Women In Media Entertaining Men In Men's World: Let's Think of a Women's World

Patowary, Himashree

Department: Political Science, Assam University, Assam, India

ABSTRACT:- Women and Media—has been a topic of interests of the researchers over the globe for its relevance in the upliftment and empowerment of women. Representation, participation and portrayal—these three are equally studying by the researchers especially by the feminists as because media have the power of its kind to create perception on male and female among the individuals. One of the major problems of the feminists with media is the portrayal of women and quite often feminists criticise media being entertaining male viewers and generating ideas and concepts according to serve the male gaze: women are portrayed according to the male's perception, experience and concepts where women are shown as slim, beautiful, stylish or sometimes as caring and sincere home-maker. But Media have been recognised in modern time as the powerful agent of social change, socialisation, modernisation and so of the creator of proper social, economic and cultural environment.

Key words: *feminist, male gaze, media and women,*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Subordination of women—which is not only a topic of study among the researchers instead it is a philosophy of each woman's life with which they have to live without having any say. It has been the history in each stage of human civilisation and is prevalent large parts of the world—all the circumstances out of the experiences to be subordinated make it happens to women be united and voice against the age old sufferings and oppressions and to cut off the subordination as fast as men can suppress women. Gender analysts are still busy with their projects to find out the substantive causes of women's sufferings out of the patriarchy and patriarchal institutions working as fuel for the survival of the socio-economic and cultural environment for women. As a result there is a shift in the feminist scholarship from mere studying the status of women whether being high or low but rather to find out the specific nature and the basis of their subordination in a given social, economic and cultural structure. Articulating the sufferings of women Mackinnon says (as quoted in Gardiner J.K: 2004 p-39):

Imagine that for hundreds of years your most formative traumas, your daily suffering and pain, the abuse you live through, the terror you live with, are unspeakable—not the basis of literature. You grow up with your father holding you down and covering your mouth so another man can make a horrible searing pain between your legs. When you are older, your husband ties you to the bed and drips hot wax on your nipples and brings in other men to watch and makes you smile through it. Your doctor will not give you drugs he has addicted you to unless you suck his penis. (MacKinnon, 1993, p. 3)

The analysts come with their interpretations out of the chronological examinations of the remnants of the human records that women's sufferings are being facilitated by the prevailing socio-economic and cultural institutions (marriage, family system, etc.): the evolution of patriarchy in the history of human civilisation and other socio-economical and cultural institutions which in turn based on patriarchy affect gender.

The Cultural Beliefs, derived from the patriarchal set up of the social structure, are justified to oppress and victimise women. In such a situation women can neither have equal status and position nor can she breathe in a free environment. In our strictly stratified society women and men are being justified on the basis of sex and gender—according to which men are superior and powerful while women are thought to be powerless and so inferior. So, Beauvoir once said:

:
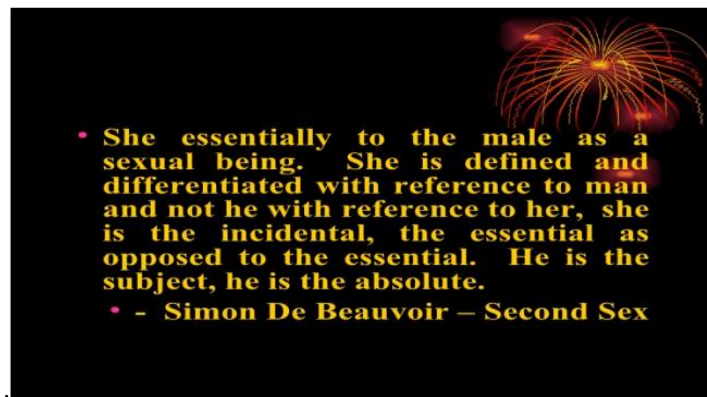
MacKinnon, on gender differences makes her opinion thus:

"......difference is the velvet glove on the iron fist of domination. The problem is not that differences are not valued; the problem is that they are defined by power". Women/men is a distinction not just of difference, but of power and powerlessness....Power/powerlessness is the sex difference" (MacKinnon: 1989,p- 219)

Culturally women had been attributed the qualities to become inferior to men, while men were supposed to be the "Essential[1]", "powerful" or "superior" with having socially attributed qualities to be so. The general view regarding the basic characteristics of men and women can be visualised thus:
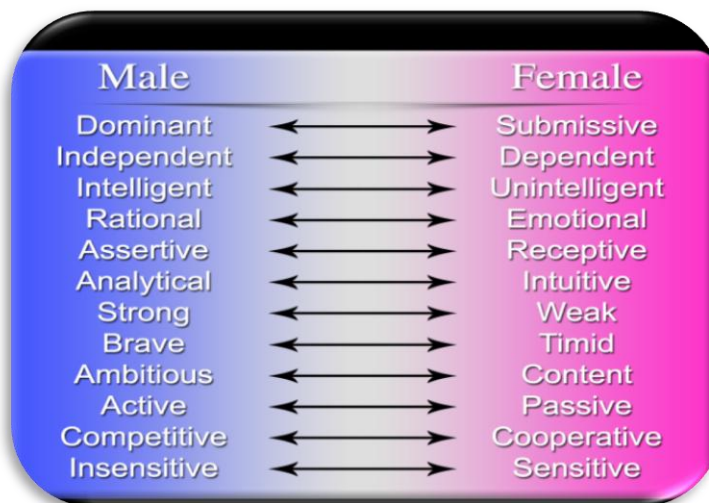
In men dominated culture, the women's position is subordinate because of the women's deprivation of status as culture subject for a long time. Therefore, we always recognize those old sayings in mind unconsciously, such as "the men go out to work while the women look after the house", "men should have a career, women should take good care of the family", "women are born to be weak, men are born strong", "Women are sad in tears, men cannot weep in public", "there must be a woman to support a successful man behind", and so on (Hui L.:2012 p-268).

---

1 According to de Beauvoir, in all the societies there exist the essential and the inessential; the self and the other, and all the societies reflect this duality. From this perspective, woman is socially constructed in relation to male and considered as inferior to the superior male. The man from his infant age has been cherished to assume an unquestioned superiority. (see http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/20322/5/05_chapter%20i.pdf)

Moreover, in almost all the religious scriptures designate women as inferior while men are superior—women are thought to be created as an "After-thought". Manusmriti[2] occupies a significant place in Hinduism where it was stressed in the inferior status of women. It reads:

In childhood must a female be dependent on her father; in youth, on her husband; her lord being dead, on her sons; if she has no sons, on the near kinsmen of her father; if she has no paternal kinsmen, on the sovereign; a woman must never seek independence. (V. Geetha: 2009,p- 48)

In Quran also women's inferiority is established under the superiority of men where women are just seen as the objects to satisfy the men sexually and providing the children. It says:

Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God had gifted the one above the other . . . Virtuous women are obedient, careful during the husband's absence, because God hath on them been careful. (Rodwell 415)

In this regard Bible is not behind to prioritize men over women saying to submit women to their husbands as women were created out of men, so men are superior and women are the subservient.

So, reform of such social structure facilitating the women's sufferings and oppressions—lies in what the agents of social change accomplish: in changing the situation for the women folk in today's digital world. Media, the powerful means to socialisation and change, though vital in communicating and covering some areas, but from women's perspective, it seems, have failed in doing that. So, Banadana Rana writes:

[...] the women's movement and the use of media got further impetus after the Beijing Conference in 1995. Many women's organisations then began to voice their concerns against the negative portrayal of women as a commodity and as second-class citizens through both private- and government-controlled print and electronic media, and the need for encouraging women to join the profession.

In today's mediated society much of what comes from the narratives, stories, series, soap operas, advertisements—which influence viewers' mentality to form own ideas and conception on a specific topic. The women question in media is very much confusing as media are being busy with creating the image of ideal women ignoring the real emotions of a real woman. In this regard, media are focussing on what the cultural beliefs presume women to be and what the patriarchy construct the image of women to be—all are regenerated in media contents leaving women as inferior and subservient. In Visual Media such as the Films, Television, or in the advertisements, those women are monitored as slim and beautiful, independent but care free as if women are nothing but the objects to be projected as men want and needs. That culminates the women's assertiveness and firmness to be called human beings and to have equal status with men and low down women to a "thing" or "objects" which are easily accessible.

In other words, media's projection of women as objects or things signifies the social and cultural construction of women as "Thing" or "object" due to their "Femaleness" or the "Procreative Power" to give immortality, continuity and purity to the "Male line". Women sexuality is being trapped in so called "Production" which divides women as upper, middle or lower and "Reproduction"(which differentiates women from men) systems of the society facilitating patriarchy in the minds of the general people: patriarchy is plant deep rooted to express, interpret, and define what it means to be men and women. In a research by Gerda Lerner about the Mesopotamian civilisation, she saw that though women were from different economic status and often enjoyed economic independence, still their sexuality was strictly controlled by men—which even can be visualised in every society. Traditional or modern, women must have to be controlled by men—this is the

---

[2] It was written by Manu and is the first Law Book in Hinduism.

universal norm of society: anyone who goes against it she is labelled as "Desperate" or "Feminist" or "Errant" by the so called patriarchal society.

So, seeing the activities of media, it appears that, it is not out of the influence of patriarchy. Traditionally, women are thought to be and adored in almost all the religions and civilizations as caring mother, wife or good homemaker where media has also a share of it to show women as so. And now there is shift to show women as slim, beautiful or stylish and economically independent but in turn in the name independence women are being pushed as objects of entertainment and sex—media are reenergising the traditional concept of women who never are independent but it was not so long ago that women on the screens solely portrayed as submissive housewives taking care of their children and family. The confusion is well stated in the following:

Many scholars who study the gender role construction of women in mass media fear the consequences of the "ideal woman," who is usually depicted as a hyper-sexualized, domestic, and obedient creature (Charlebois as quoted in Murray: 2014 p-2).

With the influx of the women characters in films, television shows, having the traditional masculine profession such as doctors, engineers, lawyers of the past few decades people may vision the gender equality be grounded in society but in reality, it is a matter of discussion, are these strong female roles shown on the screen really promoting the gender equality or are they patriarchy in disguise? Though the women characters are seen cooking kitchen wearing the aprons, washing clothes in the bathrooms, not sweeping the floors but other background activities of her personal life, the dialogue she delivers, the behaviour she portrays, symbolise patriarchy. In a study of a role of a woman CIA Agent in the television series of U.S by Shelby C. Murrey, the researcher found that instead of being a strong woman, she was not shown free from the stereotype womanly emotions: her personal life was shown so negatively that it undermined her success and credibility which ultimately reflect patriarchy still working. So, the researcher says:

Examining these misleading female roles is important because characters that may seem to challenge gender stereotypes and appeal to gender equality still reinforce hegemonic values. These media portrayals are also important to examine because reinforcing these cultural norms could potentially have a destructive effect on females and males, in which exposure to these portrayals can affect their actions, beliefs, and place in society (2014 p-2).

Feminists, after years and years struggled for gender equality and still struggling for the same, but there is no sign of equality indeed. It is implicated argument in feminism that molding, direction and expression of sexuality organizes society into two sexes—men and women—in which the totality of all the human relationships are embedded. Feminism is nothing but a theory of power and distribution: inequality—it provides the accounts of how the paternalistic disparities are internalised and justified in society though unjust. According to Griffin and Foss, the three most important principles—equality, imminent values and self determination on which feminists are justifying their movement fetching equality and to end the age old sufferings of women but it, by no means, wants to attribute matriarchy or matriarchal values. Through the basic principle of equality feminists talk about establishing a relationship between men and women on equality not on dominance by men over women or women over men. The second principle imminent value also rejecting the dominance illuminates that every individual, irrespective of men and women has their unique value in society. So there should be no ranking or hierarchy between men and women and dominance as every individual has their unique worth or immanent value. Similarly, through the third principle the feminists talk about to have the power to take decision of their own and to be empowered or to live their live the way they want.

It is on the basis of these three principles, it will be useful to reiterate that it is the difference between men and women in terms of sex and gender has problematised the situation of women to be called human beings having equal footing with men. Feminists put effort to make distinction between the biologically differentiated "male" and "female" and between the socially different "man" and "woman". According to them at the time when an infant born into, besides the biological differences in genital and reproductive organs, there is not much

difference between a male child and a female child, but in due course of time they are socialised according to their gender expectations and roles. In this regard, the imperative of Media as an agent of social change and socialisation, have meant that it should be responsible towards the development and empowerment of women. But, as against this norm, most of the time media have been seen deceiving its viewers creating vague image of women. It is well stated in the following:

Mass media portrayals of characters on television can be very deceiving. They can make you think you are engaging in something positive, such as powerful women on television, when in reality, you are simultaneously supporting male hegemony.(Murrey:2004)

It is worth-mentioning that one cannot ignore the cognitive effects of media contents on human brains—on one hand media fetch unrealistic socio-cultural and economic conditions of a particular society and on the other it justifies the created cultures through their narratives, stories and image construction: those images of men and women might not be the real as feminists say that disparities between men and women are internalised and justified through the socio-cultural beliefs though those are unjust. It is well quoted in Lou (2012 p-270):

According to the opinion of Walter Lippmann, an American media scholar, the content of the mass media create the pseudo-environment in which the mass media send all kinds of information to the public through symbolic events processing, information selection and images reconstruction. Those selected information is not the complete reflection of the reality. There is implicit ideology in the reconstructed information which not only restricts people's cognition and behaviour but also influence the social cognitive environment for quite a long time.

II.   CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that, an attempt was made to demonstrate, through this article, the relationship between images of women created by media having been patriarchal in nature and the actual feelings of women and their arguments in terms of social constructions of what it means to men and women. Rejecting the actual accounts of women to be called inferior in patriarchy dominated society, media are actualising and normalising image of women as society constructs their views on the basis of—sex and gender. Its contents entertain the male gaze and are being created such situation as if women are always ready to show their body to be called sensation by the males—which itself is a patriarchal oppression on women by men and it lowers the position to be objects of satisfying and entertaining the men.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[1]   Chakravarti Uma (2003) Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens New Delhi: stree.
[2]   Ganesh Kamala (1993) Boundary Walls: Caste and Women in a Tamil Community New Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporations.
[3]   Hutton J.H (1946) Caste in India Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[4]   Jha D.N (1981) Ancient India: An Introductory Outline New Delhi: People's Publishing House.
[5]   Joshi P.S (1978) Cultural History of ancient India New Delhi: S. Chand.
[6]   Joseph, Ammu & Sharma, Kalpana, (1994). *Whose News*? New Delhi: Sage Publications
[7]   Keval J.Kumar, (1981). *Mass Communication in India*, Bombay: Jaico
[8]   Kiran, R.N. (2000). *Philosophies of Communication and Media Ethics: Theory*, *concepts and Empirical Issues*. BRPC, New Delhi.
[9]   Krishnan Prava & Dighe Anita, (1990). *Affirmation and Denial: Construction of Femininity on Indian TV*, Sage Publication, New Delhi.
[10]   Kumar, A., (1989). *Indian Women towards 21st century*, New Delhi: Criterion Publications.
[11]   Lipner Julius (1994) Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices London: Routledge.
[12]   Maitra, Sinha, A., (1993). *Women in a Changing Society*, New Delhi: Ashis Publishing House,
[13]   Mishra, L. (Ed) (1992). *Women's issues: An Indian Perspective*, New Delhi: Northern Book Centre

[14] Munsi, S., (2000) *Wife/mother/daughter-in-law: Multiple avatars of homemaker in 1990s Indian advertising*, New Delhi: Sage Publication

[15] Pandey, M. (1991) *The subject is Woman*, New Delhi: Sanchar Publishing House

[16] Narasimhan Sakuntala (1994) India: From Sati to Sex Determination Tests in Women and Violence, Miranda Daves (ed.) London: Zed Books.

[17] Omvedt Gail (1982) Caste, Class and Land in India: An Introductory Essay. In Land, Caste and Politics in Indian States (ed.) New Delhi: Author's Guild Publications.

[18] Rambachan A. (1991) Accomplishing the Accomplished: The Vedas as a Source of Valid Knowledge of Sakara Honululu: University of Hawaii Press.

[19] Ray Choudhuri (1978) Social Cultural and Economic History of ancient India New Delhi:Surjeet Publications.

[20] Roy Kukkum (2002) Goddess in Rig Veda: An Enquiry in Invoking the Goddess: Gender Politics in Indian Religion (ed.) New Delhi: Shakti Books.