LGBTQ REPRESENTATION IN KASHMIR'S REGIONAL PRINT MEDIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BEFORE AND AFTER THE SECTION 377 JUDGMENT

Shilpa Tiwari*

ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) issues have become integral to gender identity discourse within the social sciences. Global media increasingly focuses on LGBTQ representations, yet coverage in many Indian regions, including Kashmir, remains limited. This study analyses how Kashmir's regional print media has represented LGBTQ individuals before and after the Indian Supreme Court's judgment annulling Section 377 on September 6, 2018. By examining Kashmir's media role in portraying LGBTQ lives, the study aims to assess how media reports contribute to breaking stereotypes, empowering LGBTQ individuals, and influencing public policies. Data was collected through content analysis of English dailies from June 2018 to December 2019, using simple random sampling, and interviews with media practitioners and LGBTQ campaigners in Kashmir. Findings indicate minimal media coverage of LGBTQ issues, with a positive tone towards transgender individuals and a negative or neutral tone towards LGBQ people. The study suggests ways to improve media representation of LGBTQ communities, advocating for coverage free from gender stereotypes and biases.

_____

Keywords: *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer.*

_____

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) issues have become an essential part of gender identity discourse in the social sciences. Despite the global rise in media attention towards LGBTQ representations, coverage in many Indian regions, including Kashmir, remains limited. This study aims to fill this gap by analysing how Kashmir's regional print media has represented LGBTQ individuals before and after the Indian Supreme Court's judgment annulling Section 377 on September 6, 2018. The study explores the media's role in portraying LGBTQ lives, assessing how media narratives contribute to breaking stereotypes, empowering LGBTQ individuals, and helping them claim their rights and societal respect.

Definitions of LGBTQ

LGBTQ refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning individuals. The term "lesbian" highlights issues faced by women attracted to other women, while "gay" denotes individuals attracted to the same sex. "Bisexual" refers to those attracted to both men and women. "Transgender" encompasses individuals whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth. Despite the inclusivity of "LGBT," it often masks the unique experiences of each group, especially those who do not identify strictly as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Media and LGBTQ

The rise of social media has overshadowed traditional media, yet traditional media still plays a crucial role in regions with limited internet access, such as Kashmir. Traditional media often fails to

_____

* Assistant Professor, Pursuing Ph.D- Law, B.Com, LL.B, LL.M., MA (Sociology), Vice- Principal- Haveli Institute of Legal Studies and Research, Silvassa, DNH & DD, India.

adequately represent minority groups, including LGBTQ communities, perpetuating stereotypes and negative portrayals. Proper media representation involves accurately depicting individuals and groups, influencing public perceptions and policy.

Context: India and Kashmir

India's diverse cultural landscape has struggled with recognizing LGBTQ rights. The 2011 Census acknowledged transgender individuals, revealing around 4.88 million in India. Despite legal advancements, such as the 2018 decriminalization of homosexuality (Section 377), societal stigma persists. In Kashmir, LGBTQ representation is sparse, with severe societal rejection for gay and lesbian individuals. Despite legal progress, local acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ rights in Kashmir remain limited.

Rationale of the Study

While research on LGBTQ populations in India has grown, many areas, including Jammu and Kashmir, remain understudied. This study aims to explore media representation of LGBTQ individuals in Kashmir, particularly post-Section 377, promoting more sensitive and inclusive media practices to influence public policy and societal attitudes.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by several relevant theories:

- **Social Constructionist Theory of Representation (Stuart Hall, 1997)**: Meaning is socially and culturally constructed through language and representation.

- **Framing Theory (Erving Goffman, 1974)**: Media frames shape how audiences perceive information, involving agenda-setting and emphasizing certain aspects to influence public opinion.

- **Theory of Social Stigma (Erving Goffman, 1963)**: Stigma involves discrediting attributes that lead to social rejection and discrimination.

- **Queer Theory (Teresa de Lauretis, 1991)**: Challenges binary gender norms and heteronormativity, emphasizing fluidity in gender and sexuality.

- **Feminist Theory (Elaine Showalter)**: Examines gender inequality and the socio-political dynamics of power and oppression.

- **Spiral of Silence Theory (Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, 1974)**: Individuals are less likely to express minority views due to fear of isolation, influenced by mass media.

- **Muted Group Theory (Edwin and Shirley Ardener, 1975)**: Dominant groups control communication, silencing marginalized groups like women and LGBTQ individuals.

Methodology

Data was collected through content analysis of English dailies from June 2018 to December 2019, using simple random sampling, and interviews with media practitioners and LGBTQ campaigners in Kashmir. The analysis focused on how media coverage varied before and after the Section 377 judgment, examining themes, language tone, and the placement of news stories.

Findings and Analysis

- **Overall Coverage**: Only 2.25% of sampled media content addressed LGBTQ issues, with most coverage focusing on the transgender community (54.9%).

- **Content Analysis**: A positive tone was noted towards transgender individuals (68.18%), while coverage of LGBQ people was more negative (18.18%) or neutral (13.64%).

- **Thematic Focus**: Major themes included legal rights (53%), human rights (13.7%), and political aspects (7.8%).

Discussion and Conclusion

The study found limited and selective coverage of LGBTQ issues in Kashmir's regional newspapers, reflecting broader societal stigmatization and media agenda-setting practices. Despite the Indian Supreme Court's landmark ruling on Section 377, there was no significant change in media coverage of LGBTQ issues. The research highlights the need for improved and sensitive media representation of LGBTQ communities, advocating for coverage free from gender stereotypes and biases to influence public perceptions and policy positively.

Recommendations for Further Research

- **Survey-Based Research**: Explore perceptions of stigmatization and heteronormativity among both heterosexual and queer people in Kashmir.
- **Ethnographic Study**: Investigate media consumption among LGBTQ individuals in Kashmir to understand their perspectives.
- **Expanded Media Analysis**: Examine the role of television and radio in covering LGBTQ issues in Kashmir.

By delving deeper into the dynamics of media representation, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of LGBTQ visibility and the socio-political landscape in Kashmir.

References

1. Bashir, A. (2018). Transgender Women in the Kashmir Valley Dream of a Day When Society Honors Their Identity and Rights, 1–8

2. Dr. Khushboo R. Hotchandani (2017) Problems of transgender in India: a study from social exclusion to social inclusion in Gondia International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences 4(4), 73

3. John, D. (2017). Living a Life of Exclusion Being a Transgender in Modern India. Studio, K. L. (2018). Gender Crisis, (46), 1–5.

4. Khan, S. I., Hussain, M. I., Parveen, & et,al (2009). Living on the extreme margin: social exclusion of the transgender population (hijra) in Bangladesh. Journal of health, population, and nutrition, 27(4), 441.

5. TG Issue Brief, UNDP, VC. Dec. 2010 Titled "Hijras/Transgender women in India: HIV, human rights and social exclusion.

❑⭕❑