

## Do the Visual Media Contribute to Violence Against Women?

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**ABSTRACT** The present paper discusses the rising violence on women in modern times and its relations with the violence shown on television and in the cinema. In a country where women are held in high esteem and worshipped, they would be depicted in a lewd manner in most of films. Today Indian women suffer hunger, oppression, physical and mental torture, dishonour, illiteracy, disease and general neglect. So the question arises, Do the visual media have any relation with the crimes being perpetrated on women today?

New means of entertainment have invaded Indian society in recent years as a result of novel and powerful developments in the field of science and technology, posing a threat to the status enjoyed by cinema as an effective and affordable means of entertainment for millions of people in India. The electronic visual media with innumerable and a wide variety of satellite channels, entertainment using computer graphics etc. which have flooded the Indian television channels. Television antennae on the tops of every house in towns and even in villages have become a common sight. To maintain its position as the foremost medium of entertainment and education, cinema has to compete with the mushrooming satellite television companies.

When one reads the newspaper in the morning, the items which attract immediate attention are those relating to violence, especially on women. Rapes, dowry deaths, murders - the list is endless. In fact, it must be remembered that most of the violence on women goes unreported in India. The crimes which do get reported are just depicting a fraction of the reality.

Along with the rising violence against women in modern times, we are also finding an increasing amount of violence shown on television and cinema practically every serial aired on television deals with revenge, greed, deceit and diabolical plots. In most of the television serials, women are portrayed either as helpless victims suffering silently or as tough and cunning, out to take revenge for their sufferings by resorting once again to violence. Indian cinema today has become infamous for depicting some of the worst forms of violence on women. There is blood everywhere and the victims' piteous screams for help as well as the villain's terrifying laughter haunt the audience long after the film is over.

A similar debate is raging on in the United States of America where crime rates are one of the highest in the world. American films are increasingly depicting violence and blood which is tapped viewed by children, teenagers and adults coinciding with increased violence in American society. A study has revealed that teenagers in the US are inspired by pornographic and violent films to indulge in date rapes, rapes of older women and kidnapping, etc.

The visual media, be it television or cinema, is a very powerful vehicle for communicating ideas and images. It creates a world which seems very real and viewers are unable to differentiate between the contrived world and the real one. Most problems are shown to have simplistic solutions, usually involving the taking of law into one's own hands. Thus Hindi movies like "Pratighat" and "Anjaam" and more recently "Bandit Queen" justify revenge by women. An atmosphere is created wherein it seems justified that women should take up guns to fight their tormentors. All this, if followed in reality, would only lead to further crimes on women.

It might be argued that the visual media only reflect what is already taking place in society. A criminal is not necessarily inspired by films. Male dominance and female servility have been existing in India for generations. Wife beating and domestic violence on women is nothing new in India. A wife is considered as her husband's property and outsiders cannot interfere, no matter what torture are inflicted by the husband. In Rajasthan a few years back, a school teacher who tried to educate the women of her village about family planning was soundly beaten up by the menfolk and raped. Dowry is being practised in India for ages. The practise of loading the bridegrooms family with gifts and cash has

not been inspired by the media, but is an age-old tradition. The insatiable greed of the in-laws which ultimately leads to burning or torturing of the bride is a phenomenon which has been highlighted by the media but is indeed a slice of reality.

Due to rising consumerism and higher standards of living, the desires of most people for material wealth have also gone up. The differences between the have and have-nots are widening and poverty is rampant. It is not surprising that in such an atmosphere, violence is becoming the means for gaining power and wealth since women are an integral part of society. They, being vulnerable, cannot escape the violence which is spreading all around. So the media cannot be wholly blamed for contributing to violence on women. Such violence has already become a part of society.

However, the visual media cannot be assorted of the blame of sensitising human minds to violence. By seeing violent scenes repeatedly in films, the initial shock and revulsion slowly get dulled. The mind no longer recoils from such violence and soon violence becomes commonplace. Rapes and murders of women do not evoke strong feelings any longer and in the extreme case, even such happenings are witnessed in real life one may look the other way, unaffected. This can be a very dangerous effect of the visual media which must be checked at all costs.

Of late, a new phenomenon which has emerged is the financing of big-budget commercial films by Dons of the underworld like Doodood Ibrahim. This has led to depiction of more vulgarity and violence in films to titillate the audiences. Frequent exposure of female anatomy on celluloid does inspire the perverted sections of film viewers, most of whom are from the lower and unemployed strata of the society. This might lead them to take the honour and dignity of women in a light hearted manner and indulge in ere-teasing or more heinous acts.

Many films show a hero chasing a heroine and finally getting her. Even when the heroine rejects the advances of the hero, the latter pursues her by force and makes her helpless. Such films can inspire roadside Romeos to believe that any girl is theirs for the asking only if pursued vigorously enough. Naturally when they are rejected in real life, unlike in films, they get frustrated and resort to violence.

Infact, there is a lot of scope for the visual media to contribute in building a society where a women is honoured and respected. Rather than showing films with ugly violence and unrealistic solutions they should make positive films which help in generating enthusiasms. Television serials like "Rajani" go a long way in making women confident and equipped to handle crisis. Films like "Damini" and "Raja ki Aayegi Barat" have also handled the problems of violence on women in a positive manners by showing that a women who fights for justice against all odds can ultimately emerge victorious with the public on her side.

Cinema is not just business alone to be managed the away as desired by the makers. It has a remarkable effect on the behaviour of the viewers. It carries us with it for a couple of lowers, unwholesome images penetrate our minds more easily than good quality ones and create as much chaos as possible. To get out of these, one needs maturity, balance of mind and rational analysis of events. These are usually lacking in children and youth and good quality movies can only inculcate better manners in them.

Overdose of sex and violence in cinema leads to increase in the incidence of crime, violence unethical activities, adultery, sexual perversity and atrocities on women. As a matter of fact juvenile delinquency is posing a challenge to the entire society.

Rather than showing the dark side of human life where violence reigns unchecked, the visual media should show how woman can help themselves by becoming independent, fearless and self-supporting. Men should also be depicted with healthy, supporting attitudes towards women so that viewers can follow them as examples. Since women today are entering mostly into every profession including the defense services, this should be reflected by the media. Rather than only making Television serials showing abuses on women or the moral degeneration of women in the elite circles, the individual gets respect and helps each other in distress. Even in big cities there have been instances of neighbours helping each other and living like a family. In villages, most people even from different caste and communities coexist in harmony. Television and films can go a long way in reinforcing human morals and values.

Films must not make us get used to violence. True, the films maker or Television serial maker

has every right to express his feeling or creative instincts. It would not be right to censor every film simply because it shows violence. People would not like to view life always with rose-coloured glasses or see films with preachy overtones and a moral in the end. A correct balance has to be struck between ugly reality and rosy fantasy. The visual media must provide food for thought in a creative manner.

### CONCLUSION

Whether the visual media contribute to violence on women is a question which can be debated till the cows come home. No direct relationship can be established between the two except for isolated cases where murders and rapes were directly copied from films. But it can be

realised that the visual media is a powerful tool which can mould human thinking. It can dehumanise human beings and make them more unfeeling and insensitive. or it can reinforce human values and sense of fair play. The media authorities must be aware of their responsibility to try and give women the respect and honours they richly deserve.

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