

CHAPTER VI

The Electronic Media, Social Change and Gender Relations

In the discussions in this work we have argued that communication is considered 'a social process', 'an art' and 'a necessity' for human interaction prevalent in every form of society both primitive and modern. Like communication, mass communication is regarded as capable of playing a definitive role in society because of its unique ability to reach simultaneous audiences of varied size, status, areas, the speed of transmitting messages, and its ability of easy accessibility. Mass communication has become one of the important components in human communication.¹ The media of communications today are seen not only as devices to serve and educate the public but also as a tool for government propaganda, channels for business houses for advertising gains and instruments for organisations to manipulate the editorial content for their own advantage. The whole complex process of transmission and the receiving of messages in mass communication have largely been possible because of the improvement of communication technology. The two main driving forces behind this transformation of media technology are satellite communication and the harnessing of the computer that has introduced the technique of digitalization which now allows information of all kinds in all formats to be carried with the same efficiency furthering the process of communication revolution.²

Today there is a renewed interest on the study of mass media affects on society and mass media specialists have come up with several approaches like the Sociological, Empiricist and Marxist media studies and theories to understand the influence of mass communication. The theories though not binding however provides a set of ideas that help make sense of the role and functioning of the media and facilitates in the objective, self regulatory and critical examination of media operations as well as practical application guide of the various media works in everyday situations. Scholars have laid great emphasis on the technological development of satellite communication, computer networks, Video Cassette

¹ Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, London, 2001.

² Denis McQuail, *op.cit.*, pp.18-39.

Recorders (VCR), optical fibre, lasers, transmission and reception³ of mass communication which have extended the influence of media to remote and inaccessible areas. This technological development of media power underscores Elizebeth M. Perse, has also helped in creating a common set of values and attitudes in thousands or millions of people at any given time who are constantly exposed to it. Besides other societal institutions such as the family, peer groups, school, church and others which offer immediate and personal socialization, mass media being easily accessible are attended by a large group of people, and therefore play the role of teaching and reinforcing social value.⁴ In other words mass communication is believed to help in the spreading of messages to an extended audience through the rapid process of reproduction and distribution along with an intermediary channel like the radio, television or newspaper. While some studies on the media have emphasised its reach, its appeal and its deep involvement in the process of social change other media analysts have examined its social influence and the effects and effectiveness of mass media and the role it performs in the society especially in raising gender sensitivity under dominant patriarchal values. It has been opined that if attitudes of individuals are firmly established, and have an emotional content, the individuals and their social organizations are generally inclined to resist change.⁵ Scholars further emphasised that changes in attitudes can be the result of any of the mass media or combination of them, or by a combination of mass media and interpersonal communication. However analysts and commentators while exploring the way in which works of imagination and entertainment reflect and influence behaviour have now found that materials designed to entertain does in fact directly or indirectly affect behaviour significantly. Despite the varied arguments put forward on the effectiveness of media content, our study revealed that mass communication content provides information and other communicable materials which form an important aspect in our day to day life and in our interpersonal relationships and contributes to the efficient functioning of social groups. But while considering mass media as an important component of everyday lives we have looked into the role and

³ Kiran Karnik, "Emerging Communication Scenario", *Mainstream*, Vol 34, No (38), 24th August 1996, pp.9-11.

⁴ Elizebeth M. Perse, *Media Effects and Society*, London, 2001, p. 164.

⁵ Denis McQuail, "The Influence and Effects of Mass Media", in James Curren, Michael Gurevitch, Janet Woollacott, and Edward Arnold (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society*, London, 1977, pp 70-71.

affect of media content in bringing social change. While enquiring into this we have also tried to explore if it has led to alteration in the archaic and traditional patriarchal norms, beliefs and values that still inhibit the significance of women's place in society.

In our conceptualisation of social change in the beginning of this work we have underscored that social change is an essential feature of all societies which has been occurring in different form since the beginning of human society. We have highlighted the fact that social change is a continuous and unending stream of events of alteration in people's occupation, the way they raise family, educate their children, changes in the political and socio-economic pattern that have all played a role in accelerating the process of social transformation causing rapid changes all over the world. Further in recent times several factors like the speed of information technology, globalization, capitalist production, consumerism and the proliferation of the market economy, may have all played a role in accelerating the pace of change than in earlier times. Thus social change is a process of transformation in the behaviour, attitudes and practices of individuals or groups in a society either through diffusion or through integration of cultures which may result in either complete or partial change of the existing social order. This change in practices and attitudes of the people have been affecting the functioning of organisations and institutions in a society over a short or long period of time and the result of such change or transformation of values and practices leads to either marginal or comprehensive development or decay in the structure of society or behaviour of the people. While delving upon the conditions of social change in India, sociologists have perceived changes in society primarily as a result of Sanskritization, Westernization, caste structure, evolution of the family, liberal British reform policies and conscious state planning. These explanations have helped us understand that societies have been changing ones because of the process of social change, and in contemporary period the process has speeded up because of the progress of technology and modern communication causing continuous change all over the world.

In all these writings social change has been explained in terms of changes that occurs in the entire society. But in all the explanations of change the question of women as a separate or inclusive entity, their roles and the effects of social change

on women have been sidelined almost as if women had no historical role in the process of social change. We have seen how this silence towards women in the process of social change led to the growth of feminist anthropology that first became an organised form of movement in the early to mid 1970's that led to the growth of scholars formulating approaches for addressing persistent social injustice against women. Feminist scholarship not only questioned the existing social order but also the inferior position of women steeped under the patriarchal values and norms. They interrogated the general assumptions about the 'naturalness' of sex differences, the complementarity between men's and women's roles and tried to establish that sex roles were not merely indicators of difference between women and men but marked a key social and hierarchical division. They not only questioned the existence of gender differences in family, work and the society at large but they laid bare the fact of age old gender roles that discriminates women to strengthen the power relationships. This subordination of women is maintained by institutionalising many of the myths and taboos to norms and beliefs permeating within the whole structure of society. This "system of power" writes Ann Oakley has seeped into the self, the family, the intimate relationship and also into the work, politics, law, education, religion, culture and the military and which have further strengthened the sex and gender divide in society.⁶ The rise of this collective consciousness was directed against patriarchy and feminists agreed that there was economic, social, psychological, political and legal structures that were patriarchal in practice and thus oppressive to women. Such analysis of the multifaceted exploration of gendered identity paved the way for the rise of consciousness seeking widespread changes in traditional social structures within the family, position of women, their socio-economic role and also in the fundamental attitudes and personal relationships for a just social order. The dominant and widely prevalent social structure of patriarchy was considered the biggest obstacle to women's liberation and in maintaining age old traditional norms and behaviour. Feminism and feminist writings made women conscious of their rights and their dignity and sowed the seeds of change in social structures, challenging the existing patriarchal system and demanded women's empowerment based on equality with men in society.

⁶ Ann Oakley, *Sex Gender and Society*, London, 1972, pp.9-16.

Our understanding of social change reveals that it is a process that could originate in any area bringing about changes in other areas that may lead to transformation in the structure and functioning of production process, relationships, demography, technology, new social groups or even alteration in the behaviour, attitudes and practices of individuals or groups in a society. This is brought about by technological, economic, political, religious, ideological, demographic and other factors that can be considered as independent variables which may influence each other as well as the course of society resulting in either complete or partial change of the existing social order. Though social change has been theorized in various terms and concepts but what seems apparent is that the social scientists have not viewed social change and its effects from the gender perspective. The use of the term 'people' to explain the process and the effects of change gives the impression that scholars had meant the effects of social change to be similar for both men and women in society. But could the process of social change and its ramification have the same type, level and consequences for both the sexes in society? The goal of this work has not only been to comprehend the various dimensions of social change but also to recognise the fact that scholars in their explanations have been silent on the gender component of social change. Though there is unanimity amongst them that societies have been a changing one but in all these explanations the question of women have been sidelined. But the understanding of social change remains incomplete if we fail to recognise the gender dimension of social change. Feminist writers have pointed out that it is not enough to elucidate social change but in this elucidation there should also be the critiquing of the dominant values, customs and regressive traditions that can further the process of social change. It is the erasure of such gender based detriments in society for a just social order through a process of social change by the various mechanisms and tools of societal upliftment that brings in the role of the mass communication in such a process. Though there are many vehicles to usher social change but the rapid advance of communication technology of the 20th century of the telephone, telegraph, press, radio and the television greatly extended communication affecting social behaviour to a large extent. Though there are other medium of social change like education, religion, planned legislations but with the developments in mass communication technology the sphere of

communication has widened providing the transmission of information to newer areas reaching larger individuals and groups to help achieve mutual understanding.⁷ Media is said to be responsible for building public opinion, bringing social order and social change, increase citizens knowledge of the larger world and acting as a facilitator of human communication eliminating distance and the meeting of the minds.⁸ Because of these varied advantages mass media is considered as one of the most significant medium having the potential to bring far reaching affects on people's lives. Because mass media is seen as instruments of social change we also tried to understand what has been its role in the process of sensitising the masses on crucial gender concerns. India had known the importance of mass communication from early times and its potential has been harnessed at different periods of history. Its potentiality was boosted up after Independence with the creation of the two public service broadcasters of the country, All India Radio (AIR) and Doodarshan (DD). Today both these organisations have a long history of broadcasting with the objective to 'inform, educate and entertain' the masses through its programmes to a large area and population of the country. As both AIR and DD have a high coverage in terms of population and area, we tried to look into the actual difference that their gender specific and general programmes have been able to bring to the society, in terms of social change and the position of women. In this regard we also looked into the history and role of All India Radio and Doordarshan in Northeast India and their contribution to social change in terms of their programmes removing inequality and gender bias in society.

While trying to comprehend this social responsibility we have analysed the gender content of several programmes of both AIR and DD broadcast over the years under various categories to have a broader perspective of their role in effecting change by helping remove decadent patriarchal norms, beliefs and traditions that still guide Indian society and which often comes in the way of women's wellbeing. Our endeavour was also to understand if programmes illustrated women as mere puppets in the existing patriarchal society dominated by values that still limit women's progress and deny them true justice or if AIR and DD been able to rise above the dominant social values and have critiqued patriarchy. The selection of programmes

⁷ Kamlesh Mahajan, *Communication and Society*, New Delhi, 1990, p.69.

⁸ Elizabeth.M Perse, *op.cit.*, pp.3-6.

of AIR reviewed under various categories for this study is mostly current programmes but having a long history of broadcasting. DD programmes reviewed were from 1984 to the 2007. While reviewing DD programmes however we have kept the mid eighties as the starting point of our analysis as July 1984 marked the turning point of television viewing in the country as Doordarshan started commissioning one transmitter everyday for a period of four months, an unprecedented attempt anywhere in the world and which helped increase DD coverage over a large area and population. Further it was also in the early 1980's that Doodarshan had its transition from black and white to colour television (TV) which not only began the live coverage format of transmission but also the sudden burst of sponsored 'serials' and 'soap operas' as programmes most of which were women oriented narratives of 'family drama.'⁹ The year 2007 has been kept the cut off year as it was by this period that the satellite cable TV made its inroads in most states of the Northeast which provided the viewers an array of channels to choose from apart from the state run DD Channels.

Apart from the selection of the time frame for reviews of programmes our thrust while examining the AIR programmes have been on the programmes broadcast from AIR Delhi the format of which is often replicated in the various Regional and Local Stations. We have also reviewed programmes under categories of Women's, Agriculture, Health and Family Welfare, Youth and Environment programmes which form the most important segments of AIR programmes. While making a similar study of DD programmes the thrust has been to take a re-look at some of the most popular 'serials' and 'soap operas' of the 1980's to 1990's which had large viewership across the country to help us understand the focus in the content and the portrayal of women during those decades and if there have been a subsequent change in the portrayal of both women and men and the impact these 'serial' dominated programmes had on the later format of programmes. Our endeavour was also to investigate if there has been a sustained effort by Doodarshan over the years to become a catalyst to change or a propagator of existing status quo of women's place in a patriarchal order of society. In order to have a better insight of Doodarshan's gender sensitivity we have also reviewed a number of award winning documentaries and serials of Doodarshan especially of the 1990's to the middle of

⁹ These details have been discussed in Chapter Three, Chapter Four and Chapter Five of this work.

2000. To help arrive at a comprehensive overview of the impact of National programmes on the Regional programming structure we have made a comparative study of woman's programme at the National and the Regional level as 'Women's programmes' is a category of programme in both AIR and DD set aside to discourse issues on women and related to women. To have a better grasp of the gender content of programmes we have taken up an in-depth review of the major and popular programmes under different categories telecast from the various *Kendras* of DD in the Northeast.

As we understand AIR has evolved a three tier system of broadcasting at the National, Regional and Local level. In the production of all its programmes, technology seem to play a major role as there is an increased effort to produce more 'dial-in' and 'dial-out' programmes which are of interactive phone-in nature These interactive programmes according to AIR officials has been playing a role in listeners' involvement and help gauge the importance and benefits of programmes through the participatory module crucial in a democratic setup. Such programmes involve the listeners giving them a platform to share their views on several crucial issues. The technology of digitisation has also ushered a change in the production techniques of programmes from 'spool tapes' that has completely been done away with and all recording now done in the CD format. Further to make programmes more interesting and innovative the digital use of technology are increasingly being utilised for programme production as well so as to enhance sound clarity incorporating special effects with improved editing features. Technology is employed even to gauge the status of a programme and its usefulness to the listeners which is assessed from feed backs of telephone calls from listeners during a programme. Though digitised technology has become the benchmark of both AIR and DD but our study has revealed that Audience Research Cell which is another means to assist in providing feedbacks and research support to programmes broadcast is almost defunct in all the station and *Kendras* of the Northeast. Official guidelines suggest the existence of Audience Research Cell in every AIR and DD centres' in the Northeast however the only functional Audience Research Cell is the Regional Audience Research Unit located at Guwahati which caters to the entire media research need, to identify listenership/viewership of the programmes and their market potential of both AIR and DD of the Northeast. The reports of "Listenership

Data” available to us reveal that most times data are collected to assess the male-female listenership to radio, timings of listening, frequency of listenership, listeners favourite programme, top ten radio programmes with the last priority given to assess the listenership of News, Agriculture, Health, and other entertainment based programmes.¹⁰ There has been little to no effort at all to understand the popularity of ‘Women’s programmes’ from any of the stations or *Kendras* of the Northeast except surveys carried out for ‘*Manashi*’ a Women’s programme from DD Guwahati. This exception is because of the fact that *Manashi* is a sponsored programme of the *Kendra*. Thus the compulsion of revenue calculation necessitates this periodical evaluation. This brings out the lack of focus and comprehensive planned assessment of programmes of Northeast. Interestingly feedbacks of programmes are also assessed through listener’s letters which still play a vital role in the evaluation of any AIR programme. Infact there are programmes in some of the AIR stations like *Antorongo* from AIR Guwahati that replies to listener’s letters.

A notable feature that we found in AIR programmes is that most programmes have a long history of broadcasting bringing to the fore a degree of the traditionalistic layout of programmes. Even timings of many programmes have continued to remain the same since the inception of some AIR stations. For instance ‘*Aiduer Buloni*’ the Women’s programme in AIR Guwahati continues to remain at 12.30pm in the afternoon since 1948.¹¹ The timing of Women’s programme of many other stations has also been an unchanging one for several decades. Over the years the content of radio programmes broadcast have witnessed change both in its variety and packaging having to keep pace with the changing interest and life style of listeners. Based on our reviews of programmes for example in the Women’s programme content there have been a few additions of newer issues taken up in so far as the topics of the programmes are concerned. Though the format of Women’s programmes for rural and urban listeners have not changed profoundly but we have found that with time some topics related to agriculture, farming technologies, health, nutrition and family planning that find priority in these programmes are specifically

¹⁰ *Listenership Data*, RPL Survey, AIR, Kohima, December 2004, prepared by Audience Research Unit, AIR, Guwahati, pp.1-7, *Listenership Data*, RPL Survey, AIR, Aizawl, March 2005, prepared by Audience Research Unit, AIR, Guwahati, pp.1-7 and RPL Survey, AIR, Guwahati, September 2004, prepared by Audience Research Unit, AIR, Guwahati, pp.1-7.

¹¹ *Aiduer Buloni* has been discussed in detail in pages 19-21 of Chapter Five of this work.

addressed for the women listeners. Another aspect that changed with time is regarding the style and topics of programme presentation in most programmes. For instance the common topics taken up in Women's programmes in previous years were in the form of discussion or talks on joint family, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship and cookery shows with 'live' reading of scripts by the presenter or interactions with a few invited guests who were women themselves. However with time though beauty, cookery, and familial topics are still being included as part of a 'magazine format' of programme but it is along with the resource persons from the specialised field of work. This was reflected even by the producers of Women's programmes who are of the view that the changed life-styles of women are being incorporated in various series and episodes of Women's programmes.

As stated above we have also made a comparative study of Women's programme of AIR Delhi and the other Regional stations of the Northeast in order to understand the thrust and approach of programmes. While doing so we have found some similarity as well as variation in their broadcasting, in the concerns taken up and the style of presentations of Women's programme. The structure of Women's programme at AIR Delhi is based more on 'series' type of programme which are popular form of broadcast drama unfolding in episodes for both the 'urban' and 'rural' category of Women programmes. While the format of Women's programme in the Regional level is more a 'magazine' type which within a programme may include discussions, talks or skits along with music to make the programme more entertaining all rolled up in one episode. An examination of both these 'series' and 'magazine' format of programmes have most definitely helped us in furthering our understanding of the programme content and the changes that have been introduced over the years in the Women's programmes.¹² In the National Channel there seem to be a clear endeavour through the various programmes to glorify Indian culture showcasing both its past and present glory. The programmes are of generalised nature without prioritising any specific region or segment of society. We also found no exclusive programme on women's issues which is strongly evident in the Regional stations. In AIR Delhi the programmes for Women are clearly segregated for the 'urban' and the 'rural' women listeners, both constituting of one hour

¹² The topics of programmes in the National Channel, the Women's programme of AIR Delhi, the format of topic selection and the basis on which they are mounted have been discussed in detail in pages 7-10 of Chapter Five of this work.

duration broadcast during the afternoon hours. Women are thus segmented and categorised into urban and rural women. Even topics taken up for each segment were different in nature. The focus of the 'urban' Women's programme seems to address the concerns of the housewives and the challenges of the modern working women while the thrust of 'rural' Women's programme is towards women farmers, health, nutrition and sanitation. But are issues of both the urban and rural women grossly different from each other? Women in general suffer from the burden of age old patriarchal norms and beliefs. Society is value laden both in urban and rural India which weighs women down significantly. Therefore it is not enough to merely segregate women and take up their issues but in addressing their common problem in its entirety that would sensitise not only the women but the society at large and thus initiate the process of inclusive social change as conceptualised in this work. Further while sensitivity in addressing the changing interest and life style of students and farmers by providing them the latest array of information through programmes is evident but the same has not been amply apparent while taking up the gender concerns in the society through the Women's category of programmes, a programme which is exclusively reserved to focus on women's issues and concerns.

While reviewing Woman's programme from the different AIR stations of the Northeast we found that though there have been efforts to incorporate women oriented narratives highlighting their skills and roles within the family and in the working environment outside but wider issues and gender concerns critiquing patriarchy and its varied norms impacting a woman's life has been a less focused area. Though current issues of immediate social relevance are included as topics but the role of women as the nurturer and the caretaker of the home for the children and family comfort has been abundantly portrayed. Even though there are topics on the need for women's education but it is once again in terms of budgeting the family resources and savings. The fact that women are the home keepers and men the bread winners, are stressed time and again in the various discussions and talks of *Nala Rympei* a Women's programme from AIR Shillong.¹³ These talks and discussions on women have clearly demarcated the boundary of women's roles and rights. Generally topics such as women's upliftment, dowry, child marriage, female

¹³ A detailed discussion of the topics, format and presentation style of '*Nala Rympei*' have been made in pages 14-17 of Chapter Five of this work.

infanticide are taken up in recent years in AIR's Women's programmes but our review has shown that discussions and analysis of patriarchy and its strong leaning to the perpetuation of male power and male dominance, the decadent value system as a topic or subject or even the insensitive attitudes responsible for women's demarcated arena in the social structure have found very little space in the programmes. Women's programme is not only restrictive as far as the afternoon broadcast time is concerned but it also appears that women have been segregated and shunned to the private sphere. The topics mirror the stereotypical attitude of patriarchal mindset from the level of the policy makers' right down to the implementers of lop-sided guidelines that rationalises a predetermined role and space for women and which finds ample manifestation in the programmes mounted. The very fact that such topics are set aside to be discussed only in the category of "Women's Programmes" is an example of women being demarcated within a separate enclave or arena which is of the women, by the women and for the women. The ghettoization of women is apparent in such a policy decision. It may be mentioned that in spite of the recommendations of the various Working Groups constituted such as the one headed by P.C Joshi in 1985 to recommend suitable policies for improving programmes in the state run electronic media, or the Committee headed by B.G Verghese appointed in August 1977 to look into the autonomy for the electronic media or even the High Power Committee (HPC) headed by Nitesh Sengupta appointed in 1995 to remodel the role, organisation and function of Prasar Bharati, all of which in their recommendations had suggested the urgent necessity of improving women's condition, status and image incorporating more innovative means to makes AIR and DD programmes interesting and informative but very little has been done as follow up measures.¹⁴ While encouraging more women oriented programmes the HPC had in clear terms stated "stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in media, has been identified as one of the critical areas of concern for the advancement of women and achievement of equality

¹⁴ For further details refer *An Indian Personality for Television, Report of the Working Group on Software on Doordarshan*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Vol. 1 and II, New Delhi, 1985, 'Major Recommendations' of the *Working Group on Autonomy for Akashvani and Doordarshan* constituted under the Chairmanship of B.G. Verghese, (February 1978), and *The Nitesh Sengupta Committee Report on Prasar Bharati* (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting), August, 1996. These Reports have been discussed in detail in pages 26-27 of Chapter Three and pages 23-24 of Chapter Four of this work.

between women and men” and therefore recommended “increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making and promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media”(6.12).¹⁵ Despite these crucial proposals we find most of the programmes on women depicting them in their domestic roles within the four walls of the studio recordings. Our study has also revealed lesser field based programmes which can address several core concerns of women at the grass root.

Though the use of digitised technology is the pride of AIR and DD to keep itself at par with the communication revolution but technology has been used selectively and haltingly. The fact that programmes on Agriculture, Health, Current Affairs, considered as ‘hard news’ content finds regular and easy accessibility to the public through the ‘dial-in’ facility, while the restrictive nature of Women’s programmes that can address issues on social change and gender sensitivity are sans the listeners direct accessibility are reflective of the lack of seriousness and insensitive nature at the level of mounting the programme down to the level of implementation of Women’s programmes. This bias in policy is evident even in the content of Farm and Home (F&H) a hardcore Agriculture programme of AIR broadcast seven days a week. In the F&H category there is an episode every week reserved for the women agriculturists wherein issues related to women agriculturists such as modern technologies for the farmers are highlighted. But here again the topics selected do not reflect that they are based on hard research. The AIR programmes on Agriculture reveal an insensitive nature of looking into women agriculturist and have neglected in focusing on the gender dimensions of agriculture. It is a well recognised fact that not only are the new farming technological practices prejudiced in favour of men but shifts and changes in technology and techniques in agricultural farming and production also have a profound impact on women cutting across all cultures and communities. We have reiterated in chapter two of this work the debate raised by feminist scholars like Bina Agarwal and others who have brought forward the issues of denial of women’s rights on property and land in their works which the scholars categorically stated constricts women further into subordination and dominance. Such dimensions of agriculture and agricultural

¹⁵ *The Nitesh Sengupta Committee Report on Prasar Bharati* (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting), August, 1996.

practices have been tardy in both the AIR and DD programmes on Agriculture. Showcasing women's participation in farm and fields are no doubt commendable but so also is the need to bring to the fore the patriarchal nature of agriculture that has profound and adverse impact on women. It is not enough to fill in air time toeing governmental reports through exaggerated facts and figures but to show the abject reality of agriculture vis-à-vis the way women exists.

One of the most noticeable aspect of Women's programme that appear as a stark reality is that the many important issues concerning women and their wellbeing are presented only once a week in the Primary or Regional AIR stations and most times for a duration of twenty to thirty minutes which includes songs that are also packed in every edition of the programme to make it more 'entertaining.' While making a study of the existing programmes, what also came as a revelation is that generally all Women's programmes are looked after by women producers themselves. However our review of Women's programmes and interactions with both the male and the female producers of this programme have not revealed a significant change or difference in the topics or issues taken up. This also goes to show that women producers themselves may not necessarily be gender sensitive in their attitudes or perceptions as they have not been trained in gender concerns. The United National Development Programme (UNDP) in its report on gender equality has stressed that to achieve gender equality "a strong push should be made to include men in the understanding of gender equality and steps to achieving it." The report further states that most of the time the issue of gender is conventionally perceived as being 'just about women'. But gender it emphasises concerns not only women but also men and people with other gender identities and sexual orientation.¹⁶ Therefore to make gender receptive programmes there is an equal need for men and women programme personal to be gender sensitive, trained and guided to gender concerns.

As far as evolution of policies for programmes is concerned we have found some changes both in the ways programmes are mounted and executed. For example over the years the stringent conformity of programmes to the prescribed governmental format and rules have become less binding and programmes could be scheduled based on the producer's discretion of local current situations. However

¹⁶ *Power, Voice and Right, Asia Pacific Human Development Report*, UNDP, New Delhi, 2010, p. 15.

controversial and sensitive topics are still avoided and programmes are to adhere to the democratic parameter of the country as reiterated by the programme personal of AIR Shillong. This was evident in our conversations with the programme personal who revealed that topics such as those of bisexuality, lesbianism, and mindset of rapists are either not taken up at all or are rejected by higher authorities on the pretext of such topics being controversial and therefore not air worthy. This clearly is a pointer to the bureaucratisation of the media and the existence of the older stereotypes of patriarchal mindset that has remained unaltered to this day. For social change to be discernable and widespread the deep rooted and raw hard truths of society need focused attention. It is not enough to cram up programmes but what is important is whether topics and issues taken up are a reflection of the existent ills and realities of society and if there is a sincere attempt at addressing those facts. The avoidance of certain topics for the simple reason that they are deemed as 'controversial' reflects the duality of the public broadcaster. While on the one hand it endorses its social responsibility time and again yet the real picture is a timid attitude of implementing the same social responsibility. Another evolution that has taken place is regarding the length of programmes. Programmes earlier were more talk based for a lengthy period but now in order to sustain the interests of the listeners the duration of the talks have been reduced substantially. Though with time programmes have become more varied touching upon different subjects and topics and also more interactive in nature, yet the formats of programmes have not made a drastic change.

Review of various AIR programmes over the years as well as thread bare conversations with the many Programme Executives and other officials having decades of experiences as producers and their involvement with different categories of programmes have brought to the fore the content of various programmes as well as the diverse issues related to agriculture, farming technologies, socio-economic development of women, health and family welfare, food and nutrition, women as caretakers of the home, cookery shows, scientific home management, women entrepreneurship, education, including adult education, rights and privileges, castetisism, female infanticide, domestic violence and rapes that are being taken up as AIR programmes. But our understanding of social change reveal that for real and perceivable change in society both men and women need to be sensitized for an equal and just social order. As mass media are seen as instruments to change mindset

of the people therefore the medium of radio through the AIR programmes could also incorporate gender sensitive topics in all categories of programmes which have not been so regular. All along it is only in the Women's programme that social issues of rapes, violence, infanticide, dowry deaths, school dropouts and other related topics have been taken up. But we must not forget that these social crimes are because of the existence of oppressive patriarchal values that defines women and womanhood. Therefore detailed deliberations on patriarchy, the traditional structure of society and the various forms of exploitation, control, discrimination, oppression, which inhibits societal growth and progress, also need a space in the AIR software. If bias, ideologies and taboos that rein in women to a demarcated boundary are not part of AIR's list of priority programmes than the role of the public broadcaster as institutions to change mindset would remain simply as "objectives" without being realized. The linkage between the media, social change and society can be accomplished if AIR focuses more on the need to change pernicious values and attitudes practiced and propagated. Feminist scholarship have often reflected that women's work, her caring and nurturing functions have at all times been undervalued and pushed to the private sphere and this confinement to the private which are seen as 'non-rational' is derived not from any philosophy, but from patriarchal assumptions.¹⁷ It is in the removal of such assumptions that can cut through the deep rooted oppressive traditional values in society and which would contribute more significantly in removing the firmly implanted prejudices, ideologies, social traditions and the infringement of women's rights that exist at every level of the society. Continued information and education of such domineering traditional institutionalized patriarchal values and mindset can bring in a social change for a more progressive society based on equality and gender rights and AIR through its vast network can play this role effectively.

Besides radio another important medium that has been playing a significant role in informing, educating and entertaining large mass of society is the television. Television an outcome of high expertise in the post-industrial period was the latest to arrive in the field of mass communication and considerably impacted communication as it combined both audio and visual effects along with satellite

¹⁷ Maithreyi Krishnaraj, *Androgyny: An Alternative to Gender Polarity, Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, Issue No. 16-17, April 20-27, 1996.

technology that aided its reach to wide areas and to almost limitless boundaries. We have discussed in previous chapters, that in India, television as a medium of communication was established 50 years ago and today Doodarshan is a visual broadcasting medium in our country and is one of the largest television networks in the world.

In our effort to understand the growth of Doodarshan from inception to becoming the largest public broadcaster of the country and its social responsibility to entertain, educate and inform all segments of society and a vehicle of social change in the country we have reviewed the programmes of Doodarshan under various categories from the early 1980's to our cut off year of 2007. While engaging ourselves to understand Doodarshan policies and priorities through its vast array of programmes we found ourselves surrounded by tapes and CD's of interesting and colourful serials, documentaries, narratives, tele-films and other forms of programmes that not only took us through a fascinating journey of reliving the past but also aided our understanding of DD's endeavour as a public broadcaster.

As we absorbed ourselves into this exercise of rewinding the programmes what came out significantly was the large collection of sponsored 'serials' and 'soap operas' of the 80's and 90's most of which were women oriented narratives of 'family drama.' These serials we realised played a crucial role in changing the subsequent nature of television programmes in India. While reviewing some of the popular 'serials' of the period what came out as a clear revelation was that in all the popular women oriented serials of the eighties telecast by the National Channel of Doodarshan, the female was depicted as the stereotype of helpless and weak individuals within the four walls of domesticity while those aspiring for power and the ambitious women were portrayed as rarely leading a happy life. Infact the very first episode of '*Hum Log*' one of the most popular sitcom of 1984 viewed all over the country through the National Channel of DD1 depicts the women folk within the home either in the kitchen, sewing, or learning music. The men folk on the other hand are shown either relaxing, reading newspaper, listening to a cricket commentary or commanding over the rest of the family members. Infact it was not in the serial *Hum Log* alone that women were shown as the subdued lot but each of the leading female characters in the other serials of the 1980's were either projected as

the long suffering one, docile, lacking in common sense or the other extreme of ruthless, greedy, selfish, wilful, conspiring wicked women within the strict domain of the patriarchal order of family. The 'veiled' women had little say in the decision making matters of the family. Their space was limited within the boundary of the kitchen or private domain of the home. If they dared to move to the outer space of a working or business environment they were often typecast as lacking in character or knowledge to be able to shoulder crucial responsibility or tasks and were asked to be quiet with the famous phrase "shut up kitty" by *Karamchand* to his assistant in the serial '*Karamchand*'. The serials also depicted societal hostility towards women's collective effort, negative and even trivializing of feminist activists and the stigmatisation of women rising above circumstances. Women were revealed as accepting their fate, with a large measure of pessimism over their plight. The men were on the other hand depicted as domineering, capable decision takers both within the family and in their business chambers or as having the freedom to indulge in improper behaviour. It was the traditional approach to women's role and position in society that was the epitome of such women oriented serials telecast in DD1 considered the National Channel beamed all over the country including the Northeast. Doodarshan through these serials reinforced the patriarchal social order of the time and which paved the way to many variants of similar other serials into the 1990's as well. But we did find a balancing of topics from the 90's to the middle of 2000 as besides the type-casted 'serials' Doodarshan had also telecast a number of women oriented programmes portraying women as achievers bringing to the open their constraints and struggles in more real life situations.¹⁸ What comes out significantly is the fact that it was the traditional approach to women's role and position in society that was the epitome of almost all women oriented serials of the 1980s which were telecast in DD1. There was some equilibrium of topics from the 90's to the middle of 2000 as besides the type casted women oriented 'serials' women were also portrayed as achievers and hard working individuals in challenging professions or as meaningful contributors to the family's upkeep. Doodarshan through these serials and other women oriented programmes not only reinforced the patriarchal social order of the time but also portrayed a dual image of women as repressed on the one hand and independent decision makers on the other.

¹⁸ A detailed discussion of the serials and women oriented programmes of DD1 the National Channel have been made in pages 29-34 of Chapter Five of this work.

While the 'serial' category dominated the programmes of Doodarshan at the National level it was however 'Composite magazine' format of programmes that was the new design of Women's programme introduced in the 1990's and which continued upto the mid 2000's from most *Kendras* of Doodarshan. Though there was an increase in entertainment based sponsored programmes but we also find the production of 'composite women's magazine programmes' encompassing various segments such as those of beauty, health and fitness, panel discussions on women oriented topics, career avenues, and current issues. The composite nature of programmes that began at the National level also saw similar format of Women's programme from most *Kendras* of Northeast India as well. This is evident in the content of a Women's programme from Doodarshan Guwahati telecast since the last two decades or the Woman's programme from DDK Agartala telecast from 1996. Like other Women's programme '*Manashi*' the Women's programme from DDK Guwahati which is a sponsored programme or '*Ki Rympei*' from DDK Shillong tried to elevate consciousness of social evils in society that affects women's lives. The obvious attempt of Women's programmes was towards information and entertainment. This is apparent in the content of *Manashi* and the various segments in it that endeavours to make it entertaining and informative related to women's rights highlighting social issues portrayed most times in the form of skits. Interestingly this programme is primarily presented by women artists alone. The fact that women themselves are presenters of this programme gives one a sense that women alone are the guardians of their own rights and this brings out the attitudinal bias that the problems of social evils are a concern of women alone. Earlier programmes were produced at random but in subsequent years topics for programmes were selected based on their importance, relevancy and suitability. For instance we have found that the Agriculture, Health and Family Welfare programmes or even the programmes from the various *Kendras* like DDK Kohima or DDK Shillong meant for the farming community were chosen after consultation with expert committees consisting of members from various departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Family Welfare Departments, Non Governmental Organisations and various other stake holders.

Most Women's programme from all the *Kendras* of the Northeast is of short duration featured once in a week. Examples may be cited of *Manashi* which is of just

30 minutes in the entire week, *Ki Rympei* a 30 minutes programme encompassing a mere 2.86% out of the total telecast time of seventeen hours and thirty minutes of all programmes or '*Women's World*' the Women programme of DDK Kohima consisting of 20 minutes four times a month constituting a total of mere 3.60% of the total duration of programmes on a monthly basis. Considering the total female population of 954,895 in the state of Nagaland as per census 2011¹⁹ we need to question the farsightedness of such a policy decision. Such short programmes of women's concerns cannot really address the multi-dimensional aspects of any topics and leaves little room for a complete discourse of issues that dominates a woman's life and which sets her standards in the larger social contexts. Further as women's issues are most time highlighted only in the 'Women's programme' category we find such short once a week programme highly insufficient to bring to the fore the several urgent concerns and issues of women. The cramming up of most programmes is also because of the only two and a half hours evening transmission of local programmes from all DD *Kendras* of the Northeast. Except DDK Guwahati that has a morning transmission of 30 minutes duration none of the *Kendras* of the Northeast under our period of study has morning transmission of programmes.

Women's issues also formed a part of '*Kalyani*' a health series programme of DD launched in May 2002 in the country under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare wherein the reproductive and child care and other health related problems of women catering to both the urban and the rural population are taken up. Though the focal point is to educate women on their health issues but in focusing on the 'reproductive and child care' most times, DD not only becomes a mouthpiece of publicizing the ever changing governmental agenda but also pushes through the masculinist image type-casting a women with nature, as the giver of birth and protector of her children as though women do not have any other health issues. The exclusivity of an episode within a category of programme also encourages controlled dissemination of knowledge instead of inclusive approach within the common body of information imparted to all irrespective of their sex.

Another change that was introduced in the nature of programmes was the segmentation of programmes into the 'In-House', 'Commissioned', 'Sponsored' or

¹⁹ www.census2011.com, accessed on 9th July 2012, at 10.30pm.

‘Royalty’ type of production.²⁰ It is important to note that this categorisation of programmes impacted programmes in a significant way as it made programmes more market oriented of what sells best and suits the interests of the advertising agencies and the sponsors of programmes. The categorisation of programmes into commissioned and sponsored serials, telefilms, and fiction added another dimension to the portrayal of women based on market specifics. Such programmes powered by the profit and loss agenda of business firms and multi-national companies cannot effectively address and communicate the real issues that plague different sections of society.

Another pertinent point to be noted is related to the topics taken up in women based programmes. Though topics related to socio-economic development, health and family welfare, food and nutrition, scientific home management, women entrepreneurship, education, including adult education, gender issues such as rights and privileges of women are being included in Women’s programme which we believe are required and would aid in the removal of social discrimination facing women, but what also needs to be analyzed is the focus of such programmes and if they have also included within the area of discussion and analysis the multifarious dimensions of patriarchy, and its strong leaning to the perpetuation of male authority and male dominance. Our analysis reveal very few episodes in any category of AIR and DD programmes that have underscored the necessity to improve the socio-economic status of women by addressing a change in the value system, attitudes and social structure prevailing in society. Further excepting seeking some inputs from women’s organizations and Non Governmental Organizations on topics to be taken up we have found no advisory committees constituted especially for Women’s programmes. If there are advisory committees along with members from various departments in the ‘Health’, ‘Agriculture’ and ‘Education’ category of programmes than surely committees representing members of various departments and civil societies could also be constituted for Women’s programme, a programme that deals exclusively with women’s issues. If AIR and DD considers women to be an important segment of their listeners and audience for whom programmes are chalked out then isn’t there also a need for a more organized manner in which the problems

²⁰ This segmentation of programmes has been discussed in page 34 of Chapter Five of the work.

and topics for women's wellbeing are taken up? A re-look into this lacuna by the planners of programmes is crucial.

Though successive five year plans after Independence through their policies of reforms in the socio-economic structure have upheld the need of an egalitarian society for both women and men in the urban and rural setup, but the reality indicates that in spite of such measures the patriarchal structure or mindset has not come to an end. Infact women continue their struggle to find a space of their own within the existing patriarchal setup. For a real and perceivable change in society, we have noted how scholars have focused on the need to change pernicious values and attitudes practiced and propagated. Mass media are conceived and designed to reach a very large audience, an audience that is anonymous and usually heterogeneous that forms a mass society which can be susceptible to the influence of the modern mass media techniques. Both Doodarshan and All India Radio are the largest and the biggest public broadcasters in the country in terms of its area and population coverage. Being accessible free of cost to almost the entire country it can have the cutting edge of providing valuable information that could play a major role to bring in change in society. The wide variety of programmes broadcast every single day for almost twenty four hours can play a great role in creating awareness and sensitize the majority of the people. While acknowledging the fact that there are several categories of programmes targeting both the rural and the urban population of the society in various areas of concern as well as the news and entertainment that occupies a considerable chunk of AIR and DD programmes but in all categories of programmes the topics taken up in both these mediums are similar to each other almost to the extent of being regimented programmes. For example a topic from AIR Shillong in the Women's programme was titled "how to take care of our skin in winter" while a similar topic entitled "*Grismakalat howa chalar bemar*" (skin diseases prevalent in summer) was also found in the Women's category of programme from AIR Guwahati. This is also perhaps a pointer of the tight rein over the programmes in all AIR stations of the country by the AIR Directorate at New Delhi as it issues periodically a 'Programme Calendar' which is a pre-set of programming directives to all AIR stations. Though there have been efforts at providing information and education on various important issues and some amount of change initiated towards the portrayal of women in AIR and DD programmes

since the 1990's to the middle of 2000 to elevate consciousness about social evils in society that affects women's lives, but what is noteworthy is that women have continued to be portrayed within the traditional framework. Such stereotype have retained the beliefs of women being the weaker sex and the unquestioning acceptance of women's domestic and nurturing roles by both men and women in society. Our reviews of programmes of AIR and DD have amply shown that though women are being portrayed as celebrities, achievers and treading the male dominated arenas but there has not been an equal focus on the patriarchal setup and its established values and norms which tends to delimit women's role and participation in politics, religion and other decision making sphere. The socio-economic status of women, norms that perpetrates traditional value system, degrading attitudes and social structure that encourages the secondary place of women in society have not sufficiently been the centre of attention in women oriented serials, magazine format of programmes, discussions, talks, documentaries and other types of programmes. The problems and concerns of girls and women cannot be seen from the same parameter as those concerning men. Women and their specific issues need careful and sensitive addressing and this can be possible if those issues are identified and given more space in the programme schedules of both AIR and DD. It is not enough to mount programmes on Health and Education if the core issues of patriarchal norms that restrict women's movement to receive education and grant them rights to make a choice in their reproductive health are also not addressed simultaneously. If programmes on Agriculture provide information to women on sowing and harvesting so also should such programmes address the control that men exercise on women's labour both within the home and outside the home be it in the farms, the fields or the factories. Presently women's issues finds a space only in the Women's category of programmes but for a deeper and wider social change impacting diverse sectors of society gender sensitizations need to be incorporated within the other programmes too and not remain within the domain of Women's programme alone. Moreover if Women's programmes are meant to raise the "social consciousness in regard to attitude towards women," than that consciousness can be raised only if the devaluing traditions and norms impeding women's wellbeing are also contemplated upon earnestly. Women's wellbeing cannot be accomplished if issues permeating from patriarchal ideologies such as women's earning power, economic role both within and outside the home, literacy and education that has a strong relation to the overall

well being of women themselves and that of their family, property rights that gives a voice to women to fight injustices are not included in the topics for dialogue and discussion. Further the fact that programmes on women are most times presented by women artists alone not only bespeaks the reality of the attitudinal bias of the society but also makes it amply clear that such mindsets have also seeped into the production and execution of programmes in both AIR and DD. The gender dimension of studies as reiterated by feminist has not only specified and qualified gender discrimination in society, but has also stressed the gross misunderstanding of the term gender equality. The strong pointer of the UNDP Report on this misunderstanding of the term 'gender' being "women specific" can be applicable even in the case of AIR and DD programmes and the producing of gender receptive programmes by both the women and men programme personal. It is this misunderstanding that has also seeped into the nature of programme production and execution.

It is said that in India both tradition and modernity have been carriers of patriarchal ideologies and even today several traditional institutions and practices have been reinforced. It is in the critiquing of ideologies that perpetuates male authority, male dominance and gender bias in society by providing the right education and information to change the mindset that could usher equality and empowerment to both women and men in society. There is no disputing the fact that information on various beneficial schemes and policies is necessary but focusing on devaluing patriarchal customs and traditions which perpetuates male supremacy in society is equally important and this requires sustained attention by the policy makers and their implementation through various programmes of both AIR and DD. Despite the fact that media cannot be expected to be the sole agency in cleansing the ills of society and is one of the many channels of social change but having said this we also cannot underestimate the significant place that mass media holds in the individual's and the community's life as one of the important means to bring about change in the social structure. We have realised the fact that both AIR and DD have embarked on a process of enhancement of technology through its digitization programme both in the production of programmes, transmission of programmes and the preservation of archival materials. This up-gradation of technology has not been fully utilised in the enrichment of programmes by taking up wider and deeper

concerns of the society presented in more realistic and interesting format. If both AIR and DD are committed to their “social responsibility” of upliftment and development in society and to “create awareness about women’s issues” and “promote social justice” as laid out in the objectives of the Prasar Bharati Corporation then by addressing the all round problems of both women and men, the largest electronic media of the country can become a more effective vehicle and a harbinger of progress and social change in the country. On any specific day the all India average actual listeners of AIR constitutes a high figure of 35.7 crore²¹ and that of DD that covers 92.6% of the population in India²² and therefore if these two wings of broadcasting are to play their role in ‘awakening, informing, enlightening, educating, entertaining and enriching’ all sections of the population, than producing programmes designed to combat gender issues, patriarchy and the socio-economic ills of society has to be made a priority. Recent cases of crimes against women in cities and suburbs are pointers to the domineering role of patriarchal values and mindset that has its deep roots in society and which continue to have a dominant position in women’s subjugation. If women are to find their rightful place in society then along with other social agencies the largest public broadcaster of the country can also heighten the process of social change, gender sensitization and gender equality in society, but it has not done so to the extent it should because of the deep seated patriarchal values which permeate all structures and organisation of the society. AIR and DD are mouthpieces of the state as discussed earlier, and when the nature of the state is patriarchal it is only expected that these two arms of the state will also uphold patriarchal attitudes. So, social change as conceptualised in this work has not really come about because societal values have remained primarily unchanged, and a critique of patriarchy is still wanting and if these two major vehicles of change are to become effective agents of social change, than a deeper gender sensitisation will have to take place in both All India Radio and the Doordarshan.

²¹ *All India Radio, 2007, op.cit., p.6.*

²² *Doodarshan 2005-06, op.cit., p.1.*