'Gaze' and 'Bodies' in Popular Print: Understanding the Changing Representation of Women in Visual Culture

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Abstract. The paper attempts to develop arguments around concepts like 'Gaze' and the understanding of 'bodies' within popular culture. In its discussion on the 'male gaze', it raises pertinent questions of ways in which, with the rise of consumerism, the women's representation, particularly in the popular media, has become more vulnerable. This paper has tried to problematise the existing notion of popular women's magazines as 'best companion for women', as they are fraught with contradictions of what they claim to be and represent. The paper further explores the changing meanings of representation particularly with the advent of globalisation and the rise of the beauty industry.

Keywords. *Gender studies, popular culture, visual culture, male-gaze, magazines, globalisation*

Introduction

Women's representation in print media needs critical attention. This 'criticality' emanates from the fact that women's representation cannot be presumed to be free-floating but it is often placed in socio-cultural space. There is so much media and a cultural economy centered on the idea of 'body politics' in contemporary times that the area of gender representation has become a topic of interest among the gender and the media researchers in particular.

This has captured the attention especially of the feminist media theorists who have seen women's bodies as the sight of oppression by being subjected to 'male gaze' and oppressive power relationship. This paper aims to explore how women have been represented within the popular culture in India, and particularly the changes that have emerged in such representation with the coming up of a neo-liberal age. The paper intends to explore the role of the market in constructing such an identity for women and how much construction has impacted the lives of women. The paper also aims to understand what a 'masculine gaze' is and how women are positioned when one tries to understand this masculine gaze within media forms particularly like print magazines and print advertisements. The research intends to look at how women are constantly pressured to 'perform' their sexuality that overtly as well as subtly are represented in these popular media forms.

However, the 'masculine gaze' and the performance of gender besides the heterosexual dimension has other dimensions like a homosexual gaze and performativity of male as well. There has been a range of work on understanding masculinity by Srivastava (2004), Gauntlett (2002), Butler (1993), Kakkar (1991) et. al. Gaunlett (2002) has talked about men's magazines and modern male identities, for which he has done a content analysis of some of these magazines like FHM, Loaded, Maxim, etc. These magazines not only 'reinscribe sexism' but have played a substantive role in backlashing feminism. For instance, if these magazines take up relationship issues it is not genuinely therapeutic interaction rather relationship is more or less reduced to sex tips. Male lifestyle magazines are almost like a reassertion of 'old-fashioned masculine values' (Gaunlett, 2002:180). Masculinity is considered fragile and popular male magazines constantly attempt to reassert this masculinity by reasserting the gender power relation. A body is considered masculine enough only when it asserts itself against the sexualised female body. Kakar (1991) has further looked into ways in which popular cheap-priced prints have played a significant role in upholding masculinity. For instance, he talks about novels and cheap paperbacks like 'Kissa Totta maina', 'Ek Chaddar mailli si' and the role they play in concretizing gender stereotypes and also in imposing 'morality' within society. Kakar through these texts has given a psychoanalytical reading of understanding of what masculinity means and how intersubjectivity has played a significant role in reasserting masculine values. Jain (2004) while trying to understand 'masculinity' has looked into the mimetic male bodies in Indian Mass Culture. In some of her study of the calendar art forms she has shown that masculinity is entwined with divinity and male gods within these popular art forms often are depicted with the visible signs of masculinity like 'muscular body' (depiction of lord Hanuman), 'sensuous

body' (as in case of the depiction of Lord Krishna). Thus, masculinity like femininity was also reworked within the socio-cultural-political context.

This paper will engage with some theoretical and conceptual understanding of how women are positioned in the act of 'seeing'. Further, it will engage with the analysis of some of the photographs and the concept of 'gaze' that is embedded in these photographs. Overall, the paper is an engagement with how 'visuality' and its significance in understanding women's identity is constructed within popular print media. This paper has particularly looked into popular print media like women's beauty magazines in understanding its role in constructing and imagining women's identity. Further, through content-analysis of some of these beauty magazines, it has tried to explore how visual images have gained center stage particularly with the advent of globalisation.

Print media and its significance in visuality

The evolution of print newspapers in India began with the weekly 'Bengal Gazette' started by James Augustus Hicky in 1780. Very soon other newspapers like Calcutta Chronicle, Madras Courier, Bombay Herald, and Bombay Gazette entered into the market in Hindi. The other regional newspapers like 'Prabhakar' (1841), Kesari (1881), etc. also made an entry into print journalism. These newspapers not only critically unfolded the colonial atrocities but they were also significant in bringing about social changes. The issue of 'Nationalism' had emerged as one of the core themes of these newspapers. Anderson's 'Imagined communities' have looked into the connection between 'print-capitalism' and the emergence of nationalism. Besides mainstream newspapers, print-media saw its visibility even in popular culture like novels, detective stories, songs, etc. Orsini (2009) has looked into some of the early prints of popular culture like Chandrakanta, detective novels, etc. and has argued how they often adopted themselves to local taste and nomenclature to be largely accepted within masses. With the development of print-technology and with the rise of consumerism the visuality in print media became prominent. Jeffery (2010) has discussed the emergence of newer forms of technology that added vitality to the print circulation in India. The newer print forms with finer and faster print technology developed towards the mid-1970. This led to the expansion of the print market even to local languages and in more remote areas. This was a major boost for the advertisement industry that found print-media as a fresh ground to expand their marketability.

Advertisement industry towards the 1980s expanded even to rural India as print culture expanded. This made not only their products accessible and popular among the masses but along with it the ethos of consumerism also expanded.

Visuality has had a substantive influence on print-media ever since its inception in India. The Indian National identity used symbolic representation like those of Bharat Mata, fighting sons as freedom fighters, etc. The visuality within print is further discussed by Uberoi (1990), Jain (2004) et.al. where they have talked about the representation of gods and goddesses with the 'feminine' and sexualised representation. These representations were often circulated

within popular prints like calendar art. The female body was not free of how the female body was desired within a culture. Geeti Sen (2002) in her work 'Feminine Fables' has looked into how women with spirituality, women in politics were represented in print media. Even within contemporary forms of print-media 'visual' not only remained important but it gained prominence. If one tries to look at print media particularly with the advent of newer technology and with the opening up of the economy, the visuality is one dimension that cannot be ignored. The glossier and colorful editions begin to gain popularity. Magazines with visual dominance were more popular than ones with pure facts and content. Some of these magazines at times had advertisements depicting just 'grand' images and with very little description.

What is visual culture?

Visual images are a significant source to understand how power relationships within society are distributed. However, the critical question which then gets raised is 'What does the image mean?' since there is no one meaning or one true meaning through which one can understand the set of all possible meanings and interpretations (Hall 1997a:9).

Hall thus argues that to understand or interpret an image one needs to look in detail at the relationship of the image with the 'actual practices and forms of signification used and what meanings they seem to you to be producing' (Ibid, 9). However, before delving into the meanings or interpretations that images tend to generate, let us first understand why it is important to consider visual images in the first place.

To understand the significance of 'visual' within social science research one must first understand the 'cultural turn' of the 1970s. Stuart Hall has tried to establish the relationship between 'culture' and 'representation' through what he calls 'circuit of culture'. To begin with, Hall tries to understand what 'culture' means. His definition departures from the way classical anthropologists have tried to define 'culture', as a way of life'. For him, culture is also not the way popular practices like novels or T.V. program claims it to be.

For Hall "culture is concerned with production and exchange of meanings- the giving and taking of meaning- between the members of the society of group" (Hall 1997: 2). Thus, culture is about how the participants of that culture interpret or 'make sense' the things that are happening around them in 'broadly similar ways'.

'Cultural Turn' within social sciences roots from such a definition of culture which involves 'production and exchange of meanings' (ibid, 2). Through the circuit of culture, Hall has tried to explain that the production of culture happens at different sites and their meaning is produced through everyday practices. They circulate through 'systems of representation' (Hall, 1997: 4), and thus through a 'shared' understanding they establish a set of 'cultural codes'. For Hall, this 'representation' happens through photography, exhibition, or display in museums, galleries, music, etc. Hall says that they act 'like a language' (ibid, 5) which can produce meanings. The 'cultural turn' thus implies that culture is 'produced and constructed

rather than simply found' (ibid, 5), and this production and construction happen not through the language but through the representational practices that are present within the culture.

Talking about media Hall has argued about the communication network, which passes through stages of encoding and decoding. He argues that while these stages appear to be 'perfectly transparent' and objective they play a major role in 'systematically distorting' (Hall 1993: 484) the reality. Mass-communication research creates the model of sender-message-receiver for the transmission of any message. Hall through a theoretical account highlights the limitation of this presumably 'autonomous' (Hall 1993: 478) model. Hall looks at the sender-receiver circuit as the circuit of producer and consumer where the sender of the message is the producer while the receiver is the consumer. This model helps one to understand the model of mass-communication in an entirely different light. Hall argues the entire discourse is articulated in the same way as media encodes and decodes the message. The message articulated in the media is not a pure or 'raw' event which is based on pure objectivity rather the way the message is encoded and decoded explains the event and the meanings such a message is capable of conveying. The message thus conveyed is not 'natural' as it appears to be but it is 'the habituation and near-universality of codes in use (ibid, 1993: 481). Media only gives the effect of 'naturalness' to the process that is in reality culturally coded. Hall then talks about two processes/positions, which determine the encoding-decoding process within the media. These are firstly the dominant hegemonic position and secondly the negotiated position.

By dominant-hegemonic position, Hall argues that the seemingly 'transparent' communication process operates within the 'dominant code' (ibid, 1993: 485). These dominant codes are often linked with the dominant elites and the institutional positions that serve as the 'ideological apparatus' within the communication process. Most of the encoding-decoding within the media is determined through such dominant positions, which play a major role in determining the larger-issues like those of national interest and matters of geo-political relevance. Secondly, Hall discusses the 'negotiated code' where he talks about how the dominant codes adapt themselves to 'local conditions' (ibid, 1993: 486). To explain this further Hall gives an example of the Industrial relation bill. While the bill provisions and counters are defined through the hegemonic positions. But if its provisions are to be applied at the floor or union level the same message is distorted and is labeled as 'failure of communication' (ibid, 1993: 487). Hall's theory of encoding/decoding is relevant in understanding how visual culture determines gender-relation within a culture. This can be understood through Hall's work 'The case of Soap Opera' (Hall, 1997:339), where he looks at ways in which the popular culture produces and circulates 'cultural meanings' through televised serials.

The role of technology in understanding visual culture also remains crucial. Technological reproductions of visual forms have popularised visual culture like never before. The technological reproductions not only have enabled visual culture to spread manifold, but it has also modified how art was produced. Walter Benjamin talks about the 'technological reproducibility' and how such reproduction of art 'detaches the reproduced object from its

tradition', thereby robbing it of its political and cultural meanings. The uniqueness of the art or visual form is its 'embeddedness in the context of tradition' (Benjamin, 1993:61-63). John Berger has extended this argument of Benjamin further.

Berger has critically argued about how a particular thing is looked at. It is not how a thing makes its appearance but what a photographer chooses to capture from the 'infinity of other possible sites' (Berger, 1972:10).

Berger refers to the representation of women by contrasting their representation in the past vis-à-vis their representation with the advent of a capitalistic order. He argues that women's representation is objectified to the extent that she often positions herself to the scrutiny of the male gaze. He says "men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also relations between themselves" (ibid, 47).

Taking a Marxian understanding, Berger argues the entire set of art which previously was unique has now become ubiquitous, valueless, and free. For instance, one of the popular images of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa as painting on the t-shirt of a woman depicts no art history or tradition of painting with which it can be associated. The art as shown on the woman's t-shirt in no way can explain the 'authenticity' of painting as it existed. Rather such a photograph can be an example of how an art form gets reproduced in multiple other contexts without any sense of its association with the 'authentic' art form. Such popular representations have an entirely different set of meanings wherever they are produced. The pertinent question which then rises is to whom the art belongs. The distorted meaning of art is used by the market to popularise commodities which isolates the art from its essence.

Women and visual culture

This section intends to look at the relationship between women and visual culture. It aims to understand how visual culture is used to understand the concept of beauty and femininity. Visual images give meaning to the body at the technological, compositional, and the social level. (Rose 2007: 258). By technological level, it means the tools and equipment used to construct an image, the compositional construct deals with quality and reception of the image, while the social concern deals with the relationship and interpretation of image concerning the social, economic, political, and institutional practices. Some of the questions which are ingrained within the popular visual practices are who is the subject in the image, who made it, where does the image circulate, what set of knowledge is deployed in constructing an image, etc.

Thus, visual images are not free-floating rather it determines and explains the set of meanings it carries within its representation. The visual culture as circulated within the popular media thus needs a critical assessment.

Visual images as circulated within popular print media depict women's bodies which can be seen as sexual commodification of women's bodies. Pollock (1988) looks at some of the modern paintings and tries to argue how some of the modern paintings positioned women.

Looking at some of the modern paintings like those of Manet, Renoir, etc. she has argued how within each of these paintings the sense of voyeurism is embedded. She often looks at her consumer/ spectator with a coquettish eye so that she seeks their attention onto her body. Pollock argues 'She looks at nothing that has any meaning for the spectator. Spatially central she is negated in the triangulation of looks between the man, the picture of the fetishised woman and the spectator, who is enthralled to this masculine viewing position' (Pollock, 1988: 122). For instance, let's look at one of the paintings of Pierre Auguste Renoir La Loge (1874):

Figure 1. Pierre Auguste Renoir La Loge (1874). Pollock, Griselda. 1988.
"Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity". In 'Vision and Differences: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art'. London: Routledge Classics. p.108.


(Image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Loge. Dated 4/7/16.)

Pierre-Auguste Renoir's La Loge (The Theatre Box), 1874, is considered a masterpiece of 'Impressionist' painting (a form of painting that emerged in the 19th century). It is one of the most famous works in The Courtauld Gallery's collection. The entire space of the theatre depicts women's bodies which are well decorated and are at the center of the painting. It occupies most of the space within the painting. The sense of gaze becomes very obvious given that she looks at her audience very passively and is most of the time unaware of the gaze she is intending to involve. The woman is wearing a heavy necklace and the flower on her cleavage makes it all set to give her an attractive look. Her hair is well plaited and she is covered in fancy fur. The man at back is looking through the binocular. How the images of a man and a woman are positioned also determine what kind of spectatorship did such paintings claim. Pollock argues the woman in the painting is passive as she "lacks the self-consciousness" (ibid, 1988:109). The lack of self-consciousness is deliberately intended as it would allow 'viewers to enjoy the sight of a young girl' (ibid, 1988: 109).

The viewing that encourages or calls for a masculine gaze is however discouraged by some of the feminist painters like Mary Cassatt and Morisot. Unlike Renoir paintings, they have represented women in more of their 'natural' state without seeking a voyeuristic gaze. To understand this let us first look at one of Cassatt's paintings "Women Bathing" (1891).

Figure 2. Mary Cassatt Women Bathing (1891). Pollock, Griselda. 1988.
"Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity". In 'Vision and Differences: Femininity,
Feminism and the Histories of Art'. London: Routledge Classics. p.84.
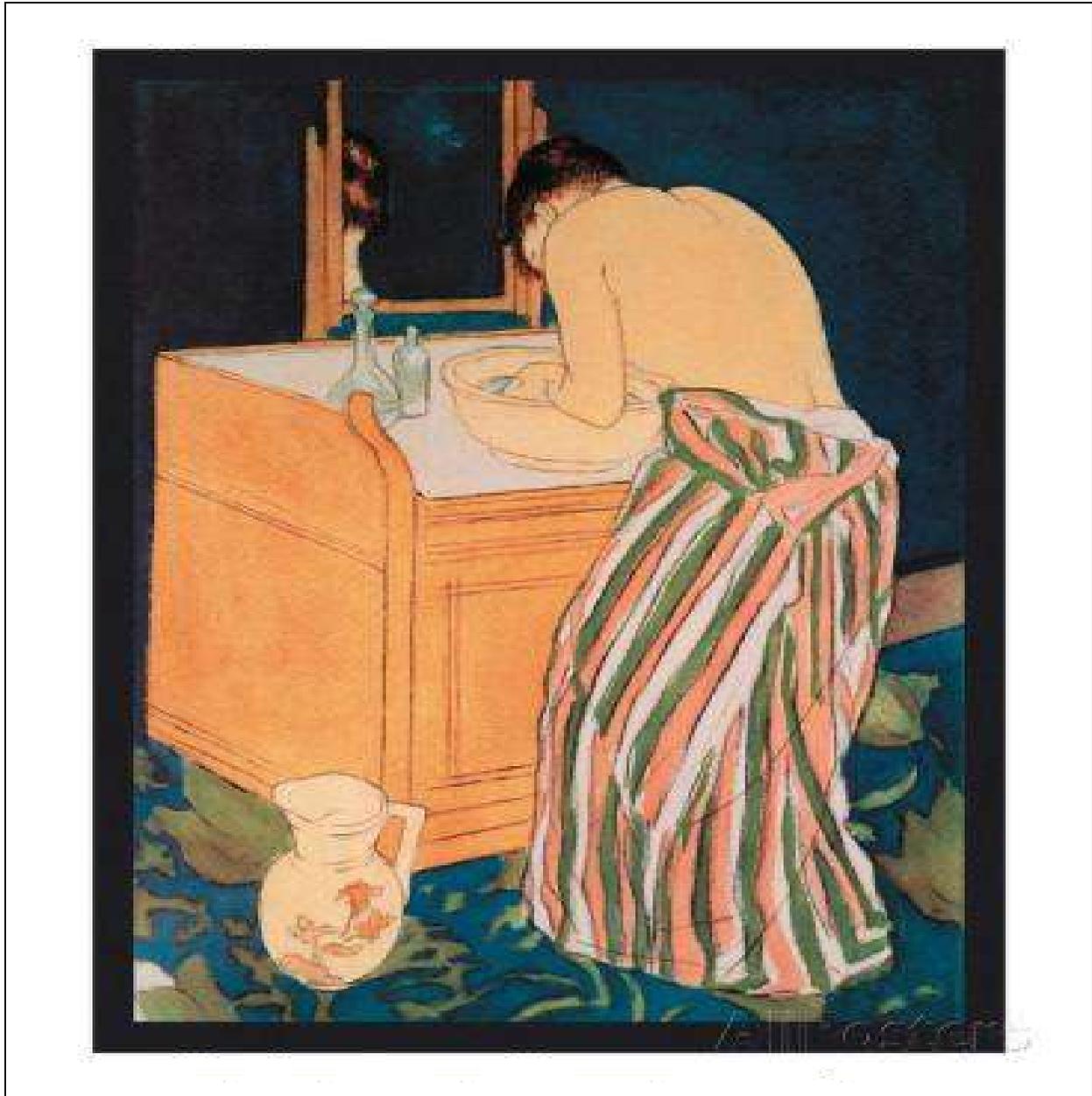
(Image Source: http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Woman-Bathing-Posters_i9088748_.htm. Dated 4/7/16.)

The woman in this painting of Cassatt is not facing her audience. She is not posing as most of the women in Renoir paintings do. The image painted is not glossy but is mundane. The face of a woman is not even visible in the mirror, thus though the central subject of Cassatt's

paintings remains to be women but she is not posing or seeking an audience. She is not turned into an 'object' to be looked at, she is not posing as to be lured but her existence in the image is on her terms. In her other paintings like 'Women in the lodge,' this theme of not being gazed upon is reappeared. The women in the painting (look below) are not looking onto its audiences but elsewhere. The look is not deliberately turned passive but is kept at a very 'natural' state. The women in the image are not exquisitely dressed unlike Renoir paintings hence the scope of voyeurism is done away with. Also, the image does not have an active male gaze within it. The sole subject within the painting is the two women.

Figure 3. Mary Cassatt La Loge (1882).

(Source:http://www.aurlaea.com/gallery_viewer.html?i=9 dated 4/5/16.)

Besides Renoir or other 19th century paintings, Geeti Sen has critically examined some of M.F. Hussain's paintings. Hussain's paintings often depicted women with some kind of mysterious charm. Sen has argued that Hussain's paintings presumed that there is something hideous about a woman that makes her encode the role of Indian tradition and at the same time allows her to 'transform herself to a transcendental order'. However, such representation is problematic as women are not allowed to be their 'own being' (Sen. 2002:135). The sense of ambivalence in women's representation distances women from her 'own identity and being'. Sen contrasts Hussain's paintings with that of Amrita Sher-Gil where she portrays herself without bearing the sense of being ambivalent or hideous.

Representation of women in print media in contemporary times has shown how these representations are often controlled through political and religious motivation as well. It many times generates a sense of consumerism around things that may even go contrary to what women might desire. Joseph (2006) in her study of women's magazines has shown how women's magazines generated a consciousness among middle-class Muslim women to wear a veil, which was not popular among women previously. Grihalakshmi (a magazine that belonged to the Mathruabhumi group) promoted the idea of a veil through advertisement taglines like 'nice-girls-wear-burqua' (Joseph, 2006:210). This had led to a dramatic rise in wearing burqa from 3.5 percent in 1990 to 32.5 percent in 2000. Joseph has argued that since these magazine groups are owned by religious groups who promoted purdah, and the popular magazine becomes the easy way to popularise what suits the interest of media houses they serve.

Popular women's magazines besides being prescriptive also trivialises the issues of law and rights. They respond to these issues more reactive rather than generating a holistic picture and delving into the issue more maturely. Joseph (2006) in her discussion on the Shah Bano case has taken notice of Femina magazine which did come up with an elaborate section on the law only after it generated sensationalism.

Understanding gaze: What is a masculine gaze?

While looking at some of the modern paintings, the recurrent theme which appeared was the presence of a 'male gaze'. The term was coined by feminist film critic, Laura Mulvey in her work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Mulvey looks at films to understand through psychoanalysis how social conditions and films mold the individual subject. To establish such a relationship Mulvey draws on the Freudian framework to understand what a woman desires to become. Freud has argued that women suffer from penis envy and hence is the bearer of castration anxiety. She 'exists only about castration and cannot transcend it' (Mulvey, 1975:8).

The world of visual culture as played down through cinema is voyeuristic. When the audiences are let to watch cinema by placing themselves in a dark hall completely isolated they become voyeurs to what is enacted out in the plot. Christopher Metz calls it a 'cinematic scopic regime' (Metz, 1999: 743), by which he means involving in voyeuristic activity with specifically

erotic aim. To elaborate on this Metz borrows from the Freudian concept of 'self-preservation of drives'. For Freud, while all instincts like hunger, thirst, etc. could be satisfied through 'objects' like food and water, sexual instinct does not have a direct relationship with the object.

> *"Drives, on the contrary, can be satisfied up to a point outside their objects (this is sublimation or else, in another way, masturbation) and are initially capable of doing without them without putting the organism into danger (hence repression). The need for self-preservation can neither be repressed nor sublimated: the sexual drives are more liable and more accommodating, as Freud insisted. Inversely they remain more or less unsatisfied, even when the object has been attained... (Metz, 1999:741)."*

So sexual drives leave some gaping and hence are never satisfied completely. It always pursues some imaginary object rather than a 'real' object to be pursued. The sense of voyeurism can be understood through this Freudian concept of 'self-preservation of drives'. Metz has argued that a voyeur always maintains a gap between the object he desires and his own body. The 'Scopic Regime of the Cinema' explains how the visual culture offers voyeurism to unfold. In theatre, the audience is present as a passive actor, since he is not acting but he constantly imagines himself to be so. Thus, within the 'scopic regime,' the audience is essentially voyeur and pursues his sexual drives.

Laura Mulvey when looking at the concept of the 'male gaze' within visual culture, she is essentially talking about how a woman becomes the 'image', while a man is the 'bearer of the look'. At the core of her argument is the fact that there is a 'sexual imbalance' within the society within which the pleasure of looking is split between the active male and passive female. Within the visual culture, the audience is also made to identify themselves with the male protagonist. 'A male movie star's glamorous characteristic is thus not those of erotic objects of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror' (Mulvey, 1975:12).

The camera technology is used in a particular way that allows man to be all-powerful on the screen. The woman audience is a passive recipient of such power structure on the screen since in psychoanalytical terms she possesses 'castration anxiety'. The 'castration anxiety' argues that since women lack a penis, she too displays her gaze and for the enjoyment of men. Thus, a woman's gaze by default is also masculine gaze.

Thus, the visual culture within a traditional viewing has gaze/look at three levels. Firstly, the camera as it records the events, secondly, the audience as it watches the recorded event, and finally, the characters looking at each other. At each of these three levels, the gaze essentially is a 'masculine gaze'. If one extends this argument of Mulvey within print visual the same logic of 'masculine gaze' persists. Print images are something which we come across quite regularly. We are so accustomed to looking at these images that it becomes difficult for one to understand the kind of impact such images make on our lives. These images are also ubiquitously present

across print magazines, billboards, TV screens, etc. One's relationship with print media is part of daily habits and practices. Geraghty (2006) has shown how these popular representations have a particular set of meanings within which these representations are rendered meaningful. For instance, she talks about a series of photographs of Charles and Diana. Diana's dress clearly marked her away from ordinary women. She is often photographed for glamorous magazines like Hello where she gets represented as representing glamour, royalty, and fashion. However, when the Daily Mail shows Diana in a rift with her relationship the same face which appeared glamorous on some fashion magazine completely changes. The photograph clearly shows the physical and emotional distance. Thus, the images offer a language through which the very personal and intimate relationship between Charles and Diana can be understood. The visual images are not as discrete as they are presumed to be, rather each of such representations engrain women with certain essentialist ways of feminine representation through which such a photographic language makes sense to us. In the case of Diana, for instance, the glamour and attractiveness are measured through the parameter of how well her relationship status is. Thus, even in print form, the images have the power to generate a sense of effect which distances women from what they are to what they should become.

Changes in representation of 'Bodies' with globalisation

Globalisation has marked a significant phase in determining socio-political-economic relations. The process of globalisation involves capitalist markets as well as a set of social relations that flows across national boundaries via a global network society. Within these global networks, the 'representation' of women has also dramatically altered. The process of globalisation has led to a dramatic restructuring of the media market. The emergence of a global media system has significantly changed how socio-cultural representations were to be imagined and made meaningful. The widespread acceptance and internalization of global corporate ideology have affected the content of media houses. While earlier media saw an engagement with the masses to a limited extent, but with globalisation and 'free market' practices media has seen a tremendous influence of marketing practices and consumerism. It is in this context that I want to look into the changes in the representation that print media saw particularly with the advent of globalisation. While the 'representation' of women pre-globalisation was limited to the nationalist agenda and within nationalist papers and pamphlets, post-globalisation saw a changing trend in such representation.

There were newer spaces within popular practices in which women's visibility got increased. While earlier women existed merely as an 'idealised' imagination, post-globalisation saw her presence in many other fields like corporate houses, the entertainment industry, etc. These newer spaces were presumed to be 'liberating' women into spaces in which they were not allowed venturing before. However, such presumptions were fraught with contradictions. The post-globalisation saw a simultaneous rise of postfeminism, which distanced woman from a

feminist agenda. Within the individualised spaces, she was under the same prison of becoming a body that needed a sexualised gratification.

The images of the body have been drastically transformed particularly with the rise of contemporary consumerism and industrial capitalism. Within feminist discourse, particularly radical feminists do not see beauty choices as a marker of 'individual choice and expression' rather as an aspect of women's oppression. Feminist scholars like Frye (1983) have argued feminism is about making women intelligible about making their choices, their desire, ambition, and action, and accepting each of them more sensibly.

McRobbie has talked about the post-feminist wave which considered feminism as a hindrance in establishing an individual female identity. Post-feminism was the time when young girls wanted to come out of the larger feminine identity and be themselves. To elaborate upon, McRobbie takes up an example of a model Claudia Schiffer who in a globalised space is free to take her clothes as and when she wishes. She has the power to exercise her choice and remains to be the most highly paid supermodel.

However, McRobbie has argued that the media often plays a crucial role in projecting such 'happy contented' women. Some pertinent questions remain unanswered that is 'despite the choices she (post-feminist) had, there are also several risks which she was constantly reminded about' (McRobbie, 2006:67). These choices range from choosing the right man at the right age, having children at the right age, etc. which according to McRobbie are not free choice and individualization. Meenakshi Thapan (2009) arguing on similar lines has talked about femininity as construed through the everyday lived experience of a woman. This construction has a set parameter for imaging a woman to ascertain her identity within the society. A misfit into this structure of 'ideal' body becomes what she calls a "The Imperfect Body" (Thapan 1997, 176). Through her ethnographic experience, she cites some of these perfections against which 'an imperfect body' has to be constantly corrected. The constraints in relationships, the denial of love, failed marriages, and gender violence often become the obvious repercussions of failing to adhere to such prescribed regimented body order.

Print media has played a major role in reasserting beauty anxiety and with the advent of globalisation and the world economy opening up such consciousness is even more concretised. Susan Runkle (2004) has talked about the protruding of commercial beauty products which began since liberalization in 1991 and the role of media in promoting the same. Runkle brings out some of the revealing statistics which talk about the volume of the increasing demand for such products. For example, Hindustan Lever Ltd released some 250 beauty products, while L'Oreal spent some 20 million dollars in local manufacturing.

Media played a crucial role in creating awareness of the same. Runkle refers to Femina, a beauty magazine, which inserted the section "Skin and scent" to spread beauty consciousness amongst its readers. The popularity of the magazine was such that it became comparable to the American Vogue magazine. The beauty products consciousness was not limited to the women with a western bent of mind but such consciousness was also seen in the urban middle class.

Beauty magazines in Hindi print also began to flourish spreading the features that can explain how to be more beautiful. Runkle looks into the magazine like Meri Saheli which played a role in spreading 'commercial beauty culture'.

The liberalization age in India also came up with the concept of Beauty pageants. Runkle argues "Beauty pageants are a profoundly capitalist phenomenon in the sense that they, at a very basic level, use women's bodies to market the products". The beauty pageant winners often represent the idea of femininity and beauty which has to be desirable to a male gaze. Runkle in work has shown how such representation becomes a socially acceptable way of objectifying women. It prompted women to 'replicate international beauty trends' (Runkle, 13) in particular those which were popular amongst heroines and beauty pageants. Besides marketability, Beauty pageants also injected the idea of beautiful women in culture.

It prescribed what a woman must wear, how she must behave, and also what ethics and morality she must carry. The idea of fashion and beauty is thus not an open-ended choice, rather at the very center of such a concept there is an ideology of creating a sexual difference and it must be subjected to socio-political analysis.

Conclusion

Thus, the paper explores how the representation of women's bodies within popular print media can be understood. It has tried to understand how 'body politics' plays a major role in asserting the oppressive power structure guided by patriarchy. With the 'cultural turn' visual practices have got a set of meanings which have become the very 'cultural codes'. Visual representations have become a new language through which cultural meanings are imparted. Media has become a crucial medium through which such 'cultural codes' are circulated.

However, it is also very naïve to presume this popular media as the 'objective' medium for the circulation of communication. Rather, the mass-communication through these popular media sources carries with itself a lot of baggage of culture and practices. In the process of such a communication network what these popular media ends up doing is reasserting the cultural values while at the same time appearing to be modern and departing away from the traditional practices. One, therefore, needs to understand what the communication network represents rather than mystifying it as something 'objective' and truthful, as it claims to be. Women and visual culture have a close relationship given the fact that popular representation of media tends to represent women in a particular way that encourages a 'male gaze'.

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