"Since the time of Adam and Eve no theme has held the attention of story tellers and their audiences more consistently than that of sexuality and the relationship between the sexes. It is multifaceted, ever changing, and so deeply involves everyone emotionally, that few other subjects present such a challenge to sociological analysis. The past century has seen unprecedented changes in the role and status of women in relation to men. The mass media have played their own part in this evolution, creating images which have helped to delineate and define its shifting currents." Margaret Gallagher "Women & men in the media".

The presumed biological and psychological differences between women & men have long been the subject of intellectual speculation and pronouncement. There have been basis on which customs manners and laws have been constructed and justified, research conceptualized and executed. In the 19th century, studies mainly explained the sociological differences between the sexes, but since 1970, against the backdrop of feminist movement interest was diverted to the difference between the genders rather than sexes.

Communication research, like other social science researches also incorporated gender research. According to Lana F Rakow "in communication gender research means being engaged in question about the role of communication in the construction and accomplishment of a gender system".

ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE SOCIETY
Humans have another fundamental needs besides the physical requirements of food, clothing & shelter; the need to communicate with fellow beings. This urge is one of his primary needs and in todays society has become a necessity for survival. This new attitude can be attributed to modernisation, brought by media of mass communications. In real terms it means the newspapers, journals, magazines, paperbacks, including books, radio, television, cinema, dramatical and theatrical performance, even the puppet shows and of course the traditional medium – the word of mouth.

Communication, which initially developed as a means of our basic needs, has now become an important input leading to socio-economic and cultural development of the society. Hence the communication planners are developing strategies to inculcate certain attitudes and induce desirable behavioural changes among the masses. The planners have devised ways and means to lift the messages from the knowledge generating centres and deliver them with persuasion to the users.

Therefore communication media bestow upon all of us "Kaleidoscopic knowledge of national and international affairs. They bless us with faculty
of sound judgement, quick decision making and long lasting nostalgic memories of what we experience, read, view and listen to. And these experiences heard, seen, read or witnessed may change many a life”. M. R. Dua.

Thus communication is an interaction between the communicating individuals and it refers to the use of symbols to achieve common understanding about an object.

THE MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

According to American sociologist Schramm “A mass medium is essentially a working group organised around some device for circulating the same message at about the same time to a large number of people”.

Traditionally the mass media was regarded as “merely a means of transmission. But it is not so much a neutral channel through which a message flows but a distinctive material in which the message is recast.”

By the 1970s, the focus of interest in communication centered towards the mass communication industries, i.e. The people who run them and the effects they have upon their audience.

It short the question originally posed in 1932 by the political scientist Harold Lasswell “who says what to whom and with what effect” became the focus of study.

The field of mass communication is vast and we realize the important part played by the media in education, economic, social and cultural development.

Infact, communicating media are not only recording history instantaneously but they are also greatly instrumental in shaping it. The rate and manner in which the mass media specially the electronic media are expanding both as an industry, as well as a tool for communication, is alarming to quite an extent. The media are probably the most pervasive influences on attitudes and opinions in the modern World. Access to mass media is in fact one of the defining characteristics of modernity, on a global basis in terms of sheer number reached. Other forms of communication cannot compete with words and pictures carried in newspapers television & Radio.

No longer can one just sit back and think of criticism and accusations to heap upon those who control the medium. While there can be no dispute about the potentiality of using television as an effective means for development and change – provided one has the will, it can also be used as a weapon to perpetuate status quo; to let the vocal and powerful few dominate the interests of the silent majority. The possible impact that mass media has, is best understood by all kinds of groups who have access to this medium and who are already exploiting its potential to further their own interests.

THE PROBLEM

The gender gap is a painful reality in the mass media all over the world. But women in Media, particularly in Asia are a disadvantaged minority.
Though they have grown in numbers and gained in visibility it is mainly in
the lower echelons of the media, not in the decision making positions. As far
as the women’s dimension is concerned one cannot help feel despair at the
manner in which women are portrayed on the media.

This, being in spite of all kinds of progressive statements and directives issued
in the highest political offices, in spite of the fact that policy makers agree
in principle, that reports are written and recommendations are given to
change the perilously dependent image of women into a strong and positive
individual who significantly and substantially contributes to the growth of
the nation.

The ways women are presented, misrepresented or unrepresented in the mass
media strongly affect people’s notions on women’s place as it is and as it
ought to be. Scholars such as Hammelink and Pavlic have pointed out that
we need to examine the role of information communication in the lives of
women, the role of women in the information communication profession
and the portrayal of women in the mass media.

Almost seven years ago the Mc Bride commission drew the attention of the
World to this imbalance and the role of the media.

‘Two thirds of the illiterates in the world are women....women need free
access on equal terms to education, social participation and communication,
if they are to share rightfully in solving problems of their societies. But this
access is impeded by traditions, by prejudices based on social customs,
sometimes on religion, by discriminatory laws in certain countries and also
by imposing on women a disproportionate share of the responsibility for
care of home and work on the land’.

It further said “Access to certain professions, to higher paid jobs, and to
senior management positions is generally far from equal.... This World of
communication reflects this inequality.... Journalists dealing with serious
issues and political events are seldom women; only a few women become
editors or hold directing positions”.

But the commission clarified that the media are not the fundamental cause
of the subordinate status of women, nor can it be remedied by media alone.
The causes are deeply rooted in social, economic and political structures, as
well as in the culturally determined attitudes, and solutions must be found
in far reaching changes. However it is within the power of the media either
to stimulate or retard this change to a significant degree.

There are several ways by which the media can influence masses. By
presenting model, offering social definitions, encouraging stereotypes,
confering status on people and influencing behaviour patterns by suggesting
appropriate behaviour, indicating what is approved and what disapproved
and in several other indirect ways. In a country where there are only about
435 literate women to 1,000 literate men the role of television and radio in
influencing change in attitudes can be crucial.
And yet why do the grisly second page reports of bride burning and dowry deaths continue? Why do rape cases described in such graphic details continue to blacken newspaper and our hearts?

There could be more than one reasons for this. The stereotypes that are indoctrined continue to influence us including those in charge of handing media.

Another reason could be lack of actual will to change due to economic pressure by industrial houses whose interests are purely commercial rather than imparting Information, Education and Entertainment.

Thus while our tools of communication have changed and evolved, our conditioning, our value system is still in the primitive ages.

Since women are a part of the social fabric, what affects and benefits women affects and benefits the totality. Decisions taken today for women will be felt by everyone, not just women in years to come.

This in nutshell is the theme of the present study since this researcher is an Indian, based in India, it is but natural that the study concerns itself exclusively with the Indian Electronic media, though a fleeting glance will be cast at the media of the World.

Hence it is an Indian woman's journey through the different aspects of Indian Electronic media, in search of an identity for the Indian women, in and out side media.

In chapters 1, 2 and 3 we first look at the meaning and the need of communication research, then the development of Indian women through time is focussed upon, after which, the myth and the reality of the existence of women is reviewed in terms of media industries in India. Chapter 4 deals with critical review of the existing studies which inspired and instigated the present study, at the same time leading to a fresh approach towards interpretation and application of facts and theories.

Since the main focus of the study is on Indian electronic media, the radio and television in particular, we look at these two media industries individually, which gives an insight into the working of the electronic media in India, in Chapter-5.

In chapter 6, we move on to the research design and here a model of the present research is presented along with the research design outlining the major areas that are the focus of this study i.e.

1. Women as media processors in India.
2. Indian Women as media Audiences.
3. Women as projected on Indian Mass Media.

The 1st section Comprising of Chapters 7-11 is a journey through the Indian media industries, specially the electronic media. This section is based on sample survey which looks at the work experiences of men & women, attitude towards women employees, the obstacles that a woman employee faces, how
to overcome these problems and improve the status of women in the electronic media.

The next section deals with the reach of media among Indian women audiences and how they react to the programmes, how these programmes influence their attitudes and beliefs or if there is any influence at all. Chapters 12-17 focus on these aspects of the study. The final section i.e. is chapters 18-24 are on the oft researched theme of women as projected on the Indian media. It shows the disparity between women's actual lives and that shown on the medium. There is also concern about the stereotyped portrayal of women and the entrenchment of the autonomy differential between men & women through television programmes. Chapter 25 is the final conclusion drawn from the study and finally a few humble suggestions are put forward for the betterment of Indian Media. Though this researcher has tried to reach a definite conclusion through this study there were many deterrents in the way.

The Indian electronic media, being government organisations were hesitant to give out essential information regarding staff lists and audience research reports which they considered as confidential. Many of the respondents refused to even talk, let alone answer a questionnarie although their annonimity was assured. When the information was obtained they were out dated and badly preserved and a lack of efforts to update audience research studies was observed.

As far as the Indian audiences were concerned, due to the advent of Cable TV more and more urban women audiences were switching on to the cable networks, totally disregarding Doordarshan and branding their programmes as drab and unintersting. The rural audiences who did not have access to cable did watch Doordarshan but very infrequently and for a very small time. A large number of listeners did not listen to radio at all.

Attempts have however, been made to make this study comprehansive and conclusive and the presentation of this report flawless. In spite of that, there may be some information gaps and typographical errors which are purely unintentional.

This researcher sincerely hopes that this study will not be a mere thesis report gathering dust on the shelves of the library, but will be a useful document and an inspiration for the future researches and policy makers. Only then will the main objective of this study i.e. to find an independent identity of the Indian women in the electronic media, be fruitful.

REFERENCE