, active doer. Women's needs and concerns are either not articulated publicly or just plain neglected. Public thinking, discourse or debates on the real concerns of women are not encouraged. Development plans take a back seat mainly because the needs and concerns about women issues remain unheard and unarticulated.

The importance of media literacy:

The greatest fear in today's world of information explosion is that we are imbibing all the gender biases subconsciously and reinforcing existing inequality without even being aware of it. The way and the lengths to which

we interact with the media no doubt affects us in knowing and unknowing ways. This affect is dangerous because very often the many media images and messages play on our subconscious mind. That amounts to passive retention and processing of information. It becomes imperative for us, as the 'consumers' of information to become fully aware and conscious about what we are imbibing through the various channels of the media. To what extend and to what purpose and in what way does the information affect our thought process, attitude and behavior – these are questions we need to ask ourselves. This is where 'Media Literacy' or 'Media Education' or 'Media Awareness' comes as a help. It helps us to critically analyse the subtle media messages, its implications and purpose both commercial or political, and those who are responsible or behind the ideas and messages. We are not only able to more genuinely and consciously appreciate or deprecate media messages, ideas and their intentions and implications, but also able to react to it in appropriate ways. It provides us with a set of tools for critical, rational thinking on media and culture which we can apply to any 'media product.' As the media grows and expands, Media Literacy as a movement is also growing throughout the world. It has become especially important and necessary for women and girls to be conscious and knowledgeable about media. But why? Its because there are genuine concerns that although life has changed for women in leaps and bounds in the last three four decades due to several powerful women and a few men demanding equality and empowerment for women, much has to be done. By and large women have been denied basic human rights like good health, respect, livelihood, equality, genuine and positive self-esteem, their comfort and understanding of their own sexuality, safety from domestic and sexual violence, participation in the democratic processes and overall power sharing in society. Women get empowered by lessons in media literacy. The lessons can articulated through public service advertising, posters etc., Television programmes, talk shows or even by a concerned citizen. Problems that arise due to unrealistic fixation on physical attractiveness that is often encouraged by media portrayal and stereotyping about the 'concept' of beauty, can damage the psyche of a young girl. Media has to play a positive role in promoting intellectual growth rather than physical beauty, a nutritious diet that promotes good health is more desirable than strict dieting which destroys the body's immunity. Zero size figures and obsession of fair skin for Indians women have left many psychological traumatized by the distorted or unrealistic self-image. Unchecked, these can lead to various fatal diseases like anorexia nervosa.

Media as a tool: Some examples of media's role as 'perpetrator' and 'challenger' of gender bias:

The following examples will highlight the two sides of the same coin:

From women's media to rural media:

i. Newsletters in UP that began as a development effort to help women communicate among themselves have evolved as a forum for addressing problems that are relevant to whole communities instead. 'Alternate media' is in fact the centre of the communities they serve. Hand written, hand designed, they are the perfect reflection of women's empowerment. Newsletter Khabar Lehariya has even won the prestigious Chameli Devi Jain award. ii. In 1981, Ashwini Sarin, who was then with the Indian Express newspaper broke the law to expose how poor women were being trafficked by actually going ahead and "purchasing" a woman named Kamala. It was later made into a feature film which received national and international awards. iii. In 2007, a Delhi school teacher (Uma Khurana) was duped by a television journalist Prakash Singh who conducted a sting operation on her using a hidden camera and claimed that she was luring her students into commercial sex work (Hindustan Times, 31 August 2007; Daily News and Analysis, 9 September, 2007). She had to spend time behind bars and lost her job. It was later found that the case was false and that the journalist had sought to malign her reputation. iv. The way in which the press covered the still unresolved Arushi Talwar murder case of 2008 has been criticized from several quarters. Not only did it show gender insensitivity, but also put her parents through a 'trial by media. v. The media has played a positive role in the criminal cases related to Jessica Lall and Priyadarshini Mattoo. vi. In July 2007, The Information and Broadcast Ministry banned advertisement of two underwear brands on the ground that these were 'indecent, vulgar, suggestive and demeaned women.' The Amul macho advertisement showed a newly-wed woman suggestively washing her husband's underwear. vii. More recently in the Nirbhaya gang rape case, some news channel went overboard by calling her a Jinda Lash (living corpse) even before she had died. It was a case of gender insensitivity. Even if

she had survived, would she have been able to live through the stigma? viii. Tucked away in Pastapur in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh is Sangham Radio, a unique community radio experiment run by two Dalit women since 2008. These days, when the villagers tune in to this radio station, they hear their voices, concerns, songs, and solutions to everyday problems. This new-found thrill of liberation, however, is rooted in nothing less than a decade of passion, pursuit, and perseverance.

Conclusion:

A study authored by Mallika Das has thrown up interesting details (Das, 2000). She made a comparative study of men and women portrayals in Indian magazine advertisements and in other western countries. The similarities between the two lay on the fact that i. Indian men and women were stereotypically represented, ii. the stereotypical images in India seemed to be slowly 'softening', iii. in both the cases, Indian and western ads, the two sexes advertised for different types of products and iv. role portrayals seem to be affected by the nature of the product in the case of women, as in other nations. In her dissertation entitled 'Portrayal of Women in Print Media', Chopra (1998) has concluded: The portrayal of woman in the print media is quite degrading more often than not depicting her as commercial commodity. It is necessary that public should be motivated and sensitized to the issue of criminalization, politicization, and commercialization of women *vis-à-vis* their projection in the media in a healthy manner. Print and broadcast media reinforce the stereotype and traditional roles of women in society. Women need to be portrayed in 'empowered' roles in their career, leadership so that the status and position of women in society is truly represents Indian culture and ethos. 'Sexual objectification' and constant glorifying of stereotypical roles of motherhood and wifehood shackle women to the fetters of these prescribed roles. They just cannot break free. The sex equality and equal participation that our Constitution guarantees remain questionable because of such conservative depictions. A sweeping change in the social outlook is required. The cumulative and unconscious impact of media messages encourages gender discrimination. The mass media possesses the power to influence and can help in removing such prejudice. Undoubtedly the media provides a lop-sided picture of women and their meaningful participation and contribution to the society. Much needs to be done with regards to

the 'participation, portrayal and access of women to the media and its impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women'. India has been a traditionally conservative society where a woman's image has been cast and moulded by years of male dominance and female-subserviency. The era of liberalization and globalization has to some extend changed the image of the 'Bharatiya Nari' – the self-sacrificing husband worshipper whose sole purpose in life is to keep her husband and family happy. Advertisements, they say reflects the prevailing trends in the society. It is also said that if one wants to get the feel of a new place one has to see the advertisements in the media. A UNESCO report lists the words women are described in the media: 'the glamorous sex kitten, the sainted mother, the devious witch, the hard-faced corporate and political climber.' The report of 2009, fears that given the current rate at which stereotyping of women take place, it would take another 75 years to achieve gender equality in the media! Gender sensitization of the Indian has to be made on a priority basis. Mere reporting of facts and figures would not help in bridging gender differences. It should play a proactive role in inculcating gender sensitivity and ensure that women are not depicted in poor light. The media has to move beyond routine crime briefs on women and sensationalized stories. Public awareness on the rights and privileges of women should be created while highlighting Constitutional and legal rights. The latest rulings and judgments are to be discussed and public awareness created. Press Council should be given more teeth so that they could intervene effectively to counteract objectionable publications. This is the time to rethink and revisit the country's mass media policy. There are many issues which should be discussed threadbare to have an unbiased and healthy media policy in the country. It is time the media walked the talk (Guha Thakurta, 2009; www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report; www.mediaed.org/wp/study-guides).

REFERENCES

Anonymous (2009-2010). Global Media Monitoring Project Report.

Aggarwal, V.B. and Gupta, V.S. (2002). Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication, Concept Publishing House, New Delhi.

Chandler, D. (2001). Semiotics: The Basics. Routledge, USA.

Chopra, A. (1998). Portrayal of Women in Print Media. IIMC and Press Council of India Publications, New Delhi.

Correa, D.M. (2011). The Construction of Gender Identity in India through television advertisements: A semiotic analysis. Australian Catholic Church Publication.

Das, Mallika (2000). Men and Women in Indian Magazine Advertisements: A Preliminary Report. In: Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, Mount St. Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Gallagher, M. (2001). Gender setting: New agendas for media monitoring and advocacy, Zed Books Limited, London.

Gerbner, G. (1972). Violence in television drama: Trends and symbolic functions, In: Media content and controls (G. Comstock and E. Rubinstein, Eds.), Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office.

Guha Thakurta P. (2009). Media Ethics: Truth, Fairness and Objectivity, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Kumar, K.J. (2008). Mass communication in India, Jainco Publishing House, Mumbai.

Liesbet, Van Zoonen (1994). Feminist Media Studies, Sage Publications, CA, USA.

Means, R.R. and Yochim, E.C. (2008). Symbolic Annihilation. In: The International Encyclopaedia of Communication. (W. Donsbach, Ed.), Blackwell Publishing Limited, USA, UK, Australia.

Tuchman, G. (1978). The symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media. In: Hearth and Home: Images of Women in Mass Media (G. Tuchman, A.R. Daniels and J. Benet, Eds.), Oxford University Press, New York.

UNESCO (2009). Chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Newsletter of the University of Cyprus, 28.

www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report (2014).

www.mediaed.org/wp/study-guides (2014).

✻✻✻✻✻✻✻✻✻✻✻✻

Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci. | Nov. & Dec., 2019 | **6** (11&12)

(2493)