

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

Before going to take a serious discussion about the analyses of the findings and conclusions, it is noteworthy that media play a very effective role in a democratic country like India. It acts as one of the important agents of the social control and social change. Being the agent, the role of media becomes more glorious and noble. But, when it comes to the case of women somewhere it feels that media are not being fully able to give proper importance to it even today. So, the researcher has attempted to study the reality of the entire scene regarding the relationship between women and media. As a result the present study takes place, having the title “Portrayal of Women in Assamese Print and Visual Media (2000-2002): A Feminist Perspective”.

The study is intensive as it takes into consideration the space and coverage of women’s issues in the editorial pages of both the Assamese Newspapers and the Magazines. It enables us to understand the pattern or nature of portrayal and the level of treatment given to women by the media. Assamese films (*Kanyadaan* and *Tumi Mur Mathu Mur*) are also intensively categorised into scenes taking into consideration the story, dialogues, dresses, behaviours and activities shown in those scenes of the films so that the pattern of portrayal and treatment of women in Assamese Visual media would come in a scientific way. The comparative study between the newspapers, the magazines and the films as well will help us examine the subject of commodification and exploitation of women in the region of Assam.

#### 7.1 THE STUDY IN RETROSPECT

‘Woman’ as a category has been subordinated for the ages in all parts of the globe. It is a cliché that women’s plights and oppressions beggar description, out of the patriarchal nature of society. Subordination of women becomes a philosophy of each woman’s life with which they have to live without having any say. It has been the history of each stage of human civilisation and is prevalent in large parts of the world. All the circumstances along with their experiences of subordination make it necessary for the women to be united and voice against the age old sufferings and oppressions. Though education, modernization, industrialization and globalization are generally thought to bring in certain changes in society for the betterment of the status and

position of women, in reality, the distribution of such change remains uneven resulting in widening inequalities between men and women. From birth to death, society fights shy of women in regard to their empowerment and development issues. However, there are women, still longing for better lives within a just and egalitarian society: just and egalitarian, not from the legal and constitutional promise perspective but from realistic point of view. So, to raise the position of women, it is the call of the hour to protect women from patriarchal subordination. Hence, radical changes should be introduced in regard to the abolition of patriarchy as a practice and ideology on which all the social relations are based. These changes would be intensifying situations for women to be liberated from the age old oppressions and suppressions. Gender analysts are still busy with their projects to find out the substantive causes of women's sufferings out of patriarchy and patriarchal institutions working as fuel for the survival of the socio-economic and cultural environment for women. As a result, there is a shift in the feminist scholarship from merely studying the status of women whether being high or low but rather finding out the specific nature and the basis of their subordination in a given social, economic and cultural structure.

The socio-economic and political institutions across the world favour men to exercise their control and authority over women. Being Patriarchal in nature these institutions and social relations result in imposing an inferior or secondary status on women. Women experience subordination, regardless of class or religion, in a number of ways for example discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression and violence inside the family, at the work place and in society in general. It is apparent that changing only the family value system, is not enough to liberate women, rather, the laws of inheritance, property distribution, distribution of the sources and the basic socio-economic and political institutions of a particular society have to be changed, as well. So, media, as the agent of the social change and social transformation should be able to curtail the language of domination in the projection of women and should awaken people's awareness for creating a just environment for women which can embank women with security, peace and development.

Feminists insist on the point that media content to some extent is an extension or projection of existing ideological power relations that get institutionalised consistently and continuously on social and cultural level. As a result, women are being projected in the manner that patriarchy produces. So, feminists regarding stereotypical or

negative representation of women in media, criticise media for being under the ownership and control of males who perpetuate stereotyped gender roles making contradictions between the “real” and the “ideal” women to maintain the *status-quo*. It should be noted that the women’s question in media is very much confusing as media are busy with creating an image of the ideal woman ignoring the real emotions of a real woman. In this regard, media are focussing on what the cultural beliefs presume women to be and what image patriarchy construct of women. All are regenerated in media contents leaving women as inferior and subservient. In Visual Media such as the Films, Television, or in the advertisements, women are projected as slim and beautiful, independent but care free as if women are nothing but the objects to be projected as men want and need to. That culminates that women’s assertiveness and firmness have to be addressed properly as they are human beings and have equal status with men. They are not to be looked down upon as “things” or “objects” that are easily available and accessible. Feminists believe that the continuation of sex role stereotypes and negative portrayal of women in the visual, as well as, print media is the signal of patriarchy embedded in media. the result is, women are shown having the stereotypical qualities like caring, nurturing, emotional, needing guidance and support lacking rationality on one hand, and men, on the other hand, are shown as decision makers, strong, hard-working and responsible. As a matter of fact, feminists being aware of the contents and languages produced in media towards women, question media for copying the patriarchal notion on women and womanhood and regenerating the concept of popularity of male gaze.

In other words, media’s projection of women as objects or things signifies the social and cultural construction of women as “thing” or “object” due to their “Femaleness” or the “Procreative Power” to give immortality, continuity and purity to the “Male line”. Women’s sexuality is being trapped in so called “Production” which divides women as upper, middle or lower and “Reproduction” (which differentiates women from men) systems of the society facilitating patriarchy in the minds of the general people: patriarchy is planted deep to express, interpret, and define what it means to be men and women. In a research by Gerda Lerner about the Mesopotamian civilisation, she saw that though women were from different economic status and often enjoyed economic independence, still their sexuality was strictly controlled by men—which even can be visualised in every society. Traditional or modern, women must have to

be controlled by men—this is the universal norm of society: anyone who goes against it is labelled “Desperate” or “Feminist” or “Errant” by the so called patriarchal society.

So, seeing the activities of media, it appears that, it is not out of the influence of patriarchy, but traditionally, women are thought to be and adored in almost all the religions and civilizations as caring mother, wife or good homemaker. Undoubtedly, media also have a share of it to show women as so. Now, there is a shift to show women as slim, beautiful or stylish and economically independent. However, in turn in the name of independence women are being pushed as objects of entertainment and sex and media are reinventing the traditional concept of women who never are independent. But, it was not so long ago that women on the screens were solely portrayed as submissive housewives taking care of their children and family.

In this regard it should be mentioned that the scene of Indian society and the media as a social institution are not different from each other in other parts of the world. The first National conference of the Women’s Groups in India held in Bombay in 1980 listed several issues related to women such as the sexual harassment in work places, needs for more jobs, job reservation, parity of pay and literacy. Similarly, the delegates at the South Asian Regional Workshop held in Delhi in 1986 criticised the stereotyping of gender in media and demanded for equal opportunity and representation in decision making bodies. Similarly, there are several writers who have criticized the role played by media towards women. A Feminist group in Delhi formed by *Ritu Menon* and *Kamala Bhasin* called ‘The Committee of portrayal of women in the Media’ rightly claims that it is not only the physical exposure of women that is derogatory but also the reinforcement of their stereotypes that are more damaging for the image and the dignity of womanhood.

The very diversity in India in terms of geography, the varying cultures, behaviours, food habits, rituals, and customs on the basis of geographical diversities gives India a peculiar position in the world culture. At the same time, it raises some problems, too, in terms of divided interests, aspirations and desires. Especially, it divides the women into several groups which restrict them to unite against the age old oppressions imposed on them. In India, there exists various categories and sub-categories among

men which are made on the basis of birth, wealth, geography, religion and so on. Strangely, all these determine the fate of women in India.

All these indicate the worsening condition of Indian women as a whole. Its social-economic, political and cultural manifestations can be seen in the increasing incidents of death related to the payment of dowry, rape, declining sex ratio, low political participation, discriminations in the work force and work places, discriminated gender roles, secondary roles in rituals and rites and preferences for sons. In brief, a woman has no personality of her own, but has only in relation to men. So, the scholars say, the Patriarchal code of living, the rigid codes of behaviour as outlined for women in the brahmanical texts and religious scriptures are mainly responsible for the inferior status of women in Indian society. Now, it has become a harsh reality that Indian women are denied basic social, economic and political rights and those who got it earlier, are struggling to maintain their acquired positions.

Prehistorically, though there is lack of sufficient evidence and what we have are tools, pottery and the cave shelters of that period, many of the scholars stick to the point, from the point of view of gender, that gender stratification cannot be presumed to have existed in those less stratified societies in this subcontinent. Historically, though most of the nineteenth century Hindu nationalists romanticised the Rig Vedic society as congenial in respect to women, lack of evidences make this notion problematic.

So, patriarchy and the customs, cultures, stratifications formed on the base of patriarchy are imbibed in such a manner that no one can think of a life without these, especially in India. Stratifications such as caste and class made on the basis of birth and wealth are two giants which providing fuel with the preservation of patriarchy, make women inferior and secondary. Among patriarchy, caste, class and gender—there is a close relationship towards shaping the life of women in India. Where caste is determined by birth, class is determined by wealth.

The Assamese society is no way an exception to larger Indian society as there can be seen gender stratifications, inequalities between men and women. From birth to death an Assamese woman, like her counterparts in other regions of India, has to be secondary without having any say in the house hold affairs or in the public. The place of women in the private sphere, blocking the stepping of women in the public sphere has generalized Manu's dictum that women can never be independent. Women of

Assam are in the midst of myriads of problems and struggling for their emancipation from caste oppression, cultural demoralisation, socio-economic and political inferiority, religious myths, patriarchal sufferings, class suppressions, globalisation, racism, capitalism and many more.

However, media are not focusing those problems even though the Assamese media are revered as one of the mainstream agents of Assamese culture and are the essential part of the Assamese society as these are serving the region with information, knowledge and entertainment since the time of start of it in Assam. It is seen that the media are busy in publishing the gossips of actors and actresses, their love stories and so on. As a matter of fact, this negative attitude towards women in real life is very much reflected in the way media represent them. Media representations of Assamese women reveal that they are less accepted and respected as persons and more looked upon as objects. She has three projected roles--- biological, domestic and decorative.

So, the Assamese media are in no way free from the shackles of patriarchy or, in other words, from the bindings of social, cultural and religious beliefs. The Assamese media's role towards the portrayal and projection of women is basically succumbed into two extreme continuums as '*devi*' and '*damned*'. As the Assamese society is more complex and different than that of the West in regard to perception, projection and acceptability of women in a stringent patriarchal culture, the persona or role model of the Assamese revolve around the set notions of '*devi*' and '*damned*'.

This particular study analyses that in most of the articles and editorials in the editorial pages of both the newspapers writers are acquiescent to showing women as victims. Victims of rapes or other sexual harassment, dowry, witch hunting etc. are given space in both the newspapers between 2000 and 2002 as these have been the burning problems of Assam.

## **7.2 CONCLUSIONS**

The discussion in the preceding chapters leads to the following inferences—

Women experience subordination, regardless of class or religion, in a number of ways—discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, and violence—in the family, at work place and in society over the centuries. The entire social, political and cultural structures—family, marriage, religions etc. are based on

the assumptions that the world is male-centric. The humanity is judged according to the male perspective. Women, on the other hand, are excluded from these constructions as woman is the 'other' or 'inessential'.

Through education, modernization, industrialization and globalization, and the paternalistic role played by the government, are generally thought of as positive turns in the fabric of society as far as the betterment of the status and position of women is concerned, but in reality the distribution of the changes remain uneven resulting in widening inequalities between men and women.

On the concept of biological sex, gender has been formed as masculine and feminine, which both men and women feel to be and with that, gender roles are put forward in a culturally and socially male saturated environment. Where men and masculinity are the hard-rock of a given Patriarchal society, women and femininity have to be the "Secondary Sex" with secondary characteristics based on Myths and Stereotypes.

Regarding the subordinate position of the Indian women, the feminists conceptualize the state of being oppressed into different concepts: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

Feminists perceive Patriarchy as intertwined and interdependent with Capitalism, where the former refers to the sexual relations and social reproduction, the latter economic relations and social production. So, in the modern era of Capitalism plus Globalisation, Media organisations are largely privately owned, profit motivated and transnational businesses mostly handled and controlled by men. This makes the Feminists argue that only because the ownership and production control is in the hands of men, they have the audacity to perpetuate certain stereotyped images of women with a view to serve their dominant mode of thinking and to maintain the status quo.

Feminists agree on the point that, power relation revolves around the concept of gender and does operated in social, cultural, economic and political fields. Patriarchy recapitulates those relations and perpetuates the biased gender representations in every field.

Indian Media are not any exception to that of the other parts of the world. Its tendency of portraying women as sexual commodity for satisfying men and glorifying women's

subordination has not changed. Sex stereotypes are still prevalent in Indian media contents and messages conveyed by it signify the slow trends towards more varied and equal portrayals from Indian women's perspective. Women are only projected to serve as the visual pleasure of the males as Mulvey articulated through the concept of "Male Gaze".

It is already mentioned that stereotypes are the tools to keep minorities in the positions of limited and subordinate powers, which are also regenerated by the media contents and the messages it tries to focus on. So, even though Indian women constitute half of the population, males are revered as the dominant social groups. Therefore, Indian media target to please the male audience with the stereotyped portrayals of women and try to preserve the patriarchy for the generations to come. Males are displayed as independent, courageous and intelligent while women are portrayed as submissive and dependent more often performing home-making tasks and less often employed outside of the home and when they get portrayed as modern or independent they are projected in a hyper-sexualised manner.

Indian society is, out and out, of patriarchal nature. Patriarchy takes the form of male domination over women in all areas of life, and the practice of male domination becomes so universal and so complete that it gets labelled as natural without any scope to be questioned.

Assamese society is not an exception to that, as there can be seen gender stratifications, inequalities between men and women. Patriarchy can be seen everywhere, from birth to death women have to live in a strictly stringent patriarchal society in Assam. The values of patriarchy are sowed in the minds of the children, from their very childhood and that value structure is reinforced in later stages of life by education, social training, and also by religious and customary rules. Girl child is discriminated from her birth and is enforced to live the life of a second-grade citizen. This process continues from generation after generation making it more universal and unchallengeable. So, they live in a traumatic condition struggling for own space of justice and equality.

The low position of women is also reinforced by the religious literatures written by the different saints of Assam and glorifies the inferiority of women to men. Assamese



family system suppresses women to be confined in the domestic sphere instead of honing their intellectual capacities.

A higher status of “Ideal women” is given to those who remain chaste and devotees to their husbands throughout their lives. In Assam also, like the other saints of India, Sankaradeva, the Vashnavite saint of Assam, also designates women to be the obstacle for men to gain spiritual advancements.

Even though the Assamese Media—Print and Visual, are an integral part of the Assamese socio-cultural institutions serving Assamese people irrespective of caste, language and religion over the years, but the attitude of the Media towards women in regard to portrayal is a matter of concern from the feminist perspective due to the growing negative trend such as trivialisation of womanhood and stereotypification of women.

In spite of the fact that women constitute half of the population, the Assamese Media having been gendered in nature, do not give significant share in the headlines and even when they get coverage in the headlines, they are presented as victims or as oppressed. During the analysis of the data collected from the Assamese Newspapers, during 2000-2002, it was found that in the editorials of both the newspapers women had been portrayed as victims rather than dignified human beings. Women were portrayed as victims in a sympathetic and judgemental manner. In the articles of both the newspapers women were shown as weak and unskilled which, in turn, signified that women were born to suffer.

In other words, women are trivialised and their issues get sensationalised and presented in a distorted manner. Similarly, it was found that Women’s issues did not get proper importance in the Assamese Newspapers during the years 2000-2002. The coverage of women’s issues was very low in that particular period. The space given to the newspapers for women’s issues were proportionally less. One of the flaming problems regarding Assamese media is arising in the insensitive media coverage of the sensitive women’s issues. The attitude of the Assamese Magazines towards women was also negative as women were portrayed as objects of entertainment and sensual/seductive. Both magazines made sensational stories on women’s body.

Like the other professions, Journalism has also been a patriarchal field for women to participate in Assam. Low wages, unfair labour practices, sexual harassment have been the unmitigated problems women journalists face in Assam: women journalists remain a minority and struggling to find their place in journalism. Even when a woman gets a stepping in this profession, she does not get a position at the decision making level or a position to influence in the formation of media policies.

The two films during 2000-2002 selected for the study were male dominating movies, even though both the movies had women characters. Both the films portrayed women as powerless and helpless human beings rather than having intellectual capacity or intelligence to take part in the decision making of the entire house and the family.

In contrast to women, men and men's lives had been given prominence. Male characters are shown as the freedom fighters, farmers having responsibility towards the family and the community, whereas women are depicted confined mainly in the private sphere. As a matter of fact, being a part of the greater patriarchal socio-cultural set up, Assamese Visual Media cannot be seen as an exception to that of the other institutions of the society.

In both the films, women's body and beauty are shown to entertain the male gaze. All the women characters were shown in traditional cum stereotype roles—predominantly in their roles as homemakers, mothers, and wives devoting their primary energies to improving their appearances and taking care of homes and people. Both the films had regenerated the concept that women's identity is always determined when they are in a relationship with men as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters.

In both the films women characters are portrayed on the basis of the experiences of the males. The directors, producers or the makers conforming to the general belief, attitudes and values try to make films showing women as the way society wants to see them.

Lastly, through the entire phenomenon of both the Assamese Print and Visual Media, it is found that the portrayal of women lies on the Patriarchal social structure. Women are forced to live in subordinate positions, who are still struggling for their identity. They are thought to be submissive, dependent and inferior creatures in comparison to their male counterparts. Like the other saints of India, Sankardeva, also designates

women to be the obstacles for men to gain the spiritual advancements. The demeaning position of women has been reinforced over the centuries even by the religious scriptures composed by the different saints of Assam. On the contrary, these texts glorified the inferior status of women compare to men. A higher status of “Ideal women” is given to those who remain chaste and devoted to their husbands throughout their lives. The values of patriarchy are sowed in the minds of the children, irrespective of sex, from their very childhood and that value structure is strengthened in later stages of life by education, social training, and also by religious and customary rules. It should be noted that being paternalistic in nature Indian Government has, no doubt, initiated certain efforts to recognise women as equal as men, safeguard their rights as humans, but execution is yet absent.

### **7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

On the basis of the findings of the study it is seen that the portrayal, participation and representation of women and their issues in the Assamese print and the visual media are still marginalised. The recommendations for increasing the positive portrayal and status of women in Assamese media are as follow -

- The mass media have been welcomed as the watch dog of the society and this term bestows upon them the social responsibility to mirror and guide the process of social change. The Assamese media, therefore, should regard its role as fundamental in supporting the progress of women and assist them in their march for achieving equality.
- The contents of mass media and the messages conveyed through these reinforce the sexism and regenerate the regressive and negative images of women. So, media should give focus on to give exposure “women question” to address the real problems of women rather than to glamorize women as objects.
- The media should give spaces to the women issues in such a way that the consumerist images of women can be eradicated.
- The mass media enjoy freedom of expression guaranteed by the constitution. So, the media professionals and the publishing houses should introduce suitable mechanisms in the nature of a taskforce and media forums to monitor performance to stem the tide of negative and unjust portrayal of women.

- The journalists and the other media professionals must come up with the vision to stop the endless scenes of violence against women and portray them in a dignified manner.
- The number of Women journalists should be increased and given proper importance in media both in print and visual to see the wider coverage of women issues.
- The government should intervene into the present situation and should pay greater attention to the needs of women. The Indian government should intervene in eradicating inequalities between men and women in the names of gender and sex or masculinity and femininity. The Government should take the initiatives to awaken the consciousness among the masses regarding gender equality, empowerment and development.
- Media portrayals of women have a great role in shaping image and concept of women as media are the powerful social organisations. Media, while highlighting the biological and domestic role of women, almost neglect the contributions they make to the development of the nation socially, politically and economically. So, media should be concerned with the women's real problems and should stop trivialising women.
- Media should not portray women in stereotypes. Stereotyped portrayals give society a false impression of what women are or should be. When people read the newspapers or watch films, they take into account how women are portrayed. Therefore, if women are consistently portrayed in same way then stereotypes will become normal ways of thinking. This can also lead to discrimination and underestimation in schools, the work place and other social setting. So, the media professionals should be concerned about the positive portrayal of women.
- Another significant way to eradicate the gender inequalities is the incorporation of gender education in the academic curricula from the school level. Education helps to the creation of such an intelligentsia, citizenry and academicians who can serve for eradication of gender inequality and patriarchal norms of the society. Gender education will create consciousness among people to form a society based of

equality in terms of societal, political, economic, public and private sphere of a woman.

- The journalists, as well as, the editors and the filmmakers should be concerned about the socio-political and economic problems of women and give space in print media. For the development and empowerment of women it is important to portray women in mass media in a positive way. So, the writers, journalists, the editors and the filmmakers should write their reports, articles or the editorials or make films keeping in mind the plights of women in a patriarchal society. In films women characters should not be used as sex objects or objects of entertainment. The film makers and the directors should have the consensus on gender equality.
- The Press Council should intervene in the publication of objectionable news or writings related to women. There should be some strict guidelines to be followed by the editors or the journalists in publishing articles or the editorials. The issues of gender inequality, negative portrayals, under-representation of women in media should be in the purview of the council. The censor board must be sensitised in the portrayal of women in media and ensure that violence shown is not glorified rather justified so that it does not further injure the image of the women.
- Introduction of Gender Perspective in Media studies at the under graduate level, as well as, in the University level will help students or scholars to become better media professionals. The incorporation of gender agenda in the media and communication studies will help the students understand the ground reality of masculinity and femininity and about the reality of various media organisations.

#### **7.4 SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Further research can be done on the following:

1. Comparison between Indian and Assamese Media in relation to portrayal of women.
2. Societal Impact of stereotyping women in the Media.
3. Psychological effects of media portrayals of women on the audience.
4. Construction of self-image of women through media portrayals.
5. Perception of the Media Professionals on women's issues presented in the media.
6. Media's projection of women in Pornographies.