



Research Paper

Gender Stereotypes In The Media: A Case Study Of Gender Stereotyping Phenomenon In Manipuri Media

Dr Moirangthem Linthoingambi Devi

Assistant Professor, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal

ABSTRACT :Media is a means of communication which is used to reach the vast majority of general public. It becomes a powerful socialising agent and is particularly influential in the arena of gender identity. When the current trends in gender representation is examined it is found that media perpetuates traditional stereotypes of women and men. Media representation tends to portray the female gender as inferior and subservient to the male gender. While women are portrayed as weak, servile, pliant and sexually objectified. Men often appear more powerful—physically, economically and culturally—and more intelligent as compared to women. The present paper attempts to undersee how media controls the ideological construction of gender and how hegemonic masculinity is represented in media with special context to Manipuri society. Because media's treatment of women and their reproduction of female stereotypes are directly or indirectly linked to gender injustices face by women in everyday life. Such examination is much needed at such situation to promote individuals' capacity for self determination.

KEY WORDS: Hegemonic, Masculinity, Stereotype, Socialisation.

Received 03 October, 2018; Accepted 15 October , 2018 © The author(s) 2018. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

Life today is increasingly saturated by mass media and information and technology. From the commercial shows that we watch on television, the songs, dramas and popular musics that we listen to radio and to the various magazines, newspapers that we read each day have strongly affected our views of women, society, beliefs and culture. Media influence can either be positive, neutral or negative depending upon how people respond to it. In this regard Stuart Hall's three ways of reading media texts, from his essay "Encoding, Decoding," is worth mentioning. First, a dominant reading, in which the audience view the media text in the way the producer intended. In which the audience agree with the ideology behind the text. Second is the negotiated reading, in which the audience interprets the text in their own way. The audiences accept the views of the producer but they also have their own opinion. Stuart Hall suggests that the great majority of so-called 'misunderstandings' arise from the contradictions and disjunctures between hegemonic-dominant encodings and negotiated-corporate decodings. The third is oppositional reading, in which the audience completely rejects the meaning and creates their own reading of the text. No doubt, the extent of the participation of audience has changed for the past many years. They are no longer a passive participation in decoding the text. A text, be it a book, music, movies or other art forms, is not simply passively accepted by the viewers, the viewers decode the text based on their social, political or cultural backgrounds and their life experiences. Now Media viewers have their own free will to create meanings of the text they view or read and the work of art they examine. And here lies the main issue and that is any interpretation of texts can lead to extremes. Because "Media structures on the encoding stage may not be the same as on the decoding stage"(Hall).

II. MEDIA AND GENDER

"Media are technologies of communication and therefore of meaning production and meaning dissemination. They generate debates, influence opinion and create markets... (they) are very significant contributors to ideologies and political culture." (Nayar) To put it briefly, media is conditioning one's perception on live. To an increasing extent, it becomes a communication platform that fortify cultural practices and ethics and presents strong views on how people should reckon with and accordingly people often consciously or unconsciously endorse and sustain those practices and beliefs.

Gender describes societal attitudes and behavioural expectations associated with the two sexes “ generated by pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilisation” (Abrams 100) The term has been used synonymously with a person’s sex but their uses are becoming increasingly distinct. A person’s sex is determined by the anatomy and gender refers to the social, psychological and cultural attributes of masculinity and femininity. “From a feminist perspective the prevailing conception of gender is understood as ideological structure that divides people into two classes men and women based on hierarchical relation of domination and subordination respectively.” (Lazar7)

In some of Manipuri medias, patriarchal practices are still seen. How women’s image is projected is needed serious consideration to negate the crux of gender socialisation. Because the message and values that come from the media are very powerful. Audiences, especially children and youths, are easily influenced by what they see around them and the repeated viewing of these stereotypical representation of gender will make a powerful force in shaping their conception about gender.

III. MEDIA AND GENDER CONSTRUCTION

In India women comprises half of the total population and with the advent of twenty first century and its development in all spheres of science and technology, the status of women are changing at a fast pace but we can not ignore the fact that even in today’s ultramodern India the situation remains the same as it was hundreds of years ago; women are still exposed to gruesome atrocities, discrimination, marginalisation and oppression because of various gender gap issues. Even though discrimination and exploitation of women are general phenomena their consequences are more appalling in the less developed regions like Manipur where incidence of political conflict and violence, crimes, ignorance, deprivation of the basic necessities of life are rampant. The following excerpt substantiates atrocities meted to the women in this region “according to data compiled...from various newspapers and media outlets, there were 15 cases of rape, four rapes and murders, eight rape attempts, 19 suicides, seven murders, one murder attempt and 13 assaults on women in 2011. Also 71 women were missing and five others abandoned in the year gone by.” (Times of India) Like in other Indian states, the dichotomy between the female and male sex role, identity is still quite obvious in Manipur. And in this juncture the media space is sometimes instrumental in creating highly sensational gender stereotypes that directly or indirectly influence the perception of people.

In a patriarchal society like Manipur men dominate media and media representation tends to portray the female gender as inferior and subservient to the male gender. While women are portrayed as weak, servile, nurturing, pliant and are often sexually objectified, men generally appear more powerful—physically, economically and culturally—and more intelligent as compared to women. Such representations are, however, a major obstacle in changing social prejudices and traditions affecting women’s freedom. The present paper attempts to undersee how media controls the ideological construction of gender and how hegemonic masculinity is represented in media with special context to Manipuri society. Because media’s treatment of women and their reproduction of female stereotypes are directly or indirectly linked to gender injustices face by women in everyday life. Such examination is much needed at such situation to promote individuals’ capacity for self determination. “Learning how to read, criticise and resist socio-cultural manipulation can help one empower oneself in relation to dominant forms of media and culture. It can enhance individual sovereignty.” (Kellner 7)

IV. IMAGE OF WOMEN IN MANIPURI FEATURE FILMS

Film is one form of mass media that affects and influences a large number of audience. Film forms an integral part of culture and society, a product of them and hence a reflection of existing beliefs and systems. When the current trends in gender representation in media is examined it is found that Manipuri feature films perpetuate traditional stereotypes of gender roles. In films women are generally portrayed as primary care givers and are expected to be sympathetic, humanitarian, compassionate and dependent on one another and in contrast men are likely to portray as breadwinners and champion who save or take care of incompetent women. Bravery, adventurousness, rational, and strong are the traits that defines masculinity. Such conventional representations are damaging as they control the societal expectations of women and men relationship. For study three Manipuri feature films like **Naoshum**, **Thabaton**, **Ningol Chakouba** have been examined to see how these films enforce traditional conceptions regarding the place and role of women through traditional gender roles that characters portray.

In these films continue to repeat portraying of stereotypical negative women characters which dampen the women’s cause rather than strengthening women through strong and independent characters. Here the women are objectified; they are treated like a tool or an object as if they have no feelings, no self-determination or rights of their own. The film **Naoshum** is about a widow and her young daughter who live like an outsider. The women are the victims of male dominated society. They often experience high levels of discrimination, sexual abuse. They are helpless, meek, naive and vulnerable. When her daughter elopes with a rich boy and the rich parent refuse to accept her daughter she is afraid of social stigma. Ultimately she unable to bear the

discrimination, killed her daughter and commits suicide. Thus the film projects that for these helpless women ultimate end is death. This not the case of one film other films have the same pattern. In the film **Thabaton** too the same images of women are shown. The mother-in-law is wicked, oppressor who does not want a poor daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law on the other hand is projected as weak, helpless, dependent who always needs a protective husband. In absence of her husband the in-laws force her out of the family and leaving her child. The misguided husband does not come to her rescue. After going through many hardships finally a benevolent man saves her and marry her. The three sisters, in the film **Ningol Chakouba**, are lazy, irrational who never fail to abuse the only sister-in-law. They are the evil agencies in the plot. And the sister-in-law is too weak to stand in the face of her antagonist and to defend herself. The only brother, who is the hero of the film, relies on his sisters to prepare his food, to wash and clean his cloths and socks. When his sisters fail to comply his needs he says he would find a wife who could wash his cloths and who could give him food in time. The very statement reflects uncultured mind set that considers a wife to be a necessity not responsibility. This man, the so called hero, is still projected as pious and sympathetic and elevated to a higher position in the minds of the audience. Besides men in these films are sometimes portrayed as immature and insensitive when trying to prove themselves more authoritative. Thus such unfair treatment of women and men is quite obvious in other films also.

Aforementioned media representations pose serious questions like what rational conclusion will be drawn by the society from the very images of men and women portrayed in such films, that what have audience concluded after watching the picture? Such kind of projection in media will promote an unbalanced vision of the roles of women and men in society. Now a serious question will be lurking in one's mind whether mass media is encouraging, if not cause, crimes, violence, adultery and aggressive, anti-social and even criminal behaviour.

V. GENDER ROLES IN TELEVISION AND RADIO PROGRAMMES

Although women's role and partaking in media have changed over the many years equal representation of female and male in media is not fully achieved. This can be seen in daily discussion hours broadcasted or aired in local television channel and All India Radio Imphal programmes. In these programmes participation of women as experts or commentators or spokespersons in various political, social or economic discussions or debates is very low or almost negligible. But when comes to discuss gender issues women speakers are likely to take part. Women's participation on television media is seen more as beautiful talking heads that read news capsules or programme anchors, or in commercial advertisements, serials and other entertainment programmes. In the songs or video albums or dramas projection of outdated image of women—emotional, weak, dependent—can be seen. Women characters are at times manipulative in media; using various software techniques actor or actress is airbrushed to perfection. The media promotes photoshopped unrealistic image of people especially women. There are pictures which feature highly attractive—slender, fair and tall female characters. At times these female characters are sexualised. Viewing such stereotypically attractive women lead to greater endorsement of stereotypically feminine gender role expectations for women. The appearance of the fake or beautified characters demeans girls's self-esteem and encourage them to wish to alter the shape of their bodies to look more like the actresses in the media. Thus unrealistic cultural expectation of beauty is enhanced through media.

In the radio programmes also the concept of masculinity and femininity are heavily ingrained. In fact Patriarchal ideology also pervades radio programmes. One example is a science serial named **Lepkhinu Pungsi Ichel**, aired on every Sunday morning at 7 am. The programme imparts a great deal of knowledge to the listeners but still the short family plays within those episodes are worth examining. One could find the father, who occupies the centre stage, is educated, intelligent, domineering and expects tea, snacks and tasty food from his wife. The wife on the other hand is portrayed as uneducated, superstitious, who raises silly question for which she is laughed at. Another popular programmes aired are dramas. The joint families seen on radio dramas are not happy, harmonious but full of intrigues and disharmony and are on the verge of breakdown. One such play is **Yumgi Mou (the daughter in law)**. In this play women are projected as mainly responsible for the ills and disharmony plaguing the family. Women in this drama are portrayed as idle, scheming, wicked who are bent on destroying family values and tradition. The same is also seen in 'Shumang Leelas' (play of the open courtyard). Even Shumang Leelas are not lagging behind in perpetuating gender inequalities. While women are recognised as associated with domestic space and men are recognised as more viable, autonomous and independent. The traditionally idealised woman projected in these media is one who keeps a good house and who attends to the needs of her family—husband, in-laws, children all of which she manages without any complain. In media a woman's chastity and virginity are valued more than life. Such conception is found depicted in the drama **Pizza**. In this drama woman is portrayed as flimsy, servile, over-ambitious and insensitive. The storyline is of one beautiful girl named Pizza who dumped her lover for a wealthy but treacherous boy. Pizza failed to perceive the scheming mind of the man and fell in the trap and lost her chastity. The man after satisfying his lust snubbed her. Pizza felt cheated and she realised her fault and spent rest of her

life in repentance and shame. The ex-lover on the other hand resolved to avenge her and married the younger sister of Pizza. In this film the name Pizza itself is metaphorical. Pizza, the girl, like the delicious dish is craved by many. In this film sexual objectification of women is shown which will have an adverse effect on women's self-image, her confidence, and on the society's negative perception that women are susceptible to objectification.

Thus media like films and dramas etc exploited women by using cultural stereotypes to reinforce subservient role model for women. Such creation of particular image of women will have a negative impact on efforts to promote gender equality, and in strengthening the conceptualisation of women's incompetence to actively contribute to public and political domain.

VI. IMAGE OF WOMEN IN NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

Reviewing the local newspaper's, published in Manipur, portrayal of Women by media indicates that women are confined to roles which are subordinate to male. Although women have taken on positions in politics, business, sports and many new occupational roles they remain inadequately and inordinately underrepresented in mass media including print media. There are few columns reflecting women's issue and challenges in general. Besides the editorial columns or articles have more male writers than women. Notwithstanding newspapers carry fewer stories about eminent women.

In newspapers and magazines women are featured more as victim of crimes on front pages where readers are likely to sympathise with them. There is no a day where news on the growing disease of women related crimes, drugs, immorality and poverty are reported. Any one who picks up a newspaper will find headline occupied by news of rape, murder, abduction, sexual harassment, human trafficking, illicit relationship etc . Inside pages are occupied by missing reports of young housewives or girls from their families. But no further reports on these missing persons. No one has an answer to these problems. No system of government has proven so successful in solving the problems.

There are several periodically published magazines, like **Nupigi Pungsi** and **Women and Crime** etc, focussing on women related crimes and issues. It can be unequivocally stated that many such magazines do not attempt to liberate, emancipate or to reinforce women's real voices and empowerment. Nor these magazines have enough systematic study of the situation, its causes and solutions to the problem. Apparently the news content is not to empathise with women but to cater sensational stories to prying public. Such magazines emphasise the feudalistic notions that virginity and chastity are more important than life. Women are encouraged to remain unblemished virgin, stressing the old-fashioned impression that it would be better for any girl to die than to lose her virtue of chastity.

Even the cartoons in newspapers embody stereotypical image of women. In comics women are either victims or demons; men represents highly masculine traits. They are powerful, intelligent and adventurous and saviour or protector of beautiful and weak women. A popular cartoon comic strip named **Makar** in Manipuri daily **Poknafam** is also one example. The idea of the comic strip is to depict the reality of social and political ills like corruption, nepotism, etc. Even when we examine it the central figure Makar exhibits hegemonic masculinity. Makar has been portrayed as illiterate, simpleton and reckless. And his wife, Ameshwari, is highly educated one. Although Makar is silly his ideas, opinions, his actions seem witty, shrewd and ingenious and are very influential. He is an angry rebel against authority. The female character, the wife, on the other hand is silent; she has no voice against the prevailing issues. She is in no position to influence public opinion. Her disposition and attributes is, more or less, of a normal housewife. Makar's character is of stereotypical masculine—aggressive, logical, blunt, dominant and independent.

Image of Women in commercial TV advertisements

“Advertising, a tool of mass media apart from selling products/brand also sells attitudes, behaviour and life styles.” (HariPriya 123) Television commercials are culpable for manipulation of gender perceptions, by casting women in subservient domestic roles. Men are underrepresented in commercials of domestic products and women are under represented in commercials of non-domestic products. Women in these advertisements usually find themselves decked up with beautiful jewellery and silk brocades and are seen promoting domestic items like cooking gas, eatable items or plastic water tanks. Here also women are objectified. They are portrayed as perfect, passionate and sexy. In the advertisement for jewellery or dress or other household items the target consumer is women and here beauty is more emphasised than health. Those jewelleries or attire will make target audience more like women in advertisements or more likely to be appealing to them. All these suggest that the greatest asset of women is her physical beauty. The ideal body type for a women as projected in such commercial advertisements is young, fair and extremely thin and pre-occupied with men, children, grooming and shopping. Such media contributes to the idea that women and men still have traditional and different roles to play in society, validating the gender gap. Besides media encourage women to consume—to own more things, buy more products and services. It is very disheartening to know that certain categories of women such as the

poor, older women or others belonging to ethnic minorities are even less visible in such media. No doubt, the invisibility and marginalisation of women in media indicates their low status in their important field of activity.

Image of Transgender in films and dramas

Media is responsible for influencing the attitudes of the people towards transgender groups. Since few people understand what it means to be transgender, they rely more on media representation. But because of misrepresentation in media transgender community is sometimes prone to prejudice and discrimination in the society. There have been many examples of transphobia in the media specially in films and other entertainment programmes like dramas. Transphobia is actually due to misinformation or no information about trans identities. In many films transgenders are reduced to comedic or grotesque twists. One could find many funny video clippings in films or dramas where sneering remarks are made towards transgender. More often transgenders are projected as subject of mockery, ridicule and social rejection instead of true depictions that the transgender community is worthy of equality and admiration. One example is from the film **ABC Zero** where the audience is amused by lampooning the transgender. Such media representation can deter transgender persons and their families from publicly identifying as transgender for fear of being bullied or rejection by the people and “The way the groups of people representation in the media can be both reflective of and influential on society’s (possibly stereotypical) perceptions of these group.” (Jobe, iii) No doubt there are films which came up to help people understand the stigmas faced by this community, mention may be made of the films **Ang Tamo** and **Sanadi Sanani** which feature a storyline about transgenders who face discrimination, verbal and physical harassment from the societies as well as the family. Priyankanta Laishram’s short films—**It’s Not My Choice** and **Who said Boys Can’t Wear Make-up**—are subversive films intending to overthrow or undermine the existing notion of people towards gender socialisation. Priyankanta Laishram says, “If you are a female who doesn’t want to wear make up it doesn’t make you a less of a women, like wise if you are male who likes wearing make up it doesn’t make you a less men.”

VII. CONCLUSION

Thus Mass media have an outstanding role in the formation of public opinion and in strengthening of society. It is true that women excelled in each and every field. There is no such arena which remain untouched by Manipuri women whether it is in politics, sports, entertainment or in academic. In spite of that women along with being succeeder are expected to fulfil their role and responsibility as homemaker prioritising home against anything else. In this situation media has a great role to play in promoting gender sensitisation because media itself is one of the influential agents of socialisation. A solemn attention needs to be paid to identifying and addressing these various gender imbalances and gaps in the media. In addition, conscious efforts should be made to portray women and men in non-stereotypical situations. The professional presence of women in the television, radio and in other print media is more likely to provide positive role models for women and girls to gain the confidence and to attract women audience. unless and until the media make a vital contribution in the empowerment of women by creating cognisance among the people to shed the primitive mindset that disparage women, true development will not be a reality. In this regard society needs to hold media more accountable for the information it dispenses.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Hall, Stuart. “Encoding, Decoding.” Simon During Ed. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2001. P507. E book.
- [2]. Nayar, Pramod K. *An Introduction to Cultural Studies*. 2nd ed. New Delhi: Viva, 2017.
- [3]. Abrams, M.H. *A Handbook of Literary Terms*. New Delhi: Cengage, 2009.
- [4]. Azar, M.L. “Gender in Discourse: Feminist critical and political perspective and Praxis.” Ed. Michelle M Lazar. *Feminist critical discourse analysis: Gender, power and Ideology in Discourse*. GoogleBooks. 1.06.18. P7
- [5]. Kalita, Prabin “Manipuri women take the lead to fight injustice.” <https://m.timesofindia.indiatimes.com>. 22 June 2018.
- [6]. [6]Kellner, Douglass. “Cultural Studies, multiculturalism and media culture.” Ed. Gail Denim. *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*. New Delhi: Sage, 2011. **Web. (Films, Dramas, Advertisements)**
- [7]. Naoshum. Dir. O. Gautam. Perf. Kaiku, Abenao, Seema, Vidyananda. Sushma Film Productions. YouTube. Web 12 June 2018.
- [8]. Thabaton. Dir. Bijgupta Laishram. Perf. Kaiku, Gokul, Shushmita, B.B. Film Productions. YouTube. Web. 19 June 2018.
- [9]. Ningol Chakkouba. Dir. Sanaton Nongthomba. Perf. Gokul, Artina, Gaitri, Olen, Linthoi Chanu, Dhanamanjuri. Nongthombam Films. Youtube. Web. 10 May 2018.
- [10]. Lepkhinu Puni Ichel. AIR Imphal. Radio.
- [11]. Yumgi Mou. Play. AIR Imphal. 12 January 2018. Radio.
- [12]. Pizza. Dinesh Tongbram. Dir. Birjit Ngangomba. Perf. Sanaton, Bonny, Arun, Bishes. Tomthin Artist Association. [People & Blogs](#) YouTube. 2018.
- [13]. Akshaykumar, Gurumayum. **Makar**. Comic strip. Poknafam 20 June. 2018. Print. **Books**
- [14]. HariPriya, M. “Women in Advertisements on Television.” Ed. Kiran Prasad. *Women And Media: Challenging Feminist Discourse*. Delhi: The Women Press, 2005. **Web. (Films, Dramas, Advertisements)**
- [15]. A Short Funny Clip of Jenny from the film **ABC Zero**. People and Blogs. YouTube. Web. Jan 19, 2017. **Theses** Jobe, Jessica N Transgender representation in the Media. 2013.

- [16]. Eastern Kentucky U, Honors Theses. https://encompass.eku.edu/honors_theses/132 Web. (Films, Dramas, Advertisements)
- [17]. Ang Tamo. Dir. Pihu H. Perf. Kaiku, Bishes, Rahul, Soma. S.M.Film Productions. 2012. DVD
- [18]. Sanadi Sanani . Dir. Homeshwori. Perf. Joy, Vidya, Homeshwori, AB, Sana, Santajit, Ton thoi, Ratan lai. Ima Memi Creations. YouTube. Web. 19 June 2018.
- [19]. It's Not My Choice Dir. Priyakanta Laishram. Perf. Bishesh Huiem. Priyakanta Productions. 2015. YouTube. Web. 22 June 2018.
- [20]. Who said Boys can't Wear Make-up. Dir. Priyakanta Laishram. . Priyakanta Productions. YouTube. Web. June 21 2018.

Dr Moirangthem Linthoingambi Devi "Gender Stereotypes In The Media: A Case Study Of Gender Stereotyping Phenomenon In Manipuri Media " (Quest Journals) Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science 6.9 (2018): 36-41