CHAPTER 6
THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

According to Wilbur Schramm “A Mass medium is essentially a working group organised around some devise for circulating the same message at about the same time to a large no of people”

Traditionally the Mass media have been regarded as merely means of transmission” by Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel. But it is not so much a neutral channel through which a message flows, as it is a distinctive material in which message is recast.

The early phase of mass Media studies believed that media could shape opinions, mould behaviour and even serve as a panacea for a host of individual and social problems.

Gradually this theory gave way to a new receiver centered paradigm in which the emphasis shifted to interacting individuals together creating meaning. Culture was considered to be an important variable among groups. During the 1960s the media was regarded as a tool of the elite to mould the masses.

“For them patterns of communication and media organisation were inherent in a given social structure and thus change could not be effected simply by changing the message of powerful media but required a more equitable distribution of social power”. Robert White.

The Marxist ideology on the other hand regards the mass media as an instrument of social and ideological control by the ruling capitalists class to maintain status quo and inhibit class consciousness among the working class.

THE FEMINIST MEDIA STUDIES
Simone de Beauvoir in her book ‘The second sex’ defined women not only through her differences in the male norm but also ‘a second sex’ a lesser being. In the early feminist researches this “otherness” was illuminated and the main objective of feminist research was to be tool in the empowerment of women.

In theoretical terms feminist studies were always based on exchange of theories with other related subjects thereby enriching the experimental studies and crossing the academic and national borders. These studies have therefore gone on to show that the complexities of modern feminist research cannot be understood by a single master theory.

Among the experimental media studies two divisions can clearly be observed. Those based on previous textual studies: for example the feminist studies of soap opera were based on reworking of classical film theories.
Reception site: It is formulated that the home plays a vital part as a material and symbolic site of media reception. In sociological studies there is a focus on family as a locus of research and feminists media researchers based their studies on this unit. Feminists have both revived and reworked these traditions, they have illuminated women's unpaid work in the home, they have stressed the importance played by informal network and the intimacies of family life, just as they have deconstructed the discursive normality of the nuclear family, that for example often determines how television editors schedule prime time flow.

Feminist television studies have had particular impact in two specific areas.
1. Content analysis of Television programmes.
2. Their relation to the study of audience, towards the later stages a third important aspect of the research came into being i.e.
3. The study of female media processors.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE FEMINIST RESEARCH

Though in Britain and U.S. Feminist Television criticism began about 15 years ago it is still a comparatively recent phenomenon in India. To get an overall conclusive picture of the research study it is essential to know the type of research methodology that is followed in a particular study along with the specific direction in which the particular study will establish itself. This is a common procedure and an important part of the study undertaken. But what is not taken into account is the persona of the feminist television critics and their relationship with the female viewer. This relationship, their identity and difference, is one the most interesting productions of feminist television research.

Charlotte Brunsdon in her study 'Identity in feminist television criticism' constructed a typology which is based on the conceptualisation of the relationship between the feminist research and the common women.

a) Transparent – no others
b) Hegemonic – non feminist women others.
c) Fragmented – everyone an other

Each of these categories is defined through the relationship between the feminist and her other – the ordinary women, the non-feminist woman, the housewife, the television viewer.

TRANSPARENT

This category believes in the shared sisterhood of all women having common gender specific experiences and are subjected to global patriarchal subordination. In this typology there is no 'otherness' between feminist and the common women and the appropriate pronoun of the research is we. This tendency is clearly represented by the British collection on women in the media, 'Out of focus'.

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HEGEMONIC
This is the most common position within the feminist television criticism. Here the feminist researcher is markedly differentiated from her other, the ordinary woman, the housewife or the viewer. Here the researcher places herself or himself on a higher pedestal than the ordinary woman and tries to interpret the viewers' likes and dislikes through the feminist intellectual framework. An excellent example of this kind of relationship projected in Carol Lapate’s article and Tania Modleski’s influential essay ‘The search for tomorrow in today’s soap operas’ where she writes:

“Clearly women find soap operas eminently entertaining and an analysis of the pleasure these programmes afford can provide feminists with ways not only to challenge this pleasure but to incorporate it into their own artistic practices”. She goes on to add “Indeed I would like to argue that soap operas are not altogether at odds with an already developing though still embryonic feminist aesthetics.”.

FRAGMENTED
The third relationship is called fragmented because it assumes the possibility that there is no necessary relationship between these two categories. The research as well as the viewers have separate identities and are on equal footing with each other. The best example is Ang and Hermes’ radical review of the use of gender in which they suggested to do away with the fixed figure of ‘women’ and went on the argue that ‘any feminist stand point will necessarily have to present itself as partial, based upon the knowledge that while some women sometimes share some common interest and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal”.

Brunsdon thus concludes that in the early year most of the feminist researches were transparent, with further development they became Hegemonic but as for as modern feminist research in concerned most if not all are fragmented.

RESEARCH MODEL
The present research model is a study which trifurcates into three different aspects.

This study focuses on.

1. Women (or lack of) in the electronic media or women as media processors their views and insights.
2. Women as audiences of electronic media – How they interpret and are influenced by the electronic media.
3. Women as they are portrayed on electronic media—whether they are stereotyped or harbinger of changes in the society.

Although loosely based on Tuchman et al’s conceptualization of research, the model has been modified substantially. According to Harold Lasswell—media transmit social heritage, dominant cultural values and sex roles from
one generation to the next. With these assumptions in mind Gaye Nuchma established a major hypothesis.

1. The mass media reflect dominant societal values in a symbolic manner, and therefore offer programmes that will appeal to the largest audience.
2. Women are subject to symbolic annihilation in the media, i.e., condemnation, trivialisation or absence. This symbolic annihilation is the most dangerous on TV because the audience consists of both sexes and all ages.

Her study supported both hypotheses. The potential model traces the symbolic annihilation of women in the media in the interinstitutional context via the

Communication Channel

**TELEVISION**

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scarcity of female processors to cause change particularly in male dominated news definitions and female lack of access to the process, secondly via the scarcity of dominant female images in the media, finally the devastating effects of symbolic annihilation are dramatized by the studies of agenda setting and television socialization.

**MEDIA PROCESSORS**

Women as media processors have been studied generally via historical, descriptive, narrative but more recently in a more analytical sociocultural context. Women in media are few and fewer are women in positions of power and hence the male media managers disregard the concerns of women. Does this mean that women reporters, editors or producers are not generally party to symbolic annihilation of sex or that a mere increase in number will dramatically improve the woman’s perspective in media? The answer is not simple and this is what we have set out to find.
PROJECTION
The aim is to find out how women are projected on the media both print and electronic. Among print media there are newspapers, magazines and women’s magazines whereas in electronic media there are TV & Radio. The serials and soaps are analyzed and the news in also dissected. Here the difference in definition of news between men and women and the Access of news among men & women will be separately analyzed.

AUDIENCE CONTEXT
Media does not produce or originate news but media certainly highlights certain news at the cost of others. It sets the agenda and decides what has to be disclosed and what not, thereby influencing peoples minds. The media’s projection of images whether stereotypic or innovative affects the attitude of audience, thereby affecting social interactions and social customs gradually. Therefore television can slowly influence people by repeatedly projecting a certain image. All this and more will have to be looked into.

REFERENCE :