



BLOCK 6
GENDER, REPRESENTATION AND MEDIA

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

BLOCK INTRODUCTION (BLOCK 6)

The Block six of this Course is titled as “Gender, Representation and Media”. The Block consists of three Units. The first Unit in this Block is Unit 13. It is titled as “Language and Gender”. Language plays a significant role in representing gender in the media. The objectives of Unit 13 are to familiarise the learners with the relationship between language and gender in literature and daily life and how language emerged as gender specific. The awareness about concepts of sex and gender has already been dealt with elaborately in Unit 1 (Block 1) of this Course. The author of the Unit reiterated the concepts of sex and gender in Unit 13. After explaining the concepts of sex and gender, the author explains a few terms like gender boundaries, gender identity, gender stereotypes and gender ideology. The existing traits of female and male are given in the Unit. Scholars studied and explained the differences in the usage of language by male and female. This is explained in the Unit. The Unit also details the factors influencing the use of language from gender perspective. Gender differences in vocabulary, usage of interrogative sentence by women and the practice of imperative sentence by men, attitudes, nonverbal languages, difference in choosing language, reasons behind differences are also explained in the Unit. Unit 14 of this Course is “Gender and Media”. The Unit begins as: ‘What is media?’ After elaborate explanation about media, the classification of media is given. Each type of media is explained clearly. And the following sections in the Unit are about media and society and media and women. We hope learners will get an idea about the media and gender after reading Unit 14. Unit 15 of this Block is “Reading and Visualizing Gender”. The Unit introduces the concepts of close reading, visualizing and representation. It discusses the significance of gender specific reading to understand the influence of culture in the expressions. Scholars also specifically make the points for the use of words by women and men writers. The Unit clearly defines reading, visualizing and expressions with examples. The Unit 15 is final Unit of this Block and the Course. As we pointed out in the course introduction, the aim of the Course is to create awareness among learners on gender issues to create gender just society. After introducing gender issues prevailing in the society, the Course provides a few suggestions as way forward to bring changes at individual and societal level to form a gender just society.

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UNIT 13 GENDER AND LANGUAGE

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

Students, we shall begin this unit with a small story. A professor at a university in America gave an interesting exercise to his students, to make a list of words

that they could think of fast. It was a mixed class of male and female students. The result showed that male students listed words denoting travel, adventure, sports, business, economics, politics and outdoor life; in brief, their preference was for the abstract; while the women candidates preferred words for beauty, colors, fragrance, friendship, food items and domestic life, in brief they were inclined towards the concrete and the ornamental. This simple exercise speaks volumes for the difference in the usage of language by men and women.

Looking around, you too may have noticed that men and women use language differently while communicating. That is to say, their preference for words, emphasis, pronunciations and intonations are markedly different. Have you ever wondered why? Just because of gender difference. Or take another example. You may have heard someone saying to a female colleague, “Oh, Tanu, you should have been more assertive to get your point home.” Obviously, Tanu lacks assertiveness. Why? Because she has been brought up that way!

This brings us to our topic, ‘Gender and Language’. Let us study in this Unit how the relation between the two – gender and language – works in life and literature. How gender influences language and how language emerges as gender-specific.

13.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this Unit, you will be able to:

- Define the concepts of sex and gender;
- Describe gender differences in language use;
- Demonstrate the relationship between gender and language;
- Analyze gender boundaries and social expectations to use language as per socio-cultural norms; and
- Distinguish masculine and feminine traits and analysis of the causes of the difference.

13.3 GENDERING THE LANGUAGE

We begin on the premise that the study of gender is important to the study of language. It makes us realize the difference in communication process and its impact on social behavior of men and women. Language is used for communication — oral as well as written. In its oral form it is used for conversation and dialogue; in its written form it is used for reading and writing. Men and women both use language to communicate; but though they may be speaking the same language, its pattern changes according to the gender of the speaker/writer. Take a simple sentence, “close the door.” A man will say more directly, “Close the door, please;” while a woman may say, “will you please close the door?” The first sentence shows assertion and authority of the speaker; the second, though more polite, denotes hesitation and lack of authority. Such differences in the use of phrases, vocabulary, intonation and non-verbal communication are due to factors like physical, psychological, economic and social differences in the approach of men and women.

Gender issues and language issues are interconnected. Since the time women’s movement started debating the power of the language, gender studies and language

studies have become important interdisciplinary academic fields. Language reflects existing social reality. Socio-linguistic and feminist scholars are examining how language upholds, supports or devalues women; how it shapes the social and cultural contexts and how it is shaped by these contexts; and what measures can be taken to change the social perception of gender.

To understand the role language plays in gender studies, we must first understand the meaning of some of the key terms like 'sex' and 'gender'.

13.4 SEX VERSUS GENDER

Let us learn What is Sex? And What is gender?

13.4.1 Sex

We generally associate the term 'Sex' with the biological self.

13.4.2 Gender

Gender is a socio-cultural construct. This means that the process of social training starts after birth as the family takes charge of bringing it up. A boy or a girl is brought up according to the socio-cultural norms of his/her society and with the passage of time he/she acquires traits that are expected of a man or a woman of that group. Thus, the idea of gender can change with social changes though sex remains the same.

Do you know what the feminist writer Simone Beauvoir said? She wrote, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman." We take a few examples to understand the meaning of this sentence. As soon as a child is born, we ask "boy?" or "girl?" We do not refer to the gender of the new-born; we refer to its sex. We do not say "What is its gender?" That would be incorrect. Later the child acquires the traits of a girl or a boy and starts behaving accordingly. This is because of training in social and cultural norms.

13.4.3 Socio-Cultural Training

The child starts growing. We train him/her as per our social outlook. Parents buy dolls and frocks for girls, cars and guns for boys. Then there are many do's and don'ts that elders start imposing. We expect the male child to be strong and brave; we cuddle the little girl. Slowly, the idea of gender takes root. Boys tend to become naughty, rowdy and aggressive. We let them be. A popular phrase in English is "boys will be boys." We expect the girls to be docile, gentle and obedient. We unknowingly create two categories – girl and boy; man and woman. Boundaries are formed; these are gender boundaries.

13.5 SOME TERMS TO BE UNDERSTOOD

In this section the Unit writer explained few terms that needs to be clarified.

13.5.1 Gender Boundaries

These boundaries are related to ideas; they are not physical or geographical. So they are called 'conceptual'. They can change with times e.g. a few decades back women/ girls (in India) did not wear pants or jeans; now they do. Men

wearing ear-rings is perfectly acceptable today. Likewise, women are getting higher education today. Was it acceptable a hundred years back? No! So, gender boundaries can and do change with time.

13.5.2 Gender Identity

Gender identity is a person's inner sense of being male or female. It is developed in childhood. It also refers to markers like voice, physique, dress, hair style, behavior and language use.

13.5.3 Gender Stereotype

These are widely held beliefs about the abilities, characteristics and social behavior of girls and boys/men and women such as, women have to be pretty, delicate and so on. Men have to be dominant and powerful.

13.4.4 Gender Ideology

It is defined as a set of attitudes and values about the proper role of women and men in the family or society. For example, a man must be competitive or aggressive; woman must be patient and tolerant is a gender ideology.

13.6 MALE AND FEMALE TRAITS

Physical: Physically men are rugged, strong, aggressive; Psychological: psychologically they are rational, analytical and problem solving; Personality: their personality is daring and they tend to be dominant. Consequently, men's use of language generally shows aggressiveness, dominance and authority.

Physical: Physically women are considered to be petite, gorgeous and sexy; psychologically, they are more imaginative, intuitive and artistic; Personality: sympathy, affection and kindness mark their personality. Their focus is on community and on others. Consequently, their language shows conciliation, docility and unassertiveness.

13.7 MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF LANGUAGE

Language is used by both men and women but somewhere in its course of development it gets divided (unknowingly) between two parts – male and female — as per social and cultural norms. Language mirrors, records and transmits differences. These gender differences can be marked in various ways. Men and women are socialized to express themselves in appropriate social language that teaches and reinforces differentiated gender roles. Following three questions can lead us to clarify our point:

- 1) Do men and women speak different languages? The answer is No and yes. No, because it is the same language they speak. In this case, let us say English. Yes, because their phrases, expressions and intonations are so different that they appear to be speaking different languages.
- 2) Do they use language differently? Yes. Otto Jespersen, in his book *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin* observes that men have many expressions peculiar to them which women understand but do not use; on

the other hand, women have words and phrases which men know of but never use for fear of being scorned at. That is the reason the language of men and women appears different.

- 3) Is there gender bias in English language? Yes. This bias is obvious in the manner in which language uses women. Women are ignored when words such as ‘he’ or ‘man’ signify women too. For example, “everyone must do *his* duty.” Here the pronoun ‘his’ denotes woman also. “Man is mortal.” In this sentence ‘man’ also means ‘woman’. In both these sentences her presence is ignored. These are known as ‘masculine generics’ and are widely accepted. Language also defines women’s status vis-à-vis men’s and by inference gives them secondary position. Let us look at the titles of respect, *Mrs* or *Miss*. These terms show the presence/absence of man in a woman’s life whereas the appellation *Mr* is independent and does not need woman’s presence. Feminine nouns of some words are derogatory like ‘dog-bitch’, ‘wizard-witch’. Similarly, words like ‘lady doctor’, ‘lady lecturer’ specify gender unnecessarily. Terms of endearment used by men for women like ‘chick’ or ‘babe’ highlight how language devalues women. Have you read Henrik Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House*? In it a reader comes across many terms of endearment that Nora’s husband uses for her to show his love.

13.8 IS LANGUAGE SEXIST?

Sexist language is a language which excludes women and considers men as the norm. It shows gender bias (as explained above). For example, the sentence “Each student must write *his* name on the paper” leads the reader to assume that all students are males. The presence of female students is not considered. This exclusion is devaluing; it encourages discrimination and is also offending.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1:

Note :

- i) Use the space given below the questions.
 - ii) Compare your answer with the course material of this unit.
- 1) Fill in the Blanks:
 - i) Gender is a ... construct; sex is a..... term
 - ii)said, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”
 - iii) Men’s style of speaking can be, while women’s style is(use one word each at appropriate place: aggressive/impolite/ polite/ irrational)
 - iv) Language as such is dominated.
 - v) We use ... for a good looking man and for a good looking woman. (use adjectives)
 - 2) Write a short note on language bias (about 20 words)

13.9 FACTORS INFLUENCING LANGUAGE

Now we will look into the factors influencing language

13.9.1 Biological Factors

The biological factor can be studied from three angles – voice, phonology and intonation.

Voice: Women have a thin voice as compared to men's gruff voice and their voice-frequency is almost twice as high as that of men. Psychologists say that speaking in high-pitched voice is their physical limitation but socially it is associated with their timidity.

Intonations: There are two types of basic intonations – rising intonation and falling intonation. Women usually answer a question with rising intonation which suggests their docility and gentleness, besides lack of self-confidence.

Phonology: Pronunciation comes under phonology. Women pronounce words in a better manner than men do. For example, women pronounce the letter 'r' softly as in 'chair' which sounds like 'chaise'. In English, the ending "...ing" as in running, walking, writing is pronounced fully by women while men miss the last 'g' and pronounce these words as "runnin..", "walkin". Women's pronunciation denotes use of proper formal language, compliance to accepted social expectations and politeness; men's pronunciations suggest their assertion and informality. The above example drawn from the situation of language use is in the American context.

13.9.2 Cultural Factors

Culture is a dominant factor in maintaining language identity. Culture is a blanket term; within it several diverse groups live and operate, which are called sub-cultures. There is a sub-culture of men and also sub-culture of women. Men and women belong to their respective sub-cultures and these sub-cultures mould their behaviour pattern, language use and conduct.

As per the expectations of their sub-culture women use language that is not aggressive or adventurous. In larger groups they remain silent but speak in smaller groups. Their conversation aims to build friendship, loyalty, equality and such other traits. They usually speak of simple domestic or personal matters which men consider ridiculous. On the contrary, men choose to work in larger groups. They want power, control and status. They like to compete and win; and they dominate the conversation. These cultural differences in the male and female groups lead to the different ways in which they converse.

13.9.3 Examples from Literature

Two examples from literature would illustrate the above points. In William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*, we get a fine example of how boys can be aggressive for power. Their language and games drive them unwittingly to frenzy and murder. In *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, the girl protagonist's aunt always upbraids her to speak proper lady-like language and criticizes her for tomboyish activities.

13.9.4 Power and Dominance Factor

In the patriarchal system women are seen to be in a subordinate position. The male members of the society used patronizing language when conversing with them. This is called *male language* which is the language of power and authority. Therefore, interaction between the males and the females has always been male

dominated. Language also shows social inequality. Women's speech was considered unimportant; therefore, they used linguistic forms that were associated with their low status. These forms included tag questions, intonation, hedges, politeness strategies and others. Conversely, men's speech became a tool of patriarchal power through gender-role training. They learned to dominate the conversation through interruption, cross-talk or talk time.

13.10 GENDER DIFFERENCE IN VOCABULARY

Men use hard and aggressive expressions like *damn*, *shit* to express anger or frustration, women would never use these tabooed words that are rated as slang. They usually go for harmless expressions like *oh*, *ah*. Tabooed words and slang are found more in men's speech than in women's though they may be of same educational level or social class. For example, when a woman is frightened, she will shout, "Oh, how frightened I am!" But a man would only say, "damn it!" and rarely admit that he is frightened. The difference in vocabulary is shown in the following five aspects:

- i) **Color words:** Women use color words like blue and lavender and azure more frequently but men would not.
- ii) **Adjectives:** Women use adjectives such as adorable, charming, lovely more often. When a woman leaves a restaurant, she will remark, "It is a gorgeous meal." If a man wants to express the same idea, he will use the word "good". Using more adjectives to express their feelings or to describe things is because women are sensitive to the environment.
- iii) **Adverbs:** Women tend to use adverbs like *pretty*, *terribly*, *vastly*, *quietly* etc more freely than men do. Men, on the contrary use, *really*, *very*, *utterly*. In 1992 Jespersen found that women like to use *so* quite regularly. Like "She is *so* pretty" or "The play was *so* interesting."
- iv) **Swear words and Expletives:** Swear words are considered dirty and impolite and women do not use these like damn, shit, hell. Women pay more attention to their manners and social propriety. In order to express their sudden and deep feelings they may say, *O God!*, *oh dear* or *dear me!* Let us examine the following example:

Woman: *Dear me! Are we going to be late again!*

Man: *Shit! The train on the platform and we have to run.*

- v) **Modulation:** When a woman talks, she often takes what others think into consideration. She uses tag questions such as, "It is cold, *isn't it?*" and hedges like *well*, *you know...* *I think...* *I suppose, kind of,.... may be I am wrong but...*

13.11 INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES

Compared with men, women are more likely to use an interrogative sentence to express their ideas, and they use tag questions, because the tag questions can make the tone less tense. Some linguists researching in this area collected many couples' conversation tapes, and found that women used 3 times more interrogative sentences than men. Women do this because they are less sure about

themselves and their opinions. They lack the confidence to use direct and firm statements. On the other hand, this style shows politeness and gentleness.

13.12 IMPERATIVE SENTENCES

Imperative sentences give command or order. Since women hold a subordinate position in the patriarchal society they are trained to not to order about. A study showed that in conversation women use the “let us” pattern of sentence, such as “let’s go out for a long drive.” A boy/man may say it directly, “Today we are going for a long drive.” This sentence has the sense of giving order. Some other examples are:

Man: Give me that pen.

Women: Would you give me that pen, please?

Man: It’s time to go

Woman: Let’s go.

13.13 DIFFERENCE IN ATTITUDE TOWARD LANGUAGE

Language is constantly changing. It evolves. It grows. Both men and women have helped in the development of language but their approaches have been different. Women instinctively shrink from gross and rough expressions. They prefer refined and indirect expressions whereas men use direct and often coarse expressions. Men find women’s language too delicate and feel that if this style is adopted, the language will become weak and insipid. It will lose its vividness and strength. Men renovate the language by adding new words. In the beginning these words may appear slang but later they are accepted into the main language. On the other hand, women are conservative by nature and they prefer to use traditional language. Thus they help in preserving old language. It may look comical today but it is a fact that women used to avoid words like *vulgar*, *indecent* in their routine conversation. They preferred to use *common* for *vulgar* and would break half way through a sentence if they were supposed to use the word *indecent*, like “this book is a little ... *um h* ... Isn’t it?” Women were prevented, in the past from using such words as legs, or pants, or trousers.

13.14 DIFFERENCE IN NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE

We can see that women do not like to patronize any conversation or discussion, they like to listen and then reply; men on the other hand interrupt other’s talk. Men do not like to be silent in conversation/discussion. When a conversation involves both sexes, women are at the receiving end; they play the role of patient listeners.

13.15 DIFFERENCE IN CHOOSING TOPICS

In social interaction, men and women have different interests in choosing their topics. Men are more likely to discuss politics, sports, economics and current news; women prefer cooking, domestic chores, clothes, fashion, children etc. Women talk more in informal situations but they play a secondary role in the formal meetings. They speak less.

13.16 REASONS BEHIND THESE DIFFERENCES

Biological difference between the two sexes cannot explain the reasons behind the different ways of communication. But gender difference plays a great role in creating these differences. The causes behind the difference can be understood as under:

13.16.1 Different Psychology

It is an accepted idea that women are more careful, sensitive and considerate than men. Before a woman speaks she usually thinks of the effect her words may have on the listener, so she often appears to be hesitant or more polite. On the contrary, men are rash, they do not bother much for public opinion and they just say what they want to say and seldom care what others think. So man's speech is usually blunt and solid.

13.16.2 Different social status

Of the social causes of gender differences in speech style, one of the most significant is level of education. Studies show that the greater difference in the educational level of boys and girls, the greater is the difference in their speech. The gap between men's speech and women's speech has reduced considerably with improved and equal educational opportunities for girls. But even then women display care and caution in the appropriate use of language.

13.16.3 Social Roles

Language use also depends on the social roles of men and women. Linguistic studies carried out in the 1970 reveal that in almost all countries men hold higher job positions that give them opportunities to dominate everything, including women. Men can order about freely while women are not so confident of giving order even when they hold higher position today. Women have had very less power in the society and this lack is obvious in their language. Women's social status makes them submissive to men.

13.17 SUMMING UP

In this unit our focus has been on gender and language and how each influences the other. This lesson prepares us to understand the socio-cultural side of gender and paves the way for gender study. We have studied following aspects:

- Language has a great connection with society, so if change in social structure takes place, language use will also change.
- The male language and the female language are different in emphasis, vocabulary and presentation. We have studied the difference as well as the reasons for it.
- With the development of new ideas and feminist theories, the strict rules governing women are changing in many parts of the world. Rules prescribed for men and women are also changing.
- Consequently, women do not consider it wrong to assert themselves and men too are comfortable to let women have their say. Women are becoming more confident and assertive; young women are especially in the forefront of language change.

- Since people's linguistic behavior is not only connected with social status, but it is also connected with their education and profession, young women getting into high-paid jobs are finding it perfectly acceptable to use language freely.

13.18 KEY WORDS

Interrogative Sentences: Interrogative sentences are one which asks questions.

Imperative Sentences: Imperative Sentences give advice or instruction or expresses request or command.

13.19 REFERENCES

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13.21 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Write short notes on: (i) Gender Identity (ii) Gender Stereotype (in 20 words each)
- 2) What are the cultural factors responsible for gender-specific language?
- 3) Who could have spoken these lines (tick mark the correct word):
 - i) Let's get some coffee en route (man/woman).
 - ii) Give me that pen (man/woman)
 - iii) Damn it! I misplaced my spectacles again. (husband/wife).
 - iv) Could you please lend me your umbrella? (man/woman)
 - v) Dear me! Look at the child jumping from that wall (man/woman)
- 4) List the possible topics that men would choose for debate/discussion out of the following: cooking, fashion, sports, politics, economics, weather, boss.

UNIT 14 GENDER AND MEDIA

Structure

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives
- 14.3 Defining Media
- 14.4 Classification of Media
 - 14.4.1 Folk Media
 - 14.4.2 Print Media
 - 14.4.3 Electronic Media
 - 14.4.4 New Media
- 14.5 Effect of Media on Society
- 14.6 Women in the Media
 - 14.6.1 Objectification of Women in the Media
 - 14.6.3 Gender and Print Media
 - 14.6.4 Gender and Electronic Media
 - 14.6.5 Gender Roles in Advertisements
 - 14.6.6 Gender Roles in Cinema
- 14.7 Summing Up
- 14.8 Key Words
- 14.9 References
- 14.10 Unit End Questions

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Mass media in its various forms have become an integral part of our lives. The issues related to media, identity and gender are integral to the discipline of media and Gender studies. The reason is the popularity and diversity of media as a source of mass consumption and its influence on constructing ideas and generating debates. The media scene in India has expanded in the (unnecessary) recent times as there is a plethora of media choices available to the audiences. The media structures and systems have also undergone a sea change with privatization and globalization. These developments influence media projections and representations of various issues – gender representation is a major concern - what media portrays gets assimilated into the minds of the audience and influences them in various ways. In this unit we shall discuss the role of media and its representation of gender.

14.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this Unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the word ‘Mass Media’;
- Explain how media influence us; and
- Explain the role of media in representation of genders

14.3 DEFINING MEDIA

In more recent times, the influence of media on society has expanded exponentially and into ever diversified forms. Media has the potential to play an active part in shaping and framing our perception of the world, and indeed in affecting the nature of that world.

Media is considered as a “mirror” of modern society, In fact, it is the media which shapes our lives and perspectives. Society is influenced by media in so many ways. It is the media for the masses that helps them to get information about a lot of things and also to form opinions and make judgments regarding various issues. It is the media which keeps us updated and informed about what is happening around us and in the world. There is a need to learn to access, analyze and interpret media messages, as well as to create our own media. Thus it is important to understand the role of media in our life which begins with understanding the concept of media along with its functions, types and genres.

“Media, like a light bulb, creates an environment by its mere presence”.

Marshall McLuhan

Media is the plural form of ‘medium’, understood as something in a middle position; a means of effecting or conveying something (as a channel or system of communication); a condition or environment in which something may function or flourish (‘media’). The concept of media has grown enormously and the term is used in the modern sense to reference the agencies of mass communication. At one time missing, but desperately desired, the concept has become commonplace in our society. It has become so common, that in terms of communication it has become known as any tool used to store or deliver information or data, such as advertising media, electronic media, hypermedia, mass media, social media and multimedia.

Media has been defined as “means of communication designed to reach and influence very large numbers of people” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1980). Media is the communication channels through which news, entertainment, education, data or promotional messages are disseminated (businessdictionary.com). Media is an umbrella term that includes all types of print, broadcast, out-of-home, and interactive communication. It includes all channels that carry brand messages. It includes newspapers, magazines, television, radio, cinema, billboards, mail, telephone, fax and now, the internet.

Thus media refers to the means of delivering and receiving data or information. In other words, media is a form of dispensing information. The term is also commonly used in place of mass media or news media. Media consists of the various means by which information reaches large numbers of people, such as television, radio, movies, newspapers, and the Internet.

Mass Media has been defined as “means of communication designed to reach and influence very large numbers of people” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1980). Janowitz’s (1968) defined media as “technological devices (press, radio, films, etc.) to disseminate symbolic content”

Media are those means of communication which help

- Transmit messages to large, heterogeneous, anonymous masses living in different regions of a locality, nation or the world.
- Transmit messages rapidly and instantaneously.
- Large group of people in different locations to receive same information in the same language, although translations of the main points can simultaneously be displayed in subtitles.

14.4 CLASSIFICATION OF MEDIA

The mass media comprise different kinds of communication means which is designed to reach a large audience. Mass media can be categorized according to physical form, the technology involved, nature of the communication process, etc. Given below are the major categories of mass media:

- Folk Media (Puppetry, Folk Theatre, Street Theatre)
- Print (books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, etc)
- Electronic (Radio, Cinema, Television)
- New Media (Internet, Mobile)

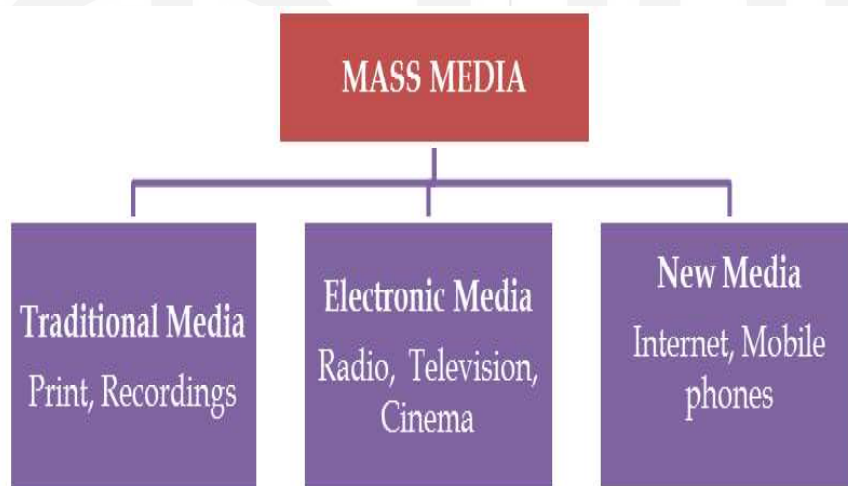


Figure 1 Classification of Mass Media

14.4.1 Folk Media

Folk Media or Traditional Media is an excellent tool to enhance communication and promote dialogue at the grass roots level of any society.

Puppetry is a popular form of folk media that is entertaining and informative. Ancient Hindu philosophers have paid the greatest tribute to puppeteers. They have likened God Almighty to a puppeteer and the entire universe to a puppet stage.

Street Theatre is another form of traditional media which is being used widely to propagate socio political messages and to create awareness for social issues. Street plays are short, direct, loud, and over expressive since they perform in places where there are huge crowds. They are known to propagate strong message

about social reforms and are considered as powerful tools to mobilize crowds towards a certain matter.

14.4.2 Print Media

Print media encompasses mass communication through printed material. It includes newspapers, magazines, booklets, periodicals etc. The printed word are a carrier of knowledge, information and news stories. In India printing came first to Goa in 1556 and penetrated into Kolkatta and inland provinces through the coastal towns.

One of the chief characteristics of Print media is that they offer extensive news coverage and in depth treatment of themes. They provide a large variety of coverage, through different kinds of writings than any other media in India. The main weakness of the print media is that they can be read only by literates.

14.4.3 Electronic Media

Another very popular means of social interaction and propagation that has emerged along with the print media is the rise of Electronic Media. Electronic media are media that use electronics or electromechanical energy for the end-user (audience) to access the content. The birth of electronic media took place with the invention of Radio when a single voice a mile away thrilled millions across the continents who marveled at this miraculous hearing of a voice.

Radio

One of the most dramatic developments of the 20th century has been the invention of the radio waves. Radio has become a means of communication of unparalleled immediacy, intimacy and power as it is highly effective and found everywhere. Radio broadcasting in its reach, power and impact, constitutes the most significant medium of mass communication. Radio has an inherent advantage to overcome three major hurdles to meaningful communications- such as mass illiteracy, lack of efficient means to reach the remote places and poverty which prevents access to mass media.

Cinema

Cinema is the Latin spelling of the Greek word 'kinema', meaning "a motion." Indian film industry is considered a huge film industry in terms of production. Indian cinema is a popular mode of entertainment for all. Digitalization is considered to be the next best thing for Indian Cinema and it is in a position to exploit the technology in all aspects: building capacity, content creation, processing, management and distribution of the digital content in various formats and sources. Indian Films have gone beyond the geographical boundaries. They have come out of the epoch of love and fantasy and learnt to work on experimental plots. The effect of globalization of Indian cinema is applicable not only to the Bollywood (colloquial) films, but also to the regional film industries of the country. Many Indian films are not only making more money outside the home market but also attracting foreign producers and directors to the industry.

Television

In 1926, Scottish television pioneer John Logie Baird (1888-1946) demonstrated the first television system since then Television has played a very important role in our lives. Television is considered one of the greatest inventions of man. It is

a multi-media system predominated by the visual medium. T.V can transport the viewers to the actual scene of action to see things as they happen. Having a television set in the home has become very essential in today's society. We depend on it to entertain us with its sitcoms and to inform us about current world issues.

A T.V broadcast directly affects two senses simultaneously i.e those of hearing and seeing. It is more effective than radio because of its visual components which has a greater influence on the minds of the viewers.

With the help of satellite technology, T.V has reached all corners of the globe. According to Marshall McLuhan the T.V has turned the world into a global village in which ideas, information and images can be exchanged with people spread all over the globe. Television is a medium of immediacy as it captures images of events as they are happening, that is why we have headlines like 'breaking news' that present events exactly as they are unfolding, hence, T.V is also called the medium of 'here and now'.

14.4.4 New Media

New Media is also known as new media or global media. New media are those that are recent in origin. The most important feature of the new communication technology is interactivity. While in the case of television, radio and other electronic media, communication is only a one-way process; their interactive capabilities are very limited because feedback is delayed. However, in new communication technologies we can get immediate responses and feedback because of advanced techniques of communication.

Modern media transmits signals instantly from one source to any destination in the whole globe by modern electronic technology. The new communication technologies are based on 5A's "Anyone can transfer any information at any time at any place to anyone". The media or the global media are capable of a much higher degree of interactivity than those offered by traditional communication technology. The use of computers in one form or the other is an integral part of most of the modern communication technologies.

Check Your Progress Exercise

Note :

- i) Use the space given below to answer the questions.
- ii) Compare your answer with the course material of this unit.
 - 1) List different categories of media
 - 2) Write short note on "New Media".

14.5 EFFECT OF MEDIA ON SOCIETY

Media effects human mind and the way we behave and act in society. The degree of influence depends on the availability and pervasiveness of media. All of the traditional mass media still have great influence over our lives.

Books once were supremely influential because they came first before newspapers, magazines, radio or television. Newspapers and magazines became great influencers after they were developed. Sound recordings and film were and still are influential. Radio and then television were very influential. As the 20th century

closed, TV exposed us to untold numbers of images of advertising and marketing, suffering and relief, sexuality and violence, celebrity, and much more. New and influential media-distribution channels have appeared in the 21st century. Delivered via the World Wide Web across the Internet, we are influenced daily by blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds and myriad forms of content sharing.

The media permeates almost every part of our lives. Whether it's TV news, web content, books or anything in between, the information we receive from the media plays a major role in everyone's everyday life. Something this large and ubiquitous is bound to. The impact of media on the society extends to both social and political sectors. There are a variety of elements in each and media touches on both sectors and each element. Media has both positive and negative effects on society

Positive effects of media on Society such as access to information, improved access to education, independent nature of social media, media can play a positive role in children's learning and development, It gives current news and information about what's happening in the world.

The major areas of negative effects of media are presented here: Invasion of privacy; perversion of truth by electronic trickery; violation of security (Governmental and institutional); Impact on the democratic process; Isolation of people; and Information overload.

14.6 WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Women are also the potential victims of media's influence over society. The portrayal of women as sexual figures in popular culture is also a threat to the well-being of our society. Frequently women are depicted or portrayed in some form of sexual representation. This portrayal has created a standard for the ideal female image that women are compared to by themselves or others. Research claims that the sexualized images of women in media serve as 'models of femininity' for females, especially young girls who are still developing their sense of self. Young girls exposed to these models may face future problems in mental and sexual development. Research also links exposure to sexualized female ideals with lower self-esteem, negative mood and depressive symptoms among adolescent girls and women".

14.6.1 Objectification of women in the media

Objectification is the representation of women in media as an object rather than as a whole human entity. This happens in many contexts including advertisements and cinema. Feminist scholars say that the objectification of women involves the act of disregarding the personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a female; and reducing a woman's worth or role in society to that of an instrument for the sexual pleasure that she can produce in the mind of another. Media often portrays women in vulnerable and easily overpowered situations. Some images will focus only on a part of the body, a leg, a neck or a headless torso that constitutes objectification and introduces the concept of Fetishisation. It intends to reduce women to disembodied parts of their anatomy.

14.6.2 Gender and Print Media

In India, print media and electronic media continue to enjoy as widespread a reach. They also leave their impression on both general readers and policy makers. Events rather than processes make news. Most issues of special concern to women do not fit into the traditional concepts of what constitute news.

Women's empowerment should bring about a situation where women can use their fullest potential and capacity to construct a better human society for all and media has a critical role to play in responding to these processes. Media commitment and support are seen as necessary for effecting social reform and initiating various movements towards achieving a better quality of life for women.

14.6.3 Gender and Electronic Media

The tremendous popularity of television and its ability to reach a vast audience with illiteracy being no barrier led to the idea of using television as a channel for information on development among several governments/ administrators. From the mid- seventies television began to be used to promote development oriented messages among the Indian population. But there was no exclusive focus on women's problems and their development. In the absence of a comprehensive media policy in India, television content emphasizing entertainment has grown to such an extent that today all television channels are oriented towards commercialization.

Most of the soaps shown in Indian television are sexist. Even the so called matriarch (supposedly the head of the home) shown in some of the TV soaps victimizing the younger daughters and 'bahus' (daughters in laws) of the house and teaching them how to be 'good'.

All serials wrapped in tradition of male chauvinism discourage women to aim for more than a loving husband, happy children and a modern home. She is portrayed as a glamorous doll whose physical beauty is her only asset. The sacrificing role of women in every serial is highlighted, as it poses no threat to the patriarchal structure. Women are all the time shown as compromising and negotiating.

Sex stereotyping is also very much evident in television portrayal of men and women in their appointed roles. Invariably, masculine personality attributes are emphasized and women in the world of television are presented in the role of domestic help, a wife, a mother etc and similar nurturing and care-giving roles and they are portrayed as submissive and engrossed in common family affection and duties. As against this, men are depicted as employed, competitive. Women shown in similar competing roles with men are far less in number and are considered to be oddities and deviations from norm, trait wise though there is a stereotypical portrayal of women being congenitally much more than men. Even when women are presented as power holders, the patriarchal context is unmistakably present. The attributes of power and aggressiveness is portrayed as something unnatural to a women and a challenge to the male ego. In families in which the gender roles are largely traditional, television may tend to serve to reinforce such gender roles. In this way television certainly plays a role in the construction of gender roles.

14.6.4 Gender Roles in Advertisements

Advertisements are yet another prominent and integral part of television viewing. Due to its persuasive power, advertising is the best known and most widely discussed form of promotion. Advertising persuades and motivates consumer about the advertised products, service or ideas. Advertising plays an important role in persuading the public to change their attitudes towards a product, service or idea. The constant flow of advertising images of gender, types of persons, social classes, and other groups influence our social learning process.

Men and women are portrayed in advertisements according to the constructed definition of femininity and masculinity. To be a woman is to be feminine and to be a man is to be masculine. There is little room for variation or a reversal of roles, except within the smaller frame of: niche marketing.

In the world of advertising, men and women have consistently been portrayed in stereotypical ways. Men are portrayed as more autonomous than women, with men portrayed in many different occupations as compared to women being shown as housewives and mothers. Men were far more likely to advertise vehicles, or business products, job website while women were found mostly in advertisements for domestic products. Some common sights of women as seen in advertisements show them cooking in the kitchen, washing bucketful of clothes bandaging wounds of their husbands and children. Men were far more likely to be shown outdoors or in business settings while women were shown primarily in domestic settings.

Women are alternately displayed as sari-wearing stay at home mothers whose only purpose in life is to please their family, ravishing sex-idols who are as objectified as they are seductive, and independent, strong-willed, intelligent go-getters. Women are usually shown in advertisement of household products. They are seen washing utensils, clothes or cooking for family. In the advertisements, women are predominantly employed to promote products and services. In every item they are utilized whether it requires their presence or not. Even in masculine accessories women are presented. From these advertisements a desirable value can be discerned. Women are portrayed as sex objects who are probably cast to titillate the viewers by exposing their body parts. Women are shown wearing revealing clothes and adopt leaning and yearning postures - signs of incompleteness or lack of security. Even in commercials of the products consumed mostly by men- male perfume/deodorant, briefs, male soaps etc. women are used as models exposing their bodies.

Fair complexion, tall, slim and beautiful looking women are the ideal ones and dark complexion is propagated as a major hindrance for self development even marriage. Utmost care is taken to manipulate the minds of young women that overweight, dark complexion are the disqualification for their self development. Fairness cream and beauty soap, shower? promises to make their dreams come true.

14.6.5 Gender roles in Cinema

Women characters in cinema are often devoid of a realistic projection and end up on screen as stereotypes. A 'good' and ideal woman in Bollywood, has traditionally been long-suffering and submissive, who is chaste, and is inclined to make sacrifices for other especially the male members in the household. The

'bad' woman on the other hand, has been depicted as Westernized, blond-haired, individualistic and sexually aggressive, ready to lead men into ruin. The Hindi film industry has repeatedly reinforced the notion that the glory of ideal Indian womanhood lies in the tolerance she shows toward society and men, even when she is unjustly treated and brutally victimised.

The narratives of Hindi cinema have undoubtedly been male dominated and male centric. Themes have been explored from the male audience's point of view. The heroine is always secondary to the hero. Her role is charted out in context of any male character which is central to the script. It may be the hero, the villain, the father, the boss, an elderly male figure etc. She is devoid of any independent existence and her journey throughout the film is explored in relation to the male character. This kind of straight-jacketing limits the women's role to providing glamour, relief, respite and entertainment.

Some film-makers dared to explore subjects from the women's perspective. *Mother India* (1957) Hindi film epic, written and directed by Mehboob Khan is a strong political statement on a woman who can do anything to establish that justice has been done even while remaining within the framework of marriage and motherhood. She defied the micro state of being a biological mother in order to fit into the framework of becoming the mother of the nation when she shot down her own son to save the honour of a woman of the village. The *sati-savitri* image underwent a radical make-over probably with Nutan, who, without showing skin, made a powerful presentation in strong roles such as *Seema* and *Bandini* while Geeta Bali promoted the image of a mischievous tomboy, also a positive deviation from the *sati-savitri* image.

During 70s actors like Jaya Bachchan, Smita Patil and Shabana Azmi stripped glamour off the female lead's character and played roles that were as important as that of the hero. Some contemporary films like *Chameli* (2003), *Cheeni Kum* (2007), *Paa* (2009), *Ishqiya* (2010), *No One Killed Jessica* (2011), *Dirty Picture* (2011), *Queen* (2014), *Mary Kom* (2014) have pictured extraordinary themes and portrayed women as central to the story line. These films have forced creators to take a fresh look at the different roles played by women and introspect upon the kind of typecasting that was being perpetuated earlier.

14.7 SUMMING UP

We have understood that the issues of media, identity and gender are integral to the discipline of media and Gender studies. The reason is the popularity and diversity of media as source of mass consumption and its influence on constructing ideas and generating debates. The media scene in India has expanded in the recent times as there is a plethora of media choices available to the audiences. The media structures and systems have also undergone a sea change with privatization and globalization. These developments are bound to affect the manner in which media scrutinizes and covers any issue – gender being an important one. Over a period of time all forms of media has gender component in it. What media portrays goes deep into the subconscious and unconscious mind of people and influences audience in various ways.

Women are shown as playing a secondary and passive role in various programmes, T.V Soaps and films. The reality reconstructed by the media, does not match the

one encountered by women in their daily life. There is huge disparity between real women and those presented over the medium of television which is perplexing and disquieting at the very least. Television programming doesn't include the image of the working class woman. Media in its myriad forms needs to create space for more progressive representations of women to do justice to women and their role in the society. Indian society is in a state of transition where it is important that media in its various forms narrate/depict positive images of articulation, agency and empowerment.

14.8 KEY WORDS

Television Soap Operas: Television or Radio serials which deals with daily events in the lives of same group of characters.

14.9 REFERENCES

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14.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you understand by the term 'Mass Media'.
- 2) Discuss the various classifications of Media.
- 3) What do you understand by objectification of women?
- 4) Men and women are portrayed in advertisements according to the constructed definition of femininity and masculinity. Comment

UNIT 15 READING AND VISUALIZING

GENDER

Structure

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Objectives
- 15.3 Understanding the Terms
 - 15.3.1 Words and their Connotation and Denotation
 - 15.3.2 Close Reading
 - 15.3.3 False Individuality
 - 15.3.4 What is visualizing?
 - 15.3.5 Reading Silence
- 15.4 Why Women's Language?
- 15.5 What is Representation?
 - 15.5.1 Representation of Women in Media and Literature
 - 15.5.2 Representation as Social reality
 - 15.5.3 Self and Other
- 15.6 The Right to Represent
- 15.7 How Women Represent Themselves?
- 15.8 The Problem of Misrepresentation
- 15.9 Challenges to Victimization
- 15.10 Summing Up
- 15.11 Key Words
- 15.12 Suggested Readings
- 15.13 Unit End Questions

15.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 13 we examined the relation between gender and language and discussed how the two are mutually dependent. We also focused on the different modes to know how men and women communicate effectively when most of their ways of communication are directly opposite. This led us to discuss various social and cultural factors that influence language. Unit 14 has equipped us to understand the difference between male language and female language and think of the possibility of gender neutral language. In the present unit we shall see how to give a gendered reading to literature and other life situations to visualize gender.

15.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this Unit, you will be able to:

- Explain concepts of close reading, visualizing and representation;
- the need to give gender-specific reading so as to examine how cultural factors are linked to emotional expressions; and also to our understanding;
- how and where men and women writers differ in their choice of words, what images are formed and how we, as readers or viewers interpret them.

- This will lead us to discern the hidden meaning of a text, be it a literary text or a media report or TV show or Ad. Concomitantly, we shall be equipped to understand the gendered use of language

15.3 UNDERSTANDING THE TERMS

We have three terms that need to be elaborated and understood for the present discussion: Reading, Visualizing and Representation.

15.3.1 Words and their Connotation and Denotation

Before we look into the meaning of ‘reading’ let us clarify that every word has *connotation* and *denotation*. Denotation is a word’s primary or literal meaning such as a dictionary defines; connotation is its secondary or accompanying meaning that the word implies or suggests. For example, *home* is a place where we live; but home also suggests coziness, love and affection, privacy. Thus the phrasal expression *at home* denotes “to be inside the home”; but it connotes being “comfortable and at ease”. While reading a text or a picture we can give a superficial reading or we can delve deeper to find the suggested meaning. Connotation is usually influenced by social and cultural realities. We take following two lines from an Indian school text book:

- 1) Ram, go to school.
- 2) Radha, clean the room.

The superficial meaning is simple: the two children are being assigned work according to the accepted gender norms. But the implied meaning is different: Ram is a boy. He is supposed to go to school; Radha is a girl who is denied this privilege and she has to clean the room. These two simple lines have deeper gender implications; and also the language is sexist. It discriminates and devalues a girl. It centers on gender roles. Gender role is a set of norms or culturally defined expectations that define how girls and boys (man/woman) are supposed to behave.

15.3.2 Close Reading

‘Reading’ is a multivalent word. It does not only mean reading a given line or text or message. It connotes what is hidden behind the obvious. Every word is invested with meaning. Every sentence can be interpreted in various forms, as per the suggested meaning. Thus literal description becomes a tool that helps us to see a situation and leads us through the multiple meaning of the language.

For example, a male character in a story or play or novel calls a woman *babe*. ‘Babe’ is a diminutive word. A ‘baby’ or ‘babe’ is small, helpless and dependent. There is no doubt that this is a term of endearment but it reduces a woman to a non-entity. It displays the authority of the man and in its ultimate analysis, it speaks of male domination. Till recently, women did not object to this appellation because it was considered a flattering personal compliment. But when feminism made women aware of the effect of language and the power-play, women realized that this is not a compliment to their sex. They found it offensive and took objection to it.

Likewise, words like *queen*, *princess*, *honey*, *kitten*, and *doll* are insulting and women have started rejecting these as they are *sex privatization*

stereotype(source?). These appellations have superficial attributes and they encourage men to see women as helpless and dependent. The side-effect is: if women are described only by such superficial attributes, conversely, men appear more individual and strong on whom women depend.

15.3.3 False Individuality

In this process of gender attribution, women acquire false individuality. This individuality hinders the development of the real personality. What do we mean by false individuality? To explain this, we ask you a question: What are the attributes of a 'doll'? It is dumb, it is a play thing and it has no personality and no intelligence. All dolls are alike and they do not have individuality. Conversely, it means women are look-alike, they are dumb, they have no opinion, and they are play-things. This is its implied meaning.

Socially, women are expected to express their individuality through their physical appearance or beauty or through carrying out gendered roles. They are thus stereotyped as a class: they look alike, they think alike, and they are beautiful but have no brains. Such socio-cultural parameters keep sex oppression going on. The image becomes extension of oneself; it gets hard to distinguish the real person from his latest image. Men see women not only as an image; but as an image of sex appeal.

Look at some of the fairy tales. The story of Cinderella, for example. We all have liked it since childhood but read it closely and you will realize that Cinderella is beautiful but she is helpless; she has sex appeal but she is almost doll-like. And she needs a prince to rescue her. Through fairy tales such as these we are still taught that we are princesses, someday our prince will come, we will be picked up, carried off to a palace to live happily ever after.

15.3.4 What is visualizing?

The dictionary meaning of 'to visualize' is to form a picture of something or someone in our mind. This is a mental image. Visualization is a problematic word and difficult to define. The purpose of visualization is to connect what we have imagined or what picture we have formed of it. It is based on idea formation and is abstract, the image is not visible. When we visualize, we transform the image from invisible to the visible. Visualization has to produce an image but this image, as you see it, may not be so clear to the other. The most important criteria is that visualization must provide a way to learn something about the given idea or language. Visualization helps us to recreate a mental picture. How it works with gender can be understood with following example:

How would you *visualize* a girl or a woman? Probably, you will make a stereotypical mental image: weak, submissive, emotional quiet, engaged in household work, nurturing children, not much educated. How would you *visualize* a boy or a man? The stereotypical picture is: aggressive, assertive, dominating, loud, messy, scientific mind, outdoor life, interested in games and sports. These mental images are socio-cultural and may be different in different cultures.

In many textbook images or magazine pictures we still find the father sitting comfortably and reading a newspaper, while the mother slogging in the kitchen. Here we can visualize that boys and men are presented as universal figures in which women/girls are invisibly included. The image of the mother is reduced to

a performer of household chores. Obviously, she does not have an individual personality; and thus shown to have no choice. This type of approach encodes women's fear of public spaces and men's incompetence in household work. Further, this has implications for division of labor: childcare and household work is for women, public life is for men.

To explain what we said just now, we give you below two pictures. Look at them and visualize the scene and interpret it with the tool of gender:



Picture 1. In this picture boys are doing all outdoor work, imitating their father. Gender roles are all masculine.



Picture 2. Here girls are playing at household chores and imitating their mothers. Gender roles are clearly feminine.

Researchers have observed that stereotypical conceptions of girls and boys occur even in schools. Usually, teachers also have patronizing attitudes toward girl students; they give more space to boys. The girls' performance in science subjects are not as highly valued as the boys', and this outlook can ultimately have consequences for girls' attitudes towards science.

Check your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) What attributes would come to your mind while visualizing 'mother'?
- 2) What is gender stereotyping? Give two examples – one male one female stereotype
- 3) Write a note on Close Reading (50 words)
- 4) Fill in the Blanks:
 - i) Girls imitate their (mothers/fathers/ teachers)
 - ii) Boys like activities (indoor/homely/outdoor)
 - iii) Boys gender roles are (masculine/boyish/)
 - iv) False individuality hinders a girl's development of personality (real/ feminine/brain)

15.3.5 Reading Silence

Women's silence has been the subject of much debate. Silences mean those statements that are in the background, that are not expressed. Some critics say that women are capable of 'speaking out', yet they cannot/do not 'speak out'. That means they have no voice. About Indian women many critics argue that the public voice of the Indian woman has long been stifled by the male-dominated society. She has been led to believe in her self-image as a sober, silent, docile being. Her silence on the problems she faces is connected to this self-image. Women need encouragement to shake off this imposed reserve and speak of her problems and their solutions. Women writers today are speaking up. They are even exposing rape cases and the aftermath of such exploitation. Let us examine these lines from two poems:

"Sita speak your side of the story

We know the other too well...

Sita speak!"

(This poem by Bina Agarwal exhorts Sita to speak out. Sita has been silent but now she must speak out and we must know her side of the story; which is a story of oppression).

- 2) "You welcomed me
With a smile on your lips
And a frame in your hands
I was to fit into that
Like a circus animal.

(This poem entitled 'Ring Master' is by J. Bhagyalakshmi. The poet resents the social stereotype. 'Frame' and fitting into the 'frame' means fitting into the gender role).

15.4 WHY WOMEN'S LANGUAGE?

It is usually observed that women use different language for their literary works than men do. By using their own language, women challenge the male repression of the feminine and attack the dominant ideology. Women's writing has often been ridiculed as without substance. Critics and readers have ignored women or acknowledged them as inferior. But in women's writing we can discern sisterhood and women's ability to empathize which is absent in men's writing.

We need the term 'women are writing' if only to remind us of the social conditioning and conditions under which women wrote and are still writing. That women are viewed as being incessant 'gossips' or chatterers distract from the fact that in the world of the written world they are silenced, censored, persecuted and marginalized when they seek to go beyond the topics allocated to them as 'good' women.

Feminist criticism questions the accepted conceptual structures; it wants to decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that have always shadowed the connections between genre and gender. Language is not a carrier of ideas, but it is a shaper of ideas. It is a means of self-expression and is co-related with socio-cultural facts of one's upbringing, environment, class and nationality. This is called 'language socialization' which means people learn how they are expected to behave socially. Women as a category employ language differently from the way men do and hence "women's language" is believed to display their female identity.

An example from literature can illustrate how language creates and sustains gender. The dialogue below is from Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. A mother is addressing her seven year old daughter. The words are simple but when you visualize gender role you find their real implications:

- Mother: Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker.
- Saru (daughter): Who cares?
- M: We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.
- S: I don't want to get married
- M: You can't live forever with us.
- S: Why not?
- M: You Can't.
- S: And Dhruva? (*her brother*)
- M: He's different. He's a boy.

Read this carefully and evaluate these words and see how harmful they are for the little girl's psyche. This brief conversation highlights the following issues:

Gender role: Marriage is a woman's final destiny for which she is prepared from her childhood. She has to be fair-skinned (this is society's definition of the masculine/feminine).

Gender stereotype: Saru cannot live with her parents; Dhruva can because he is a boy.

Gender stratification: Saru is ranked at a lower level vis-à-vis her brother.

Gender ideology: Mother's ideas and values legitimize sex role for her daughter; she has to be pretty, fair, married.

Femininity comes to signify a role, an image, a value imposed on women by the logic of the masculine systems. With the advancement of women's educational standards and gender consciousness, women have recently started to speak out. They have shed their inhibitions and they talk about their experiences of gender discrimination in their everyday lives. This is how they represent their side of the issue.

15.5 WHAT IS REPRESENTATION?

Now that we have explored the areas of language, gender, visualization and the need for close reading, we shall examine representation. The simple dictionary meaning of representation is: the act of re-presenting/ presenting again, something that represents as an image or a symbol, like a verbal picture. For example, the portrayal of women in films or newspapers can be stated as "representation of women in films/newspapers." Other synonyms for representation are: *portrayal, depiction, rendition, characterization* and so on. Representation also means an act of speaking or acting on behalf of someone. Representation covers the fields of literature, gender studies, politics, sociology, cultural studies and many other disciplines. But we shall restrict ourselves to the relationship between gender and representation.

15.5.1 Representation of Women in Media and Literature

Imagination plays a significant role in representation. In literature it helps in engendering and re-engendering women. In films and TV serials and advertisements, women's representation is visual. Nowadays, television has centrality to our daily lives; in fact to our culture. It is like the language we speak, it is simple yet complex and difficult to understand and analyze. The representation of women in the media is varied – sometimes it is according to cultural norms, sometimes as per the new ideas and sometimes it breaks all norms. The mother, for example, is represented as a patient, all-loving presence but she can be very strong despite her several problems. We know how the woman is represented in art and sculpture. All these representations are gendered and need to be understood from a gender perspective. Representation asks the question: who is speaking, on behalf of whom? In gender studies, one of the important aspects of representation is to enable women to re-present themselves. There was a time when women were represented by men because women were not allowed to speak or write. Now with socio-cultural changes they have seized the opportunity to represent their case, their problems and their view points.

15.5.2 Representation as Social Reality

Representations are based on social realities. Therefore, they are social constructs. They can only change when the overall picture changes. Ask yourself a question: how are women portrayed in Hindi cinema today? How were women presented in the films of 1940s and 1950s? We can also note the difference in women's portrayal of women and men's portrayal of women.

15.5.3 Self and Other

When there is 'self', there is the 'other'. In literature, women have been treated as objects rather than as subjects. As object one loses one's individuality. One becomes the 'Other.' Men are often portrayed as powerful and in control of things. Man is the subject, the decision maker. Woman has a secondary position. In the patriarchal system, man is in a speaking position, so he is the 'self', all those about whom or for whom he speaks are the 'other'. The speaker has the active role and an element of control. Women are deprived of this central/active role and are therefore, muted.

15.6 THE RIGHT TO REPRESENT

Women have been striving to represent themselves. In the contemporary context, women are writing about what they feel and how they feel. They are giving their own account of their experience thus allowing previously silent voices to be heard and also to make patriarchal structures aware of their joys and sorrows, problems and strengths. In gender studies the issue of representation is a significant one for research as well as for political activity. Representation/voice is an important factor for access to power.

Just a few lines from a short story can illustrate how women express themselves frankly: "For the past two days Khatija was living in unbearable pain. Even now there were no sign of her giving birth to a baby. She tried to keep the pain to herself as much as possible. At times, she felt like screaming but she was dreading by the thought that others might hear it." ('The Birth' by Sarah Aboobacker). This is a typical female experience and only a woman can give expression to it. Analyzing literature, media and other fields to examine women's representation by both men and women is important to ensure in future a balanced picture of power-relations.

15.7 HOW WOMEN REPRESENT THEMSELVES?

Social tradition has all along looked at women as weak, submissive and dependent. The written word asks the question: how do others see us, read us or interpret us? When men present women's picture they look at them from their own angle. But women want to pen down their own perceptions and realities that have relevance to their lives. Women may represent themselves as a group or as individuals in written or oral texts; they may also be represented by others. Representation has a political connotation also. When women struggle to get representation in political field, they are struggling for the right to represent and be represented. In sociology, representation allows them to express their views of their social situations. In literature, it stands for their own writings in which they can express their innermost feelings and experiences. For example, women writers from the Dalit sections of the society know the pain of double marginalization and double victimization. In their writings, these women depict firsthand knowledge of their problem. Men writers writing about such situations can offer a view from the outside. Women want to represent themselves to avoid being misrepresented.

15.8 THE PROBLEM OF MISREPRESENTATION

Closely allied to representation is the problem of misrepresentation. How is one misrepresented? Systems are always partial and always subject to interpretation, in the process there is likelihood of misrepresentation and misinterpretation. To be dismissive of women and their problem is misrepresentation; likewise, to portray them frivolously or to see their problems as non-issues, to deride their emotions and sentiments or behavioral pattern all come under misrepresentation. Writing must expose the real experiences of real women. If we get these from women's own perspective chances of misrepresentation become less. Women's experiences are different from men's but difference does not mean inequality, and therefore should not signify unequal relationships.

A correct representation of gender will help re-structure socio-cultural perception of women. Let us take a small example of misrepresentation. In the Indian social tradition, we call a woman "devi". As a goddess she is to be held in high esteem and kept on a pedestal but the social reality is different. She is a real woman with real problems, to give her the status of a goddess means to divest her of her human pains and pleasures. It is necessary to explore how women define themselves and are defined as women within various systems of representation. Women have their own unique identity. If we enable them to define themselves, we shall give them their unique identity which is important for their individuality.

15.9 CHALLENGES TO VICTIMIZATION

Women are burdened by the notions of femininity, of respectability, of honour because these shape the crucial questions of their sexuality. In literature, language plays an important role challenging the stereotypes. Women writers are challenging the victimization of women characters and seeking new balance of power between the sexes. Women writers wish men to understand that women are not commodities to be possessed. This is a kind of revolt against social norms that breed inequality. In the film *Fire* (1996) for example, Deepa Mehta uses feminism in a manner that does not fit into the normal socially accepted discourses. Representation of lesbianism in the film generated anger. Representation in the cinema requires both language and visual depiction; other disciplines like literature and social sciences depend on language to delineate reality.

15.10 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have focused on language and gender from several angles.

- The ability to use language, whether oral or written, is one of the most important characteristics of human beings.
- In analyzing language we go beyond the boundaries of grammatical analysis of a text. We are aware of grammar but we see functions within the language as it is spoken or written and also how words (language) function within the context.
- Focus is also on the social action of the language of the users communicating in a particular social and cultural context.
- We know by now that language is a tool. Not only that, it is a powerful and essential tool which people use to express, control and also alter existing power relations.

15.11 GLOSSARY

Gender Attribution: Gender attribution is a process. In this process, society ascribes or assigns a sex or gender on to an individual with or without knowing concretely what sex that person is or what gender they identify as.

15.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

Coates, J. (1996) *Women Talk: Conversation between Women Friends*. Blackwell: Oxford and Cambridge Masc.

Coates, J. (ed.) (1998) *Language and Gender: A Reader*. Blackwell: Oxford, Malden Masc.

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James, D., and Clarke S. (1993) 'Women, Men and Interruptions A Critical Review', in Deborah Tannen (ed.) *Gender and Conversational Interaction*. Oxford University Press: New York and Oxford.

Lakeoff, R. (1975) *Language and a Woman's Place*. Harper and Rowe: New York.

15.13 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Write a note on the terms connotation and denotation.
- 2) Define representation. How do women represent themselves?
- 3) What are the terms of endearment that women resent? And why?
- 4) Fill in the blanks:
 - i) Reading Silence means.... (Read silently/understand hidden meaning)
 - ii) When one is portrayed as an object, one becomes ... (the subject/ the other)
 - iii) The connotation of the appellation 'doll' is.... (a cute woman/a sweet woman/ a dependent and helpless woman)
 - iv) To deny women's authentic experiences and belittle them can be called ... (representation/ interpretation/misrepresentation).
 - v) plays a significant role in representation (words/images/imagination)
- 5) Explain visualization and its importance for gender study.