

"Media reinforcing old perceptions of women"

Kanimozhi says women largely portrayed as pin-up girls or in traditional social roles

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: Large sections of the media continue to reinforce traditional perceptions of women instead of seeking to empower them, Kanimozhi, MP, said on Monday.

"The media largely portrays women as pin-up girls or in traditional social roles," she said, addressing journalists, students and women's rights activists at a seminar on women empowerment and the media. "The media, and society as a whole, is confused with the new woman who has broken free of traditional barriers. Whether they are politicians or journalists, we still don't know how to place them."

Ms. Kanimozhi attacked the media for focussing more on what a celebrity wore, or didn't wear, instead of highlighting social problems. "The media made a big controversy about the length of [actor] Shriya's skirt... It is her personal issue. The hypocrisy here is why didn't they raise the question when this happens in a film? In a film, the less she wears, the happier they are." She said the current trends in advertising represented "a mis-

sed chance" to change how the next generation perceived women by constantly emphasising physical beauty, objectifying women and portraying them in traditional social roles. "In an ad for fairness cream or talcum powder, even an educated woman can find her salvation only after she becomes fair, and not in her intelligence," she said. "The media reinforces these notions because they believe it sells and that is what people want to hear."

She said while the media had an "extra responsibility" to change the way people looked at women, newspapers and television serials were still reinforcing traditional perceptions. "In any TV serial, every five minutes a woman is slapped or given a sermon about how she should behave," she said. "There are more women making these serials, but nothing has changed."

The Draupadi Trust organised the seminar at the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. M.S. Swaminathan, chairman of the foundation, called for a "widely accepted gender code" for the media to address the negative portrayal of women.



RAISING A POINT: M. S. Swaminathan, chairman, MSSRF, with Neera Misra, chairperson, Draupadi Trust, and Kanimozhi, MP, at a seminar in Chennai on Monday. - PHOTO: K.V. SRINIVASAN