



# The Portrayal Of Women In The Media And Feminist Movements

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**ABSTRACT:** The portrayal of women in media has long been a subject of critical analysis, revealing the pervasive influence of gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms that shape public perceptions of gender roles. Media representations often reinforce traditional notions of femininity, depicting women as passive, subordinate, and primarily concerned with beauty, relationships, and domesticity. Moreover, the media's frequent objectification of women, particularly through advertising, film, and television, reduces them to mere objects of male desire, perpetuating a culture of sexism and gender inequality. This objectification not only influences how women are viewed by society but also impacts how women perceive themselves, often leading to issues related to body image, self-esteem, and mental health. Feminist media criticism has highlighted these issues, advocating for more diverse, complex, and authentic representations of women that reflect their multifaceted roles in society.

**KEY WORDS:** portrayal of women, stereotypes and patriarchal norms, traditional notions, social media, perceive, self-esteem, Mental health, diverse, complex, representative, history of feminist movement.

**Introduction** Media refers to the various means of communication that reach or influence people widely. It encompasses different platforms and tools used to store and deliver information or data. The relationship between women and media is complex and dynamic, encompassing various aspects such as representation, impact, and the role of women within media industries. Here's a detailed exploration:

**Media and women** Historically, media has often portrayed women through a limited lens, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Women are frequently depicted as caregivers, homemakers, or in supporting roles, while men are shown as leaders and decision-makers. These portrayals can perpetuate stereotypes and influence societal expectations. Women in media, especially in advertising, films, and music videos, are often objectified and sexualized. This not only reduces women to their physical appearance but also contributes to unrealistic beauty standards and body image issues. The "male gaze" perspective often dominates, where women are portrayed primarily for the pleasure of a presumed male audience. Perception towards women, Body Image and Self-Esteem, Media often promotes unrealistic beauty standards, leading to body dissatisfaction and issues with self-esteem among women and girls. This can contribute to harmful behaviours such as dieting, excessive exercise, and cosmetic surgery. Women are often portrayed in stereotypical roles, such as the caregiver, the homemaker, or the romantic interest. Stereotypical Portrayals are quite common, there is a tendency to depict women in ways that emphasize their physical appearance, sexuality, and emotional nature. Media interprets women career without the consent of women. Women in science field are less depicted like, science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics fields, Despite being a significant audience and participant base, women are underrepresented in leadership positions within media industries, such as directors, producers, and editors.

Media plays a crucial role in reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Domestic Roles, Women are often depicted in domestic settings, reinforcing the idea that their primary role is in the home. Certain professions are stereotypically portrayed as male-dominated, which can discourage women from pursuing careers in those fields. Women are frequently sexualized in media, which can lead to objectification and impact their self-worth and how they are perceived by others.

Survey Reports UN Women Report on Media in South Asia (2015): Women constitute only 26% of news subjects in Indian media, similar to global trends. The report highlighted that women are often portrayed in stereotypical roles and that news coverage related to women is frequently sensationalized, especially in cases of violence against women.

### **BBC STUDY ON INDIAN TELEVISION (2019):**

Female characters in Indian television shows are often portrayed as submissive, sacrificing, and primarily focused on family and relationships. There is a significant lack of diversity in the portrayal of women, with most characters conforming to traditional gender norms.

The history of feminism is a rich and diverse narrative that spans centuries, reflecting the ongoing struggle for gender equality. Feminism, as both a social movement and a theoretical perspective, advocates for the rights of women based on the equality of the sexes.

### **HISTORY OF FIRST WAVE FEMINISM (LATE 19TH TO EARLY 20TH CENTURY)**

The roots of the feminist movement can be traced back to the Enlightenment era in the 18th century when thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft began advocating for women's rights. Her seminal work, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792), argued for women's education and equality. Suffrage Movement, The first wave is most closely associated with the fight for women's suffrage. In the United States, leaders like Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Sojourner Truth played pivotal roles. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, where the Declaration of Sentiments was signed, marked a significant moment in the movement. The suffrage movement was not limited to the United States. Women in New Zealand were the first to gain the right to vote in 1893, followed by Australia (1902), Finland (1906), and the United Kingdom (1918 for certain women, and full suffrage in 1928).

### **SECOND WAVE FEMINISM (1960S TO 1980S)**

The second wave emerged in the post-World War II era, a time of social upheaval and civil rights movements. It was characterized by a broader agenda that went beyond suffrage to include issues like reproductive rights, workplace equality, and sexual liberation. The second wave saw the development of feminist theory, with works like Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" (1949) and Germaine Greer's "The Female Eunuch" (1970) exploring the societal construction of gender and the oppression of women.

A significant focus of the second wave was on reproductive rights, culminating in landmark cases like *Roe v. Wade* (1973) in the U.S., which legalized abortion.

### **THIRD WAVE FEMINISM (1990S TO 2010S)**

The third wave arose in response to perceived shortcomings of the second wave, particularly its focus on the experiences of middle-class white women, often to the exclusion of women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

### **FOURTH WAVE FEMINISM (2010S TO PRESENT)**

The fourth wave is often defined by its use of digital platforms to mobilize and connect feminists around the world. Social media has been a powerful tool for spreading feminist ideas and organizing movements.

#MeToo Movement: A defining moment of the fourth wave was the #MeToo movement, which began in 2006 but gained global prominence in 2017. The movement exposed the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault, particularly in the workplace, and led to significant cultural and legal shifts.

The fourth wave also emphasizes body positivity and challenges societal standards of beauty. Movements advocating for the acceptance of diverse body types and combatting body shaming have gained momentum.

### **FIRST WAVE FEMINISM IN INDIA (EARLY 20TH CENTURY)**

Women like Kasturba Gandhi, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, and Aruna Asaf Ali played significant roles in the Indian freedom struggle. Their participation in movements like the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement brought women's issues to the forefront of the national agenda.

### **POST-INDEPENDENCE FEMINISM (1947-1970s)**

India's Constitution, adopted in 1950, granted equal rights to women, including the right to vote, equality before the law, and protection from discrimination. Article 15(3) allowed the state to make special provisions for women and children, laying the foundation for various social welfare measures. The post-independence period saw significant legal reforms aimed at improving the status of women. The Hindu Code Bills, introduced in the 1950s, reformed laws related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption for Hindus, granting women more rights and protections. The 1950s and 1960s saw the government focusing on women's development through education, health, and welfare programs. However, the top-down approach of these initiatives often failed to address the grassroots issues faced by women, particularly in rural areas. The late 1960s and early 1970 witnessed the emergence of a new feminist consciousness in India, influenced by global feminist movements. The publication of the report "Towards Equality" by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1974 was a turning point. The report highlighted the persistent gender inequality in India and called for comprehensive policy reforms.

### **SECOND WAVE FEMINISM IN INDIA (1970s-1990s)**

The 1970s and 1980s were marked by widespread protests and activism against gender-based violence. The dowry system, which often led to dowry-related deaths and harassment, was a significant focus. The 1980s saw the rise of the "Anti-Dowry Movement," leading to the strengthening of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. Campaigns Against Rape and Domestic Violence: Cases like the Mathura rape case (1972) and the subsequent acquittal of the accused police officers sparked nationwide protests, leading to changes in the laws related to rape in 1983. Women's groups like the Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW) in Mumbai were instrumental in these campaigns.

### **Third Wave Feminism in India (1990s-Present)**

#### **INTER SECTIONALITY AND INCLUSIVITY:**

Third-wave feminism in India has been characterized by a focus on inter sectionality, recognizing the diverse experiences of women across caste, class, religion, and sexuality. Feminist activism has increasingly addressed the unique challenges faced by Dalit women, Adivasi women, and women from minority communities. Feminist movements have long challenged the way women are portrayed in media, recognizing that these portrayals often reinforce harmful stereotypes, objectify women, and perpetuate gender inequality. Below are some of the key feminist movements and campaigns that have specifically focused on confronting and changing the portrayal of women in media:

### **FEMINIST MOVEMENT TO CHALLENGE PORTRAYS OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

#### **THE ANTI-OBSCENITY MOVEMENT (1980s-1990s)**

During the 1980s and 1990s, feminist activists in India began to vocally oppose the objectification and sexualisation of women in media, particularly in Bollywood films. The movement criticized the portrayal of women as mere objects of male desire, often seen in "item numbers" and hyper-sexualized roles. This movement raised awareness about the negative impact of such portrayals on societal attitudes towards women and led to calls for censorship and regulation of media content that demeaned women. It contributed to the establishment of the National Commission for Women (NCW) in 1992, which has since been involved in addressing such issues.

### **DARK IS BEAUTIFUL CAMPAIGN (2009-PRESENT)**

The "Dark is Beautiful" campaign, launched by the Women of Worth (WOW) in 2009, specifically targeted the Indian media's obsession with fair skin. The campaign critiqued the widespread promotion of fairness creams and the media's portrayal of fair skin as the ideal standard of beauty, which often marginalized women with darker skin tones. This campaign sparked a broader conversation about colorism in Indian society and media. It led to increased scrutiny of advertisements and media content that promoted fairness as a standard of beauty, pushing for more inclusive and diverse representations of women.

### **ME TOO MOVEMENT IN INDIA (2017-PRESENT)**

The #MeToo movement in India gained momentum in 2017, with women in the media and entertainment industries coming forward to share their experiences of sexual harassment and assault. This movement highlighted the systemic sexism and exploitation within these industries. The #MeToo movement led to significant changes in how media organizations and entertainment industries handle sexual harassment cases. It also influenced the portrayal of women in media, encouraging more respectful and accurate representations of women's experiences and challenging misogynistic narratives..

### **FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF ADVERTISING**

Gender Stereotyping and Objectification in Advertising Feminist critiques of advertising have long focused on how women are often depicted in stereotypical and objectified roles in advertisements. Campaigns have targeted ads that reinforce traditional gender roles, portray women as mere decorative objects, or promote unrealistic beauty standards. These critiques have led to greater scrutiny of advertising content and have pushed brands to adopt more progressive and inclusive portrayals of women. Some advertising campaigns have responded by highlighting women's empowerment and challenging traditional gender roles.

### **THE REPRESENTATION PROJECT**

Gender Representation in Media Although based in the U.S., The Representation Project has had a global influence, including in India. It challenges harmful gender stereotypes and advocates for more balanced and diverse portrayals of women in media. The project's documentaries, such as Miss Representation, have been instrumental in raising awareness about the effects of media representation on women's self-esteem and societal roles. The Representation Project has contributed to the global conversation on gender representation, encouraging media creators to rethink how they portray women and girls. It has also inspired similar initiatives in India, focusing on local media content.

### **CONCLUSION**

Feminist movements have been crucial in challenging and transforming the portrayal of women in media. These movements have not only raised awareness about the harmful effects of stereotypical and objectifying portrayals but have also pushed for more diverse, nuanced, and empowering representations of women. While progress has been made, ongoing activism and advocacy continue to play a vital role in ensuring that media reflects the true diversity and complexity of women's lives.

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