

# Gender Equality, Mass Media

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*In this research article, the contributor has tried to explore the role of mass media in emancipation of woman. Some pertinent issues related with gender bias in media reporting as well as feminism have also been discussed. Media play a great role in ensuring gender equality.*

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'A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle'.  
-Gloria Steinem  
(veteran American feminist).

Gender study has been an important subject of study for feminists, anthropologists and social scientists, 'but it has been given a more explicitly critical inflection in recent decades, when feminism came to the fore also in the humanities' (Jensen 2005). Apart from gender being a characteristic of an individual, it is an essential parameter in all social interactions and relationships. Feminist media studies began with focus on 'images of women' representing women as stereotype and presupposing gender equality as a neutral parameter. Radicals among liberal feminists fought only for equal political and economic rights. In literary studies, past was explored to provide some evidence of eminent female scholars to put forward 'alternative images of women'. In cultural approach of gender, it 'is conceived as a pervasive condition of all individual and social being, affecting the thinking and actions of both women and men'. Respective cultures have evolved different sets of expectations from men and women. Most of the time we tend to ignore, or rather prefer to ignore, the complex relationship between biological sex and cultural gender. Gender is socially constructed, and 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (cited in Kearney, 2006, p-9).

In Indian scriptures women have been assigned a very lofty and high place like Mother, destroyer of evil forces, Creator, Goddess, an object of worship, sources of all powers, and so on.

But we are reluctant to recognize that a woman is a human being. She needs to be brought down on the surface and transformed from a heavenly object to an earthly subject like man. Emancipation of woman is to liberate her from the stereotype. In this regard mass medium like cinema most of the time objectify women and 'reinforce sexual stereotypes'. Movies in general and Indian cinema in particular are instrumental in perpetuating gender bias. This is important because cinema has great impact on people and slanted gender representation determines how patriarchal society perceives women as also how the two sexes interact in their family as well as social roles. The filmmakers must realize their social responsibility. In this respect Shyam Benegal's films like Ankur, Nishant, Manthan, Bhumika and others of the genre are good examples wherein the pathetic condition of women are depicted and issues of their personal, human and social rights

are raised. These films were made during a time (70s) when the mainstream Bollywood was busy minting money by catering to the demands of the patriarchal society.

Biological difference between the two sexes is to be complemented by socio-economic structural adjustments. Biological difference does not mean weakness. It is the responsibility that the Nature has bestowed upon the female to procreate and not upon the male. It shows that God has more faith in women to perpetuate and preserve and keep intact His best creation, i.e. the progeny of humankind.

May be due to the child bearing and rearing, women might have been given the responsibility of keeping fire alive and thereby staying at 'home' (caves), i.e. men going 'outside' for hunting or food gathering, i.e. outside 'home' and women remaining within 'home'. This also might have limited the movement of women making them a bit physically weaker.

Biological difference between the two sexes is natural; we cannot and dare not undo it.

Gender inequality on the other hand is manmade and socially created, we can and we must abolish it. And in this regard mass media have to play a socially responsible role.

The traditional inequalities are vanishing while new inequalities like gender difference are emerging. In fact, inequality in the name of rights has been institutionalized as the difference is ignored (both have equal rights and duties).

Most democracies today, in the globalized world, are concerned with ensuring only legal and political equalities. According to Marxist feminists, females' subjugation is a consequence of their economic dependency in the family as capitalism demands traditional family structure based upon monogamy and nuclear family. Socialist feminists believe that 'it is not capitalism, but the mixture of the patriarchal structure with capitalism that forms the basis for the gendered division of labour that putting females in the household and males into the industrial workplace' (Kim 2006, p-126).

Subsistence existence does not have inequality, whereas surplus production gives birth to inequality and this inequality in itself is not gender biased, but creates space for gender exploitation. By gender exploitation, it is not always meant exploitation of only fair sex, but also to an extent, of males.

It is the material development that has been changing the civilizations. Material development, including technology, increases inequality. If we endeavor to retain our positive cultural values intact, most of our evils emerging out of changing civilization

could be avoided, or at least minimized.

It is relevant here to quote Mrinal Pande, the then Editor of 'Hindustan', (Pande, 2007) that shows her concern and bitterness as well for post modern feminism:

'If by flaunting their youthful sexuality they can exploit the vulnerability of some powerful men and get a good role, or gain better marks and admission to the hallowed portals of a good college..., what's our problem? What they are doing is exploiting (not for the first time) the traditional macho response of an Indian male to a young female body being flaunted. They (women) feel, instead of being angry or embarrassed, it is better to play and give them an access of it'.

If we start quarrel between male and female we would lose our children, and that would be certainly unnatural and unwanted. Family is the most important social institution, ever devised by the humankind.

Women, no doubt, have been exploited or have been subjected to oppression and given second place in society.

Now it is the question of giving women their due. What would be the means, this may have dispute. Men would prefer to give concession without giving up their patriarchal supremacy. Post modern woman would like to snatch power even at the cost of destroying the family based on the institution of marriage. Today post-modern feminists don't ask for protection, as protection connotes imprisonment, or even deprivation, and a sort of glass ceiling. Now women need and demand equality and justice as a matter of their right.

If oppressor gives the oppressed an opportunity to develop, the evolution takes place, when the oppressed snatches power to develop it is revolution that erupts. We as a society in general and men in particular, have to make a choice.

Empowering women does not mean weakening of men. In fact strong men as father, husband or brother, can do better in promoting the cause of women. It is worth citing an example from a news story published in 'The Hindu' (Jan. 23, 2007):

Eleven girls mostly belonging to rural Maharashtra, joined forest service in March, 07 probably for the first time in India. All these women spoke proudly of liberal parents, particularly of supportive fathers. Many well wishers told one of the women's fathers that it was ridiculous to let her go to the jungles. She should have been married off by then. Her father's reply is worth noting: he said that looking at some of the young men around, she would be safer amongst the tigers. This statement is more relevant today when we notice the routine reports of

ghastly crimes against women around us. One of the girls joining the service said: "my father always told me I could do anything men did and do it better". These instances are at least a step forward and show the way how things can be improved and propagated and publicized by the media.

Now this is the responsibility of the mass media to infuse this type of positive attitude among the masses. Media can play a catalyst role in these efforts.

Here it is important to note that while reporting crimes or other hard news media concentrate on process based reporting making the whole news story sensational. What we need is that such stories should be reported on event based format; whereas developmental issues like concerning emancipation of women should be process based. All over in the world, most of the media reports are full of skewed gender representation.

Print and electronic media should devote a fixed space or airtime for development communication or success stories as a gesture of social responsibility. A very low percentage of their expenditure would do it. Media may earn profit with purpose.

Media as Fourth Estate is expected to share the responsibility to help people-centric and gender specific development through need based intervention.

The legal enforcement of state responsibility and accountability, firm policy initiatives by state and central governments and their ensured implementation in letter and spirit, public activism through democratic participation for public concern, and intervention by media and civil societies are all need of the hour to realize this agenda and intervene to ensure the entitlements of the half of the nation's population.

Only intellectual involvement cannot be a substitute for active participation. Something concrete in deed is urgently required. And this something concrete must come from all walks of society including media which should take a lead by portraying women's issues in right perspective.

White House's first female Press Secretary (press secretary to Bill Clinton), Dee Dee Myer's nursery going daughter Kate believed that only boys could be the President of the United States. 'Girls can be Presidents wives'. For the little girl the presidency was reserved for a male only. We are fortunate enough, and in a way, politically ahead enough, that a two hundred plus old vibrant democracy could not give a women president whereas we had a lady President just after six decades of independence.

#### **Like all identitiesn-**

linguistic, geographical religious etc, the

identity of women is lost. Issue of gender identity has been diluted. It has been converted into a tool to gain political concessions or create a vote bank. Political resistance to the Women's Bill in the Parliament and outside is an example. Yet we have some silver lining. Initially empowerment at the gram panchayat levels was seen as a proxy war for sarpanch (we coined the phrase like 'pradhn pati'). But thanks to the political awakening, the pradhnpatis are weathering away now. Slowly but steadily, women are getting aware of their rights and trying to assert their political new found land.

On April 17, 1954, when the Federation of South African Women was founded, 'The Women's Charter' was formulated that declared: 'The level of civilization which any society has reached can be measured by the degree of freedom that its members enjoy. The status of women is a test of civilization'. At the opening of South Africa's first democratically elected Parliament on May 24, 1994, first President Nelson Mandela said: 'Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression'.

And this freedom means not only freedom from foreign rule, but freedom within a nation, within a society and within the family itself from the stereotype of womanhood. And the responsibility of ensuring this freedom must be shared by the Fourth Estate by sensitizing, motivating and mobilizing men in particular and community in general towards a gender sensitive, not gender-neutral, society.

Gender discrimination is a global phenomenon. The difference lies in degree, not in kind. During Hillary Clinton's campaign for Primary, there were some men who teased her with signs that read 'Iron my shirt'. Though she became the first woman in the United States to win a presidential primary. Here it is relevant to quote the famous US journalist Jodi Enda (2008), 'Hillary Clinton was treated in a way that no man would ever be treated as a presidential candidate'. Enda said terms like 'too ambitious' and 'calculating' were used to describe Ms. Clinton. As if men are not ambitious or calculating or these otherwise human traits are not considered negative for men.

In the context of gender debate, an exchange on the status of women through letters, between John Adams (Adams, 2007), second president of the US, and his wife Abigail, is relevant. She was among the first people who fought for women's rights: '...Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies,

we are determined to foment a rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.

That your sex are naturally tyrannical is a truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute ; but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up - the harsh tide of master for the more tender and endearing one of friend. ...Men of sense in all ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the servants of your sex".

**This is President John Adam's reply-**

'...But your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented. ...We know better than to repeal our masculine systems. Although they are in full force, you know they are little more than theory, we dare not exert our power in its full latitude. We are obliged to go fair and soft and, in practice, you know we are the subjects.

We have only the name of masters, and rather than give up this, which would completely subject us to the despotism of the petticoat".

**Appeal to median`**

• Don't sensationalize the gender related issues, but sensitize the people. We need to change our mindset. Of course this sensitization has to be both ways, as gender sensitization is not a matter of choice for one-half.

• There is a big gap between the law regarding

empowerment of women and the actual implementation of the law. And here media can play a socially responsible role by exposing the lapses and helping in bridging that gap.

• Another point to be noted here is that media and civil society are complementary to each other, and join hands in their efforts especially when it comes to fulfill their social obligations. Actually media constitute not only Fourth Estate and watchdog, but also functions as a civil society

Lastly, women must remember what Sarojini Naidu once said: 'Let women feel that what they are today is because they deserved it and not because they were given any special treatment". But still they have miles to go. They are equal in number. Why not equal in power?

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**पृष्ठ 26 का शेष**

उत्तर वैदिक काल में रोगों का उपचार न केवल जादू-टोनों से ही किया जाता था, अपितु औषधि के विभिन्न स्वरूपों का ज्ञान होने के कारण उनका प्रयोग भी किया जाता था। इस आधार पर यह कहा जा सकता है कि उत्तर वैदिक काल में दैव व्यापाश्रय चिकित्सा के स्थान पर युक्ति व्यापाश्रय चिकित्सा का अधिक विकास हुआ।

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