In her article, “Television and the feminine mystique” Betty Friedan stated: “The whole world beyond her home—Its politics, art, science, issues, ideas and problems—is evidently beyond her comprehension. For not only is there no television image of a woman acting in the world, but the programming of daytime television and, increasingly, even prime time, assume she has no interest in it or ability to understand it. She lives only for love.”

If this is one aspect of projection of Television image of women the other aspect is described by Laura Mulvey (1989): “Thus the woman as icon displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, bursts through the world of illusion as an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish.”

Caught between these two images the picture of women as projected on the media are far removed from reality. A similar concern was reflected way back in 1981 in a report published by UNESCO on the portrayal and participation of women in the media.

‘Characterised as essentially dependent and romantic women are rarely portrayed as rational, active or decisive... prevalent news values define most women and most women’s problems as unnewsworthy... As the “bait” through which products are advertised, women are exploited in terms of their sexuality and physical appearance.

Though there were certain minor cultural differences noted in the dominant media images of women, the smaller local media tended to present a more positive picture—the overall situation was said to be remarkably consistent from one country to another.

In a later update published by UNESCO in 1985 no significant radical change was reported, however there was a proliferation of research from Africa, the Media East and Eastern Europe, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America as well as from Western Europe and North America. But while the Early studies were simple quantitative analyses of media content, much of the recent research is relatively sophisticated.

By examining the women and media relationship in the context of national and international, social, economic and political processes, these studies have highlighted some of the reasons behind the persistence of existing pattern in media images of women.

THE WORLD OF WOMEN’S MAGAZINES
Most of the women’s magazines deal with the classic components of women’s traditional domain: home, family, beauty, fashion and above all romance.

The traditional magazines depict the ideal women as dependent and utterly
home centered capable of finding real satisfaction only in service and submission to others.

Cornelia Butler Flora’s study of women’s magazine fiction in the U.S. and Latin America showed the values of two cultures to be quite consistent. She found that the woman of popular fiction is humble, virtuous, dependent, weak, submissive and tolerant of sexual double standards. In addition to misrepresenting women, these stories also lure their readers into a fantasy world of false standards and easy solutions.

The continuing popularity of the women’s magazine has resulted in the proliferation of women’s magazines which cater to the income earning decision making women—some of these magazines invoke women’s changing lifestyles, often in practical terms but on an individual material basis. Another group of the new periodicals, seriously feminist, address themselves to the collective awareness and common problems of women.

On the other hand many of the traditional publications have come to include more articles of interest to working women.

A third kind of woman’s magazines are those whose feminism is purely incidental. These are popular with young women who work, live alone and spend hefty sums on clothes, cosmetic, travel & entertainment. Their concept of a woman’s ultimate goal has not changed i.e. to get a man but the woman’s arsenal has expanded. These kinds of magazines are attracting more & more readers and advertisers as well.

Many new explicitly feminist magazines cannot match the circulations of traditional publications due to the lack of financial resources. Their non-commercial orientation, limited access to conventional distribution channels and in some cases a deliberate appeal to a narrow audience because they run articles that address serious problems in a serious manner and because they hire editors and writers who do not flinch from controversy. Magazines like ‘Manushi’ and ‘Stree’ have an impact on attitudes and policies that affect women. Most literate countries with well-developed media markets now support at least a few small feminist magazines and newspapers.

For women, the ultimate value to mass circulation feminist magazines goes far beyond the financial interests of the backers. Such publication speak both to their readers and to other more traditional publications: The ultimate message is that the audience interested in serious discussion about the world of real women is growing.

RADIO – A MEDIUM FOR THE MASSES
To the more than one third of the world’s women who are illiterate, newspapers and magazines mean little. Fewer than a fourth of all women ever see television. Globally radio has by far the largest audience. Radio can reach even the most remote and inaccessible settlements, broadcasting is flexible, low cost and technically simple. Receivers, especially transistor radios, are easy to operate, durable and inexpensive. From the listener, radio
requires no special skill other than the ability to comprehend the broadcast language. For many millions of the poor, the isolated and the illiterate, radio provides a window of the world.

In many countries, radio is used to reach rural adults with practical information and educational programmes. Virtually every country in the world today has at least one radio station and most of the world regions lie within at least one station's broadcast sphere.

Owing to their lower literacy rates, more limited access to formal education, lack of leisure, and lesser mobility, women have even more to gain from radio than men.

Programming designed specially for women in poor countries tends to stress domestic skills and child care etc. since providing for home and family remains a large part of women's work and worry. Where radio programmes present practical advice that helps women to do their jobs better or more easily, the programmes are more enthusiastically received.

Some of the most successful of these practical programmes co-ordinate radio broadcasts with the work of extension agents, either hired or volunteered. The broadcasts lend authority to the agents, and agents can elaborate points made during the broadcast, illustrate or demonstrate the techniques recommended and answer question that arise in connection with the programmes.

For example Latin America's most powerful rural educational radio systems. Colombia's Action Cultural popular organisation (ACPO) reaches nearly 5,000,000 rural audience and unknown numbers of people in neighboring countries, their action campaigns are based on local needs and local resources. The listeners must plan and carry on the project themselves. Some of their programmes are designed specifically for women and women benefit indirectly from other programmes.

This system taps the collective spirit of the community and diffuses the personal risk of attending innovation by lending its prestige and authority to development projects. This system also establishes the fact that women's needs are unlikely to be fully answered by a system controlled by others who place their own interests ahead of women's.

Thus the uses of any medium are determined by those who own or control the medium. Influence in the mass media is distributed in much the same way as are other form of power in society.

TELEVISION

In the affluent countries television has truly become a mass medium. Third world countries are rushing headlong to join the television age, often with unanticipated consequences. For television changes the way people live, in some fundamental ways. It may change the way they think as well and what to think about. The world portrayed on television-especially in developing countries where most programmes are imported from developed
countries-differs markedly from the real world. A huge discrepancy exists between the broadcast image and the reality of women's lives.

Surveys conducted by different organisations in the United States analysing the portrayal of programmes on TV showed that most TV Programmes show women as psychologically dependent, deceitful, incompetent, indecisive, foolish, and cruel or competitive towards other women. They rarely occupy a position of authority; they run to men for solving their problems.

But social pressures are gradually producing some changes and show more lifelike people in more plausible situations, towards allowing programming on controversial issues, and even toward giving a few strong, credible female charters prominent roles.

Television today is a major source of information about the world. Since its distortions are all too often accepted as reality, those who control the medium must see to it that TV does not delude people with powerful false images of women.

PORTRAIYAL OF WOMEN IN MEDIA CONTENT:

THE WORLDWIDE PICTURE.

AFRICA

The portrayal of women in the media changed somewhat during the United Nations decade for women: There was a shift from the traditional emphasis on fashions and cosmetics towards the depiction of women in a range of occupation, and a considerable effort was made to promote positive images of women. Nevertheless, negative portrayals are still evident.

In the daily press women’s news and features remain confined to the women’s column, and several countries stress the need for more air time for women’s programmes on the radio. Findings point out that women’s magazines do not play a strong role in changing social attitudes.

After a series of case studies (including Niger and Sierra Leone) on women and mass media, published by the Africa training and Research centre for women, Addis Ababa in 1981 it was concluded that African women are portrayed in the media as weak, emotional, inferior and unintelligent.

ARAB STATES

A content analysis of three Egyptian dailies, Al Ahram, Al Akhbar, and Al Jumhouria examined their standpoints on women’s issues between international women’s year 1975 and 1979. These three dailies showed interest in the activities of prominent women, women’s organisations, family health welfare, personal statute, legislation, women’s news, work problems and labour laws related to women. In spite of all these it was concluded that the Egyptian press tended to highlight the traditional roles of women at the expense of other roles and seems to pay little attention to rural women.

In a 1984 study of the image of women in the Algerian press and TV it was found that the media address themselves to the middle class, apolitical women, projecting a fantasy image which distance women from their own and other women’s reality.
In the Gulf the traditional, religious approach to women prevail in the print media. But interest in specific women’s issues finds expressions in magazines like Al Azmina, Al Arabia. A study of the image of Iraqi women in the press during the war revealed that between 1980-1983 women’s contribution to the war effort was recognised and emphasized through studies and interviews in magazines like Al Mara, although other newspapers and magazines presented women more as social workers than as active participants.

A sample survey of the image of women on television and Radio in Egypt revealed that though they were present in more than 50% of the total transmission time, they mainly occupied marginal and stereotyped roles. On Egyptian radio women’s programmes constituted 1.15% of total transmission time in 84-85 compared with 0.3% in 1974. But the main theme always revolved around home based activities.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

A number of specialized women’s magazines of the traditional kind are an important vehicle for advertising, and related information through out the region.

Argentina had Vosotros, Claudia, Mujer, Viva, Emmanuelle and Para Ti, which had the largest circulation of 105,000 in 1986. A great deal of research on the content of these magazines show that they revolve around romance fantasy and escapism.

Main stream newspapers devoted little attention to women’s issues. In Argentina, La Rason, had a woman’s page of the conventional type, La Nocion periodically devoted a page to women’s fashion and the weekly supplement of Clarin had some notes on cooking fashion cosmetics and advice. According to an UNESCO report of 1988 many television channels too have programmes of the purely traditional kind like exercise and cooking classes. In 1986 an official commission on the Image of women was established in Argentina and one of its first activities was to produce a series of 45-minute television programmes to improve the image of women in the media.

Another positive development was in Brazil, where in 1987 one of the large commercial television networks, Rede Machete, began a special daily feature show concerning women’s issues like legislation, sexuality, politics, economics and health.

NORTH AMERICA

In Canada a number of measures involving both government surveillance and self regulation within the industry have been developed to eliminate sex-role stereo typing in broadcasting. Regular checks on these implementations are made as a result of which women are increasingly portrayed in non traditional occupations. A 1985 study of television programmes found that 30% depicted women in non-traditional roles however in two-thirds of the 127 programmes monitored almost all prominent characters were males. Half of the programmes conveyed the message that powerful authoritative or knowledgeable people were male.
Canadian activists have been lobbying to improve the image and participation of women in the media requesting that more programmes be produced by women.

In the United States of America for the past ten years research has consistently come up with the same ratio of male female characters on television. Men out member women by two to one. Only a minority of women portrayed are mature adults, compared to 70% of the men portrayed. Two out of three men are depicted in some occupational context compared to only two out of five women.

An analysis of racial representation for the 1985-86 season indicated that Hispanic and Asian women were seldom seen. Black females accounted for 12% of female character most of which were confined to situational comedies.

The situation however is gradually changing but compared with entertainment programmes women's visibility in the national news does not appear to be increasing greatly.

**EUROPE**

A 1985 study of prime-time television programmes on 25 channels in 10 countries of European Economic Community (EEC) showed that in the new programmes male journalists out number females by six to one. Only 14% of the news items dealt with specifically women's issues. In dramas and serials also the roles of women and men are still strongly differentiated, with women identified primarily by their family status and circumstance.

Among East European countries, in Hungary in 1981, 60% of radio broadcasters were men. Men covered foreign and domestic politics as well as the scientific and technical areas. 49% programmes presented a traditional image of women. These findings were also echoed in a later (1984) study of TV programming in Hungary.

A study carried out for the commission of the European Communities (1985) found that by the early 1980s most of the more forward looking women's programmes initiated in the mid 1970s had vanished from the screens in Belgium, France Italy as well as United Kingdom whereas others were in constant threat of cancellation.

Consequently there have been a number of initiatives within the context of the European community to encourage more positive approaches to the portrayal of women.

According to a study by Irma Kaarina Halonen the image of women in Finnish mass media is non-existent especially in economics, foreign and domestic politics, sports, defense politics and in all those public areas where special expert skills are demanded.

Vibeke Pedersen who studied femininity on Danish Television accentuated need for high profile female presenters that may turn the conventional images of women inside out.
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
By far the largest body of Asian research of media comes from India covering feature films, magazines, newspaper television and advertising. This indicated a trend towards more negative and narrow portrayals of women.

PAKISTAN
A very detailed study of the portrayal of women in the media of Pakistan (1986) covered advertising, films and television drama as well as school textbooks. The overall conclusion is that the fundamental image underlying all media output is that of the desirable but mythical women of male fantasy. The image is structured across a whole series of contradictory, female attributes. The study contends that this image is functional in maintaining male supremacy and women’s subordination within the social system.

SRI LANKA
In Sri Lanka a study of the press in 1983 found that coverage of the women’s movement appeared mainly in the English language press, but that it was almost portrayed in terms of ridicule. Sinhala and Tamil Publication were more accurate and less strident, but did not treat the issues of the women’s movement as politically important. The women’s journals published by the Upali group of Newspapers experienced a serious circulation drop when they discarded traditional women’s interests like cookery, dressmaking and beauty care on the assumption that women of today needed a deeper awareness of current issues. Most regular newspaper have sections devoted to women where occasionally important issues are discussed but generally only a narrow range of subjects are portrayed. Women in television and radio are a slightly improved version of print media. The woman of Sri Lanka is portrayed as a person perpetually in pursuit of glamour, food, drinks, cosmetics and clothes.

BANGLADESH
Though the number of women journalists in the profession is quite insignificant, problems relating to women are given fairly wide coverage by both the print and electronic media.

In 1985 the national television station of Bangladesh introduced a series of progressive programmes for women to commemorate the end of the United Nation decade for women.

Oppression of women and dowry issues make headlines and invite editorial comment.

Four national dailies were analysed over the first two weeks of June 1986. They were daily Ittefaq, Daily Sangbad, Dainik Bangla and Bangladesh Observer. The study showed that the newspapers provided very little space about women.

Among women’s news, a major portion was devoted to the oppression of women and crimes, paying little attention to their achievements. Thus although they make up about 50% of the population they got only 2% of the
total space in the country’s newspapers. It is only through consistent efforts and firm policies that we can evolve concrete plans that will bear fruit for the mass media and society.

NEPAL
Women in Nepal generally complain that the coverage of women by the media is by no means commensurate with their role and contribution to society. The media unduly play up negative or sensational news about women and rarely do justice to good news about them. They are used by the media only to add colour.

SOUTH KOREA
A study published in 1987 by the Korean women’s development institute stated that although the number of female characters in television programmes have increased since 1983, men still out number women who are projected in stereotyped roles.

A dissertation by Lee Haeok “An Analytical study into the sex role division as reflected in Korean TV. Soap operas” concluded that sex differences are exaggerated and distorted by the media. Women appear in far smaller number than men and their roles are unimportant as compared to men. Women are characterised as romantic, passive, and preserving while men are realistic, active and independent.

PHILIPPINES
In the Philippines a study of women in newspaper coverage (1985) found that women make news almost entirely as rape victims or when involved in some kind of scandal. A content analysis of the front page of ‘Bulletin Today’ from 1975-84 indicates that news on women were essentially personality oriented with focus on women’s looks, figure, and wealth or family connections. They are projected as consumer’s sex objects and mothers. In 1975-77 and 1983-84 soap operas formed the bulk of radio shows followed by news & public affairs, music personality shows and religious programmes. The soaps are generally emotional stuff and project women as irrationally emotional beings. The popular TV shows which have high viewership reflect the present Filipino woman’s preoccupation with gossip and fantasies regarding the artificial world of show business. On one hand they are projected as sex-siren, the vamp, the shameless sinner or the teasing temptress while on the other she is projected as in the traditional mould of ideal wife and mother in the male dominated Filipino media. But there is a tendency towards positive change by women who are both the liberators and liberated.

JAPAN
With the great majority of newspaper articles written and edited by men they reflect the men’s concept of how women should be. The male dominated Japanese media does not treat women in the same way as men are treated. In some cases women are ignored and in others they are covered not because of their knowledge but because they are women.
MALAYSIA
A study on the image of women in Malaysian television advertisements by Wendy Anne Rodrigues concluded that advertisements on TV are still generally conforming to stereotype. The portrayal of women on the feature programmes of Malaysian TV further project a negative image of the fairer sex.

AUSTRALIA
Recent activity in Australia has centered on lobbying for change. In 1983 the office of the status of women published a set of guidelines, entitled fair exposure for the constructive portrayal of women in media. The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal set up a committee in 1984 to gauge public concern and consider action to be taken about the portrayal of women in radio, television and advertising. When this project was shelved in 1985; the women's Electoral lobby followed it up by issuing sexism complaints checklist, containing advice on how to take action against offensive treatment of women in the media.

Thus we see that all over the world women projected in the media share the same fate. Though the above mentioned data are old, based on an UNESCO report published in 1988 there has been no significant change in the portrayal of women even after a decade of protests and research. But change in any sphere is a very slow process and one hopes that these studies will bring in positive awareness, which in turn will facilitate change.

REFERENCE