

MEDIA PORTRAYING THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN PAKISTAN: AN ISLAMIC STATE

Muniza Javed*

Dr. Musferah Mehfooz* *

In the present era the value of gender equality is being accepted and promoted in almost all regions of the world. For the emancipation of women in every field, economic independence is of paramount importance along with creating awareness among them about their rights and responsibilities-the recognition of their vital role and the work they do at home. In exploring the relationship between media and society, pertinent questions include whether media are molders or reflectors of social structures, and whether media are agents of social change or reinforcers of the status quo. The media is considered as the most potent and influential mean in this regard as it has the capacity of persuading and molding opinion. The relationship of the media and the women is important because whatever image women have in our country is influenced by media. It is thus vital, to utilize the media for improving the status of women in Pakistan an Islamic state, and divulging their role in national development. The problem in Pakistani society is that the media is portraying negative image of women which in real is not a part of our society and culture.

Key word: *Pakistani society, Media, Image of women*

Introduction

In the present era the value of gender equality is being accepted and promoted in almost all regions of the world. For the emancipation of women in every field, economic independence is of paramount importance along with creating awareness among them about their rights and responsibilities-the recognition of their vital role and the work they do at home. In exploring the relationship between media and society, pertinent questions include whether media are molders or reflectors of social structures, and whether media are agents of social change or reinforcers of the status quo.¹ The mirror approach employs the metaphor of the mirror to describe the role of media in society.² Studies show that the “pictures” we get from the media differ from the world outside.³ Media content does not simply reflect the world, but represents it by highlighting certain elements over others.⁴ Traditional Marxists believe that the images and definitions provided by the media

* Lahore College for Women University, Lahore.

** COMSAT University, Lahore.

are “distorted or ‘false’ accounts of an objective reality” which are molded by the ruling political and economic groups.⁵ Many feminist studies on media and society focus on the relationship between media portrayals of women and social reality. Much attention has been given to the gender-role messages in television programs⁶, newspaper and magazine content, and advertising.⁷

The media is considered as the most potent and influential mean in this regard as it has the capacity of persuading and molding opinion. The relationship of the media and the women is important because whatever image women have in our country is influenced by media. It is thus vital, to utilize the media for improving the status of women in Pakistan and divulging their role in national development. The problem in Pakistani society is that the media is portraying negative image of women which in real is not a part of our society and culture. According to liberal feminist men and women must be equal in society but in Pakistan liberal feminist thought is playing a negative role as in Pakistani culture both male and female have their responsibilities described by their values and norms, but liberal feminists are making females far from their own values and responsibilities like household works, child birth, child rearing etc. all these are the responsibilities of women and without these a woman is incomplete in our society. Being a woman and having all such duties does not mean that our society is conservative, and women have no liberty to get education, making their careers and earn by their own selves. Pakistani society gives liberty to women to get education, work outside and earn. There are so many women of our country who had built a remarkable career and make our country famous all over the world, but the problem is that media is portraying a negative image of Pakistani women by showing that women must work equally and have to be just like male and in this race if they neglect their families and fundamental responsibilities then it is not a big deal which is wrong because in real the women of Pakistan are not like that.

Portraying a negative image of women by media is destroying the image of Pakistan all over the world and taking the young generation to the wrong tracks as now the divorce rates and late marriages are becoming a trend of Pakistan because young girls start thinking that they are not less than males and they do anything like males, so they get isolated from families and just want to make their career. The other feminist thought i.e. the cultural feminist thought is that the female nature and female essence is important in society. Females are

different from male and even superior then males due to their quality of being a female. This thought is also playing a negative role in Pakistani society as media is using women as a sex object or advertising agent. Women are considered important on the bases of her beauty and attractiveness which is destroying the image of women. Now the presence of women is important in every sort of advertisement and in movies and dramas women are shown as a sex object which is insulting and effecting women's respectful image.

Feministic Approach:

Feminism is not a monolithic ideology, that all feminists do not think alike, and that, like all time-honored modes of thinking, feminist thought has a past as well as a present and a future". There is no precise definition of *feminism* or *feminist* because by nature these concepts resist definitive statements.⁸ Bowen and Wyatt noted that there are many statements that might ease the understanding, such as: feminism is concerned with women's lives; theories about humans; the nature of knowledge; the way in which knowledge is generated and legitimated; the "canon" of traditional knowledge; and process and connection.

There are several theories of feminist perspective which includes liberal feminists, radical feminists, cultural feminists, socialist feminists, eco feminism etc.

Liberal feminism is a form of feminism that argues that equality for women can be achieved through legal means and social reform.

Cultural feminism believes that a female nature or female essence is essential to society. It's the theory that there are fundamental personalities and psychological differences between men and women, and that woman's differences are not only unique, but superior.

Radical feminism is a branch of feminism that views women's oppression (which radical feminists refer to as "patriarchy") as a basic system of power upon which human relationships in society are arranged. It seeks to challenge this arrangement by rejecting standard gender roles and male oppression. **Socialist feminism** focuses upon both the public and private spheres of a woman's life. They argue that liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women's oppression. **Eco feminism** is a social and political movement which unites environmentalism and feminism. Ecofeminists argue that a relationship exists between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature.

Media Portraying Image of women in Pakistan:

Media are considered social systems within a specific system -- the set of social and cultural conditions that make up the society.⁹ As such, the content of the media must be understood within the framework of the overall social, political, economic and cultural conditions that are prevailing in a society.¹⁰

The pressure on women to look and behave in certain ways is deeply ingrained into our culture. It is often easy to overlook the impact that culture has on how we feel about ourselves and our bodies. Watching TV, reading magazines, newspapers, or surfing the internet it is all we see are airbrushed images of perfect bodies of women. Images of female bodies are everywhere. Women and their body parts sell everything from food to cars.

Research indicates that exposure to images of thin, young, air-brushed female bodies can be linked to depression, loss of self-esteem and the development of unhealthy eating habits in women and girls. Twenty years ago, the average model weighed 8 percent less than the average woman, but today's models weight is 23 percent less than the average women. The messages that the media sends to women about thinness, dieting, and beauty tells "ordinary" women that they are always in need of adjustment, and that the female body is an object to be perfected. Emotional abuse is any behavior that is designed to control human beings using fear, humiliation, intimidation, guilt, coercion, or manipulation. Emotional abuse is any kind of abuse that is emotional rather than physical in nature. It can include verbal abuse, constant criticism, put-downs, and constant disapproval.

Objectification theory postulates that many women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others.¹¹ Sexually Objectification occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire. Objectification theory posits that Sexually objectification of females is likely to contribute to mental health problems that disproportionately affect women (i.e., eating disorders, depression, and sexual dysfunction) via two main paths. The first path is direct and overt and involves Sexually Objectified experiences. The second path is indirect and subtle and involves women's internalization of Sexually Objectified experiences or self-objectification.

According to UNDP (1998) women's role in TV drama have become secondary, passive and glamorous. However, it is important to discuss here that Pakistan's electronic media has undergone a revolutionary

evolution which has completely changed the dynamics and characteristics which used to define traditional trends of Pakistani electronic Media.¹² The private sector in electronic media is successfully competing with the foreign channels. Women participation in TV and FM radio channels is quite promising, we see women in on TV as News Anchor conducting Current Affair Programs, in news casting, working behind and in front of camera, in news studio as well doing field reporting. Number of educated young woman journalists working for electronic media is increasing day by day. There is room for improvement in the way Electronic media presents genders issues. Women make more than 50% of Pakistan's population as their issues are represented as par warranted by their number. The drama presents women mostly in typical roles in which women life is depicted as being confined dealing with highly politicized domestic policies. The essential feminine appeal of women is highlighted even when their character is presented in a modern professional role. For example, Women are casted just to glamorize the ad even when their presence is not required for example ads about gents' products, electronics etc. and female models are used to enhance the sex appeal and attract the audience even when it's irrelevant to the item being advertised. The survey of Pakistan Advertising Association has come up with the findings that 83% of women are used in the advertisements where they are not even needed, 88% of women are used just to promote the products, 75% of all advertisements portray women for products used in kitchen and bathroom while 56% of advertisements portray women as domestic helpers or housewives and Men are presented in 43 professions whereas women are presented in 18 of them.

Research on the genre of women's magazines and its implications for women's social roles and identities in the Pakistani context is almost nonexistent. In recent publications on women's literacy practices carried out in rural and urban Multan, reading of women's magazines among teenage girls and young women was reported as a significant finding: women read these magazines not only as a source of pleasure but in quest of their identity.¹³ Most young women reported reading popular romances and women's magazines such as *She, Mag Woman's Own, Pakeezah, Shuaa* whereas older women reported reading religious texts. In a subsequent study, female images in magazine advertisements (*She, Mag*) were deconstructed in a feminist perspective¹⁴. The study found that the images presented in the world

of advertisements were utopian and far removed from the actual reality of women's lives; images of women were sexualized to sell the products hence women were not represented as subjects but objects of discourse.

A gender writer Tazeen Javed (2005) mentioned in national daily, 'The News', that the women present by the media can easily be codified in categories such as, a woman dependent on man, as an overachieving house wife, as physically beautiful and sexy. Newspapers, especially local language newspapers, are not careful about the importance of the style of the reporting, and tend to ignore the extremely adverse effect of sensational reporting on the victims and their families. The Urdu terms generally used for victims include those dosheeza, charhati jawani, badnaseeb nokhez kali, hawwa ki beti, etc. as if that is not enough, the phrases use to describe such incidents usually include phool masal dala, abrurezi, moonh kala ker diya, barbad kerna, etc. has been dishonored. The words used for the culprits are jinsi darinda, bheria, shetan, nashey main must, shatan ke chalay etc. this gives the impression that abusers are not responsible for the crime as they are often overcome by devil or are under the influence of alcohol.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it is found that feminism theories were given, and movement were happened due to giving rights and place to women in society but now it is playing a negative role as based on feminist perspective media is exploiting women by portraying them as a sex object and de tracking young girls and women from their religious beliefs, norms and values. In Pakistani society it is affecting our tradition culture roles and portraying women as an object of beauty, advertisement and sexual pleasure. It is also promoting gender discrimination in Pakistan by making women bold enough to ignore their relationship with males and with their families. Making women an earning material is destroying their unique quality of being a woman and effecting health and minds.

NOTES & REFERENCES

- ¹ Rosengren, K. E. (1981). Mass media and social change: Some current approaches. In E. Katz & T. Szecsko (Eds.), Mass media and social change (pp. 247-264). Beverly Hills: Sage.
- ² Curran, J., Gurevitch, M., & Woollacott, J. (1982). The study of the media: Theoretical approaches. In J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, & J.

-
- Woollacott (Eds.), Culture, society and the media (pp. 11-29). London: Methuen.
- ³ Lang, K., & Lang, G. (1971). The unique perspective of television and its effects: A pilot study. In W. Schramm & D. Roberts (Eds.), the process and effects of mass communication (pp. 84-99). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
 - ⁴ Devereux, E. (2003). Understanding the media. London: Sage.
 - ⁵ Curran, J., Gurevitch, M., & Woollacott, J. (1982). The study of the media: Theoretical approaches. In J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, & J. Woollacott (Eds.), Culture, society and the media (pp. 11-29). London: Methuen.
 - ⁶ Ferri, A. J. & Keller, J. E. (1986). Perceived career barriers for female television news anchors. *Journalism Quarterly*, 63(3), 463-467.
 - ⁷ Lysonski, S. (1985). Role portrayals in British magazine advertisements. *European Journal of Marketing*, 19, 37-55.
 - ⁸ Bowen, S., & Wyatt, N. (Eds.). (1993). *transforming visions: Feminist critiques in communication studies*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
 - ⁹ Defleur, M. L. (1970). *Theories of mass communication*. New York: David McKay.
 - ¹⁰ Cheng, H. (1997). "Holding up the half of the sky?" A socio-cultural comparison of Gender-role portrayals in Chinese and US advertising. *International Journal of Advertising*, 16, 295-319.
 - ¹¹ Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21, 173-206.
 - ¹² UNDP (1998). *"Representing the Unrepresented: Portrayal of Women in Pakistan Television Programs"*. United Nation Development Program, Islamabad, Pakistan.
 - ¹³ Zubair, S. (1999) *Women's Literacy in a Rural Pakistani Community: An Ethnographic Study*. Unpublished PhD thesis: Cardiff University: Wales.
