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THE ROLE OF GENDER IN INDIAN MASS MEDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CHANGING LANDSCAPE

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Gender Studies is a leading subject of discussion in academia today. It's an interdisciplinary course studied in various universities and colleges on the global level in order to aware and sensitize the society about every gender like men, women, LGBTQ and women's right. National Commission for Women New Delhi India made a module on "Gender Sensitization and Legal Awareness Programme" in Collaboration with Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan for class 11th and 12th for Kendriya Vidyalaya. According to this module "gender sensitization is gender awareness and sensitization in society regarding rights of women and sensitizing the people to change their mindset", further it rightly adds that "gender roles are learned or conditioned by socialization process through various socializing agents." (National Commission for Women New Delhi) So due to these gender stereotypical roles and social norms influence society since young age set a negative mindset towards woman as a "second sex". Mass media is an important socializing agent and a very influential medium of communication in society today. "Mass media means technology that is intended to reach a mass audience. It is the primary means of communication used to reach the vast majority of the general public. The most common platforms for mass media are newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet. The general public typically relies on mass media to provide information regarding political issues, social issues, entertainment and news pop culture." (Study.com) Mass media is a mirror to the society and shows the changing gender perspectives in Indian society. The representation of the women and gender roles in mass media has become one of the significant aspects of gender studies. The present paper intends to provide a landscape of changing gender stereotypical roles in Indian mass media with reference to Television, Films, Short Films, Advertisement and OTT (Over the Top) platform.

Gender Studies, Queer Studies and Women Studies are most of the popular areas of studies but misinterpreted as synonymous terms. Though these studies are interdisciplinary but there is a slight difference between them. Gender is an umbrella term which covers all issues discussed in queer and women studies. It is a significant area of study discussed on the global platform in order to have deliberations on the stereotypical issues related to feminine, masculine and LGBTQ identity. Gender studies analyses the social practices governed by the society for each gender. As Donald E. Hall rightly says, "Though commonly used, the term 'gender theory' is something of a misnomer or, at best, a euphemism. In reality, gender theory could more accurately be termed 'sexuality theory', because it explores the variety of ways



that 'gender', our assignment to social role in ways related to our biological sex, is connected intimately and variously to our experience of sexuality, and how that experience bears on our own and other's identity...(Thus) gender theory examines critically the *identity politics* of sexuality" (Hall, Donald E. 102). These so called socially constructed stereotypical gender roles are having its influence on mass media also. Mass media has a significant impact on people in a large scale for building up an opinion. The popular mass media platforms like News channel, movies, Television, advertisement, short films, OTT, whatsapp, facebook, and twitter are heavily influenced Indian culture and society today. Traditional Indian patriarchal society has appointed certain set of gender roles to every gender and this changing gender roles according to need of time are exactly represented in those popular platform of mass media. Women were facing gender discrimination at all level like home, workplace and society, but the constant persuasion of these feministic movements has changed the mindset of the society and these positive changes were reflected in these popular forms of media.

In India Cinema and Cricket are very admired part of Indian pop culture. Indian film industry is recognized by all over globe as Bollywood, which is situated in Mumbai Maharashtra. There are other industries in which films are produced in Indian regional languages. In 1913 first Indian feature film *Raja Harishchandra* directed by Dadasaheb Phalke was released. This film was based on Indian mythological story of Raja Harishchandra, in which role of women characters were played by men. Indian cinema portrayed various aspects of people's life during colonial and postcolonial period. Ardeshir Irani then gave sound to Indian Film *Alam Ara* (1931). *Kisan Kanya* was the first colored Bollywood film released in 1937, which was directed by Ardeshir Irani. In beginning stage major themes of the cinema was mythological in which women were shown either goddesses or playing the stereotypical role of Indian woman. Later on Indian cinema became immensely popular in all over the globe and its themes were started to revolve around social, political cultural and economic issues in the contemporary society. But still in 1960s and 1980s apart from the exceptional films like *Mother India* (1957), *Bhumika* (1977) and *Arth* (1982) women rather were shown as showpiece of Indian patriarchal tradition or sometime their role was limited to item songs. Since 2000 to contemporary period movies as *Astitva* (2000) *Lajja* (2001), *Chandani Bar* (2001), *Dor* (2006), *No One Killed Jessica* (2011), *English Vinglish* (2012), *Kahaani* (2012) *Mardani* (2014), *Queen* (2014), *Highway* (2014), *Marry Kom* (2014), *Parched* (2015), *Angry Indian Goddesses* (2015), *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016) *Pink* (2016), *Neerja* (2016), *Mom* (2017), *The Last Colour* (2019) and *Thappad* (2020) etc. women were shown modern and independent, who have taken charge of their own life to face the challenges in order to search their *Astitva* the existence. There are some women centric movies which reflected the changing gender stereotypical role of women and mindset in Indian society. Gender is one of the important topics of Indian Cinema. In the initial phase of of the Indian Cinema like women were portrayed as submissive and had very little space for argument. But in recent years we can see the signs of change. Today there has been a shift towards more nuanced and realistic portrayals of women in Indian cinema. There are many female directors, producers and writers in the industry, who are slowly moving towards more gender inclusive production of the Cinema. The same way television is also an important part of mass media which reached every corner of India and had gone through a great change.



Television was introduced in India in 1959. It became popular in 1980s and was on the pick of popularity during 1990s. Doordarshan a public broadcast channel was started in New Delhi by PrasarBharti a government body of India. *Hum Log* (1984) was the first T.V. serial in 1984. Apart from news in various languages the soaps like *Hum Log* (1984), *Buniyaad* (1986-87), *Ramayana* (1987-88), and *Mahabharata* (1988-89) attracted audiences from young to adults in a large scale. The T.V serials were highly liked by rural and urban viewers. It is highly effective and popular media of mass consumption in India and also played a crucial role in exploring and recreating opinions. In initial era of television in India women were represented as devotee, sober and highly submissive. But in 1990s the middle era of television in saas-bahu daily soaps women were portrayed in traditional gender stereotypical way. In contemporary Sas-Bahu T. V. serials like *Kyoki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*, *Kasouti Zindagi Ki* women are clad in expensive saris and jewellery. In many serials women either are shown as poor exploited *bahu* like *Tulsi* from *Kyoki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* and doing a lot of domestic work or a glamorous vamp like *Komanika* from *Kasouti Zindagi Ki*. In these serial women are shown as doing their stereotypical jobs like cleaning the floor, utensils, cooking food for family and growing the children as their only duty. Now days in these typical saasbahu serial, the negative roles as vamp played by some women characters has exploited the image of women as woman are enemy of a woman, and she is the one who always busy in plotting against family and friends. But recently there were some serials like *Diya Aur Bati Hum*, *Everest*, *Airlines* and *Service Wali Bahu* in which women characters are breaking down the boundaries of gender stereotypical roles set by society. They are shown to be working as airplane pilot, police, and mountaineers, which are considered as male dominated jobs. These are some of the daily sops breaking the stereotypical gender roles of men and women.

During Covid-10 pandemic the OTT (Over The top) platform like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar, and Zee 5 became popular all over the world due to its access in anytime anywhere in low cost. OTT (Over The top) means any streaming service that delivers content over internet. The OTT platform became an easy way to view films, web series, short films and documentaries with new experiments on various subjects using internet connection without satellite and cable connection. Because of reduce cost and original content OTT is maintaining its popularity after reopening of Theatres. Even popular actors of the big screen are making OTT debut of their films. In India it becomes hugely popular in covid-19 pandemic time. In last year majorly women-oriented videos were on viewed a lot, which have been breaking the gender stereotypes. This platform in the last one year has produced and promoted more women-centric content than what mainstream cinema has done in the last five years. Shows like *Karenjit Kaur*, *Lust Stories*, *Four More Shots Please*, *Arya* and many others were on high demand in the last one year. *Four More Shots Please* is popular web series of four women discusses various gender issues like infidelity, misogyny, body positivity, open marriage, homosexual relationship, women's sexuality, single working women, and stereotypical notion of society for marital relationships in very open manner. Anjana (Kirti Kulhari) a single working mother, Damini (Sayani Gupta) journalist, Umang (Bani J) homosexual fitness trainer, Siddhi (Maanvi Gagroo) an unmarried girl from *Four More Shots Please* are modern Indian women shares their issues like work, love, anxieties and conflicts.



Arya is story of a single mother who tries to survive after her husband's death. Though these films and web series speaks about the empowerment of women but most of them are from privilege background.

Advertisement plays a very significant part in shaping the vision of the society towards every aspect of human life. Since initial times women were portrayed in a stereotypical ways in advertisement. In 70s and 80s advertisement in of washing powder, dishwasher bar, oils, mixer, pressure cooker, 'Surf', 'Nirma', 'Ghadi', women were shown in sari with traditional get up cleaning clothes, utensils, house, cooking for family and taking care of children and elder people. In old advertisement men are driving the vehicles like Bajaj scooter to office and taking family for shopping. Men were shown as in charge of the family and self-contained. Today in some advertisement of washing powder; toilet cleaner and cooking oils had broken the gender stereotypical roles appointed to the man and women by society. The famous actors like Amitabh Bachhan, Akshay Kumar are shown helping women in their household duties like cooking, cleaning toilets and clothes on equal gender level. Presently advertisements are breaking down the gender bias inherited from generations and constructed the image of woman as a strong, powerful and in charge of office.

Short films are again one of popular part of Indian mass media, which has broken down the gender stereotypes by portraying changing gender roles in Indian society. They have voiced the various problems along with issues of women very effectively. Short films are made up of 3, 5, and 10 minutes and they are also screened in local, national and international film festivals. Initially film are made up of short films then it took cartoon and animated form. Today Internet has given a new life to short films; it is mostly shown in YouTube and various OTT platforms conveying the content in a short time span. The short films like *Devi*, *Nitishastra*, *Chhuri*, *Juice*, *Maa*, *Pressure Cooker* and *Going Dutch* are some of the excellent movies delineate the changing role and position of women in Indian society. *Devi* makes us speechless and raises the question behind the rape of women, in which so called stereotypical patriarchal society blames women for. In *Nitishastra* Roshni (TapsiPannu) is head of the house and a self-defense instructor punishes her brother Ravi (Vicky Arora), who rapes her student. *Juice* is a story of a homemaker working continuously in a hot kitchen in a get together party of her husband. At last she loses her control and sits in front of her husband, his friends in front of cooler with a glass of juice silently. Her silent eyes and attitude questions her husband for the stereotypical expectations. *Going Dutch* is one of the excellent and positive film answers to every stereotypical gender roles. So there are many short films recorded the viewership due to its genuine portrayal of contemporary Indian society.

The Indian stereotypical society has fixed certain gender roles of human behaviour for men and women about working and clothing, and this division of labour is reflected in Indian mass media. Today women in India are facing many problems like rape, female feticide, dowry, child marriage, harassment at workplace, although positive changes are noted by this mass media. Most of the TV serial are still representing women characters in a stereotypical roles and dominant cultural values. In contemporary films, short films, T.V. soaps, web series and advertisements women are shown powerful working women and standing against injustice. They are shown as balancing the responsibilities as a mother, daughter, wife, employee, and colleague in everyday life. It's a high time to move beyond "socially



constructed” gender identity and sensitize every gender in this era of mass media. Every gender should get an equal status, opportunity and distribution of work in personal and social level rather than their stereotypical masculine and feminine identity.

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