CHAPTER I

A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT.
In the present chapter we shall begin to explore the historical trends in role of women in shaping society and Nation. We will try to find out how women’s role has changed over a period of time in historical perspective. As society has developed in other fields defined roles for its members have also gone for perceptible changes. For example, in the ancient society women enjoyed the freedom of education, it was deprived to them in the post vedic era. Beginning with dynamic contribution to society by women, we have witnessed a time when women were reduced to secondary status in all spheres of life. Their role was defined narrowly and they were forced into subordination. Women were deprived of freedom of choice in any sphere of life. Decisions about their lives, were taken by male members of the society. This was more evident in a relatively background society than a modern one. However, the scenario has changed in democratic and scientific society, where emphasis is more on freedom of individual and freedom of choice. Media is basically a mirror of the society in which it operates. Media has been projecting
the characters as they are in any society. In this chapter we are attempting to go into the historical background of growth of media and its overriding concerns in and for society. India, with its unique social structure and varied cultures has been a dream field for sociological studies. Women as a social category and economic class have fascinated the researchers. Women have been studied in their various perspectives for understanding their role and status in Indian society. With all its cultural diversity provides us with a fertile ground for the study of women. At present we know relatively little about Indian women due to the tendency of researchers either to exclude them from analysis, or to focus only on limited samples of women who are not necessarily representative of women in the wider society. A more integrated approach to the study of women would greatly enhance our understanding of her position in Society. Studies of women have typically focussed on attitude and beliefs without reference to actual behavior and without careful delineation of the relevance of important social cultural variables such as religion, caste,
region, family structure or systems of kinship and marriage. Such knowledge is essential for the understanding of the special problems of women in Indian society and would seem to be a prerequisite for arriving at solutions and policy decisions meant to alleviate these problems and to create an atmosphere of greater equality.

THE STUDY OF WOMEN AS A ‘CATEGORY’

This brings us to a question "to what extent can women be studied as a separate category?" There are many who argue that women cannot be studied in isolation but should always be studied in relation to men. The underlying thesis is that "women" exists as a category, whether biological or social, only when considered in relation to its natural counterpart "man" otherwise, there is no justification for selecting sex as a category for analysis.

In a passage written more than 25 years ago, Margaret Mead argues for the integrated approach in words that seem relevant to debate today.
"We are passing through a period of discrepancies in sex roles, which are so conspicuous that efforts to disguise the price that both sexes pay are increasingly unsuccessful. Only if we perpetuate the habit of speaking about 'the position of women' in a vacuum will we fail to recognise that where one sex suffers, the other sex suffers also. As surely as we believe that the present troublesome problems of sex adjustment are due to the position of women alone, we commit ourselves to a long series of false moves...."

Adding mounting confusion to the difficulties born of a changing world climate of opinion, a shifting technology and an increasing rate and violence of the cultural change.¹

In the same set of essays Mead demonstrates that there are hardly any sex linked aptitudes or abilities which are universally acknowledged. In all societies there are certain aptitudes and abilities which are considered typically male and others which are considered typically female but these vary from culture to culture and what may be considered an innate ability of females in one culture may be considered an innate
ability of males in another. Devaki Jain has approached the same problem, arguing in essence that one's approach to the formulations of a problem depends on one's belief regarding the natural relationship between men and women in society. She goes on to contrast feminist who deny that biological differences can be extended to aptitudes with those persons who hold that they can be research formulations. Thus depends, she argues, on whether women are considered similar to or different from men.

There is certainly need for a more integrated approach to the study of women in India, as elsewhere. Nonetheless, the most popular approach to the study of women in India has been to isolate categories of women for study on the basis of certain shared characteristics. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach deserve some mention.

The most widespread sampling technique among sociologists is to select a random or stratified sample of women from certain offices, professions or universities in order to measure the changing roles and attitudes of women.
The reason for selecting women from offices, professions or universities is that it is assumed that these are the women who are in the forefront of changing roles and attitudes within the wider society and who are or will be leaders of public opinion. Thus women who pursue higher education and/or modern occupations are considered both an index of change and predictors of trends among women in the wider society.

Unfortunately the authors rarely present evidence in support of these underlying assumptions. "It is interesting to note for example, that employment of women in nearly all fields has registered a downward trend for more than a decade". Thus it would be seen that increases in the general level of education among women have not led to greater employment among women. The question also arises, to what extent educated women, especially those with higher education are leaders of public opinion and therefore just what impact their attitudes and opinions have on the rest of the society?
In this regard one might point to the responses of married students in Goldstein’s study most of who claim to keep their educated opinions to themselves in order to avoid conflict with their husbands and their husband’s families.

Another shortcoming is a failure to delineate carefully the traditional attitudes and practices against which change is presumably measured. As will be argued below, these may vary from region to region, and within a region from caste to caste. While some studies report a general caste and income level of the respondents or the respondent’s fathers, little attempt is made to analyse the relevance of these factors to attitudes. According to Kolenda “regional variations may actually be more important than caste variation within a particular region in statistical prevalence of the joint family”\textsuperscript{5}. This, Rhoda I Goldstein suggests is due to regional differences in the institutionalised sanctions women may exercise over their husbands\textsuperscript{6}. Thus the study of attitudes towards the joint family are likely to differ according to region of origin, and education is not necessarily the only factor related to a high
incidence of negative attitudes, especially if the study is done in a region where the joint family is relatively unstable. Furthermore, there is plenty of evidence to show that the joint family, whatever the ideal, was never predominant form, if only due to natural pressures of domestic cycle. Thus one must be careful not to assume that the ideal was in fact the prevalent form, or that marked differences of opinion or attitudes did not exist among the people in the past.

**CHANGING ATTITUDE AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

One of the techniques used to assess the changing attitudes is to compare the attitudes of students to those of their parents. Parents, it is assumed, are representatives of the previous generations' beliefs and practices and students are representatives of the present generations and future practices. Differences between generations are assumed to represent the diachronic change within the wider society. There are a number of problems with this approach that would seem obvious. First, assessment of their parent’s attitude and one might question the reliability of this kind of data. Second, it
would seem that an individual’s position in the life cycle would be important to his or her perspective on such things as joint family living, religion or marriage. Differences in attitudes between generations are not necessarily indicative of historical social change. Those who say they would prefer to live in nuclear family may end up living in a joint family and by the time she has finished college and has children of her own be convinced that the advantages of joint family living far outweigh disadvantages. Thus we may question the extent to which attitudes are accurate indicators of social behaviour. It would be illuminating indeed to follow up these studies of attitudes among students with a study of what the same student actually do and how their attitudes change because of this. Students of attitudes too often stop short of relating attitudes to actual behaviour. Observation technique when combined with interview technique could greatly enhance the value and meaning of such studies. Attitudes towards caste could be contrasted with the caste composition of actual friendship grounds, for example and attitudes towards
arranged marriage could be set against the existing conditions and practices (such as dating) which enhance or limit the possibility of unarranged marriages.

Another problem in studies of changing attitudes and roles is the lack of a clear cut time dimension. In only one study—a study by Pramilla Kapoor comparing the attitudes of working women towards love, marriage and sex—do we get an idea of the changing attitudes of women over a period of time? In 1959 and again in 1969 Kapoor selected a random sample of women from the same offices in Delhi and Agra. Using the same interview structure with both samples she finds considerable change has occurred over last decades. Unfortunately, however, a number of methodological problems lead one to question whether the changes she perceives are reflections of progressive changes in the wider society or just differences between her two samples. The two samples of women, for example, come from very different backgrounds and one wonders if perhaps the growth of the institutions themselves has led to different standards of recruitment or if
changes in the cities in which the offices and institutions are located have led to a different base population from which women are recruited. And since so few of the women in the original sample are included in the 1969 sample one is left wondering what has happened to these women who are no longer employed by these institutions- have they been promoted, have they changed jobs, have they been transferred to another city, or have they left the labour force altogether.

It is unfortunate that studies of women as a category rarely include companions with male students, husbands of female students or working women, or males in similar occupations. A notable exception to this trend is the study of working mothers in white-collar occupations in Madras where interviews with husbands of working and non-working mothers are held regarding both attitudes and actual practice. In most studies however, one is left without a clear sense of the differences and similarities between the male and the female worldview, or the mutual adjustments necessary
between men and women in situations where women go beyond their traditional roles.

**SURVEY RESEARCH**

Finally a word should be said about survey research which includes reports based on census data and other large-scale socio-economic surveys where females are contrasted with males in terms of basic demographic characteristics.

First of all we find the basic problem of the inadequacy of existing categories arising in part from the tendency to adopt categories used in the more urban industrialised societies of the west. Such categories are not necessarily relevant to the Indian situation. For women, the catch all category of house wife or non worker seems inadequate for meaningful analysis or even for an accurate description of the status of women in any society. As Jain⁸ points out “whether or not a women works outside her home or is directly remunerated for her activity are factors not necessarily related to the developmental productive work of Indian women? There is a need to take greater notice of indigenous categories
of work participation rates with regard to both males and females."

Studies based on this type of data are also conspicuous for their lack of qualitative data. "Where correlation and trends are found to exist, caution must be exercised in accepting explanations, which are general in form and based more on guesswork than on solid empirical evidence. Correlation after all does not necessarily imply a casual relationship between two or more factors. Explanations must be based on more intensive research techniques. To give an example it is widely known that females in India have abnormally high mortality rates compared to males. The most common explanation for this discrepancy is that females in India due to their lower status are often more undernourished than males (therefore being more likely to die when ill)\(^9\) and that they are less likely to receive health care when ill". "While these explanations may be correct it is possible that the explanation is far more complicated than this especially if one considers the tremendous variation between male and female
mortality rates in different regions of India, and even different castes in the same regions”

Despite the many methodological problems which researchers have encountered in doing survey research and studies of changing attitudes, they have served a useful purpose. Attitudinal studies give us a qualitative view of society, which is difficult to achieve through other techniques. Survey research of course is tremendously useful in describing trends, in suggesting possible relationships between various factors and in generating hypotheses for further testing. But there is a real need at this stage to redefine categories used. This will lead to the generation of important data that do not exist. There is also a tremendous need for more in-depth studies using qualitative techniques to test hypothesis that have already been generated. The multiplication of studies of women in India should lead naturally to the deeper consideration for their issues, and as more comparative data become available, there is little doubt that scholars will
become more cautious in trying to generalise for all of the society on the basis of such limited data.

**REGION.**

One of the usual ways of organising material on India when discussing the society and culture is on basis of regions – geographic, cultural or historical.

These categories often overlap to a great extent and are used for different purposes and levels of explanations. For Anthropologist, language is usually considered the most important variable in delineating cultural regions since language is the primary means of transmitting culture, especially where low rates of literacy and a well developed oral tradition exists. In India there are four major language families distributed over quite distinct geographic regions. Each of these linguistic areas have been shown to be somewhat unique in the terms of the values and myths associated with women, as well as systems of caste, family, stricture, kinship and marriage- all of which affects the status of women in a fundamental way. Karve writes ‘The linguistic
region possesses certain homogeneity of culture, traits and kinship organisation. The common language makes communication easy, sets the limits of marital connections and confines kinship mostly within the language region. Common folk songs and common literature characterise such an area.¹²

"Thus one might argue that the Bengali speaking women of India have more in common with the Bengali-speaking women of Bangladesh than with women in the other linguistic region of India."¹³ Yalman has argued that "basic structural similarities exists between the people of Ceylon and the people of South India in their beliefs regarding women and this he attributes to the similarities in structure. Smartha Brahmins of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka for example might have more in common with each other in some respects than with Harijans from their own village but Brahmins of the south might have more in common in other respects with non Brahmins of Uttar Pradesh. Thus the importance of regionalism depends very much on the purpose of the research but it should certainly be taken into account when making
generalisations about women based on studies of women in particular regions.”

**RELIGION.**

Religion in India as has been widely acknowledged. Plays an important role in defining the status of women especially regarding belief about their inherent character structure, natural strengths and weaknesses and their rights and obligations towards men, Society and God. The fact that India hosts several major religions each with very different myths, ideologies, belief and ritual practices, suggest that the status of women would vary tremendously of thoughts. Kolenda in a survey of literature on family structure finds distinct differences in the statistical occurrence of joint family households in different regions of India which she attributes to “the regional differences in women’s’ control over certain means of rewarding or punishing her husband for his compliance or non compliance with her wishes”. There are many more studies, which trace the social and cultural similarities and differences in region of South Asia. According
to Andrea M. Singh\textsuperscript{16} “one must be careful to take regional differences into account when generalising about women in South Asian society. One might be able to generalise about women in Bengal and Bangladesh and women in South India and Ceylon more accurately than about Indian women generally. Not to oversimplify the situation one should also remember that most languages in India are part of a pan regional cultural complex in some respects but there are numerous cross cutting factors. These religions include Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrians and Judiasm. Of these, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism originated in India the latter three representing major breaks with Hindu ideology”. As Thapar points out, “Buddhism and Jainism both supported greater freedom for women than did Brahminism”\textsuperscript{17}. One might also add Sikhism to her list.

In an interesting variation on this theme, Furer-Haimendorf suggests that Buddhist “tolerant attitude to sexual laxity might be related to the occurrence of polyandry among
the Buddhists of Ceylon and the Himalayan regions". He stops short of suggesting that Buddhist Ideology is a causative factor in the development of Polyandry, although he considers “Buddhist morality to be permissive of a type of sexual arrangements unacceptable to the more puritan Hindu Moralists”.

In addition to ideological differences between the major religions regarding the position of women in society, there have been different religious streams within the major religions, which should be taken into account. The Bhakti movement in Hinduism for example offered women a larger role in Hindu worship and greater freedom and equality than they had enjoyed previously. Unfortunately, however, we have very little empirical evidence to suggest how widely the effects of such movements were felt in society, or how they affected the status of women in their secular role. In a study of South Indian migrants in a neighbourhood of Delhi, Singh found out that four out of nine women who participated individually in voluntary associations attended female bhajans
association. These women however, represented only a very small proportion of South Indian women in the neighborhood and found little evidence that such participation affected their status as women in a broader sense.

Another aspect of religion, which may be of no small importance in India, is the difference between popular Hinduism and Sanskritic Hinduism in their consequence for women. The tendency of those discussing religious ideology beliefs and attitudes is to assume that the norms of what we might call the “high religion” are equally applicable to all people. It is well known however, that there has long been differential access to religious knowledge among Hindus with Brahmins having almost total monopoly over access to the Sanskritic tents and the right to interpret them. In popular Hinduism there is an emphasis on female deities, spirit possession and super natural cures, which are quite different from the beliefs and practices of brahmanical Hinduism. Harper notes the high incidence of spirit possession among young married Brahmin women in a Mysore village and
suggests that possession represent one means of coping with the tremendous strains inherent in this structural position. (Other solution includes fasting and suicide)\textsuperscript{22}. The consequences of most of these popular beliefs and practices for women in the society, however, are not adequately understood.

According to Nor Yalman “in the realm of natural beliefs and practices two other important topics are – the first – the concept of pollution. Beliefs and practices regarding pollution in India have received wide attention by Anthropologists many of who consider concepts of female susceptibility to pollution to be central to the structure of the whole society”\textsuperscript{23}. The second aspect of ritual, which has so far received very little attention, is the different roles played by males and females in ritual performances. It appears that in ritual performances as in many other areas of social life there is a dichotomy between male and female spheres of activity. Labrack suggests “in Hinduism female ritual activity focuses
around the domestic hearth, while male ritual activity involves a more public role". 24.

In only a few ritual activities do men and women participate together, but even then they rarely share an equal ritual role. This is a dimension of religion, which needs more study.

Another question is the extent to which Hindu beliefs and practices have influenced other religions in India. We know, for example, that caste is not limited to Hindu although caste is usually considered a Hindu structure. There is a need to know more about actual beliefs and practices and how they differ from religious ideology among the non-Hindu religions. This is important in trying to assess difference according to religion in the status of women within India as well as when making cross-cultural comparisons.

There are a few studies of women, which have taken religion into consideration, but the treatment has been brief and generally superficial. Census figures and demographic surveys tell us that fertility rate, urban residences and income
differ for the major religions in India, but as yet we do not know the causes of these differences nor their consequences for the status of women. In a study of working mothers in white collar occupations in Madras it was found that Christian women had a much higher rate of participation in white collar occupation than Hindu women and that Muslim women had a much lower rate\textsuperscript{25}. The authors suggest that Christians place fewer restrictions on the activities of woman than other religions and therefore Christian women have acquired more education and vocational training than women of other communities\textsuperscript{26}. Hate found similar religious differences in rates of participation of working women in Bombay and Poona belt offers a different explanation\textsuperscript{27}. She claims that since there is no joint family system among the Christians women work out of necessity or the expectation of the eventual need to be self-supporting\textsuperscript{28}. Both studies attribute the low participation of Muslim women to greater conservatism\textsuperscript{29}. This question calls for more rigorous attention from researchers.
Too often the religious factor is left out altogether. Carmack for example tells us that her sample of Indian women studying at Columbia University includes Christian and Muslim women but goes on to title her book “The Hindu woman” and omits any further reference to the religion of her subjects. In a study of marital adjustments among working women, Kapoor includes non-Hindus in her sample but dismisses it as irrelevant to marital adjustments, in another study she says that she excluded non-Hindus “in order to have a homogenous group for study and also to delimit the scope of the study” but elsewhere she says she included six Buddhists and Jains in her definition of Hindu since these religions came under the jurisdiction of Hindu Marriage ACT 1955.

**CASTE**

There are a number of factors related to caste in India, which clearly affect the position of women in society. Srinivas and Beteille suggest that among the poor and low castes the relationship between men and women is more egalitarian than among the higher castes and that when lower castes try to raise
their status through sanskritisation one of the consequences is lowering of the status of women making them subordinate to men in moral, economic and ritual terms. Strokes, in her study of a Bihar village found Harijan women more open, expressive, joking and willing to mix freely than upper caste women. One of her informants a Dai (midwife) in fact expressed very little envy of upper caste women who according to her have nothing to do except fight with each other. Thus it would seem that the differences between high caste women and low caste women are great.

There are a number of caste related factors in addition to the general concept of the relative freedom of women that can be gleaned from the literature, but of special importance are differences in kinship and marriage practices. A very interesting example of how these may differ within a particular region is the case of the Nayars and Namboodiris of Kerala. In a traditional society, Nayars maintained a matrilineal system of descent whereby status and property were inherited through the maternal line. They also practised
notolocal residence where brothers and sisters stayed together with their mother, mother’s sisters and their children and maternal uncles, husbands had visiting privileges only. Namboodiris Brahmins on the other hand maintained a strict patrilineal system with inheritance passing through the male line and patrilocal residence where only the eldest son was allowed to marry and inherit property. Other sons were free to form alliances with Nayar women in marriage ceremonies, which were considered legitimate by the Nayars but not recognised by the Namboodiris. Among other things this led to large number of Namboodri women who were unable to marry. Thus there was a structural relationship between these two castes in which the position of women was entirely different while this is probably a unique case there is little doubt that differences in kinship system, marriage practices and patterns of residence among castes in other regions of India have very important consequences for the status of women. We also find caste differences throughout most of India relating to the giving of dowry or bride price in
marriage, both of which have very limiting consequences for women. The ease with which divorce may be achieved the possibility of remarriage for widows and divorces the extent to which women are allowed to move out of their house or caste cluster the possibility of working and what types of work are considered appropriate to the women of the caste – all these things are defined by caste and are basic to the considerations of the position of women in society.

Of course these things may also be subject to the influence of other factors such as religion or region. Nearly all castes in South India, for example, cross cousin marriage acceptable while hardly any North Indian caste would dream of such a marriage as Kolenda points out, the incidence of bride price, divorce, and remarriage varies in practice from region to region, despite differences in the ideal among castes within one region still\(^{36}\), it is important to consider caste related differences when sets out to discuss social change.

Depending on caste tradition, actual change may be in two different directions or even irrelevant one might expect
that even among educated women caste tradition would be an important factor in shaping attitudes.

Another interesting question regarding caste is the extent to which caste background affects the woman’s self image and influences her selection of a role model or reference group. As Beteille and Srinivas point out when the lower and middle castes imitate the Brahmins the position of women may be adversely affected\textsuperscript{37}. But it is not at all certain that Brahmins provide the only or even the most common reference group for non-Brahmins women. It is possible that as the Brahmins are progressively stripped of their traditional powers, other important role models will emerge. In fact, one can question the validity of their model in the past in North India where Brahmins have long occupied a lower status in society than Brahmins in south. Another important question is who provides the reference group for Brahmin women? It is interesting to note that Both Goldstein\textsuperscript{38} and Vreeda-de-stuers\textsuperscript{39} in studies of changing attitudes among female college students found Brahmin women constituted the majority of
their sample. Thus the change in attitudes they found are all the more interesting for what it tells us about Brahmins women in modern society. All this suggests that the dynamics of upward mobility for females as well as males is more complex than most writers have assumed.

In the urban arena caste continues to operate as an important factor. The caste system – i.e. inter-dependence of castes at the village level may be largely irrelevant to the social life of the city, but caste continues to be a primary maker of social identity. In a study of middle class South Indian in Delhi A.N.Singh found that caste was one of the most important factors in the formation of social networks and in organising voluntary associations. It also appeared to be related to the types of occupation women persue and whether they would work before marriage or after marriage. At the middle class level, however, it was found that only a small portion of women are employed. In a study of lower class migrants, in Delhi which was in progress. A.N.Singh found that a much higher proportion of women were employed. Even
at this level however, caste and region play an important part in determining whether a women will work or not and what type of employment she will take up if she does work. On the other hand traditional caste occupation plays an important role in evaluating the suitability of different types of work and providing training and skills which might be adaptable to the urban situation and on the other hand, caste and village network provide the mechanism through which women are recruited to certain kinds of employment in the city Bell winkle\textsuperscript{43} has discussed these mechanism with regard to Rajasthani contract labour in Delhi and Lubell notes a similar tendency for migrants from certain castes and regions to dominate specific areas of employment in Calcutta\textsuperscript{44}. The importance of caste as a vehicle of employment for women in urban areas needs more study. It is unfortunate that most studies dealing with occupational mobility especially those that contrast traditional village occupations with modern urban occupations focus only on men\textsuperscript{45}. The occupational mobility of women should be considered just as important.
FAMILY STRUCTURE

Studies of women in South Asia have tended to focus on attitudes towards the family and marriage as an indicator of the changing position of women. One of the reasons for this has been the assumption that the forces of modernisation and urbanisation will lead to the breaking down of the joint family as well as an increasing number of unarranged marriages (or at least a larger degree of choice in arranged marriages). Because of this A.N. Singh chooses to discuss some of the aspects of family structure and marriage that might be of particular relevance to the status of women in society.

To begin with it is necessary to take a careful look at the assumption that joint families are on the decrease. A number of recent studies lead us to question this assumption. In a comparison of family structures in a village in 1891, 1958 and 1967 Kolenda found that the joint family if anything is increasing even after she manipulated the data from 1819 to show the maximum number of possible joint families and the modern data to show the minimum number. Singer notes that
among the industrial elite in Madras City the joint family is both structurally and functionally compatible with the requirements of modern industry and urban life\textsuperscript{47}. Other writers have found limited change in the direction of nuclear families but this seems to be conditioned by the extent to which occupation requires geographic mobility rather than purely urban residence\textsuperscript{48}. Nuclear family living may be out of necessity or expediency in such cases rather than the result of changing attitudes or ideas. In A.N. Singh study it is found that a higher incidence of joint families exist in long time Punjabi residents in Karol Bagh most of whom were self employed businessmen than among South Indian Migrants most of whom were in salaried white collar occupation\textsuperscript{49}. Thus it would appear that the pressure of urbanisation and modernisation do not have equal impact or consequences for all segments of the population whether we are speaking of the rural or the urban setting.

The next question then is how do these changes when they do happen affect women and its corollary how do
changes in the traditional position or rules of women affect the stability of the joint family. Most researches have assumed that changes in the attitudes and status of women especially those associated with the pursuit of higher education and the opening of new avenues of employment are related to the breaking down of the joint family. But the evidence of such a direct relationship between attitudes and consequences can be questioned. Kolenda, suggests that a women may exert a deciding influence over joint family living she argues that her bargaining power must be institutionalised in such cultural practices as a wife’s right to a legal divorce bride price negotiation of marriage economic and social support to a couple from the wife’s natal family or lineage.

The key point is whether the husband gets economic or social support from the wife’s kin that might modify or override the advantages of joint family living. She also dismisses the arguments that power derived from making an economic contribution to the family income through working is related to the jointness. Since there is a high incidence of
joint families among cases whose women work in the fields in some regions and not in others. One might add that working women do not necessarily maintain full control over their own incomes. Goldstein found that 77% of the employed women in her sample of highly educated women turned over more than half their earnings to their families. In fact she found that the majority of her respondents whether married or not, felt that education would help them fit into a joint family that it will not cause them to challenge the traditional expectations of obedience to husbands and in laws but will enable them to handle role requirement better.

Whether or not women lives in a joint family however, may have important consequences for her position in society and the opportunities that are open to her. There is no doubt that in many cases joint family living strict the freedom of women (especially younger women) with regard to movement outside the home, decision making in financial matters or running of the household and even in the dress she may wear.
But the nuclear family has its own problems in India when geographic mobility necessitates the establishment of a neolocal residence the joint family may continue to be the ideal carrying with it obligations such as remittances of a significant part of the couples income participation in family ceremonies (sometimes at a great cost if the distance is great) care for the aged and disabled maintenance of supervision of family property and so on. This combined with the lack of other members of the family to share domestic chores and child rearing responsibilities or to provide adult company to alleviate the drudgery of household work may be far more limiting in the end than joint family living.

It sometimes happens, in fact, that joint family living frees women for employment who would otherwise find it impossible to handle both an outside job and domestic and child rearing responsibilities. In the Madras study it was found that half of the women who had once worked but withdrew from employment later did so due to increased childcare and household responsibilities at home. At the lower class level
although it is common for female construction workers and domestic workers to carry at least their youngest children with them to work, joint family living may ease the burden of working women and increase the quality of child and household care. Mody and Mhatre describe a case where a 45 year old women living in a large Bombay slum was looking forward to the arrival of a new daughter in law to free her from the household work and enable her to return to selling vegetables in the market place\textsuperscript{54}. Thus it is not just the younger female members of the joint family who may benefit older women may also find greater freedom. This type of sharing of female role responsibilities appears more acceptable and perhaps more realistic in the Indian setting than the western alternative of shared responsibilities between husband and wife although the Madras study has shown that even in India, husbands of working women participate in household tasks to a far greater extent than husbands of non working women\textsuperscript{55}. Of course it can be argued that as long as domestic and child rearing chores are considered beneath the dignity of
men, women cannot achieve equality. But we must also point to the alternatives of the joint family and for the middle and one aspect of marriage which cuts across the specific systems of kinship and marriage in India and which has been widely discussed in studies of changing roles and attitudes of women, is the system of arranged marriages. Arranged marriages are practiced by nearly all segments of the society, with the partial exception of portions of the Anglo-Indian community who find unarranged marriages acceptable but also practise arranged marriages. It is significant that the Indian view of "Love marriages" is filled with as much awe (if not thinly veiled disapproval) as the western view of arranged marriage. This is clearly an emotion-tinged subject, which makes objectivity difficult. Nonetheless the system of arranged marriage certainly has important consequences for the position of women in society and it seems worthwhile to take note of some of the issues involved.

Recent studies have not found much change in attitudes towards arranged marriage among college students. There is
some evidences in fact that modern women are more in favour of arranged marriages than they were ten years ago. This finding suggests that the system is not necessarily linked to the urbanisation and modernisation.

Higher education however, may have the effect of limiting marital choices for women where it is considered imperative that the upper class women of living full time domestic workers many of whom are men) in the Indian setting which are not usually realistic possibilities for women in the west.

**KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE**

In much of the general theory on kinship and marriage systems it is significant that women are treated as Pawns in the system being “exchanged” or cementing alliances’ between males in the system. Ego, the person from whom descent or marriage patterns are traced is always a male (which is often confusing to female students when personal pronouns are used to describe the action). Anthropologists have even gone to the great lengths to explain how men in matrilineal systems
continue to be the dominant force in the system. In India one can find nearly every system of kinship and marriage which is described in the literature and it would seem to an ideal setting for research into these systems from the female point of view. Nonetheless the large body of literature on the subject which already exists should be examined by any researcher concern with problems relating to the position of women in society or with their changing roles and attitudes\textsuperscript{57}.

Have equal and preferably more education than his wife does\textsuperscript{58}. Still we cannot assume (as most researchers) have that this is a universal norm among the Punjabi Business community in Delhi for example daughters often receives higher education than sons, higher education for males being considered of no great importance in developing business skills and an early entrance into the business than continuing education. Parents of these young men, however, often seek out girls with BAs or MAs who it is expected will bring “culture” into the household and will be better able to guide the children in their studies\textsuperscript{59}. It would seem that factors
related to region caste and occupation need greater consideration in analyzing new trends in arranged marriages.

The system of arranged marriages appears to be at the core of the society's ability to sustain traditional images and roles for women, despite the revolutionary changes in the economic and political spheres of the wider society. Regionalism caste, religion and to some extent even the joint family find reinforcement through this practice. The complex inter-relationship of all these factors is a condition specific to the Indian situation and deserves special attention by those interested in the study of women in the Indian Society.

Television was introduced in India in 1959 (with the help of an UNESCO grant) with the purchase of a 500 watt transmitter at a nominal price from Phillips a multinational corporation. A pilot project set up to study its use was aimed at evaluating TV as a medium of education, rural uplift and community development. Twice a week, hour long programs were telecast to an audience that gathered at specially created TV clubs or community centers in the capital city of
Delhi. Two years later aided by the Directorate of education and the Ford foundation a weekly program created for students of higher secondary schools began to be telecast. It was only in 1965 that regular daily telecasting began in Delhi. In 1975 when a satellite Instructional Television experiment (SITE) was launched a politically cornered Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi imposed emergency, which led to a ruthless censoring of all media. All India Radio and Doordarshan became blatant mouthpiece for the ruling party; and they have since not been able to stigmatize themselves totally in the public eye.

The next phase occurred in 1982 just before the 9th Asian Games were scheduled to be held in Delhi. At the behest of Rajiv Gandhi son of the Prime Minister and a moving spirit behind the preparation for the games, the switch to colour TV was made. Political circles now began to debate liberalisation of India’s economy and the ruling class began to doubt both Gandhian austerity and Nehruvian brand of socialism. The import of TVs was put under open general license and license requirement was waived for sets already
imported. In July 1983 the cabinet Okayed the plan to expand TV networks adding 126 new transmitters for networking through the Indian Satellite system. TV now covered 70% of India’s population and this is where things began to change for women within the electronic media.

During the 1980’s the government controlled electronic media made several affirmative efforts such as focussing the national attention on the girl child, family welfare and concern for pregnant and lactating mothers and mothers of school going children. But programs promoting this mind set were still formulated firmly within the traditional model of integrating women into a given developmental framework. Most of these attempts as a result became what the filmmaker Deepa Dhanraj calls the “add women and stir” formula. They were doomed to fail for the same reasons that the Delhi centric approach to the development strategies for the government had not succeeded. In 1986 when a panel interviewed the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi for Doordarshan TV his stock reply to women’s concern about high mortality and low
literacy rates among girls and women was that in his family they valued girls and that he did not subscribe to the patriarchal mind set. As though what the women of the Gandhi family could expect and get would be naturally replicated in the lives of millions of India’s women living below the poverty line and haunted by endemic joblessness. By the end of the interview it was clear that even this very suave and liberal young; Prime Minister who had ushered in liberalisation and the latest in electronic media, still harboured the typical upper middle crust Indian males top down assumption that Indian women are a uniform group with uniform needs and that age old differences of caste, class and social structures that operate and segregate one group of women from another are all but gone thanks to liberal minded men.

It was around the late 1990s when women like Mrinal Pande began to be mobilised around not just issues of rape, dowry, murders and family violence but also pure professional concerns. Within two years many members of Indian
Women’s Press Corps saw many of its members shift base to the electronic media since it seemed somewhat more free of the biases against women and also offered a much wider viewership. This was the time when CNN’s pioneering effort to show live the gulf war in the 1990s brought home to media mandarins in India the technological feasibility of global satellite based TV. Soon after this the Hong Kong based consortium of Companies launched STAR) Satellite Television for Asia Region) and started beaming programs through five channels via Satellite (Asiaset). And star plus, MTV, Prime Sports, ZEE TV and BBC world service entered Indian Middle class homes through cable network worked by private operators who mushroomed magically almost overnight in all the major cities of India.

Today satellite and cable television in India is a big economic activity and offers wide ranging choices from global to local – to all those who can subscribe to it. With the opening up of the urban markets to private TV channels several women CEOs have begun to be visible, true, some of
them have inherited their position by birth, but their clout enhances women’s worth in Media. Among them is Shobhana Bhartia whose homeTV in collaboration with the person Grovy also gave a piggyback ride to the BBC news in Hindi, Malvika Singh of Business India TV International whose BITV was launched with loud fanfare; Madhu Trehan of the living media group whose weekly news program news track has since moved from government run Doordarshan to StarTV and Karuna Samtani who helped Subhas Chandra Goel launched the most successful private TV channel ZEE TV in Hindi.

The government run Doordarshan in the early 1990s also had a formidable trio of women CEOs Urmila Gupta, Vimla Bhalla and Indira Mansing. And among the private producers who produced programs for Doordarshan and can be deemed successful even by commercial standards of the media. Nalini Singh, Neeraja Guleri and Manju Singh proved women’s worth in the field of production. Then there is the cluster of women anchors for chat shows, from the
redoubtable Maneka Gandhi (with her ecological concerns and vegetarianism) to Mallika Sarabhai, Kiran Kher and Sanjana Kapoor who have chatted with an urban studio audience on taboo topics such as AIDS homosexuality and extramarital love. Despite the deprecations this proliferation’s of women in media usually draws. It is clear by now that similar woman in various fields is matching their daily (or weekly) rebellions and the dreams of equality that they represent. Their alternatives may be more restricted but in these programs we can see a glimmer of a democratic ethos germinating within homes. It would, therefore, be an invested snobbery to play down their importance.

In India of the late 1990s the whole question of privately owned electronic media and its relevance to wider social concerns has taken a new colouring. The first point that stands out now is that contrary to the illusions of mass people (and women are no exception). TV producers, even those who are making films on socially relevant themes and 50 years of India’s Independence exists to make money. As that sly fore
Orsan Welles said to practise his or her art a poet needs a pen, a painter needs a brush, but a filmmaker needs an army. Even with several cost cutting measures, the Indian producers of software for TV need this army just like their counterparts abroad. So whatever, we like it or not, money making is the heart of the matter in TV programming today with DTH telecasting round the corner, perhaps mergers of local producers with foreign companies will take place.

The second point that recent surveys reveal is that given the reach of TV into nearly 80% of India’s homes media priorities and primetime will be decided not by the small, urban centric, English speaking elite but by those who speak in Indian languages.

The ineffectiveness of English as a language of popular discourse in India has been revealed when some of the BBC’s target oriented broadcasts and popular soaps such as Santa Barbara or Baywatch, failed to attract high viewership rattling on the cable TV networks in India. Inspite of glib promotion and excellent technical quality and inspite of being dubbed in
Hindi all these failed to attract audiences even a quarter as large as those commanded so effortlessly by serials based on song and dance sequences from Hindi Films, musical games, shows based on Hindi film songs, and Hindi, Telugu, Tamil and Bengali films.

This fact, ironically helps women English has for long segregated classes and genders in India more firmly than caste or colour. The percentage of Indian women who could read and write English has never been more than 1% of their total population. But since English speakers almost always come from an upper crust well-to-do-urban class, their visibility and assertive loquaciousness has always been quite disproportionate to the actual size of this elite. TV has shattered the myth that English alone can get communicators a direct access to the average Indian mind. For years, the highest level government policy papers promoting women, feminist disclosures on women’s issues and economic analysis of women’s actual contribution to the nation’s economy have all chosen to use the English language as their vehicle. As a result
not only 99% of our women but also a substantial number of grassroots social workers and activists have had little or no dialogue with our top government policy makers, feminists, economists and social scientists. Even the most eminent of India’s economists and social scientists and Anthropologists have been getting their data collected by (a largely unvetted army of) young researchers whose only qualifications are mobility within the geographic area being researched and a certain facility with the local languages.

Suddenly what the pressures of academic research of five year plans or just plain common sense could not change for 50 years commercial TV and its TRP (Television Rattling points) ratings have begun to challenge effectively. TRP ratings have revealed how home based, near illiterate women may also have an astute and shrewd perception of their rights as consumers of TV and may reject or force families to reject programs that are outside of their own lives. Also, now given a chance, illiterate and semi literate women workers such as those of SEWA (Self-employed women’s Association,
Ahmedabad) may even with little training be able to handle sophisticated cameras and video recorders and record the stories of their lives. The latter fact has still to find takers in the commercial world, but the psychographic profile of the average women TV viewers has suddenly become a Holy mantra to marketers who have at long last begun to look closely and with renewed suspect at non English speaking, non assertive Indian women in lower middle class homes.

In visualising the post 1990s mass communications environment the marketers have realised that they need as never before, to give a local habitation a gender and a name to the masses. Most Indians do not know English and would not care for technical sophistication beyond a point. Nearly 300 million men and women in the six northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana want their programs only in Hindi.

However, the west created and largely west perfected electronic media that is required to produce the saleable and commercially profitable TV programs in Hindi including news
bulletins still uses an information technology largely locked up in English. Like the holy scribe or the fearsome Brahmin, the ruling elite has once again encrypted vital information in an alien tongue. Information that decoded could empower millions of women. As the Indian press television and radio congratulate themselves on their commitment to free speech they have to remember that it is not always the ideas that create the market but often vice-versa. And in as much as market is functioning increasingly through web servers and websites, the webmaster may quietly replace the bureaucrats or the merchants, who were at least known devils.

Of course, there is something healthy about the fact that many such shibboleths from India's bureaucratically ridden and politically manipulated marketing past are being destroyed. If only for the sake of profit, our media barons are beginning to look where women and the Indian languages have stood for 50 years forlorn and neglected. The results of the electronic revolution are also reaching the anglicized marketing gurus and advertising executives who have trained in Europe and the
United States and had earlier looked at women and vernaculars as avoidable down market entities. We are all now learning to see culture as something decentralized, flexible and very, very mobile. At this moment of historical vulnerability in the traditional Asian Ethos, if tackled sensitively and with honesty, can help women achieve freedom.

Even a limited study of popular programs on both Government controlled Doordarshan and cable TV shows that the dominant image of the women constructed as the norm has been urban, literate, middle class and westward looking. The power of this image must not be understated. As urban societies change in India and more and more joint families break up into nuclear ones, TV becomes a new and powerful teacher of cultural, norms. Despite their individual and different motivations, the interest of the program bureaucrats, advertisers and audiences can frequently coincide and coverage to make a pro-women bias inevitable. With the proliferation of TV sets in urban schemes and rural areas, middle class modes of social conduct, dietary patterns and
consumerism may be scattering their seeds far and wide. But biases that are man made can be unmade too. With a concerted effort the programs as well as the law and order agencies and the general public can come together to counter as never before the rise in cases of rape and molestation of women, dowry and violent inner city crime.

It is senseless now to plead a Luddite case for a life without TV and the electronic print media. The point the electronic media has reached today also makes any debate on government control a meaningless proposition. Government in developing countries such as ours began the process of privatization in the 1980s and that process has gathered momentum in the 1990s. Privatization of airwaves may have been slow and drawn out but it is distinct possibility now.

In a broad sense, privatisation of the audio visual media the kind that the supreme Court of India envisaged in a recent judgement when it declared airwaves 'public property not to be monopolized by either the government or major publishing houses, meant that not only the government but also market
forces must work towards meeting a society's need for vital information and clean entertainment. Both markets and governments however, are imperfect. To control TV programming completely through laws, so that socially relevant programs may be beamed into homes and all kinds of subversive capitalistic consumerism may automatically be filtered out would require an autocratic and centrist state where all programs are financed, supported or else jammed by government and powerful armies and generals. The experience of those who have tried to put the clock back shows that it is impossible to jam information today except in dictatorship. We will be better off if we start by keeping in mind that in the coming times, private voluntary involvement with leverage in the market place is the answer, and not government controlled programming.

Today since the free market juggernaut is well on its way to privatization it would do well to remember that the problems of poverty are located in the socio – economic system, problems such as low and unequal wages doled out to
women workers in the unorganized sector (which employs almost 90% of our women) or the politically motivated diversion of state resources to pay higher salaries to an ever expanding group of government employees and doles and subsides at the cost of the social sector, are basically born of sick political systems. Mere TV initiatives into ‘socially relevant’ programming can hardly be expected to bear fruits so long as the country is run by irresponsible and corrupt governments.

According to Mrinal Pande the following facts, unpalatable as they may be, have to be kept in mind by all those who really wish to tackle the issue of a healthy and free media. Social problems in India and similar countries that bedevil women are structural and not conjectural i.e. rooted in a particular time and set of circumstances. Interventions when made here have to have a teleological Perspective.

1) The willingness of free market forces to share profits and resources with the less advantaged, the largest number of whom happen to be women in any society has been dubious at
the best of time. There is no reason to hope that things will be different now. So, if women wish to be heard they must become more alert and demanding as consumers, and more assertive and less eager to please as media executives.

2) Substitution of symbolic motive images on TV in the absence of substantive benefits (jobs equal wages, health care, and day care) does not work. Therefore if pro-woman, positive programming on TV has to have any lasting impact, it has to be matched and supported from the outside by assertive social activism and democratic tools at women’s disposal such as the franchise and the entry of women representative into all media bodies and decision making fora.

3) Ultimately technology itself is neutral. The questions that spell the differences elate to who is asking it and for whom. Indian women’s problems are not the kind that can be solved by half an hour TV serial watching. Today the decisions that effect the lives of all Indians are not taken by TV executives and producers alone, institutions of power
where women are either non existent or sedimented in the lower echelons. This has to change.

4) Isolated do goodism is out. The personal ties between say an ‘art film’ maker and an NGO group or a particular village may be cute, but they cannot successfully overcome the impediments to mass social mobilisation. A few sensitive and ‘feel good’ programs on the saving the environment or tigers or the girl child are unlikely to make a permanent difference.

We must therefore stop harping perennially on the heartstrings of an increasingly heartless system and instead learn about the roots of problems and how to help others asserts their rights locally without being overbearing a petulant.

Today the powerful forces of electronic communication individuate and globalize simultaneously. They isolate women by exalting their gender identity while making them dependent on mass markets. Both information and women are going to be free eventually whether the societies and political systems like
it or not. But freedom brings with it a new set of responsibilities. And the women and dealers and suppliers of information will also do well to remember that there is no such thing as free and quality information to masses.

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