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Stereotypes And Women: *A START or an End*

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Women And Stereotypes: A Start or an end

Research interests in women have not only gained momentum since, 1970, but the stance and areas of researches have also significantly changed. Women's position has worsened considerably in almost every sphere with the exception of some gains in education and employment for middle class women. It is a universal fact that discrimination against individuals still exists because of their sex, race, age, sexual orientation or health status in institutions in every nook and corner of the world. We also may not want to accept the fact that sexual violence is common in all culture, that women are victims of rape, battering and sexual harassment each day, despite legislation prohibiting such violence, common policing, workplace policies, counseling and training programs exist. Yet this is the reality for most women. What is worst, there has been growing violence against women. Women's studies can be classified into 5 broad categories:- Studies on Women's Problems, Studies on Changing Status of Women, Studies on Different Aspects of Women's Life, Studies on Women's Organization and Movements in India, Studies on Conceptual, Ideological and Methodological Issue Involved in Research on Women. Given the various waves of women's studies, it would be in order to demonstrate the specific concerned of researchers in social, economic and political dimensions.

- In the social dimension, a large numbers of factors were emphasized as the cause of women's subordination and low status in society.
- The marriage and family found utmost attention, for; the private sphere has been considered as one of the root causes of women's problems.
- The abhorrent customs that attracted attention of scholars are infanticide, prostitution, purdah, dowry and divorce.

  These studies examined the legislations made towards eradication of these evils and highlighted their shortcomings in tackling the problems.
The existing literature of the women can be briefly revived here for the clarification of the study. The paper examines women's classification with the review from the sources of the last 10 years

literature of sociological and women's studies. The researcher has focused on the topic of stereotypes and media in her PhD work. Research on women's portrayal by mainstream media has been a continuing preoccupation for many scholars in communication studies over the past decades. In this sociological endeavor an attempt was made to reveal the impact of television serials and advertisements among the college students in Surat city through individual interviews in various educational institutes. The areas covered were S.P.B. College (South West Zone) i.e. Parle point, Surat Zillah Sahkari Spinning Vidya Sankul (West Zone) i.e. Olpad and Veer Narmad South Gujarat University (South Zone) (P.G.) students. The researcher had particularly interviewed U.G. and P.G. students from different sectors of Surat city to study their own perceptions based on their environment and level of educational qualifications. The study noticed differences in colleges situated in urban and rural areas revealing remarkable differences in the mind set. The total number of respondents in the sample were 300 students, 100 from S.P.B. (50 males and 50 females), 100 from Olpad college (50 males and 50 females), and 100 from VNSG University (50 males and 50 females) respectively.

India's Scenario On Education

Education of women is another popular theme, studies directed towards the status of rural women's education- both formal and non formal, revealed very disturbing trends. The illiteracy is more rampant among women than among men. While it was expected that education will give more employment to women, it is creating more unemployment among married women graduates as compared to women as a whole. Health problems of women are another area which always attracts the attention of scholars. The studies reports the poor health condition of women due to poor access to health services and lack of nutritional diet. In the economic dimension, three themes have attracted attention of scholars; women's employment,

- their participation in development, and
- impact of technology on them.
- In the political dimension it has been summarized that women suffer from powerlessness.

Stereotypical Mindset

The fact is that when we hear a word surgeon it somehow resembles a man, and this is how an individual imagines. This illustrates how we all hold beliefs, attitudes, the stereotype that influence our perception of the world around us. Which sex do you associate with elementary school teacher? With model? With engineer? Most individuals still indicates that elementary school teachers are female, models are female, and engineers are male. Individuals also mark the occupation if they believe the sex of the person performing this job is typical. Stereotypes refer to individuals cognitions that typically do not correspond to reality. A stereotype is a picture in the head not an accurate mirror of the real world.

Stereotypes occur when individuals are classifieds by others as having something in common because they are members of a particular group or category of people. Gender stereotypes are a psychological process which illustrates structured sets of beliefs about the personal attributes of men and women. An awareness of the contents of gender role stereotypes begins in the preschool years and is rather well-developed by the time children enter first grade. Parents are among the

more important socializing agents for children in shaping values, beliefs and behaviors related to gender. Furthermore knowing the sex of the baby conjures up all kinds of personality characteristics and physical attributes even when these factors are not present in the child. Parents communicate their stereotypes to children in numerous ways. Boys are given building blocks, sports equipment and model vehicles. Girls, on the other hand, are encouraged to play with dolls, dolls houses and miniature household appliances.

Cultural Images Of Women:-

It needs to be mention that any analysis of women cannot be viewed in isolation but from wider context as both men and women constitute society. Accordingly an attempt is made in the present exercise to examine the issue of gender stereotyping in media from a larger perspective i.e. men and women in society as a whole. Culture ideas, symbols, norms and values play a significant role in the creation of women images and the differentiation of gender roles. The purpose of the present paper is to understand the images of femininity in Indian society from ancient to modern times. India, a heterogeneous society, presents conflicting women images. Images of women have not remained static and have undergone numerous changes. However, certain basic models have widespread acceptance. Various cultural images of women:- Pativrata-unconditional devotion to husband, Glorified Motherhood, Bharat Mata Image.

- First at the societal plane, the perception of different categories of women is distinctly carved by the popularly accepted female images and stereotypes.
- Secondly, at the interpersonal level within the family situation, these images frequently impose in a variety of ways. Indian girls grow up with deep rooted sense of fear and anxiety which not only restricts their social mobility in the routine day to day life but also often psychologically cripples and convince them to face the hardships of life in general and resist gender based discrimination in particular. These gender dichotomies flow almost directly from the popular images to most of the Indian families.
- Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, these images leave a deep imprint upon women's self-perception and development.

Portrayal Of Women In Advertisement

Advertising has been a prime target of attack and scrutiny all over the globe. The basic explanation for the critical focus on sex role portrayal in advertising lies in the close relationship, which exists between advertising, the consumer goods industry and the vital economic role of women as consumers. Generally it is shown in advertisement a woman's goal in life is to attract and attain a man:-women are shown in advertising as always young and attractive. They are frequently depicted as sexual objects. Women in advertisements are restricted to the home and isolated from other women outside home, man is her favorite companion. Domesticity is the second role of two dimensional image of femininity in advertising.

Sex Stereotyping In The Media

Far more dangerous than the overtly indecent advertisements are the sexual stereotypes that are found in different media. The Indian version of sex stereotyping would have all women

behaving like mythological Sita and Savitri- docile, submissive, sacrificing, sentimental, superstitious, and incapable of rational action, their primary duty being wives, companions and devoted mothers. Television serials and films are the largest disseminators of stereotyped images. They have a package formula for women: the latter are shown as traditional, truly Indian women, who are devoted, son producing wives etc. so far women's protests and criticisms have not had much effect on the commercial Hindi film industry. Television serials, advertisements and cartoons also perpetuate sex stereotypes. In its woman's world all that has happened is that the traditional sitas and savitris have given way gracefully to an alien creature who is new role model for the Indian woman who has the best of both worlds, is economically independent, progressive, ambitious and very feminine. What is being peddled here is grotesque caricatured western lifestyle which is quite far removed from the average Indian woman's struggle to survive totally negating and never questioning her reality. Even though 60% of women are involved in agriculture, radio programmes for the rural areas are only directed to men. Women's programmes almost never discuss technology, banking facilities, new laws or any such current issues.

Consequences Of Negative Stereotype And Sexism For The Individual

Society suppresses the choices of males and females through cultural tyranny. The socialization process forces males and females into behavioral modes, personality characteristics, and occupational roles deemed appropriate by society. Most important, these constraints bring about system that is biased in favor of males. Men have the opportunity to develop their talents while women may only within a severely limited range. The consequences are as follows:- Relative Powerlessness of Women, Limited Range of Occupations for Women, Loss of Academic Potential for Women, Lack of Respect for Women's Abilities, Low Self-esteem among Women, Trials of the Aging Women.

Conclusion

In summary, then, the preceding analysis of some of the selected socio-demographic, legal, educational, economic, political and socio-cultural indicators on the situation of women reveals that even after four decades of assiduous effort women's condition continues to be miserable and they still confront immense problems in all these domains of life. However, recent international and national spectacular developments have turned the attitude of society towards women and women's perception of their own situation. Consequent upon these efforts and development, a spate of women's studies in different directions were made which inter alia raised new question on Women Question.

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