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Media, Culture and Society

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Gender and Media

Media plays an important role in society because it forms an essential form of communication and is widely observed and analysed, along with being distributed locally and globally. Thus, media in one sense can be said to be a mirror of society which in turn society views. In addition, the form of the media or the medium matters : Tv channels, News, Cinema, editorials, articles, books et al are various mediums of media. This is important because different forms of media impact different sects of society in different ways. To give an example, certain audiences of media might have an exposure to news in the form of TV news and newspapers but might not have access to cinema necessarily. Therefore, media essentially becomes an important source of information, that in turn forms the knowledge of the individual (also true of Ackoff's Knowledge hierarchy) leading to a belief system of the audience.

However, unfortunately this information is often biased and marginalised via creating divisions and hierarchies on the basis of caste, race, class, and gender. This is largely due to the belief system that has been upheld over the years. It is the belief system of media creators like directors, news makers etc that are represented in the works of media.

It is quintessential to ask what has formulated their belief system. In India, caste, gender, class discriminations can be said to have its influences from the Manu-Smriti,

claimed to have been established around the 5th Century CE, which specifies in its laws that “being unfaithful to the husband in the world leads to evil diseases” (Ghosh). This is just one instance. There are several others that are representative of women being subservient to men or else it is denoted that there would be dire consequences. The reason I have brought the Manu-Smriti forefront is because it is essentially a form of media. Being a legal text was widely read, translated and reproduced by the British in 1794 to form the Hindu law. And what is surprising that despite the Indian Constitution promoting equality by Law, even today “inheritance of women in India related to socio-economic issues, based on culture and religion rather than on the spirit of law” (Khan 139). After almost 2 centuries (226 years from 1794 to 2020), signs of similar discrimination is seen in modern forms of media. Due to the word limit and constraints, for the rest of this article, I shall primarily lay focus on Gender.

Before going further into the topic of Gender discrimination in media, I would also like to lay some light onto similar social constructs like the Manu-Smriti that existed in other continents. It is also important to note that during the colonialism, discrimination towards women of other colour was very common, where “live in servants black women were required to learn and respond to all of the mistress’s demands” (Lewis 108). This is again a sign of subservience similar to the laws of Manu smriti.

A similar ideology is displayed in more modern mediums – Cinema, Newspaper and Music, apart from others, which I shall explore in the context of this paper to ascertain the gender representation, disparity and the reasonings behind the same.

GENDER AND CINEMA

Women have very often appeared to be commodified especially in the context of Indian Cinema, which is often explained as a means to attract the male audiences towards the movie. This in turn leads to a larger viewership and in turn greater box office collections. Also such ‘item numbers’ benefit from being widely reused in weddings and parties, in turn leading to a larger exposure. However, the audiences often fail to realise that this exposure is what is creating a mindset of sexual harassment and as though women can be owned by men, as represented by several of these item numbers. An example of such an item number is ‘Chikni Chameli’ part of the 2012 Agneepath movie, where the item number had no/hardly any relation to the story line. Moreover, men can be seen groping the dancer and staring at her, which very easily leads to a “retrogressive representation in a country where women constantly battling against physical violation and harassment” (Datta 74).

GENDER AND NEWS

Globally, there is a massive underrepresentation of women in the news- “ In a 2015 report, women made up a mere 19% of experts featured in news stories and 37% of reporters telling stories globally” (Rattan et al). This, I believe, in turn leads to discrimination in the reporting of women and an underrepresentation in the coverage of women related news or events.

An example of such an article is the recently published article in TOI dated March 22nd 2020 headlined “Ugandan alleges rape, Delhi Cops Deny”. The headline immediately shifts the blame on to the Ugandan by using the word “alleges” creating a sense of suspicion

towards the victim and also ‘cops denying’ leaves no doubt that the rape is false, which is incorrect and unethical, without giving any support or justice to the Ugandan.

Similar cases of Victim blaming have been noted globally, such as in the British Newspaper The Sun displaying “negative constructions of female rape victims, which may promote rape myths” (Phillips & Tosh).

GENDER AND MUSIC

It is often reflected in music award ceremonies such as the Grammy that women are underrepresented and are denied even the opportunity to win a Grammy award. For instance, “Only 10.4 percent of nominees between 2013 and 2019 were women.”(Kelley).

CONCLUSION

The three cases above- Cinema, News and Music, show the ways women are underrepresented, represented as inferior to men, and the lack of women representation in the media industry which all bundle up leading to significant marginalisation of communities as in conclusion, what is observed by the audience, is what ultimately is believed. Thus, behaviour, reactions towards people is often rooted from the examples media lays out. When media produces item numbers. When media is unfair in news reports. When media like music shows unfair decision making. It is this media which leads to ‘negative’ media consumer behaviour in day to day lives.

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