SECTION II
WOMEN AS AUDIENCE
OF
INDIAN ELECTRONIC MEDIA
Mere introduction of a technology like Television or Radio does not ensure its access to the intended audience. Media access is dependent upon a variety of factors like social, cultural, economic and political. This is especially true for disadvantaged groups like women, especially in Indian context. Cultural barriers, domestic duties and other taboos come in the way of women being able of view television or have access to television viewing.

Studies specifically dealing with television reveal the conflicts that can arise within the family on the choice of programmes and the difficulty women have in perceiving the home as a place of entertainment. These studies reveal women's resistance to the media in two forms. The first is the establishment of alternative media that correspond more fully to women's aspirations. The second is the unorthodox use some women manage to make of stereo typed products. Studies on women & technology note that the effects of technology on women are mainly undesirable. The quality of access to technology for men and women caused by the value system and underlying decisions affecting the introduction of most technology, the use of technology as an instrument of increased oppression, the meager impact of the different technologies on the division of household duties etc. are some of the findings of such studies.

The day to day life of women differ in all aspects-social, cultural, economic and political. Even when it comes to leisure activities, interests and tastes we find difference between women and men. Television viewing preferences are no exception.

The basic idea of this section is simple. To know more about the social and cultural frames of reference of different audience groups and how these differs between groups.

UNDERSTANDING TELEVISION AUDIENCES

"It you want to use television for teaching somebody something you have first to teach them how to use television" (Umberto Eco. 1979).

Audiences are established by television institutions and programmes, but at the same time they exist independently as specific groups with particular social and economic status, such groupings are themselves the product of social variables like class, race, gender age & locality. They help to determine the particular understandings which audiences bring to television. So audiences have a dual function. Programmes make audiences by calling them towards particular pleasures or problems, but audiences also make programmes by interpreting them within specific frameworks of understanding and attitudes.
For effective communication to take place it is important to predict to some extent, who the audience will be, what kind of expectations they may have and in what circumstances they are responding. Because people’s habits and their basic patterns of work and leisure are well established, the scheduling of television programmes can work within these limits. Broadcasters are able to produce programmes with particular groups in mind and to schedule them so that they are transmitted at a time when appropriate viewers are available. Research in this field is capable of identifying sub groups within audiences and relating variables like age, gender and social class to viewing habits. Because audiences can be classified in this way, broadcasters can tailor their programmes for different groups.

HOW ARE AUDIENCES ADDRESSED?
The way audiences are addressed is a product of producers’ notions of who they are and how they are likely to respond. Audience identity is ‘written into’ programmes in various ways, through, for example, tone, pace and vocabulary. Television programmes make a special effort to appeal to particular audience attachments. Audiences are invoked through specific sounds, rhythms and colours. Because of its intimate manner, television appears to address viewers as individuals but it actually uses this appeal to mask the generality of its assumptions.

Audience research is an uncertain business and its relationship to decision making about production is complex. Knowing the size of an audience is not the same as knowing its composition. A crude estimate of the number of viewers watching any particular episode of a television programme disguises the fact that the actual composition of the audience changes from episode to episode (exponential decay means that only 50% of the audience for a specific serial normally watches the next episode.)

ASPECTS OF AUDIENCE MEASUREMENT

Average Audience: Number of people who watched/listened to a programme averaged over its transmission time.

Programme Reach: Number of people who watched/listened to any part of a programme.

Core Audience: Number of people who watched/listened to the whole programme.

Average Daily/Weekly Reach: Number of people who watched/listened to a radio or television station in a particular day.

Audience Share: Average amount of watching/listening for a particular Service expressed as a percentage of all watching/listening

HOW DO AUDIENCES RESPOND?
Audience works upon texts in complex and different ways, just as much as texts work upon audiences (Masterman 1985)
Television viewing always involves mixed audiences. Patterns of television viewing do not depend exclusively on the content or quality of programmes. Many Programmes are watched by accidental viewers. There are many unpredictable variables as well as the more predictable, seasonal, social and cultural ones. Programmes need audiences in order to release their potential for meaning. Personal experiences and individual identities are diverse and programmes therefore have potential for multiple meanings.

![Diagram]

Text ←——— Production ←——— Identity and experience

Audience

Audience watch programmes with existing knowledge and values as a result of which, some kinds of programmes are alien to them.

A general framework for understanding the interaction between audiences and programmes has been developed by Hall (1981). He suggested that all 'readings' of media texts can be defined within the three broad categories of dominance, negotiations and opposition.

Audiences will produce a dominant or 'preferred reading' of a programme if they understand it largely as transmitted.

If they read it in a different way by exploiting contradictions within it and subverting its overt meanings, they are producing an oppositional reading.

If on the other hand, producers and readers do not share the same codes and conventions then misreading or aberrant decoding occurs.

In practice, most readings, are negotiated' between the dominant one and what readers themselves bring to texts.

Interaction between audiences and programmes is not straightforward. It is an unpredictable process and Hall's categories are only a logical framework. They do not equate in a simple way with the different socioeconomic positions of audiences. There is no necessary correlation between demographic or sociological factors and different responses. But some researchers have tried to refine this approach by exploring the 'fit' between the structural positions of television viewers and their actual responses. They have shown how audiences' responses need to be understood in relation to the sub-cultural grouping which define them. The way they approach programmes has an important bearing on the meaning, which the programmes can achieve. Television audiences bring their own views and agenda with them and the programme maker has to address to these audiences with fixed values and prejudices rather than on blank minds.

Studying audiences has progressed beyond taking about them as victims or dupes and should now insist on their central role in the television system. Audiences who are 'media-literate' in terms of understanding how and why
programmes are produced and circulated through media institutions are more familiar with the language and forms of television, will be more sophisticated in their responses to programmes. They will constantly be asking questions about the ways in which different ideas, issues and social groups are represented. As a result greater demand can be made on their involvement and understanding so that more complex programmes can be made with confidence by producers. But these demands will only be sustained if producers take their audience seriously and get to know them well by researching their preferences and responses.

Finally audiences will fulfill their role as active meaning makers not only through their own responses to programmes made by others but also through making their own programmes, either for their own benefit or for the education of others. Audiences will be more than passive consumers of programmes but they will become active users are makers of the own.

Thus according to Bowker 1991, Media education aims to develop systematically audiences initial and creative powers through analysis and production of media artefacts. This will deepen their understanding of the pleasure and entertainment provided by the media. Media education aims to create more active and critical media users who will demand and could contribute to a greater range and diversity of media products.

**INDIAN TELEVISION AUDIENCES**

The TV audiences in India are dominated by an unimaginable plurality and diversity. Plurality not only in vast numbers that television in India should cater to but also in heterogeneous composition of socio-culturally diverse groups of audience. This is due to the fact that their religions and languages, traditional, social and cultural outlooks, economic educational and informational levels differ. Likewise there is the rural and urban divide. In brief, men, women, youth & children with their varying age groups constitute the diversified units of TV viewing masses in India. Furthermore personal preferences of viewers are enormous and sharply divided.

Ronald Frank and Marshall G Greenberg in their book 'Audiences for public Television' have rightly commuted that TV viewing is an extremely flexible means of individual expression"They further add that "patterns of interest change, needs change and media behavior change in response to numerous forces in our society.”

**THE HANDICAPS**

Ever new and ever fresh is the never relenting demand of this medium. What may be considered innovative today becomes stale tomorrow. Naturally it calls for abundant resources, efficient manpower and effective technical backup. The existing constraints – financial technical and others hamper this continuous innovation and upgradation of software.

Secondly as a government controlled department Doordarshan has to do a very tight rope walking in respect to what the viewers ‘want’ and what they
‘need’. The primary channel of Doordarshan Kendras have to continue serving as an agent of social change, harnessing and harmonising all forces and factors for national integration and development.

With the invasion of Satellite channels form abroad, however some sort of reversal of rules of Doordarshan has come to the fore Today we see the domination of entertainment shows but not always in good taste.

Today with such a wide choice available to viewers the competing networks have to introduce newer and fresher programmes otherwise viewers would invariably change channels. Even those loyal to Doordarshan find that most of the high visibility time is marked for news bulletins and topical programmes and sponsored programmes of limited variety and appeal.

Thirdly almost all production centres of Doordarshan are located within urban limits. Most of the TV producers, talkers and participants belong to this cluster as well. Naturally urban trends and Western oriented thinking get reflected on the small screen.

Also since there are a large no of sets in urban and semi Urban areas than in rural parts this has given rise to a sort of semi urban and semi rural treat but in the process neither segment feels satisfied or happy.

Thus we can see that TV communication suffers from a number of barriers which can generally be categorised as ‘Physical’, intellectual ‘Pshychological’ or ‘social’. What is good at sender’s end should be good at ‘receivers end’ as well. If atmospheric conditions, viewing facilities and general environment were not conductive to good and clear viewing even the best of production would cause dis-satisfaction and frustration. The mood of the viewers too is equally important in making them feel interested or disinterested in a particular TV show on a particular day at a particular place.

Also the language used, the intellectual standard maintained, the ideas expounded and the level of understanding expected are other considerations.

The social environment, religious sentiments traditional outlooks personal attitudes and current trends largely influence viewer’s acceptance or rejection of the message-transmitted. A particular programme may be liked in one area but disliked in another or vice versa. Besides our society as a whole is in the process of rapid change. Doordarshan has therefore to be alive to its multi dimensional responsibilities.

It should not be forgotten that the viewer today is highly selective, exclusive and rigid in his or her preference of programmes. It goes to suggest that the software needs, demands and even techniques would have to be closely watched and creatively responded to by all those involved in Television. It is a well-established fact that television in India cannot with stand the new pressures without producing first rate software. Without good innovative software, the very programme structure is bound to tumble, even fail.
REFERENCE:
2. Eco U (1979) can Television Teach? Screen Education.