

## **Dehumanisation of Women in Media**

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There is no country in the world where women are accorded the same status as that of men. Kerala society is overly hierarchized in terms of gender. What is the cause? There is no point in blaming media alone; myriad beliefs, traditions and rituals contribute their share to the subjugation of women. Media, in the modern era of media explosion, play a considerable role in defining women's status and role in society. The portrayal of women in media has a substantial influence on society's collective psyche. Today, the portrayal of women in media justifies and strengthens gender inequality; added to this is the increasing dehumanization of women. Today, consumer culture is on the rise globally; male dominance exists globally too. Consumer culture emphasises the physicality of a woman; her intellectual and creative facets have been disrespected. A woman's visual appeal and advertisement value have been increasingly prioritized; she is often portrayed as a sexual object. The present paper focuses on the portrayal of women in the medium of Television.

### **I. MISOGYNISTIC FACET OF NEWS**

News reporting is the main duty of media. There are TV channels which are specially meant for news. 'Vice is news' is a general truth regarding news. Bad and abhorrent matters excite the common mass. The channels are vying to report such tidings; they are least bothered about the undesirable effects the broadcast of such news cause in society. News often portray women as frail beings. People accustomed with incessant stories of rape tend to consider rape an ordinary event, and therefore a grave, horrendous crime gets soft-pedalled. Media is replete with images of women portrayed as commercial objects, which condition and abet a given society to conceive of women as commercial objects. A Woman findsherself vulnerable from the cradle to the grave in a society that is conditioned to conceive of her as object. She is prone to sexual predation even at her own home. These days, molestation, dowry related violence and domestic violence have been made light of since they are frequent and everyday events to us. Media are disposed to treat issues such as eve-teasing humorously. Rape stories are described in the fashion of romantic tales! Media have been effecting a favourable cultural climate that increases the number of rapes.

Media are strikingly alike in perceiving women-related matters; they seem to be united in their misogynistic stance. The regressive social tendency which considers women as objects for consumption exists unwaveringly in media too. In the images that accompany news, women appear as mere luxury items meant to provide a rich and colourful visual treat. Media celebrate rape and molestation as titillating stories. Vulgarity, violence and criminality hold sway when camera is operated with the sole intent of commercial gain. Even the language employed to deal with women's issues is visibly different.

### **II. WOMEN'S SERIALS**

Serials that last endlessly is the life-breath of channels. Serials were known by the name 'soap operas' since advertisements for their episodes were drawn from soap companies in the beginning. The plot and subplots of such serials are replete with elements which could be lengthened inordinately. During evening hours, these serials take centre stage in Malayali lives, mostly in the case of certain women. There is a popular joke in Malayalam that three things starting with the letter 'sa' are important to women: saree, swarnam(gold)—and serial. Serials play a crucial role in making people crazy about gold and apparels.

It is a naked truth that the representation of women in serials is a far cry from reality. Women are portrayed either as mothers or prostitutes, virgins or harlots, and as traditionalists or libertines. The main themes of serials are the brutalities of mothers-in-law and the helplessness of male characters caught between wives and mothers. Most of the females in serials are overemotional, superstitious, and dependent. Women fall prey to the visuals that stir tender feelings.

Women with important participation in the public sphere and work place do not figure in the serials. Research on the topic indicates that only one-fourth of the female characters in serials have any significant

occupation. In the domestic space, women are often accorded a mere supplementary role with men. We find women acting as per the dicta of men even in personal matters.

The role models featured by media are engrossed in the idea that women are frail, and provide opportunities for women sans discriminative knowledge to ape them. Serials are competing with each other to portray women with wails and cries. By presenting women who are capable of reactions as insolent, media inculcate the message that such women are misfits in family and society.

Marriage is the ultimate goal of women in serials. We often hear the refrain ‘give her a life.’ Marriage is the alpha and omega in a woman’s life; it is followed by the concomitant phenomena such as dowry and abuse.

Marriages celebrated by media are exemplars of luxury and pomp. They condition brides and their families to love ornaments and clothes, and crave for them during marriages. Media are disempowering women by nourishing their frailties. After conducting a marriage, umpteen families get into bad debts and often end up in suicide. The undue expense of marriage often lead many a family into bad debts and subsequent ruin.

It is a naked truth that the most important issues of women are of no importance to media. They have no liking for the progress of women’s organizations and the stories of phenomenal women who paved the way for social reformation. Serials at large justify the social disabilities that women are fettered with. No serials are ready to examine or reject the misogynistic ideals. Women are mere vulgar objects in comedy serials. Akin to the celebration of female nudity, when men appear in the guise of women they are ever zealous to vulgarly expose the body parts like stomach.

As the number of channels are increasing day by day, channels are vying to do anything and everything in order to exist profitably. Many channels have become hotbeds of obscenity. Paying no heed to propriety, serials portray extra marital affairs. Many women characters are closer to other men and love them more than their husbands; a good number of men characters are closer than their wives to other women. Countless acts of violence and murder fill the serials. The performances of villainous men and women fly in the face of all our ideals. Consumer culture affects even ordinary housewives to a suicidal extent. Following the image of women in serials, there are so many housewives who are bent on decking themselves up even while at home.

They wallow in the passion for ornaments and yearn for extramarital relations. So many ill effects ensue from the channels’ endeavour to rivet the audience by portraying regressive ideals. The portrayal of violence, murder and drugs as fashionable paves the way for many a social evil. I am reminded of an unforgettable experience shared by Prakash Paul who played the role of KadamattathuKathanar in the eponymous serial. As he was seated on a dais, a woman walked up to him and prostrated before him. To the woman, the man who acted as KadamattathuKathanar was a human-god. The impact of serial cannot be overstated.

### **III. WOMEN AND ADVERTISEMENTS**

Since advertisement is the best way to sell out products, commercial lobbies are fervently engaged in producing ads. With repeated ads, companies are trying zealously to make their products a part of the viewers’ consciousness.

Ads are the life breath of channels; they cannot survive without ads. To get ads, the programmes of a channel should be as popular as possible; that means they should be peppered with titillating elements; popular taste will always favour emotionalism.

Ads have been transcending all the bounds of propriety. Nude beauties are deployed to advertise cigars and shaving sets. Women are indispensable even in the ads of products exclusively meant for men. Bikes are advertised by comparing each parts of the vehicle to different female body parts. Obscenity, in fact, is the principal quest of advertisements. Showing instead of telling has become more important in advertisements

The misogynistic politics of ads is palpable. The ads of domestic tools and appliances reaffirm the idea that women’s role is in the kitchen and are protectors of tradition; a nurse to her husband and kids. The roles of doctors, engineers, managers, and higher officials are have been monopolized by men. Even though women’s participation in the professional fields have increased, such facts are often neglected in ads. Even in the ads where women deserve prominence, men often speak louder than them, and are seen in more assertive postures.

In a half an hour episode, more than half of the time is set apart for advertisements. The ulterior motives of multinational companies who are bent upon grabbing the money of housewives by enticing them through ads, and channels who want to generate income are behind this trend. This makes Malayali women unsuspecting preys of commercial culture. There are some female college students who buy cosmetic products by spending the money given to them to buy lunch.

Jewellery advertisements wrap women from head to foot in gold. They convey the idea that women are dolls to be covered in gold. Serials do not wrap women fully in gold, but there too gold is an unavoidable factor to make a woman glamorous. Media propagate the message that women are objects whose main duty is to deck themselves up. Chiffon’s gloss, silk’s softness and nylon’s dishabille is the best combination that makes a

woman! Such advertisements delight the women audience and they happily imitate the images propagated by such ads. Irrespective of financial status, the ultimate aim of some women is to gain the luxuries shown in ads at any cost.

Today's media consider men as consumers; therefore women have been portrayed by them as per men's wish and desire. Media do not consider women as clever audience. Media are engrossed in romantic, regional and hot matters; they also follow the method of condemning rapes and at the same time representing women as commercial objects. They are unable to do anything against the dehumanization of women. They also lack the policy to encourage individuals and organizations who actively resist female dehumanization.

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