

## Carcass In The Cage: Women As Victims Of The Media

**Rameen Rashid Khan**

Student, Faculty of Law, University of Kashmir  
Rambagh, Srinagar, Jammu And Kashmir

**Falak Naaz**

Phd Scholar, School of Legal Studies, Central University of  
Kashmir, Gulshan Nagar, Srinagar, Jammu And Kashmir

**Abstract:** *“In reality, she was neither one nor the other, she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name.”*  
(Amrita Pritam, Pinjar)

*In all its shades, media, though reflecting various aspects of the life of a society, also contributes towards shaping it. It has influence over common lives and by setting standards and ideals it can become instrumental in bringing about progressive change. It is a gruesome reality that in modern times, the media, while literally “bringing light into people’s lives”, also has in store for them dismal clouds of disadvantages. It is true that while media can create better conditions for women in the world that we live in, it often tends to culminate in the exact opposite by painting disadvantageous pictures of women, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes. Media as a tool of powerful influence can contribute in fighting the battle against indecent representation of women by changing outlook and establishing women at their deserved stations in the society. In the wake of an increased number of crimes against women, it becomes essential to understand the persisting problem related to the indecent representation of women, its inter-relation with the unprecedented increase in violence against women and the efficacy of the relevant law. This paper aims at analyzing the problem of indecent representation of women in media with special reference to Indian media and the relevant legal cure.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Stereotypes, Indecent Representation, Crimes against Women.*

In all its shades, media, though reflecting the various aspects of the life of a society, also contributes towards shaping it. It has influence over common lives and by setting standards and ideals it can become instrumental in bringing about progressive change. The representation of women in the Indian media has undergone a change to a great extent from earlier times. However, this transformation has not been successful in eliminating the discrimination against women in respect of their commodification and has rather contributed more to the detriment. Media as a tool of powerful influence can contribute in fighting the battle against indecent representation of women by changing outlook and establishing them at their deserved stations. In the wake of an increased number of crimes against women, it becomes essential to understand the persisting problem related to the Indecent representation of women. It is a gruesome reality that in modern times, the media, while literally “bringing light into people’s lives”, has engulfed it in dismal clouds of disbenefit. It is an agency that encultures the viewer to its point of view. It is true that while media can create better conditions for

women in the world that we live in, it often tends to culminate in the exact opposite by painting disadvantageous pictures of women, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes. Portrayal of women as equal has not been given the priority it deserves by the media. Sexual brutalization of women has remained a highly marketable commodity in all the popular forms of Indian media.

### REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POPULAR INDIAN MEDIA

#### IN FILMS

A study conducted by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media in collaboration with the University of South California, The Rockefeller Foundation and UNwomen, has shown that sexualisation of Women in Indian films is greater than sexualisation of males. Sexualisation of females in Indian films is the third largest in respect of sexy attire (34.1%)

among a total of 12 countries. 35% females are shown with some nudity. However, India lags behind the 11 countries in respect of thin females showing a lowest of 18%. In respect of males 12.2% are shown in sexy attire, 13.5% with some nudity, 4.3% female characters are shown to be attractive and 6.7% are shown to be thin. This shows clearly the discrimination and stereotyping of females in sexualized roles. Movies that portray women in non-sexualised roles are not popular because they do not fetch the kind of success that commercial films do.

#### IN ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertisements for men's products generally depict women as sex objects (for example, advertisement of deodorant, shaving cream etc.). The main reason for this is to persuade the target customers to buy a particular product or to avail of a service. We can see a woman depicting a vulgar and lusty image in many advertisements such as soft drinks (Slice), Deodorant and Body Spray ("Engage", "Axe", "Wild Stone"), which is not at all necessary to portray in this kind of advertisements of male products.

#### IN NEWSPAPERS

Besides Sunday and Saturday special glossy editions on women's leisure, fashion, beauty and other luxurious news items with erotic photographs are issued from time to time by daily newspapers.

#### THE ITEM SONG PHENOMENON

Item song is a song and dance sequence which is characterized by a provocative dancing woman known as item girl. Item songs have been part of Indian films since the 1950's. However, they have evolved with the changing times. Earlier item songs were relatively modest in comparison to the present-day item songs which have acquired an element of 'rank sexuality, brutish pride and vulgarity.' These songs aim at attracting largely male audiences. Item songs in Bollywood films deserve a mention in so far as they, as the name suggests, refer to a girl in a skimpy attire as an "item" thereby reinforcing the misogynist gender stereotype. (*Chikni Chameli*, *Munni badnam hue*, *Sheila ki Jawani*, *jalebi bhai*, *Afghan jalebi*).

#### THE INTERNET

From pop-ups to well-designed internet sites, the internet has literally become a place of open derogation to women. Advertisements inviting one to "hot babes" videos is something one almost always comes across.

#### SONG LYRICS: RAPE RAP

Lyrics of songs are a very important influence on young minds. Nowadays song lyrics have also become a device of derogation to women (for example, *yoyo honey singh songs*) which have received immense popularity among adolescents. In this trend of literal glorification of hatred for women and

promoting a liquor culture through song lyrics, one is awed to hear even lullabies being reconstructed in this endeavour (e.g., *lala lala lori, daru ki katori*). In the aftermath of the gangrape of a young woman in Delhi on December 16, 2012, leading to her death, an intense debate about glorification of rape in popular culture was sparked in India. All of a sudden Honey Singh's lyrics came under the scanner, and a petition was filed to appeal for a ban against him performing. The Indian lawyer Arundhati Katju went as far as stating in a column in *The Indian Express* that Honey Singh's music should be recognised as "gender-based hate speech". She laments that the current hate speech ban in the Indian Penal Code only criminalises speech that "promotes feelings of hatred, enmity or ill-will between different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities". Katju argues that women are a vulnerable group in the Indian society, and there is no justification for not including gender in the country's hate speech ban.

#### PERCEPTION OF THE YOUTH

In a research conducted by Archana Kumari & Himani Joshi it was found that out of 100 students, 50 girls and 50 boys students of the age group 17 to 20 years, 76% agreed that there is unnecessarily display of vulgarity in media, 80% relied upon the fact that women are used more in commercials than men, 60% of the students agreed that women are used as commodity to attract the customers and 76% held that sex stereotyped roles are shown in sitcoms which in turns create a vague image of women in society. Approximately 60% students agreed that women are portrayed as decorative objects as they overemphasize beauty and sexuality.

#### MEDIA IMPACT

The importance of media impact cannot be underestimated because it has virtually become the staple diet. Soaps, operas, films, videos have become sources of standards of behavior and lifestyles choices follow the path led by this trend-setter. The extreme views that the media portrays can gradually become part of the collective conscience of the society if left to their own device. Gradually people can become desensitized towards violent and aggressive acts as the norm and not exceptional. Jennings Bryant of the University of Alabama warns of the "stalagmite effects," whereby "cognitive deposits build up almost imperceptibly from the drip drip-drip of television's electronic limewater.

#### MEDIA IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

In recent times, in India the number of juvenile offenders has increased to such an extent that a complete overhaul of the law relating to Juvenile offenders has been demanded by the educators, lawyers, women's groups, etc. In consequence of this uproar it becomes indispensible to weigh the impact of various factors on the development of the personality of children and adolescents especially the mass media which we literally "feed upon". A major influence on the growth of

violent behavior occurs in the prime of a child's emotional developmental life. As our children grow and develop attitudes and beliefs about the world and how it works, they are plugged into the electronic media from morning to night. The pictures, images, and sounds they hear are being imprinted practically from birth. If we, as concerned citizens, do not begin to address the presentations of violence, senseless killing, and merged sex and violence in the electronic media, we become at risk for even greater proliferation of such images and the loss of more and younger children to their influence. One line of research indicates that children's attitude may interact with other variables, such as identification with television characters, to produce aggression, and that interventions that change attitudes can significantly reduce aggression.

#### MEDIA IMPACT ON WOMEN

According to Sgarzi (2003) Images promoted by the media give women double messages: Be sexy, be alluring, be free-and don't complain if people think you're asking for it. Often female victims accept the blame for their victimization. Generations of women are told that they should act like sexual objects, play like sexual objects, but if someone crosses the line, it's the woman's behavior that caused the action (Jhally, 1990).

#### IMPACT ON MEN

Machismo refers to an attitude of male pride and sexual virility, a form of narcissism that condones sexual use and abuse of women and, in the extreme, views violence as a dimension of sexual gratification or instrument of sexual goals.

#### DOES MEDIA INFLUENCE CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

The impact of media per se is gigantic especially that of visual media which serves as a very powerful medium for communicating idea and images. The impact of television can be seen on all age groups be it adolescents or old, sitting in front of the television for hours and watching series of images that become impregnated on minds and thus act as the measuring canon for coded behaviours. "Indecent representation of women" means the depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form or body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent, or derogatory to, or denigrating, women, or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure the public morality or morals. With the growing commercialization of the mass media, there has been increasing commodification of women in the mass media. The body of a woman is constructed on the screen from the eyes of the male "gaze" that objectifies her as a commodity. Women's images on television consistently follow traditional stereotypical patterns and are very often derogatory. One artist who has been fiercely attacked in this respect is the Punjabi rapper Honey Singh, a popular artist, performing songs in many Bollywood films, criticized for both misogynistic lyrics and videos. Such representation of women cannot be ignored

in view of the soaring rates of crime against women. Women face violence inside and outside the family throughout their lives. According to the National Crimes Records Bureau, there were 32,000 murders, 19,000 rapes, 7,500 dowry deaths and 36,500 molestation cases during 2006. A Thomson Reuters Foundation global poll ranks India the fourth most dangerous country in the world for women, only better than Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Pakistan. A similar poll among the G20 countries ranks India the worst country. In the latest Global Gender Gap Report by World Economic Forum, India is ranked 105 out of 135 countries. Following the Delhi gangrape case, the UN's human rights-chief pointed out rape in India as a particular "national problem", and called for a review of India's legislative framework on violence against women. In the last few years, in respect of portrayal of women in India, It is often felt and understood that, there is an overdose of nudity and vulgarity that is being depicted in media be it, Newspapers, Television, Films, Magazines, Hoardings and posters. Moreover, the increasing cases of exploitation of women in recent times make it more crucial to avoid portrayal of women in negative and regressive ways and also altogether stop commodification of women. There are many laws related to obscenity in India. However, none of them specifically deals with the indecent representation of women except the indecent representation of women (prohibition) act 1986. The said act is almost three decades old and needs improvement in order to match pace with the present times and to create an effect upon the problems of the present day.

#### TUG OF WAR: WHY THE ANTI-MEDIA CRUSADE?

The increase in the crimes against women in the recent years has shocked the whole nation. It is important to understand the attitudes and behaviours prevailing in respect of women to understand the mind of the offender of a crime against women. The treatment of women in the society is vitally influenced and determined by how women are thought of by the society at large which in turn depends a great deal upon the reaffirmation of gender stereotypes and their overt and covert recognition by the mass media. The influence of media is paramount in shaping attitudes and behaviours generally and in particular towards women and their role in the society. Numerous studies have demonstrated the effects of media on various behaviours including violence and aggression, social stereotyping and prosocial behaviours. A stereotyped portrayal of women in the media is likely to render it as the accepted role or position of a woman in real life as the cultivation theory posits that heavy exposure to mass media creates and cultivates attitudes more consistent with a media directed version of reality itself. The circle goes full as media alters the idea of reality so much so as to end up altering the reality itself. It has been argued that the people involved with the media do not "bear the responsibility of the morality of a nation". However, it is worthwhile to say that those involved in the media have a responsibility to "protect the dignity of women" to an extent no less than that of an ordinary citizen of the country. Why should the women of India bear the wrath of victimization at the hands of those

living in the illusionary world of a media-taught mind. In reality the male mind too is not a free bird so long as it is fed with unreal stereotypes and distorted perception of the opposite gender.

#### THE LEGAL REINS: THE INDECENT REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN (PROHIBITION) ACT, 1986 AND THE NEED FOR AMENDMENT

The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 was enacted to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner.

At the time of the enactment of the IRWA, 1986 "electronic media, internet and other channels were not common". However, it was being observed that the IRWA, 1986 was not just happening in the print media like newspapers and magazines but was more prevalent in advertisements and serials shown on television shown on television channels or internet which was within the reach of children. Various legislations such the cinematography act, the information technology act, 2000 and certain provisions of the IPC deal with obscenity as such but no specifically with the indecent representation of women.

The Act, however, in its present form, relates primarily to the print media. Since the enactment of the Act, technological revolution has resulted in development of new forms of communication, such as, internet and satellite based communication, multi-media messaging, cable television etc. It has, thus, become imperative to widen the scope of the law so as to cover such forms of media on the one hand and to strengthen the existing safeguards to prevent indecent representation of women through any media on the other.

#### THE INDECENT REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN (PROHIBITION) AMENDMENT BILL, 2012

The Union Cabinet on 11 October 2012 approved the introduction of Amendments to the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 in Parliament. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Amendment Bill, 2012 seeks to broaden the scope of the law to cover the audio-visual media and content in electronic form, prescribing stringent penalties which would act as deterrent to violation of the law. The Bill also proposes to strengthen the enforcement mechanism under the law by specifically authorizing police officers not below the rank of Inspector to enter any premises and carry out search and seizure of any material, if there was reason to believe that an offence under the Act has been or is being committed. However, there are still many deficiencies in the bill which need to be addressed so as to have the required effect.

#### MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE

- ✓ The penalties should be very high and stringent so that they act as a deterrent for all and results in regulating cases of indecent representation of women.
- ✓ A legislation for regulating and prohibiting the increasing incidence of indecent representation of women needs to be effectively implemented and must have solid institutional mechanism to deal with complaints in this regard. A provision creating a central authority with adequate powers and functions must be included in the bill. Creation of a Central authority to regulate the cases of indecent representation of women and empowering them to receive or take complaints and decide upon them would be the most effective way to enforce the legislation.
- ✓ It is important to have a law on such depiction of children. to deal with cases of indecent representation of children. Representations wherein children are portrayed indecently or made to do certain acts which are unbecoming for their age, thereby corrupting innocent minds would have an adverse impact on the minds of children themselves and also on the minds of pervert adults who may take advantage of vulnerable children and sexually exploit them. Also, indecently representing children would influence the attitude and behavior of children who may imitate such acts and enter an adult realm too early in their lives. This would definitely lead to many psychological, physiological and emotional problems in the child and he/she may not turn out to be a normal adult. Therefore, Important to have a law on such depiction of children to deal with cases of indecent representation of children.
- ✓ Live shows indecently representing women in any manner whether through song, dance, comedy etc. where large number of public gather together to enjoy the show need to be curbed. The Committee understands that at present such violations are dealt with under section 294 of IPC which provides lesser punishment when compared with that provided for indecent representation of women under the present Act.
- ✓ Role of the National Commission for Women in this regard must be to organize awareness generation camps/programmes in this regard for the film fraternity, advertisers, writers, publishers, internet and mobile service providers etc so that depiction of women in an obscene or objectionable way is stopped and regulated. Further, the Commission can also make efforts for spreading awareness amongst the general public about the legislation and the mechanism.
- ✓ Common terms in all the Acts concerning indecent representation of women should be defined in a similar fashion. Hence, there should be synergy among all the concerned legislations when amendments are made in the Parent Act relating to indecent representation of women. Further, penalties as specified under the IT Act and in the proposed amendment Bill should not differ but remain the same. This would avoid all kinds of confusion and

complications when an offender is booked under both the Acts.

- ✓ Formation of a central authority would also allay the apprehensions expressed by various stakeholders regarding subjective interpretations of 'indecent representation' by police officers leading to unnecessary harassment. This would eliminate any lop-sided or faulty interpretations of 'indecent representation' and would not become a tool for misuse by any public authority.
- ✓ The role and mandate of the National Commission for Women is reviewed and strengthened adequately, particularly in view of rising cases of exploitation of women.
- ✓ It is, therefore, considered necessary to adopt some remedial or preventive measures, especially by the Central Board for Film Certification (CBFC) regarding the quality of films. The Committee is of the view that the Board needs to review its guidelines with respect to indecent representation of women with an objective outlook.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Judith M.Sgarzi and McDevitt. (2003) *Victimology: A Study of Crime Victims and Their Roles*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall
- [2] Adhikari Sharda (2014) *Media and Gender Stereotyping: The need for Media Literacy* International Research Journal of Social Sciences, 3(8), 43-49
- [3] Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, & Dr. Katherine Pieper. (2014) *GENDER BIAS WITHOUT BORDERS* Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media
- [4] Archana Kumari & Himani Joshi. (2015) *Gender Stereotyped Portrayal of Women in the Media: Perception and Impact on Adolescent* IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science, 20( 4), 44-52
- [5] Dhar S; Pattnaik S.N.( 1996) *Portrayal of Distorted image of Women by Indian Media Communicator* , 31( 3),11-13
- [6] Becky Bergdahl (2013) *Yo ban? Rape rap and limits of free speech in India An argument analysis of the debate about banning the artist Honey Singh* Faculty of Theology Uppsala University
- [7] Archana Kumari & Himani Joshi. (2015) *Gender Stereotyped Portrayal of Women in the Media: Perception and Impact on Adolescent* IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science, 20(4), 44-52
- [8] Judith M.Sgarzi and McDevitt. (2003) *Victimology: A Study of Crime Victims and Their Roles*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall
- [9] N. M. Malamuth J. Briere (1986 ) *Sexual Violence in the Media: Indirect Effects on Agression Against Women* Journal Of Social Issues, 42, 85
- [10] Vagdevi H.S, Shantharaju S. *The Changing Paradigm in Gender Constructed Texts In Media – A Semiotic Approach*, 141
- [11] Section 2(c) *INDECENT REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN (PROHIBITION) ACT , 1986*
- [12] Patel Representation Of Women In Mass Media
- [13] Becky Bergdahl Degree Project (2013) *Yo ban? Rape rap and limits of free speech in India An argument analysis of the debate about banning the artist Honey Singh* Faculty of Theology Uppsala University
- [14] S. Liliana Escobar-Chaves et al (2005) *Impact of the Media on Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors* PEDIATRICS, 318
- [15] S. Liliana Escobar-Chaves et al (2005) *Impact of the Media on Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors* PEDIATRICS, 304
- [16] *TWO HUNDRED FIFTY EIGHTH REPORT The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Amendment Bill, 2012. DEPARTMENT-RELATED PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Amendment Bill, 2012.*