Portrayal of Woman in Print Media A Bibliographic Essay

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In the research of literature on media and women, we have observed that though women have been considered very important segment of the societies all over the world and in the field of mass communication as well as in media studies women are considered an attractive field of research but unfortunately, very few experts have conducted scientific research on the relationship between media and women. "The survey of the literature on women and media brings out the fact that there has been an agreement all over the world that the images of women projected through the media tend to reinforce the traditional attitudes and often present a degrading and humiliating picture of women, which may be true for certain cultures and societies, but does not reflect the changing attitudes and the desired role of men and women as demanded by the modern age. Social scientists, researchers and international agencies working for the emancipation and welfare of women are aware of the fact that image of women projected by the media constitutes a major obstacle to eliminate the discrimination against women throughout the world, and is a main factor in preserving the traditional sexist attitude towards them.

The purpose of bibliographic essay is to know that what type of research has been done in the area and what has been found in previous studies because researchers often spend time on collecting data that are already available. So, the study of available literature saves time and money. Through literature review, the researcher can know that what has not been already investigated. (Agostino, 1980).

Following are the summaries of the reviewed literature from the primary research studies.

In a study of four magazines; having largest circulation and directed to and read by women (Ray, 1972), has found that the fiction contents in the magazine place women's prime responsibility in home; if employed they are shown in traditionally female jobs and professions which tend to be less skilled and less rewarding. Volunteer work or part time work is encouraged for married women and mother of growing children. Two of the four magazines to some extent present profile of successful women in vast variety of fields, including nontraditional occupation, and women are not restricted to domestic roles. But the orientation of the readers, express through readers correspondence reveal, that the majority of the readers favour the role of home makers. Work is presented as an opportunity to meet men and job descriptions are glamorised and romanticised. It was found that there is a sharp decrease in the number of career women appearing in the fiction from 1939 to 1949.

In a study of Egyptian middle-class women's magazines, Suleiman (1974) detected a tendency of the characters portrayed to assume Western rather than Egyptian attitudes, and found a generally equal treatment of males and females, although the relationships between men and women were depicted as relatively formal. A rather less gloomy picture emerged from an analysis of the women's page in two newspapers and of a women's magazine over the period 1965 to 1976. He detected an increased interest in women's activities in economic and cultural fields and a generally wider range of topics being treated; but at the same time, the percentage of advertising in all three papers had increased and the concerns and interests of only urban middle-class women were considered.

Ray (1975) latter found that by the end of 1950 career women were, completely replaced by young house wives, whose interest were home and children oriented.

In Pakistan, Habib (1975) observed that the media in general are said to present women exclusively in the stereo typed roles of house wife, mother and consumer. of advertised goods, while as far as development is concerned, women are very rarely spokespersons of their own problems.

Sreberny (1978) concluded that the media were found wanting in terms of active support in reflecting new roles for women and men. Little communication was addressed specifically to women Content analyses revealed a limited number of female images, stereotypic in nature, which seemed to run counter to the national development goals articulated at that time. (Sreberny, 1978). Magazine analysis revealed that the most popular women's weekly, *Zan-e-Ruz* (Woman of Today), with a circulation of over 100,000, was found to present three main types of story. First were direct translations or plagiarism's of Western teenage romances, with blonde, blue-eyed images and foreign names. Second were Iranian-based fantasies, in which the village girl finds love, excitement and a rich husband in the city. Third were cautionary stories in which adventure-seeking girls are betrayed by men, ending up in the streets or in a brothel.

In a study, Gallagher (1979), titled as the "Portrayal and Participation of Women in the Media", based on a review and analysis of researches and action programmes world wide, relating to both the portrayal of women by the mass media and to their participation in the industry. "Overall media treatment of women can best be described as narrow. On films, in the press and the broadcast media, women's activities and interests typically go no further than the confines of home and family. Characterised as essentially dependent and romantic, women are rarely portrayed a rational active or decisive. Both as characters in the fictional media contents, and as news makers in press and broadcasting, women are numerically represented -- an absence which under lines their marginal and inferior status in many spheres of social economic and cultural life. Prevalent news values define most women and most women's problems as unnewsworthy, admitting women to coverage primarily as wives, mothers or daughters of men in the news. In their own right they make headlines usually only as fashionable or entertainment figures. Much media advertising directed at women as is consumer condescending in tone, and manipulative in intention, as the bait through which products are advertised. Women are exploited in terms of their sexuality and physical appearance. Underlying practically all media images of

women, though characterised some what different from one country to an other in as dichotomous motif which defines women as either perfectly good or wholly evil, mother or whore, virgin or call girl, even traditional or modern.

Ceulemens (1979) collected and analysed the research material on the topic of Mass Media; Image; Role and Social Conditions of Women. The images of women in the advertising reveal that women are considered as the major consumers and advertising manipulates the female image in order to persuade women to buy; at the same time women are used as a bait to attract the opposite sex.

Goffman (1979) concludes that women are weakened by advertising portrayals via six categories: relative size (shown smaller or lower, relative to men), feminine touch (women constantly touching themselves), function ranking (occupational), family scenes, ritualisation of subordination (proclivity for lying down at inappropriate times; women using bashful knee bends, canting postures, puckish, expansive smiles), and licensed withdrawal (women never quite a part of the scene, possibly via far-off gazes).

Allouche (1980) to find out the image of woman in the Lebanese press between 1935-75, concludes "Weekly magazines though they give woman more space than dailies, still restrict her sphere, to feminine activities and keep her away from man's world, i.e. from the area of leadership and major decisions. As an argument for woman's sexual discrimination, her biological functions and emotional nature is over emphasised. This natural difference is the arm they use to legitimise for men polygamy and other privileges. While women are called

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upon to vow eternal faithfulness to their husbands, and to consider love and devotion to them as a duty.

Gallagher (1983) pointed out that although the social situation, the role of the media, and the status of women have all changed dramatically in Iran since the studies to be reported here were carried out (in 1978), they are presented as having immediate relevance to the overall regional review, in that they reflect the nature of the women-and-media relationship in that country at a historically recent point in time. Later changes have yet to be documented.

Kapoor (1986) remarked that the Pakistani Press, especially newspapers and magazines, contains Urdu biased reporting on matters concerning women. Crime is given a great deal of coverage and accounts pertaining to women have a heavy slant in favour of the oppressor. The brother, father or cousin who murders a sister or mother is given implicit or explicit applause for upholding honour. There is no distinction between adultery and rape: moral laxity on the part of the woman is held to be the cause of both. Women are thus made to hold the ultimate responsibility for the ills of society. There are a few English language newspapers / magazines which are partially staffed by a handful of enlightened and emancipated women. Their articles are exceptions to the general pattern. In feature articles, news coverage and editorials, human rights and the constitutional/legal as well as social/cultural problems of women are often dealt with in a responsible manner. In the vast majority of the Urdu press, however, the social paradox outlined at the beginning is fully manifest. Apart from the slanted news coverage that has already been referred to, the establishment press carries little news about achievements of women productive work. the in

Newspaper fare for and about women falls into a few major categories. Firstly, there is that aspect in which a woman is portrayed as the docile, home -loving, sexless, holy mother, daughter, sister and wife who, interestingly, carries on her assigned role in the home and nurtures the family dutifully. On the other hand, there is little or no favourable coverage of women's demonstrations against laws which violate their essential humanity. Woman as the object of male desire is the second aspect of press coverage, Thus a large quantum of reading matter is devoted to the question of increasing the desirability of women. Articles on how to improve one's complexion, removal of undesirable hair, etc., abound. Lastly, women are used as saleable commodities to increase circulation and the sale of products. Large photographs, often in full colour, of women from the elite, are splashed across the front pages, Often, they carry degrading captions.

Smith (1989) regarding advertising in print media said that the results of more than a dozen studies, almost all conducted in the 1970s, have shown the messages of advertising to be astonishingly similar: Woman's place is in the home; women are dependent upon men; women do not make independent and important decision; women are shown in few occupational roles; women view themselves and are viewed by others as sex objects.

Perveen (1986) pointed out that the photograph of a woman in our newspapers is just a mean of making the money. They publish colour photographs of women whether these are required or not. The condition of our journals and magazines is also not different. They are also flooded with such pictures in most of the journals, short stories conflicting with *Islamic* teachings can be seen. In an *Islamic* state a women should not be used as instrument for earning the money. The government should raise all the mass media on *Islamic* foundation. If the mass media remain the tool for commercial benefits it will be impossible to realise the objectives of an *Islamic* state. As the mass media in *Islamic* state are the representative of *Muslim Ummah*, it is their obligation to would themselves according to the *Islamic* ideology.

The magazines that are most read in Algeria, observed Abu Nasr (1992) are the French ones. These magazines convey an "absurd" image of women that does not correspond to the reality the majority of women live in. It only corresponds to the reality of women belonging to the privileged classes who are not at all representative of the feminine condition in Algeria. These women's magazines, the author adds, do not propose "reality" but "sentimental dreams" and "evasion". They portray women as seductress wholly concerned with love, submissive to man, and totally apolitical. Moreover, these "foreign" revues do not only aim at making women dream, thus, distancing them from the "true" problems they confront, but they mainly "glamour" occidental clothes and products. This process is very successful in Algeria, Hammouche comments, because many of "our" women make regular trips abroad to renew their wardrobes in order to remain "eternally young and pretty." Thus the feminine press, he declares, is a "social product" carrying enormous economic interests, because it addresses the people to whom it denies simultaneously a "real and autonomous economic and social insertion." The reason why the foreign press has a considerable audience in Algeria says Hammouche, is due to the fact that there in no local feminist press, except for the Al-Djazaira revue. Another reason is the portrayal of the Algerian woman as a culturally alienated woman, who

easily and comfortably identifies herself with the "seductress image" whose life is only concerned with beauty questions on one hand and with the universe of love and passion on the other. This observation may be true of other North African countries as well as Lebanon, in other words, the Francophone countries of the East.

Khokhar (1995) observed that almost all the *Islamic* journals in Pakistan have been published by the various religious groups. Being the mouth organ of their own sect, these magazines projected various issues in lieu with their own school of thought. Their contents ranged from purely religious matter to the social issues but with a typical religious shade. The women's issue too has no exception to this. Though these periodicals did not address the women's portrayal specifically yet a bit attention was given to their rights with only 4 percent of the total contents. It was too had no comparison with the women folk in this country.

Niazi (1995) explained that "The Islamic Concept of Journalism" is purely based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. Islamic principles about projection of women, derived from the Qur'anic verses and Ahadith are prohibition of dissemination of obscenity, sensitivity about chaste women , molestation, curiosity about one's privacy, publication of news not duly investigated, and publication of any type of indecent matter. False propaganda, accusation, publicity of illicit crimes, matter provoking evil deeds, publicity of nude women, mixing of the both sexes openly, dancing and coquetry of women and dissemination of bad habits are also obscenity and it should strictly be avoided. Journalists should safeguard the chastity of pious women. Anything against them must not be published until it is witnessed and supported by four persons. False accusations should not be accommodated at any cost. Media men should not

humiliate or ridicule any man or women. They should not insult, irritate or criticise any women. Any bad name on any woman should not be labelled. It is also essential not to interfere and intrigue into the private life of others. Journalists should not over hear, peep into others, or spy on any person. God has forbidden curiosity and undue probe into others' affairs. They should sift and sort out the news with a sense of great responsibility because it is possible that anyone may have concocted it for one's own and or some mischief. God has forbidden the publication of absurd, false, seductive, and misleading matter. This matter might be about such social activities as are against the spirit of *Islam. Islam* prohibits mix gatherings, sports and entertainment of man and women together and its publication too.

Butt et, al (1996) studied the portrayal of women in general press is practically non-existent with the exception of magazine sections and limited news. The women's specialised press offer an over-whelming portrayal with either fantasising or distressful cases and exhibit a lack of realism. Moreover, there is a low level of coverage regarding women in comparison with the level of their performance in rural production, female education, health etc. The specialised press seems to be unaware of the needs of the female communities and does not address the various tiers in a positive way, whereby a variety of skills, trades and welfare programs are displayed, explained and taught to portray the women in a positive realistic and comprehensive manner, the real contribution of women in different fields of our society should be projected by our media and this projection would be a milestone for the progress and development of our women as well of our country.

Seema Pervaiz1 pointed out that in our society, women, because of the social deprivation and home confined interest in life, are influenced by the media to a great extent. For them, in most of the cases, media remains the only contact with the outside world. Many studies on mass media have proved that the media play a vital role in conserving or reinforcing the existing views and attitudes of a society. It acts as a strong force in maintaining the status quo, in the roles of different segments of the society. The fictional characters portrayed through the popular media serve as a model or identificant object for a large number of people. The analysis of media contents in this study reveals that the media project and image of devalued, inferior and economically and emotionally dependent woman. In spite of being the central character of the fiction, in most of the cases, she has no real human value. The media tries to put too much emphasis on the description of her beauty, jewellery , clothes and physical appearance. It conveys that she does not have enough inner human qualities to stand without the crutches of such super imposed decorations. A healthy human approach in projecting a character should be that you accept a person and make human contact with her or him, because of the personality characteristics; but the image of women projected through the media generally lacks good human qualities. What we find is just a cluster of attractive physical features. The value of women characters as good human beings becomes secondary, and the aspect which gets real projection is that she is a cluster of big attractive eyes, long black hair, good proportionate figure, nice and costly jewellery. She is being put in a well decorated

Seema, Pervaiz. Analysis of mass media appealing to women. Islamabad: National Institute of Psychology. (Un dated) surroundings like a show piece. Incidentally if she is not rich than she is shown in naturally attractive surroundings like mountains, farms or rivers. It is revealed from the survey of the related researches that emphasis on the physical beauty of women is a universal concern of the media.

Media in American and European countries also emphasise on the physical beautification in woman's image and use her as sex symbol. Because of cultural taboos and censorship; media in our country does not project women as a sex symbol very explicitly; yet in a subtle style tries to project her sexual attraction. When we review the international media from the point of view of women's' status, we find similar attitudes and inclinations as it is in our media; but there is a significant difference in the intensity of the expression of the attitudes towards women's position and status. The aspect which gets maximum projection in women's portrayal is her emotional dependency passivity and other directness. In most of the cases she needs emotional support and love to lead a good life. She is not responsible for the things happening around her and she never takes charge of her life. Somebody else decides for her on important occasions. It may be father, husband, boy friend or for that matter the luck. She does not try to change the circumstances according to her own conveniences if she looses the sympathy of the viewers, audience or readers. Active manipulation for transforming her own life is always discouraged by the media. The media tries to establish that good things can happens only by chance. Emotional and social exploitation of women is an other salient feature of women's projection on the media. This tendency has also been found in the research studies of other countries. It is always she who sacrifices

for her husband, father, brother or for children. She is being deprived of her rights and pleasures on the name of cliches such as sacrifice, humanity, sincerity and devotion. On the name of maternal love i.e. mamta, she sacrifices all her comforts and for the matrimonial happiness she will go though all kinds of pathetic situations. The analysis of woman's image in the popular media reveals that romance is the full time job of the young woman in our society. This is another sugar coated style of devaluing woman as human beings. Her beauty and capabilities remain waste unless she is chosen by or for a member of the opposite sex. She is always in search of he. In spite of so much emphasis on romance she is discouraged to take initiative in the expressions, and the passivity in the whole affair is always appreciated. In certain cases if she tries to take initiative in selecting some body for romance, she immediately falls in the category of bad women. The heroine receive sympathy while indulged in a romance, where as the other woman, for the same type of behaviour, will get a negative labelling just due to the difference in the strategies. The initiative by a woman in the expression of love is not appreciated. The analysis reveals that women's role as an independent economic unit gets least projection at the media. As a rare case if a woman is shown as a working woman, it will always be supported by some justification. She is portrayed as working woman only under certain socially negative circumstances, such as parental loss, broken home, or some other social mishap. In a normal social condition she is not supposed to work for the sake of economic productivity only. Her economic independence is not taken as a praise by the other people around her. She is hardly shown as doing a job just for the sake of job. The working women portrayed through the media are generally shown in low

status jobs and it is very rare that they received social approval from their significant others.

Simorgh² observed that one difference that emerges in newspaper and magazine advertisements is the extensive use of advertisements lifted from western campaign. The majority of these are advertisement of foreign products, mainly perfumes and cosmetics. Or else, locally produced beauty products employ images of foreign, white models. Invariably these are highly suggestive in posture and dress. Close-ups of open mouthed women with hair flying and dreamy eyes are superimposed on bottles of perfumes. These women are transformed into sex symbols. The message here is seduction by the woman through the advertised product. Again the two are interchangeable and the women. by implication, is as much an object for possession as the purchasable commodity on sale in shops. Cloths that reveal the body are utilised to the extent that the scissors of censor board will permit. This is greater in magazine than in television commercials. Often bare legs and off- shoulder dresses are covered by lines and designs to suggest dress material. Where men only are depicted, as in 'T'J's Fashion Garments for men, the campaign is unabashedly macho, with slogans like 'The Combat Club' or 'Though, give a macho soft leather look'. Women and men are rarely shown together, but where they are, the socially structured supremacy of the male is evident in posture and attitude. The man is placed above and literally looks down at the woman, or the man is leading with the woman following him. There is a disdain and detachment in the male for the female, or simply, the women is a

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Simorgh. The portrayal of women in the media of Pakistan. (un dated)

background spectator to the central drama in which the man plays the key role in a social or a family situation. In the rare interaction between men and women, again the man is shown in a protective or custodial role. This once again establishes the gender hierarchy within patriarchy.

Besides, there are certain published and unpublished reports, resolutions, and recommendations of different meetings, symposia and seminars held on the topic of portrayal of women in the mass media.

Mrs. Helvi Spila, Secretary General of International Women's Year in her opening speech at the Media Workshop for Journalists and Broadcasters (Mexico City, July 1975) referred the following three most common women's stereotypes: The "dumb blond" woman who is laughed at by men for her lack of education and whose sexual endowments generally place her in the "desirable" but not "marriageable" category. The "nice girl" the virginal woman with whom the hero falls in love and marries. This stereotype has the qualities of a good servant. Cheerfulness, dutifulness and obedience to the desire of her husband. The middle class working woman who seeks to free herself either of the previous stereotypes and who seeks through her work to reach parity with the males. This newly emerging image is identified as domineering, sharp tongued, unattractive and castrating. This image has emerged as a result of pressure from a growing number of the unsatisfied viewers; but is presented in a distorted way, which arouses more suspicion that sympathy for the women concerned³.

Media Workshop for Journalists and Broadcasters. (1975). Mexico City.

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The International Year of Women (1975) and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-85) brought out special efforts in the shape of researchers, as well as seminars, workshops and round table discussions, to mobilise all forces in order to change this image and replace it by a truthful, honest and desirable representation of women. Following are the resolutions and recommendations of the UNESCO sponsored meeting:-

The media workshop for Journalists and Broadcasters, Mexico City (July 1975) observed that there is a tendency in the media to "project a stereotyped image of women, reinforcing traditional concepts of the roles of women, prejudicial to aspiration for improved status, rights and participation in society". The Regional Seminar on Women and Media at AIDB, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, November 1980 declared in the policy statement "The media should be used more effectively in raising self awareness in women of their inherent and acquired capabilities and of their roles in society as active participants in development." It further says "Vigilance must be exercised in monitoring the portrayal and depiction of women in The Director General of UNESCO, while media". formulating the resolution for the World Plan of Action adopted by United Nation's World Conference of the International Women's' Year held in Mexico City (July 1975); expressed "The Conference condemns the degrading exploitation of woman as sex symbol and instrument of economic interests by certain media of social communication." He further stressed "The conference request governments, and responsible organisations to promote and encourage in the mass communication media of their countries, the projection of a dignified and positive image of woman, divesting them of their role as vehicles

for publicity and as targets for the sale of consumer goods, with a view to bringing about changes in the attitudes and ways of thinking of both men and women and their full participation in society"⁴.

There is a need to change the existing images of women in the media: that their portrayal as victims and as powerless persons; as stereotypes of the housewife and / or temptress; and as creatures limited to the domestic sphere. There is also a need to make women more "visible" to make their voices heard and views recognised. Print media must reflect the multiplicity of women's roles, lives and views⁵.

Nowhere has the duality of recent trends been more clearly demonstrated than in the area of violence against women. There is currently unprecedented coverage of the issue focusing on domestic violence and rape. Through all forms of media and communications, there has been a shattering of past myths and taboos, as well as of the silence imposed on victims and those who have suffered with them. This development is significant in that it is impossible to tackle the issue on a public scale as long as it remains restricted to the private domain. However, an adverse effect is that violence against women can also become glorified, and in many instances is even used as titillation. This trend is most notable in the commercial film industry and in television dramas, as well as in the Urdu-language press, where there is no code of ethics requiring journalists to protect the anonymity of female victims of violent crimes. There is a very real danger that the widespread coverage given to such violence in the media, in the absence of

⁴ UNESCO Report. (1980).

⁵ Koala Lumpur Workshop. (1992).

gender-sensitisation of media personnel, will de-sensitise the public to these issues⁶. In the case of women, in particular, media has played an insidious role in reinforcing their oppression and subordination in our society. This has been done through media's portrayal of women and the messages contained therein which have, in a number of ways; adversely influenced social attitudes and social behaviour, especially of males, with a negative impact on women and girls⁷.

Women are noticeably absent from the senior ranks of the mass circulation Urdu-language dailies which play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes as well as from the smaller circulation provincial vernacular press. Although the independent press practices self-censorship and a code of ethics, that is demand appropriate, the outlook varies across newspapers. For example while some shun projecting violence and gore, others highlight it on the grounds of the public's need to know. The main matter of concern is the manner of the projection of women. Even when they are not directly undermined, it is often conveyed by insinuation of privacy of women victims of rape, wife-battering and humiliation through the printing of their names or photographs or both, always without their permission. The poor who cannot raise objections are particularly and doubly victimised and often made outcast8.

⁶ Fourth World Conference on Women. (1991). Beijing.

⁷ Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women. (1998).

⁸ National Plan of Action for Women. (1998). Islamabad.

Conclusion

We can sum up the reviewed literature that research work done by western scholars focus on the media which portray women as saleable commodities to increase their circulation and to increase the sale of the products they advertise. Such studies reveal that in the west, print media portray stereo type roles such as office secretary, receptionists, telephone operator, nurse, teacher and rarely as active and decisive executive. These studies also emphasize the need for equal rights and the equal opportunities in all walks of life. Such studies have been conducted mostly by the feminist scholars with motive to exploit the feelings of the women against the status quo and to become the champion of the women's right or to The researches achieve some other vested interests. conducted on the subject under study in developing countries highlight that women have their prime responsibility at home as docile home living, sexless, holy mother, daughter, sister and wife who interestingly carries on her assigned role and natures the family dutifully women is considered as consumer of advertised products. Also she is portrayed as an appeal for the promotion of consumers products.

The women's role as seductress wholly concerned with love, submissive to man and apolitical, is also portrayed in the print media of developing countries. Media also portray those women who make regular trips abroad to review their wardrobes to remain eternally young and pretty. The studies conducted in Muslim countries generally conclude with emphasis on the observance of Islamic values for example curiosity about one's privacy publication of news without investigation and publication of indecent matter be discouraged. These studies also reveal the discriminated image of women in the media but suggest no remedy or solution of the problem.

In Pakistan, the studies conducted in this regard also focus on the negative image of the media but suggest no solution or strategy of the problem through *Islamic* perspective. We see no study in which portrayal of women in media is analysed from the perspective of the 'Status of women in *Islam*' or in which strategies are devised for the media of a Muslim country to project the image of women according to her status given by *Islam*.

Published and unpublished reports, resolutions and recommendation of different meetings, symposia and seminars on the subject reflect the observations of the participants and conclude that there is a need to change the existing images of women in the media; that their portrayal as victims and as powerless persons as stereotypes of the housewife and temptress; and as creatures limited to the domestic sphere; that there is also a need to make women more visible to make their voices heard and views recognized; that the print media must reflect the multiplicity of women's roles, lives and views.

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