



MISREPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN MEDIA

Dr. Shabana Kesar

Asst Professor, DWE, MANUU.

ABSTRACT :

Muslim women are portrayed in the mass media as voiceless, submissive, passive and oppressed victims instead of the powerful and creative leaders that they are. The media has become fixated with the way Muslim women look what they are or not wearing instead of who they are and what they are doing.

There is absence of spotlight on accomplishments of Muslim ladies, particularly the individuals who don't fit a hidden and misled generalization. Media usually portrays Muslim women as a mysterious, veiled victim of male oppression, awaiting western liberation. A slogan shouting terrorist. An uneducated figure and these impressions of Muslim women have largely been formed by the media stereotypes images that usually have nothing to do with the real status of Muslim women. Thus paper focuses on how media portrays Muslim women which hinders in positive image of Muslim women.



KEYWORDS : Muslim women , misled generalization , media stereotypes images.

INTRODUCTION

Since the most recent few decades, the subjects of Islam, the Muslim people group and particularly Muslim ladies appear to have ruled the Western media. It began with the extreme inclusion of September 11, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the forbidding of the shroud in Europe, to the fear based oppressor assaults and suicide planes in the Middle East. These are only a couple of pictures to name that the Western social orders and nations have been retaining in their every day lives, in the long run shaping their dispositions, observations and thoughts regarding the Muslim world.

Media inclusion of Islam-related issues has changed drastically since the start of the new thousand years, both in amount and quality. The occasions of September 11, 2001, push Islam into the worldwide media front line: not exclusively did inclusion of Islam definitely increment, especially in news and stimulation media, yet the manner by which Islam was encircled by the media changed too.

The American-drove 'War on Terrorism' prompted an expansion in Islamophobia (dread or disdain of Islam) over the globe. This expansion in Islamophobia was thusly reflected in the manner in which news sources tended to and stereotyped Muslim populaces. While some purposely surrounded Islamic inclusion emphatically trying to counter Islamophobia, a considerable lot of the depictions of Muslims added to the arrangement of unsafe Islamic media generalizations.

The most pervasive Islamic generalization is the extreme Muslim radical, set on pursuing jihad, or sacred war, against the West. This generalization ordinarily speaks to savagery as an indivisible piece of being Muslim, just as religion as support for rough activities.

Another Islamic media generalization includes depictions of Muslim ladies. Western Muslim ladies are frequently exhibited either as latent casualties of male power forced upon them, or as solid women's activists who contradict this power by battling it from an impeded position. Media in some cases condemns Islam for minimizing ladies and for giving an unbalanced measure of capacity to men. Acknowledgment of Islam is compared with ladies surrendering uniformity and ladies' rights are spoken to as being inconsistent with opportunity of religion. Because of these depictions, the most widely recognized words used to portray Muslim ladies by columnists and government officials are 'isolated', 'beaten', 'affronts', 'cover', 'opportunity', 'religion', 'disdain', 'human rights' and 'fanaticism'.

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Muslim ladies watch customary male centric chains of importance, numerous others specifically apply these lessons and live totally autonomously. The generalization that accept the minimization of Muslim ladies fails to consider the decent variety of female Muslim encounters and places Western standards of sexual orientation and power upon a non-Western religion.

In spite of the fact that media portrayal of Islam has changed radically inside the previous decade, it is important to perceive how these portrayals have formed popular sentiment of Islam. While just a minority of youngsters have been found to hold partial or bigot sees with respect to Islam, a lion's share see Muslims to be outside and outsider, fuelling the thought that Islam is a risk to Western culture and that Muslims are not quite the same as what individuals from Western culture 'should' be.

The representation of Muslim women in the media continues to be a source of contestation for many Muslim women around the world. In spite of Muslim women's diverse legacies as political, cultural and social leaders, their image in the media is often reduced to stereotypical portrayals of Muslim women. For instance, after 9/11 in New York, Muslim women became a renewed symbol of Islamic militancy and feminine oppression in much of Western media, and popular media outlets continue to portray representations of "Muslim women as incomparably bound by the unbreakable chains of religious and patriarchal oppression."

The persistence of negative language used to describe Muslim women, the homogenization of all Muslim women, and the heightened focus on the headscarf are all examples that reflect how Muslim women have been used as a discursive means to render those who do not share Western values as "others." Moreover, these media representations have fostered the perception that Muslim women are not active citizens in their communities, and instead reduce them to victims, passive women, or only veiled women. Such representations tend to reflect a narrow view of Muslim women, in which the actual problems or challenges faced by Muslim women are ignored. In this way, critical issues which affect Muslim women are often mistakenly perceived to be caused by religion, rather than specific socio-economic, nationalist, or political forces.

In other societies, media outlets may often invoke variations of similar stereotypes by generally reporting only stories which depict women as passive victims or as women attempting to or prevented in furthering their social, civic development. For instance, in Ukraine, news reports inaccurately reported that a successful beauty pageant contestant was stoned to death by a "radical Islamist." Muslim women have also been re-victimized through the stigmatization of rape in the media, as evidenced in a report on how Pakistani media has irresponsibly covered rape cases. In addition, the over-emphasis and simplification regarding the head scarf, *hijab*, portrays a lingering symbol of female submission by many contributors of the global media.

Muslim women have also created their own sites in monitoring and representing their image in the media. For instance, online sites like Muslimah Media Watch and Muslim Women's News review and critique representations of Muslim women in the global media. Muslimette.com covers a diversity of everyday lifestyle issues from favorite iPhone apps, to questions about marriage. In addition, *Aquila-Asia* is the first magazine devoted to an audience of Muslim women in Asia.

Despite the contested imagery of Muslim women in the media, they have nonetheless carved out their own discursive space in mediating and representing their own cultural, social and ethnic diversity, and the growing number of media outlets created by and for Muslim women reflect the inherent heterogeneity of Muslim women around the world.

For many years, particularly the period following 9/11, there has been an overabundance of misconceptions and misrepresentations of Muslim women in American television and film, which has had an enormous impact on the public mind. The negative stereotyping and homogenous outlook has led to a large cultural misunderstanding of Arabic and particularly Muslim women as many Westerners see such women as inferior to the Western defined norm by virtue of their "incomprehensible" difference. These false and exaggerated representations in the media have ultimately led to the oppression of this minority group.

With respect to Muslim women who are depicted as passive victims of masculine dominance, this victimization is often demonstrated in the media through images of cloaked women submissively following a dominant male figure, often for example, images of women shuffling in the background are seen. Moreover, in many movies it is not uncommon to see women covered in black from head to toe, appearing as unattractive and enslaved beings to men. They shuffle behind abusive and dominant "terrorist" men following their every command while not muttering a word.

In movies like BOL and NIKAAH also a view that Muslim women are the possession of men, and are oppressed by Islam is asserted. In other scenes of the busy downtown streets, occasionally several women in burqas can be spotted in the background, Moreover, not only are the Muslim women in this film displayed as the victims of Muslim men, but also are vilified and made inferior in comparison to men. To conclude, non-Muslim people frequently mention veils as evidence of the oppression of Muslim women, and when media outlets such as the film "Zero Dark Thirty" only portray these oppressed images, it is no wonder that non-Muslim people develop such false notions. Not only do these images narrow the Western understanding of Muslim women, but they also create cultural barriers for Muslim women in reality, as they are unfairly judge based on these false representations. Hollywood movies from 1896 until today depicting Arabs as inhumane, foes, unfeeling, thieves, fanatic in their religion, merciless killers, and abusers of ladies. History demonstrates that since the start of film, Hollywood's motion pictures have been distorting Arab ladies. Unmistakably, movie producers did not make these pictures but rather acquired Europe's previous Arab generalizations. These pictures have been made long back; in the eighteenth and nineteenth hundreds of years, European craftsmen and journalists offered anecdotal renditions of ladies as washed and agreeable fascinating "objects". Thus, through the time, the generalization came to be acknowledged as substantial, turning into a lasting piece of European pop culture (Cheney, 1986).

The media is entranced by the depiction of Arab ladies and they way they dress. As indicated by Ahmed (1992), with regards to depicting Muslim lady, the media in the West is by all accounts mindful and fixated by the manner in which they dress which is the shroud specifically which has brought about an extraordinary number of responses and discussions. These discussions demonstrates that the cover is seen as an indication of social contrast in the Western world as it separate Arab ladies from Western ones. (Ahmed, 1992). Muslim Arab lady are in every case gravely depicted as the ill defined and apparition ladies in their Islamic dress .they are truly confounding the western typical individuals as it's not their blame that what they are seeing on TV is that it's the blame of the western media.

Consequently, when the Western media outlines ladies as sexual slave and persecuted by men as they are mishandling their ladies, beaten, and mortified, they are being honest as this is the picture that has been constantly stuck in the Westerns minds. Truth be told, the West has been stereotyping Arab ladies since perpetually, and they didn't change their search for the Arab ladies till now.

Terms, for example, the cover, the array of mistresses, female circumcision helped in the development of such misguided judgments just as gave the impression to a portion of the related pictures with the mistreated Muslim lady. The issue is that these observations have been erroneously summed up with no separation. (Gwinn, 1997). This issue has made it harder for the hidden Muslim ladies living in the

West, as they will in general experience the ill effects of the narrow mindedness from the manner in which they dress, what's more, they are not really acknowledged in the Western people group. (Mohanty, 2005).

Middle Easterner ladies in outsider networks and who are living in Western social orders, are casualties of these negative generalizations and sexual orientation based media portrayals. As Morin (2009), noticed that these ladies confront negative media inclusion that depends on social misinterpretations and the ongoing political clashes that have ruined Arab-Western relations. Therefore, Arab ladies in settler networks can't win the battle for better media acknowledgment while they keep on being seen inside the limit of customary Arab-Islamic generalizations. (Morin, 2009).

As Posetty (2008) expressed in his article, in the depiction of Muslim ladies, consideration is every now and again centered around the manner in which they dress, with their garments seen as an image of their undermining, outsider status. Pictures of Islamic dress are progressively utilized in the media as visual shorthand for unsafe fanaticism, and Muslims all over Europe are experiencing the outcomes of such affiliations. The principle issue as Ahmed (1992) brought up, is that the demonstration of veiling among Muslim ladies or the shroud itself is regularly connected with the absence of conventionalism and backwardness that does not fit into the cutting edge society and among Western ladies who don't have to cover (Ahmed, 1992). This marvel proposes that we can achieve the other social distinction and how the West is interested with otherness and still proceeds inside the Western media towards the Muslim world (Ahmed, 1992).

Ayish (2010) pointed out in his paper that the Western media will all in all portray Arab men as mighty and abusers of women, and that they control women. Media depict that the ladies is continually wearing her shroud, remaining at home bringing up kids and just comply with her better half who she fears. Papers thinks about has demonstrated that Western representation of Muslim marriage issues is ambiguous and this is on the grounds that the absence of the learning of remote societies and religions One could differ that the serious issue is Islamophobia, numerous Western writers, new to Islam religion, tend to see the confidence as brutal, in reverse and the opposing of resistance. (Ayish, 2010). called attention to in his paper that the Western media will in general depict Arab men as forceful and abusers of ladies, and that they control ladies. Media depict that the ladies is continually wearing her cloak, remaining at home bringing up youngsters and just comply with her significant other who she fears. Papers thinks about has demonstrated that Western outline of Muslim marriage issues is obscure and this is on the grounds that the absence of the learning of outside societies and religions One could differ that the serious issue is Islamophobia, numerous Western writers, new to Islam religion, tend to see the confidence as savage, in reverse and the conflicting of resilience. (Ayish, 2010). On the contrary a very different representation of Muslim women is also demonstrated in popular media today. The second common representation is of Muslim women being exotic and darkly-tempting sex-symbols. Particularly more recently, exoticized, and hypersexualized images of Muslim women are becoming increasingly popular. Many movies and TV shows highlight objectifying Muslim women as sex symbols, for example in the heteronormative and highly criticized, but ever so popular show, "The Bachelor". America was introduced to the first-ever Muslim woman on the Bachelor, Selma.

The recognizable proof of Muslim ladies in the media by means of conventional Islamic dress has been noted by Begum, who contends that "pictures of Islamic dress are progressively utilized in the media as a visual shorthand for unsafe fanaticism, and ... Muslims all over Europe are experiencing the outcomes of such affiliations" (Begum, 2005, p. 1). In France, a hotbed of media and political discussion about the hijab, the issue has had a polarizing influence on the Muslim people group and a disruptive effect on society and woman's rights, as indicated by Ezekiel. She writes about the effect of the French Parliament's banning of the hijab (and other "conspicuous signs of religion and politics") in February 2004. In the first year of its operation, the legislation saw the expulsion of 48 Muslim girls and three Sikh boys from government schools. The capture of two French journalists by terrorists in Iraq who demanded the French Government lift the ban fanned the debate in August 2004. When the hostages were taken, hijab-wearing French women took to the streets demanding their release, reportedly saying "send me instead" and "I don't want my hijab stained

with blood The media's depiction of these ladies went from evil images of Islamic fanaticism to overcome courageous women of the republic medium-term (Ezekiel, 2005). Be that as it may, from that point forward, the French media have covered the suspension of a Muslim meter peruser who wore a hijab under her cap, the forbidding of a mold show of hidden ladies, the aversion of hijab-wearing moms from volunteering in schools; the refusal of administration to an understudy wearing a hijab by a college cafeteria and the restricting of an observer to a common administration wedding from marking the documentation since her hijab kept her from being formally recognized (in the same place). Unmistakably, the hijab story stays newsworthy in France, and Muslim ladies' personalities are inseparably connected to the headscarf subsequently. According to Ezekiel, sexism and racism intersect in this debate. On one side of the women's activist discussion about the hijab, there are the individuals who request cloak be restricted from French lanes as they support the badgering of disclosed ladies. In any case, at the opposite end of the range, women's activists upholding a Muslim lady's entitlement to wear or not to wear a hijab have adjusted themselves to fundamentalist Islamic pioneers, contending that it's a Muslim lady's commitment to wear a hijab and requesting the boycott be upset. In Canada, the hijab has also been the subject of intense national debate and media scrutiny. Manji and Clarke argue that the Canadian media's focus on women as oppressed figures in far-off lands undermines the plight of all women in Canada, which has the second highest rate of "woman-killing" in the world (Manji & Clarke, 1992, p. 35). "There's a journalistic jihad afoot in Canada ... In recent editions of the Globe and Mail, the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette or the Vancouver Sun in the space of just three weeks, each ran features 'unveiling' the horrors of woman abuse in the Muslim world." (ibid) These authors suggest the focus on the hijab, for example, stems from the development of a "new Cold War" in which Islamic fundamentalism has replaced Communism as a rallying point for opponents of Western society.

Drawing on a study utilising focus groups of Muslim women, Bullock and Jafri found that: "Muslim women are often presented in mainstream Canadian media as outsiders and members of a religion that does not promote Canadian values." (Bullock & Jafri, 2000, p. 35). They conclude that Muslim women's identities will continue to be excluded from the construction of "women" in the broader context until there is a better understanding of Muslim cultures and Islamic beliefs. "Our argument is that Muslim women are presented as outsiders: as foreign, distant 'others', and as members of a religion (Islam) that does not promote 'Canadian' values but anti-Canadian values such as indiscriminate violence and gender oppression."

The creators contend that due to the media's social obsession with Muslim ladies' dress as an image of mistreatment, Muslim ladies frequently need to concentrate on that part of their way of life also, regardless of whether they would prefer to examine something different. They propose that even mindful news-casting about Muslim ladies will in general consign them to the job of a reactionary source in the hijab banter. "In total, obviously Muslim ladies are overwhelmingly displayed to the Canadian open as outside, 'fascinating', abused, or undermining 'others' as opposed to as one's 'unexotic', pleasant nearby neighbors."

REASONS FOR MISREPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN MEDIA

Many reasons appear to be the cause of such essentialist representations of women in Islamic cultures. Constraints such as deadline pressures, length requirements and reader accessibility, force stories to be brief and under-investigated which leads to influenced stories that can perpetuate stereotypes.

As well, Journalistic conventions of 'fairness' often impose only two sides or perspectives. This dichotomisation oversimplifies the complex and multi-faceted nature of the issue.

It is also found that reporters themselves feel commercial and financial pressures of the news media industry are damaging the quality of news coverage, and not a lack of journalistic ethics or professionalism. Spending cutbacks aimed at increasing profits have resulted in over-worked journalists, the loss of foreign bureaus and a general trend towards rehashing old stories and facts.

What effect has sensationalistic coverage produced in multicultural societies like Canada? Gema Martin Munoz writes: "Far from increasing our knowledge of the 'Other', more often than not this treatment leads to distorted conclusions, which strengthen feelings of rejection and incomprehension." This can be

seen in turn by the reactions of Muslim women "who do wear the hijab, [and are] afraid to go out, or do not wear the hijab when they go out because they feel threatened and insecure due to the kind of stereotypes equating the enemy with people who wear Muslim clothing" recounts Dr. Karim. This danger to the well-being of intercultural relations points directly to the need for journalism to be anthropological noted Carolyn Rouse, Associate Professor with the Department of Anthropology at Princeton, in a recent lecture for the Western Knight Center for Specialized Journalism. Rouse stated that an anthropological approach to reporting on cultural issues entails challenging and disrupting conventional categories and de-constructing generalisations. Questioning the basic categories through which we define the world around us can be crucial to the understanding of women in Islamic cultures. This lens prompts questions such as: is the veil truly a sign of oppression for all Muslim women? The adoption of a lens that challenges easy dualities also speaks volumes to the concern voiced by Haideh Moghissi as to the challenge of confronting "inferiorizing stereotypes about Islam and Muslim women without resorting to apologetic and self-glorifying accounts of Islam and Muslims".

CONCLUSION

It is observed that not all attention surrounding this subject is negative. The increase in Western news media coverage of issues surrounding Islamic cultures has been viewed in a positive light by some. "Monolithic misconceptions are subsiding as the nature of the Muslim community worldwide gains more attention" writes Dr. Aslam Abdullah, editor of the Muslim-American newspaper the Muslim Observer.

Another misconception is "Muslim women have no right in Islam". Islam gave women rights over 1400 years ago, which is still ignored by many Muslims and non-Muslims today. Firstly, Islam has given women the basic right to freedom of speech. In the early days of Islam, the leaders of the Islamic state regarding legal issues consulted women. Rights that were appointed to Muslim women since the beginning of time are only just surfacing for non-Muslims. In Islam, a woman is free to be whom she is inside, and protected from being portrayed as a sex symbol and lusted after. Islam praises the status of a woman by commanding that she "enjoys equal rights to those of man in everything, she stands on an equal footing with man" (Qur'an, Nadvi: 11) and both share mutual rights and obligations in all aspects of life.

Many women are treated in ways far from Islamic ideals, yet in the name of Islam. The Taliban is an example of a cultural and political name that has been branded with Islam. There is no freedom for women if they are imprisoned in their home in the name of the Hijab and Islam. Moreover the veil of Islam is not associated with the veil of oppression.

Women that are regaining their identity and role in society, are now wearing the Hijab and are embracing its concept of liberation. They are taking their lawful places that Islam had awarded them fourteen hundred years ago. In fact, the western women had no rights nor did they have rights over their husband. Not only were woman the property of their husband but so were their possessions. In 1919 women in England fought for their rights to be elected to parliament. Because of their demands, they were imprisoned by the government and suffered greatly. It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when women were given these rights.

A quote from the Qur'an in Surah 2: 26 states: "And for women has rights over men, similar to those of men over women.

However, some evidence of discrimination against women still exists in Western societies — especially when it comes to employment. Comparing this to early years of Islam, women were very accomplished. The best examples are of the wives of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Khadija, the first wife of Prophet Muhammad, was known for her business acumen and high intellect in spiritual matters. Prophet Muhammad himself had sought her council numerous times in the matter of the faith. Aisha, another of Prophet Muhammad's wives, is known as the scholar of religion, who taught both men and women during her life.

Women in the early years of Islam participated in all aspects of life. They were scholars, businesswomen, homemakers, nurses and even warriors in the battles. Present-day Muslim women are also very active in getting higher education and doing important jobs in science, technology and the arts.

There is need of better understanding of Islam and status of Muslim women in Islam. Then only we can build a positive image of Muslim women.

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