

Summary of the Findings of the UGC Minor Research Project No.1690/11-12/KLMG12

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN DEFINING THE CHANGING FACES OF WOMANHOOD IN KERALA

Media is one of the most powerful and wide spread circulators of meaning. A society's intensive exposure to the mass media has a great impact on its culture. Technology has empowered the media to communicate their meaning to a wider variety and mass of people. In the rapid commercialization of a society, the media plays a very important role and in the pursuit of profit and growth, the corporate forces appropriate the female image, transforming it into a commodity.

Masculine and feminine identities are reinforced by the media. The media sends messages pertaining to what is physically valued in terms of beauty. The ideal image of a woman is that of a beautiful object subordinated to the fancies of man. The discourses on female desirability are reinforced by patriarchal notions of womanhood. Her beauty is perceived as her passport to success and happiness. Observers tend to learn and attempt emulating the behavior of models who are perceived as attractive, successful and whose behaviours are rewarded and not punished.

Conceptions of gender identities and gender roles are strongly affected by a continuous viewing of portrayals of the same by popular media. The element of realism that is assigned to the portrayal of female characters augments the interest and the motivation of the viewers/readers which in turn accounts for the increasing viewership/readership of these texts.

Discussion of domestic issues and the providing of guidance on correct behaviour and legal advice are documented and become part of popular culture when it is commercialized .The

increased demand for such sensational shows points to the fact that it is a source of entertainment for the public. When sensational private stories are used by the media to increase viewership and thereby profit, the victims of these forms of shows are those who are unaware of their personal lives being made public for profit by the media owners.

Capitalism survives by forcing the majority whom it exploits to define their own interests as narrowly as possible. While a former way of achieving this was through deprivation, today in developing countries it is being achieved by imposing a false standard of what is desirable and what is not. When judgments are made on appearances, we justify choices by providing reasons. Comparisons can be made, meanings searched, customs and traditions looked into, in order to vindicate judgments.

Media serves to promote the consumption of goods and services and this study concludes that in spite of the strides women in Kerala have made, the influence of the media continues to have a great influence over their outlook and choices. With its hidden aims of sales, profit and growth, capitalism has a strong hold on the functioning of a society. The women of Kerala are beckoned to transform into citizens of a globalised world and they have tried moving out of their shells and embracing the changes of the times. But a more critical outlook at the way media works along with capitalist forces to control societies, is the need of the hour.

While the messages imparted through such women oriented programmes telecast by Indian TV channels and women's magazines may appear to empower women, they ultimately serve to widen the chasm between the rich and the poor. The ongoing globalization aims at the

erasure of cultural differences by enforcing its ideals . But the inability of poorer sections in society to achieve an economic liberation in the midst of the onslaught of a cultural imperialism, leaves them frustrated and women are the worst hit in this process. New elite gender norms created by the media bring in more control and surveillance in women's lives.

Neo-liberal globalization has adversely impacted women's status and livelihood in different ways. The market tries to present a hyperreal world which obstructs the view of ground realities and social issues. The unprecedented and myriad forms of violence that women face today show that forces of capitalism place women at a tremendous disadvantage. Popular mass media shields the workings of these corporate forces through the promotion of mindless consumerism combined with the most regressive anti-women ideologies, practices and rituals. A global world order is trying to exert control through economic, social and cultural interventions and women are expected to conform with the norms of femininity in order to be accepted. The study concludes that the women of Kerala are victims of the discourses created by the media which reinforce social stereotypes and prejudices , and a knowledge of the real world which lies outside these discourses produced by the media, should be made available in order to resist the tightening grip of capitalist forces.