CHAPTER-III

Changing Media Scenario: Women and Television Images
This chapter concentrates its focus on visual media. As has been noted, television is first occupying the center stage in the prevalent media induced culture. In this chapter, the objectives are three fold. First, I intend to probe into the dissemination of news and information. It is in this context that I would concentrate primarily on the government controlled Doordarshan. My purpose is to see how DD news depicts women’s issues and the experiences of women professionals in Doordarshan. Second, I have tried to look at the overwhelmingly powerful phenomena called television soap operas and examine their explicit and implicit symbols and messages as far as the projection of women is concerned. And finally, I have chosen select television commercials and advertisements, which has indeed become an organic component of sponsor oriented television culture. My purpose is to see how these commercials represent womenhood.

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Doordarshan: Women’s Perspective

This section intends to understand the perspective of the women journalists and professionals working with Doordarshan. Before going into details let us look at the origin and evolution and objectives of the said channel.

Profile of the Doordarsan: Emergence of the Doordarsan in 1980s is acknowledged as an important landmark in the history of the media world in
India. It started functioning on the basis of the code of the All India Radio as a government controlled media and the main aim was to spread information and education among the masses. However, over the years DD has evolved in many a ways and today it may be acknowledged as the most popular channel of India for its reach and accessibility to the every nook and corner of the country.

Social objectives of DD

- To act as a catalyst for social change
- To promote national integration
- To stimulate a scientific temper in the minds of people
- To disseminate the message of family as a means of population control and family welfare
- To provide essential information and knowledge in order to stimulate greater agricultural production
- To promote and help preserve environment and ecological balance
- To highlight the need for social welfare measures including welfare of women, children and less privileged.
- To create values of appraisal of art and cultural heritage
- To promote interest in games and sports

DD code: Doordarshan has adopted the All India Radio Broadcasting Code, which states: “Broadcast on All India Radio by individuals will not permit:

- Criticism of friendly countries
- Attack on religion or communities
- Anything obscene or defamatory
- Incitement to violence or anything against maintenance of law and order.
- Anything amounting to contempt of court
- Aspersions against the integrity of the President, Governor and Judiciary
- Attack on a political party by name
- Hostile criticism of any State of the Centre, or
- Anything showing disrespect to the Constitution or advocating change in the Constitution by violence, but advocating changes in a Constitutional way should not be debarred."

(The procedure to be followed in disputed cases have been clearly enunciated)

Convention: The following are some of the conventions observed by the AIR:

1) Appeal for funds are disallowed except in national emergencies

2) Exclusion of trade names in broadcasts which amount to advertising directly (except in commercial service); and

3) Direct publicity is not permitted for or on behalf of an individual or organization which is likely to benefit only that individual or organization.

Sociologically it is significant to note that Doordarshan is confronting innumerable challenges in present day context and the reasons are manifold. To begin with, it has to be realized that Doordarshan is a government controlled, state centric television medium. And as a result it is endowed with a series of responsibilities like disseminating and communicating government objectives and policies, representing the pluralistic cultural tradition of the country and
also acting as some kind of a moral guardian for the larger collective. But at the same time Doordarshan has to compete with innumerable private channels that are becoming increasingly popular particularly among the urban, metropolitan audience because of their professionalism, technological sleekness and aggressive market oriented drives. It has to be seen how Doordarshan copes with the changing time particularly when in the new liberal phase of economic globalization the state is first losing its monopolistic hold over cultural policies. And innumerable private experimentations are emerging in the domain of culture. Keeping these challenges in mind, I began to study women professionals in Doordarshan and understand with a high degree of empathy their dilemmas, work experiences, aspirations and anxieties.

It must be pointed out that the functioning of Doordarshan is quite different from that of private channels or print media. The production of news items in Doordarshan is handled to a great extent by the bureaucrats of Indian Information Services. They are the ones who are in the decision-making position and handle the major crunch of production of news items like planning and selection of news items. The editorial body is constituted of 25 members with a male female ratio of 20:5. The reporting section however is constituted of journalists (reporters) who report or collect data from the field. There are six reporters working for Delhi bureau (3 permanent and three contractual) with a male female ratio of 3:3. The anchors are appointed on contractual basis. And the technical aspect of the production division is handled mostly by the engineers and technical assistants, camerapersons etc.
During the course of my interaction with the professionals in DD in order to get an insider's perspective I formally interviewed 5 bureaucrats (Indian Information Services), two reporters, three anchors and one camera person (all women). Apart from that I did interact with few of the male professionals working in the structure whose inputs play a significant role in enriching data.

**Background profile**

All the respondents come from middle class educated (and barring one) upper caste background. They come from various parts of the country and for most of them Delhi is their work place rather than birth place and they are yet to accept the metropolitan culture of Delhi combined with consumer culture and frivolous attitude towards life. As Poonam curtly remarked, 'people in Delhi don't represent the people of India. There is a sense of indifference and immunity for everything that is happening around which perturbs me thoroughly.' Geetam points out that Bombay has a different attitude towards life than Delhi. People out there have a sense of solidarity which this city lacks.' Anupma, a news editor adds, Delhi is politicized and its all about page 3 culture. People are in a rat race. There is a lack of sense of value and ethics one witness in one's day to day life. This is not a culture an average Indian can associate with.' ‘However, Delhi is a happening place’, reflects Indrani, an anchor who has been working for the media since last 25 years. ‘And the fate of India is determined by what happens in Delhi. No matter how skeptical we stay about the culture of Delhi, there is no escaping out of it’. Adds Sweta, a

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74 Geetam Mishra is a senior reporter with DD.
reporter who hails basically from Bihar. And all of them take a critical stand against the culture of Delhi and show their concern about the changing scenario in the city and its adverse impact.

Out of eleven respondents, six of them are married with kids and rest five are unmarried. All of them admit that it is not the resistance but the co-operation and encouragement from the family members which has helped them reach where they are today. Family members have been quite supportive in helping them pursuing the career without which it is not possible to sustain in a demanding job like this. As Poonam puts it, ‘in this highly competitive world it is only because of my parents’ support and encouragement for which I am here today. The lingering years of preparation for UPSE, the failures and frustrations one goes through needs a strong familial support structure to be coped up with.’ Geetam, a news reporter working with DD for last two decades points out that she comes from a liberated background and more of a second generation journalist (her father was a renowned writer and All India Radio professional who encouraged her thoroughly to join the field when Doordarshan opened its branch in Mumbai (then Bombay) and she was the first woman reporter working for Doordarshan). R. Jayshree, the camera person (and the first women camera person who was taken for Doordarshan) recalls her father fighting all the resistance coming from different quarters against her joining Pune Film Institute and making her way to the profession smoother.
Class and education play a pivotal role in our society in deciding one's career and it holds true mainly for women, agree all my respondents. As to quote Aanupma, one of the news editors, 'if the financial status of a household is not sound then there are chances the person won't be able to give proper education required to his/her children to pursue a suitable career of one's choice. And the women members of the house hold are the first ones to be withdrawn from school/ colleges if the family is faced with a financial crunch.' And Sweta, a reporter, is more categorical in her remark. 'it is only because my parents had enough money and a liberal mind set, they could send me to Delhi and financed all my expenses during my education. Some of my friends (quite talented otherwise) could not make it to higher studies because of financial problems or parental pressure.'

And it was difficult to convince my respondents on the question of caste. Though during the course of our discussion (with most of the respondents in other media industries as well) the role of caste was subtly sidelined as an irrelevant factor and I myself was about to accept that caste is gradually losing its significance among the liberated educated lot of our generation contrary to all the sociological literature, I was made to rethink the importance of caste yet again when they bluntly refused to fill up the caste column of the profile chart. As to quote Anupma, 'it is time we put our foot strongly down and stop recognizing caste as a factor in our society.' Natasha agrees and adds, 'why should caste be considered as a factor at all.' My attempts to point out that whether we like it or not, caste plays the most important factor in determining
development in Indian society was strongly questioned. However, some of them did fill up the column recognizing it as a researcher’s drudgery. But it must be pointed out that the column that has been filled up says caste as ‘general’, OBC etc. and not the traditional way of saying ‘Brahmin, Kayasta and so on. And I would conclude, caste emerges in yet a new form in the eyes of this generation of Indians, especially those working within a government structure. I must add, though I had learnt from my past experiences the issue of caste is not a well accepted topic for most of my respondents, a rebelling attitude is at its highest amongst the government servants interviewed. And there is a new kind of categorization emerging as well. As Sweta puts it, ‘the reason why I hesitate to fill in this gap is the amount of stigma attached to it.’

She belongs to the newly recognized OBC category and despite the fact that she topped in her IIMC final exam. And got through DD by ‘fair’ means, her getting through was not free from the raise of eye brows and back biting from her batch mates. However, the government policy of positive discrimination in favour of the disadvantaged lot was abandoned crudely as ‘trash’- ‘a mere trick of politicians to influence the voting behaviour and nothing else’, to quote a male respondent. Bharti, one of the senior editors with 20 odd years of experience in Indian Information Services is highly critical of quota system. ‘I think these reservation policies in favour of lower caste or for that matter women is weakening rather than strengthening the system. It is ultimately the talented lot who make it to the top. I strongly am against quota system.’ And an upper caste bias predominated the debate all through.
The responses on their (expected) role in the media were not uniform and varies quite drastically between categories. While the bureaucrats preferred to stay tight lipped about the loop holes of the government structure to avoid controversy and chose to talk more on the important role Doordarshan is playing and took a strong position against the role of private channels, the reporters were the most critical lot against the government ways of running the system. The anchors settled down to believe, ‘it is time Doordarshan changes its face and compete with private channels.’

The bureaucrats working for Doordarshan project themselves to be responsible government servants who understand the role of Doordarshan as an electronic medium in present day context. The respondents quite assertively corrected my use of the term ‘Government controlled media’ for Doordarshan and pointed out that it comes under the purview of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting yes, but it has all the autonomy to produce news items as they are without any fear or malice. And as Natasha pointed out ‘being within the Government, it has to follow certain rules and guide lines. But these guidelines only help one to perform better.’ Most of the respondents agree that they have a professional approach to their job and collect, edit and produce

75 * The bureaucrats interviewed for the purpose have been cooperative in clarifying all my questions but ask categorically not to be quoted in order to avoid controversy. In order to maintain the privacy I have not revealed their details in this research work. However, the names remain unchangable.
news items on the basis of priority without any prejudice. Their role is quite well defined and producing news is mostly a teamwork and as there is perfect coordination between the colleagues the workload is shared comfortably. The editors point out that it is a teamwork basically and the hierarchical pressure is not felt severely. The job is hectic and back breaking. But there is perfect coordination among the colleagues which make it easier.

Doordarshan is responsible and accountable to a larger audience and it has to keep in mind audiences of all part of the country while arranging its news contents. Points out most of the editors working for the channel. As to quote Bharti, ‘unlike private channels who keep in mind viewers who have the purchasing capacity we keep in mind the people who are watching even from the remote part of the country. A strike and its implication in Kerala is as important to us as a news in the Parliament. And we have a complex job of putting all these news in a half an hour capsule bulletin.’ My contention that the Delhi centric news anyways get preference in Doordarshan was not denied however. But they contend that Doordarshan is authentic and is answerable to a far larger audience. As to quote Natasha, ‘Doordarshan works as a perfect medium. It states facts as facts. Millions of people in India trust Doordarshan and that is our certificate.’

Reporters however donot speak the same language. Though they all agree that Doordarshan sincerely aims at providing credible news and to an extent succeeds in doing so, they point out that Doordarshan has this limitation of
functioning like all the government run organizations. There is absolutely no coordination between different departments and a sense of lethargy prevails among people working in this organization. As Jayshree puts it, ‘unlike private organizations, one does not have to prove herself if she does not want to’. And the reporting section is highly marginalized on the process. ‘Bureaucrats set the rule here and dictate all the terms and conditions and we are provided with trivial jobs. Go to any other channel and you will see reporters are the backbones for them and they are exploited and utilized to the core. But here we are highly ill utilized.’ And the grievances are pronounced most eloquently by this section, and with good reasons. There is clear discrimination against reporters in Doordarshan, asserts Sweta, a casual reporter who joined the organization instead of private channels expecting the atmosphere to be less constrained and she will get a lot of scope. However, it did not match her expectation. She pointed out that the room determined for the reporting section is quite ill equipped out of negligence and nobody bothers (the interview was conducted in the reporting room itself and as is observed, the room is quite small to accommodate more than 10 people at a time. The room had a worn out look. The computer lying in a corner, as I was told, has been out of order since years. There is no fax machine. The room has not been dusted for days together and the furniture require repair. There is a stenographer who virtually has no work to do and the peon fidgets with the remote controller all day through in this ill frequented room). The reporters are not assigned specific beats and they just get to know what they have to do for the day when they reach the office and
look into the notice board where a notice is put up for each day's assignment. Sometimes there is no work. The reporters do not have any kind of incentive either like promotion etc. and even after spending decades in the organization they don't have a say in the decision making process. And if somebody goes out of his/her way to cover a story on his/her own it will be completely the person's responsibility. From getting the permission from the authority to asking the transport guy for mobility support to record the data from the field and convince the editor to go through it and give it its due coverage. However, amidst these constraints there are some who stay committed to their job. Geetam points out that Doordarshan has given her the kind of exposure and experiences she could have never got otherwise. She is very sincere about her assignment and takes up all the responsibility assigned to her. She treasures all her experiences fondly and points out that she feels privileged for being a part of Doordarshan. She recalls her most exciting sound bite in early eighties when Amitav Bachan met with an accident during the suiting of Coolie and there were rumours he has lost his voice. The Delhi Head Office called up their office (she was in Bombay then) to get his voice recorded somehow and she was assigned that job. Those were her initial days with Doordarshan and she was quite excited about the project. She had to really do a lot of running around and somehow managed to get the permission. The voice was recorded. The Director General of the local station brought the recording material by air the same day to Delhi. Those were the days when electronic media was run manually and the hi tech cameras were not available. The coverage was aired

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and it was really a thrilling experience for her. And she has probably covered most of the important events being in Doordarshan. Covering issues like international festivals and meets, going inside the war ships, sitting in a fighter plane are the experiences she still cherishes as her initial experiences and now she has wide range of experiences as a reporter and has traveled all over the world in different assignments. Despite her exposure and experiences Doordarshan reporters are not given specific beats rather they are asked to cover whatever as and when required. That’s a government policy she has not been able to come to terms with despite her years together in the same organization. It is overwhelmingly ruled by the bureaucrats. Reporters or journalists play a peripheral role in decision-making process. When I was amused as to how come the reporters don’t complain against such discrimination she had a point to add. ‘It in fact suits most of them. You are not answerable to any one. If you don’t want to work nobody forces you. This is how government system functions. And Doordarshan is no exception.’

Classification of Issues

There is no denying the fact that hard news covers a wide space as news items and soft issues hardly finds its due status. Though issues like poverty, developmental, environmental and women’s issue need to be addressed with equal emphasis, agrees all the respondents, and they do acknowledge media is not giving enough space to women’s cause in comparison to print medium. One of the respondents points out that electronic media has limited scope in comparison to print media in many ways. Where as the later has enough space
to provide analytical details of soft human interest issues, electronic media is hard pressed for hard, on the spot news, current affairs and politics as it happens through the day. There’s very little scope in the news to find space for giving coverage to soft issues. But she gropes and adds, ‘I think the news does give coverage to women’s issues as and when it deserves a space.’ Like for instance on March 8th, all the channels would give coverage to women’s cause as it is marked as women’s day. However, they agree that this is not the way women’s issues (or for that matter any other issues which get sidelined but deserves space) should be covered. But electronic media has its own limitations. Geetam critiqued, this year though she has covered two/three stories specifically on women’s issues to get a coverage on the International Women’s Day, succumbing to some pressure the last minute decision was taken to make a collage out of all the meetings and rallies held in town the same day and shown it as a .1/2 a minute clipping instead of carrying the substantial stories. ‘The bottom line is you cannot ignore the rallies and functions attained and inaugurated by Usha Narayan or Suman Krishnakant, or for that matter Sonia Gandhi or Saban Azmi. And the concept of International Women’s Day reduces its substance to a farce.’ To quote exactly the way it was told. She prefers covering human interest stories and despite DD (and any other channel) giving politics and hard issues the first preference she manages to cover certain stories she feels needs coverage which otherwise would have gone unnoticed. Recalling few of the stories she has covered despite resistance which got high applaud she mentioned that she had gone to Agra to cover some
political story and during her stay there she came across the marketing potentials of a kind of sweet locally made and relished by the people there and also noticed the unhygienic process in which these are made. It looks like an insignificant story and a kind of story that does not have the potentials to be given coverage but I covered that and when it was telecast on DD many viewers and businessmen approved of it and recognized the potential of that consumer good. These are the small ways we promote certain cause. And she is thankful the then director general considered that story worthwhile. She also mentioned about the stories she has covered on child labour, environment and other human interest and cultural subjects generally not the prioritized subjects to be telecast on a national news channel. And it is difficult convincing the authority to give these stories a coverage. Generally the political news eat up these issue based stories. She concludes non comittally. Sailesh points out that one of the major loop holes of the functioning of DD is that the reporters are not assigned beats and suggests that reporters should be given due status in DD for better output. But the bureaucrats are hard pressed keeping the government in good humour which creates a lot of discredit to DD. Reporters should be given enough freedom to report facts from the field as they are. This should be the role of a media. Sweta adds, ‘electronic media is even more important as a medium because of its massive reach in comparison to the print media which is limited to only educated lot. It is time government realizes the role of journalists in electronic media and recognize their status.’ And Poonam takes a pro active stand. ‘the history of electronic media in India is quite recent in
comparison to print media which has a rich tradition. And it will take some
time to get matured.'

Articulation of political sensitivity

- Market and Media: it was universally agreed that DD has lost its status as a
hegemonic state apparatus with the entry of private channels. and
commercialization of electronic media with the entry of private channels
and the stiff competition as a consequence has made the industry ruled by
market force shunning all ethics and values a 'medium' should adhere to.
Comments most of the respondents. Their grievances were provided with
strong evidences to substantiate their theory. Driven now by the logic of
profit and competition, the overriding objective of the new media
corporation is to get their product to the largest number of consumers.
People are overloaded with choice and this information overload has its
negative consequences as well. As to quote Poonam, 'with the emergence
of private channels, viewers are actually spoilt for choices. And prefer to
watch stuff that comes in the package without any discrimination.'

However, the threat to DD because of this emerging factor was refuted by
the bureaucrats. And the argument that predominated was that DD is more
credible where as the private channels are profit oriented. Anupma asserted,
'it may be true people who have a choice prefer to watch private channels
for news items for all the sensationalization and provocative visuals
available in the package, but for a authentic information people do get back
to DD. And this is our role. To provide credible news. We don’t sensationalize, we don’t sit in the next room and come on line saying we are calling up from the spot, we don’t frame sentences which would sound as if everything that happens are wrong doings of the government. We provide facts as they are’. And Poonam settled down to convince me, ‘I think it is important to understand the dynamics. The private channels are catered to a particular class/category of people i.e. predominately middle class urban people. They are controlled by profit motive and the role of those working for those kind of system are restricted in a way to produce news items that would sell and would be able to get revenue to sustain themselves. DD does not have that motive. And that’s why we don’t work under pressure. Natasha adds, ‘I think you are mistaking between the market and the viewership. I still think DD has the largest audience. The private channels cater their news item for a particular category of people who are ruled by the market. And this reflects in the amount of sensationalization they do to attract the market for the revenue.’ And Dharini asserts, ‘now in this cut throat competition between private channels to make profit, the first one minute of the news bulletin becomes crucial. If the headlines are catchy and phrased sensationaly the viewers stick to the channel. And that is the aim of the private channels. To attract the attention of the viewers by hook or crook. And sometimes they even interpret the situations in manners unthinkable for a responsible professional. It is time the viewers get critical about these immaturity of these channels.’ And Poonam adds, ‘when DD
does not follow their footsteps and maintain the ethical aspect of a media you complain of monotony.’ And when asked why DD closed its 24-hours news channel, the bureaucrats preferred not to comment pointing out it was a policy decision and they are not aware of it. And one of the reporters pointed out that ‘it is any layman’s guess it was shut down because it was not making revenue as per expectation.’ And some of them did agree DD needs a face lift otherwise there are chances DD will lose its importance. Geetam critically remarked, ‘if private channels are at one extreme in sensationalizing issues to make profit, DD is at another extreme, it has reduced its status to be a government’s mouth piece.’ And to quote Sweta, ‘there is a difference between national interest and government’s interest. And DD is seen catering to the interest of the later which is unhealthy.’ And some of them off the record agreed that the concept of autonomy is only there in pen and paper. It is a government controlled media and we are not allowed to independently analyze issues if it goes against the government.

- **Women, patriarchy and culture:** the dominance of patriarchal structure in Indian society was highly recognized by the respondents. Women are the disadvantaged lot in our society and it is a well acknowledged fact. Married women face problem it was agreed, and women have to split their time between home and work, to quote Anupma, ‘though our generation husbands are cooperative and helpful in the kitchen it still is considered a women’s job’. but as Bharti Mahadevan points out, ‘one just gets used to it’. And she goes on to add, ‘it irritates me when women go on cribbing
about this problem which has absolutely no solution. We entered into professions knowing it fully well.’ And it was evident from some of the responses that some of them have made a conscious choice to join a government organization because it is gender sensitive. As to quote Sweta, ‘Government organizations are quite gender sensitive that way and there are defined policies of social security schemes and maternity benefits exclusively for women. And this is the reason why I preferred to stick to DD, instead of private organizations which provides a lot of money, but they are quite discriminatory when it comes to women’s problem. She also adds that private organizations have a manifested preference for single (unmarried) women. The nature of our job is quite demanding which says it all.’ Sweta is quite apprehensive she won’t be able to give as much time and commitment to her career once she is married. But marriage is the first priority in an Indian context. Geetam points out that it has been possible for her to successfully stick to her career for last two decades without interruptions only because she remains unmarried and when I was about to conclude she has taken a conscious decision to stay unmarried for the sake of profession she adds, ‘ but staying as a spinster is Indian society would give one a stigmatized status. People in our society are insensitive enough to repeatedly ask you questions like ‘app ki saddi kyun nehin hui’ presuming there is something abnormal with being a single woman and you are looked down upon with suspicion.’ And in the course of our discussion she confided that it was not a conscious decision against marriage for the
sake of her career rather she could not get married succumbing to some familial problems. 'No middle class woman would choose to remain single in a society like ours because she knows fully well the repercussions involved' - a forced decision that haunts her even when she is at her forties and has established herself quite substantially career wise. And Jayshree points out, despite having the most supportive family structure she has to come back from work and cook for the children which is not the case with the men. being a camera person is not an easy job. Rather it is more like a job of a wrestler. And at the top of it, it is a male dominated profession where you have to run faster to prove that you are one among them. And after a whole day's hectic schedule and the weight of a 13 kilo camera on the shoulder along with the accessories (she shows me the swelling that has left its mark in her right shoulder as a common phenomena as a result of the 'carrying' of the camera for a lingering period(yesterday was a NDA alliance meeting which got her stuck till 9 o'clock in the evening- she mentioned)'. And in the mid of your field you receive a call(on the mobile) from your children asking you about the dinner and you assure them you will be back right on time. It is back breaking but you love your kids anyways and you can not run away from responsibilities.' However, she points out that when her husband is home he takes care of certain things but his is a touring profession and 'household chores are meant for women no matter how much you pretend it is not.'
Relatedness to suffering women: the respondents would agree that being a woman help one understand and empathize with women’s cause better. Though most of them pointed out that they have never faced any kind of discrimination on the ground that they are women at home, in the profession or in the society at large, being a woman give one a perspective, all of them would agree. As to quote Poonam, ‘there is not a single woman in our society who can vouch she has never gone through any kind of exploitation/discrimination/ assault for being in the wrong side of the gender. And this is the common factor.’ Geetam points out that women reporters are generally more sensitive by nature which reflects in their reporting and women have this natural inclination towards women’s issues being women. More women in this field would definitely help in focusing women’s cause which more often goes unnoticed in a male centric world. and more representation in the decision making position is more important, add some of the respondents. As to quote Bharti, ‘women’s issues get coverage as and when it occurs. The problem with an electronic media is that it has to give utmost importance to current political issues, not soft issues. But we try our best to give women’s issues its due space being women.’ Jayshree points out that some times her camera catches pictures which are more sensitive than that of the other cameras. Women are sensitive and it reflects in their work.
Relationship with male colleagues

The respondents share healthy relationship with their male colleagues and none of them pointed out any kind of discrimination against women in the office set up for their being women. According to one of the news editors Natasha, ‘it is all there in the mind. How one conducts and carries oneself determines the kind of response one gets from the surrounding’. She goes on to add, ‘women have all the potentiality to be treated as equal to men and there is no point why one should feel discriminated or handicapped because she is a woman.’ She discards all the hues and cries for reservation for women and quota system etc. as a part of hollow politics which should not be encouraged and points out that women should be left to themselves to fight their own battle and these unnecessary hype creates further complications in the society.

However, some of the reporters did point out there are some constraints one has to encounter on the ground that they are women. Jayshree recalls her initial confrontation with DD in order to prove women ‘also’ have the potential to carry out jobs that are ‘defined for men’. Recalling her first experience in the DD interview board she elaborates, ‘it was only few months after she completed her diploma in electronic engineering that she came across an advertisement in the newspaper which said there is requirement for camera men for Doordarshan and the qualification required matched hers. She informed few of her friends as well and applied for the post. She was already working with a private company by then and was not in dire need of job. But she applied because it sounded fascinating. During that period (1984) there was
certain amount of aura attached to DD. And she got a call letter for the interview. And in the interview board she was harangued thoroughly on the ground that she was a woman. and this is how her interview went, 'the first question was ‘why did you apply when the advertisement required a ‘camera man’. And I was foxed. I had never thought that my gender could come in between a profession. However, I boldly said, ‘I applied because I thought I have the necessary qualification. And until I prove myself otherwise how can it be concluded that women are not meant for this job.’ One of the panelists curtly asked in Hindi, ‘but don’t you agree women have this tendency of asking for advantage on the ground that they are women.’ And I replied, ‘there are possibilities they do so. But it certainly cannot be generalized. I in fact know few men who use contacts and donot perform their duties in office. But I do not sit down to conclude all men are like that.’ I was quite blunt in my remarks as I assumed I am not going to get this job seeing their bias. I just wanted to answer them back. However, in the process of discussion the panel sobered down a little and one of them told me that if we take you, you will be the first woman to be taken as a camera person in DD and it will be a bold decision on our part, and of course you also have to prove yourself on behalf of women.’ And I confidently answered, ‘I have enough faith in me to prove myself, but it is time you take a bold decision to prove that the fate of our society is not decided by and for men alone.’ And the only technical question asked to me was if you have the camera in your hand and you can shoot only one of them, whom would you shoot, Jia Ul Haq or Yassar Arrafat. And I had absolutely no
exposure to camera then. But I thought from a layman’s perspective and thought whom would I prefer to see on television? I asked them whether I am shooting for the Indian media and as they said yes, I answered, I would shoot Jia Ul Haq because I think he would mean more to Indians than the later. The interview was over and I was confirmed I am not going to make it after all the nuisances I had created’. But surprisingly I was selected, and after that I have never given them a chance to point a finger at me on gender ground.’ And when I asked her is there an attitude in her to prove that she is one amongst those men, she reluctantly nods, ‘yes, and I must admit throughout my life and career it is men who have played a significant role in shaping my career. If at all I have learnt anything from women it is what one ought not do being a woman.’ her cynical remark against the women lot was however not irresponsible. ‘I think women must try hard to prove themselves. Our society is a patriarchal one and thus, we being women have this extra burden of working harder to reach at par with men, but most of the women I come across in the office set up choose not to take up adventurous assignments on the ground that they are women and prove the men time and again they are the inferior lot. When one gets the opportunity, she must make the best use of it.’ She recalled her encounter with one of the instructors in PFI and says, ‘the instructor would make us stand for eight hours constantly during his instruction saying that this is how a camera person has to perform in the field. There is no place for fatigue and rest. You have to act till it is required. And he was giving me extra attention saying, ‘if you don’t prove yourself now, no other woman will ever be
given a chance in this field any more.' And this inspiration to prove her as a strong person is keeping her going still. And she also admits being a woman has proven to be an advantage for her in many instances, she does not want to be disobliged. 'like for instance, I am a camera person to cover the Prime Minister and in most of the cases we are assigned only one minute to shoot the conferences etc. at that time we have to really run and take position and shoot. One has to be really alert. And I invariably get 30 seconds extra because the SPG cannot really push me out of the hall. And I avail that advantage my male colleagues can hardly get.'

II

Are Things Different in Private Channels?

Doordarshan, as the findings suggest, has its own limitations and contradictions. Its bureaucratization, lack of professionalism and its inclination to government news have definitely constrained its potentials to emerge as people's medium even though, DD is being seen throughout the country. These constraints have been articulated by the women professionals and it is clear that DD has to fight a long battle to emerge itself as a gender sensitive medium articulating the dissenting voices against patriarchy and representing women's aspirations for creating a just society. As we have already said in the earlier chapter on the print media, all these require a radical restructuring of the philosophy of 'relevant' news itself. The hierarchy of news in terms of hard and soft news or categorization and hence marginalization of some issues as
women's issues have done a terrible damage to the media culture. What is important is to transcend these hierarchies and examine everything be it war, sports or fashion show from the critical but gender perspective. This also requires a new kind of orientation on the part of both men and women professionals. One may argue that Doordarshan has its bureaucratic orientation. Doordarshan cannot innovate so easily. But are things different in these private channels which are supposedly free. It is in this context that we have tried to engage with a couple of private channels although very briefly.

In order to get a comparative perspective, I interviewed few of the women journalists of the leading private (news) channels of Delhi. The findings vary in many ways from the previous findings as the functioning of the former is quite different from that of the later. It may also be pointed out that the aim and objectives of these two kinds of channels are different from each other. Private channels are the outcome of the liberalization and open sky policy and in a highly competitive market scenario private channels compete with each other in every possible way to increase their TRP rating for commercial purposes.

All the journalists interviewed for the purpose belong to upper class, educated family background. All of them point out that family has played a significant role in nurturing their career and has acted as a support structure rather than an obstruction. As Manisha points out, her parents have given her the best of education and upbringing to become the person she is today. Her parents in laws have never interfered in her professional life as generally is projected and
in fact have played an encouraging role in her life and career. Sujata, Aaj Tak has left her 5 months old daughter with her parents back home in Chennai for she understands it would not be possible on her (or for that matter her husband’s who works as a journalist as well) to do justice to both home and profession at the same time. Journalism is a demanding profession and we have to deal with long erratic hours in the interest of her profession. Some of the respondents still lead single life and have preferred to live in independent apartment to avoid intrusion in their personal or professional life.

Women journalists/professionals refuse any kind of distinct categorization on the basis of gender. Invariably all the respondents insist that the would rather perceive themselves as young, aspiring individuals who are equally capable of reaching the heights as that of men and gender has (and would) never come in their way. Manisha Natarajan from the Business Desk NDTV throws some more light into it. “It is not the gender but class which play the defining role in our organization. If you really want a clear picture, the men women ratio in NDTV is approximately 30:70. Even at the editorial level it is 40:60. Women distinctively out number men in NDTV. But this is quite an elite organization. All the professionals working here come from highly educated, upper class, liberated background where gender in not an issue when it comes to choosing a career or functioning in the organization of your choice. Nidhi Rajdan, a young reporter of the same channel agree. “NDTV is quite a gender sensitive organization. Nobody would dare to point a finger at us or make a derogatory remark because we are women. A single complain to the editor would suffice
to throw the person concerned out of the office.” Sujata, AajTak, points out that “feminist theory is a over built theory. If women have the confidence and courage, they can excel in any field. There is no such obstruction because we are women if we don’t wish to acknowledge them. And it is high time we should come out of these narrow identities and move ahead with life.”

However, the journalists interviewed admit that electronic media don’t give as much coverage to human interest stories as it is due. It has been pointed out that politics and business get the utmost importance when it comes to prioritizing news items and in a market driven society, channels decide their priority on the basis of market demand rather than the gravity of the story. As Sonia Verma, the News Editor of NDTV points out, “these competition helps us in a way to improve ourselves in different ways. But it is unfortunate that in order to increase the TRP rating, some of the channels ignore the media ethics and sensationalize the substance in such a manner that the story loses its significance.” In a market oriented journalism culture, the journalists no more identify their role as the conscience keeper of the society, but as corporate professionals ‘producing’ news stories to cater to the market demand. In this scenario where hard news stories get a clear preference over the soft human interest issues, women’s issues, as has been pointed out by the respondents, don’t gets its due coverage. In the world of sound byte journalism and professional functioning, private news channels clearly neglect the stories that would not be valued by the market or the sponsors.
Before concluding this section couple of observations may be made to sum the findings up. Take for instance the NDTV-24/7 channel which has indeed projected itself as one of the respectable channels and it has a fair degree of legitimacy among the English speaking urban professionals and educational elites. If one compares it with DD news channel some interesting sociological facts begin to emerge. First, we see a high degree of innovation on the part of NDTV which manifest itself in programmes like ‘Big Fight’ and ‘We The People’. These innovative projects characterized by the zeal, enthusiasm and self confidence of professionals like Rajdeep Sardesai and Barkha Dutt look refreshingly different from very static, monotonous DD panel discussions. Second, the visibility of confident, self assuring women professionals on NDTV is remarkable. And DD has to overcome a long distance in order to arrive at such a stage. Third, relatively speaking, women’s issues such as debates on censorship, the uniform civil code, domestic violence, cyber pornography, consumerism in matrimonial relations are covered much more sensitively in NDTV compared to DD. Not surprisingly then the story of women professionals in in a channel like NDTV sounds different from what their counterpart say in DD. But then, there is also a paradox. And that is related to class and cultural capital. NDTV-English channel, as the background profile of both male and female professionals suggest, is visibly upoper class and metropolitan. There is indeed distance between this cultural and symbolic capital from the rythem of everyday life people in rural and semi urban areas indulging. NDTV as a result remain limited to the select few. Even though it
gets lucrative sponsorship and from corporate houses and is commercially successful, it cannot reach the periphery where as DD has the ability to address the sections of the society but it does not seem to have the imagination and creative sense to unfold that potential. This also poses a serious sociological question to reflect on. Is it then the fact that the emancipatory feminist voice is just a class phenomena?

III

Soap Opera: Representation of Womanhood

In this section we are shifting from television news to soap operas. Reason is that teleserials constitute the most important component of the visual culture. Neither DD, nor private channels like Sony, Zee or STAR PLUS escape this overwhelming presence of soap operas in the small screen. Before we reflect on the hidden meanings of these cultural products we need to make the following observations. Broadly speaking, there is a huge difference between a classified literary tradition and television serials. A television serial, unlike a literary tradition is often temporal. Its narratives are fleeting and superficial and it keeps continuing only to sensitize and stimulate the viewers with colour, visuals and melodrama. These visuals continue to bombard the minds of the viewer ship while reading a classic text by Shaksphere or Tagore would require a solitary and concentrated engagement of the readers, television can just be viewed with utter passivity and leisure. Tele serials as a result unlike literary texts are not sufficiently demanding. That is why tele serials have wider
audience. Rural folks, grand mothers, housewives, students, shop keepers all can watch these serials. And in our public spaces, i.e. tea shop, colleges these narratives become the objective of public gossip. The popularity of these serials can be imagined when we notice that some of these actors become household names and becomes attractive commodity for political consumption. This apparent democratization of tele serials, as critical theorists have argued, is also responsible for their trivialization and reduction into flat, hollow, spectacle that bombards people’s mind and imagination. A student of media and gender must study these dominant component of media culture and examine its implication as far as the reproduction of stereotypes and images of women are consumed. It is with this urge that we have tried to study the cultural and symbolic images beneath some of these popular television serials which are telecast in private channels.

In a month long exercise of watching soap operas (that are highly rated among the viewers) shown on various cable channels as prime time shows I attempt to analyse the role of *entertainment medium* in today’s context. And the focus of my research/reflection is on: a) how women are depicted in these soap operas as a representative of their lot; and b) what are the possible impact of such representation on its viewers. This study concentrates its focus largely on prime time soap operas highly rated among its viewers.

Depiction of women in all the soaps speaks in elaborate details about the role of women as a consistent or unchanging category. They are shown as
traditional stereo types- positioned at home as housewives and are always projected and identified by their male counterparts (as mother/wife/daughter/daughter in law). Even though most of these serials are claimed to be women centric and are made catering to the demand of a predominantly female audience, the one macro objective have often been to preserve the ‘feminine’ rather than the ‘feminist’ values.

Media’s depiction of Indian women in soap opera leaves a great impact in the psyche of the viewers who watch it. Are these images of women simply a reflection of cultural beliefs and attitudes or do they help to shape those beliefs and attitudes? How do these images affect the ways that women think about themselves and the ways that others think about women? Does the depiction of women differ depending on religion, caste, class and rural-urban divide? These are the specifics on which I attempt to focus in this section of the chapter.

It must be clarified that in an increasing attempt by the producers of the entertainment program to popularize their shows for all commercial purposes which comes with the package of open air waves and privatization of TV channels (which results them to indulge in cut throat competition to increase TRP ratings), the motive to produce socially relevant tele serials are shrinking in rapid rate catering to the demand of the sponsorship and taste of the viewers for light entertainment.

Few of the prime time soap operas* have been randomly picked up from three leading private( entertainment) channels namely Sony, STAR Plus and Zee. The
game shows and musical shows have not been taken into account in the study though they constitute a substantial portion of these entertainment channels.

* The briefings of the tele serials viewed for the purpose are given in the annexure though unlike films, soap operas don't have a particular story line and are based on a series of issues and (sub)plots. All I have attempted to do has been to broadly outline the content of these serials though I must add, I have not watched any of these serials from the beginning for a substantial length of time. A lot of input has been taken from some of my friends and relatives who helped me largely in watching these serials by updating me with the rating on the basis of popularity and narrating the plot of the soaps.

✓ Family drama: Family is (perceived) as an important institution in Indian society and family values as the most enduring values. And catering to this sentiment most of the shows projected today are soap operas whose story lines revolve around family values. And the role of women in preserving or breaking the family is the core theme of each soap. As the soaps are plotted largely in domestic settings, the centrality of women is the first point I must highlight upon. Women are not peripheral to the stories unlike mainstream films or crime series which definitely helps a large number of women to watch these shows (and they are the target audience of these soaps). There are a set of 'good' or 'bad' women in each of these serials who handle the complex web of relationships which make up a soap opera. Where as Parvati (Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki), Sarla, Kkusum(Kkusum), Tulsi(Kyun Ki
Saas Bhi Kabhi Bohu Thi), Saina(Kahin Kisi Roz) epitomize the level 'good', women like Esha, Nikita(Kkusum), Arti, Payal(KSBKBT) symbolizes 'bad'. However, despite the centrality of women in each of the stories in handling relationships, the lack of **realistic representation of women** is the first critical point I would like to make. Though soaps donot deal with a single story line and creates an illusion of showing how families actually function with their slow pace, repetition, overlapping story lines and focus on the day to day lives of the families, I would like to reflect- media produces family values as artificial constructs neglecting the core stories of real families. In all the shows I watched the focus has always been on the families of upper middle class or rich with a large chunk of over dressed women engaged in domestic power game and emotional trivialities, leaving aside the larger problems and issues which a family(and women in particular) in an average encounter. Financial issues, dowry, rape, problems of working women, handling difficult kids etc. though sometimes touched upon lacks its significance for being approached in a superfluous and unconcerned way. There is no serious engagement by these soaps to depict women's problems and tension arising out of changing socio-economic setting. It may be critiqued that by emphasizing so much on marriage, family, sense of clothing, family celebrations and relationships, soaps ignore and in a way glamorized the greater issues and some times they are reduced to a level of family melo drama. Another example of family as artificial construct is the way women are projected as 'good' or
bad' leaving no room for 'in betweens'. This celebration of ideal women who are self sacrificing, adjusting, compromising, coy and docile emphasizes the traditional belief on how women 'should be' ignoring the sensitivity of a modern independent woman and the problems and confusions she goes through. And there is a danger that it may create an illusion of stereo typical image of 'good' and 'bad' women in the minds of the viewers: the kind of women one does not encounter in real life circumstances. And it must be pointed out that though women play a crucial role in handling all domestic trivialities(of which the soaps are majorly consisted upon) the major decisions of the family are taken by the male members preserving confidently the patriarchal values of Indian society.

Joint family syndrome: If family values are much talked about story lines, then the families mostly are joint families. And the visibility of women within these families are quite high. And this intent of the media to preserve joint family structure as an essential institution for the betterment of society at large is persistently followed upon. The focus of the soaps have mostly been on the joys of 'living together' celebrating happiness jointly and sharing sorrows amongst each other occasionally. One of the prime time tele serial infact has been named as 'Kutumbh'- the English equivalent of joint family(Sony, 9-30p.m.-10.00p.m on weekdays). In 'Kyun ki saas bhi kabhi bohu thi'(STAR Plus: 10.30-11.00p.m.), the lead character Tulsi in the title song of the soap opens the door of the (joint) family and introduces the viewers to the whole range of characters living(together) happily within
the family which includes three generations of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters (unmarried or divorced/separated), sister in laws sons, daughters, grand sons, grand daughters and nephews, nieces and some close (and sometimes distant) relatives: a complete picture of all possible relationships that can exist within the framework of a joint family. The role of women in preserving or breaking a (joint) family is the core theme of the operas where men hardly play any role. ‘Adjustment’ and ‘compromise’ are key themes for all serials and women epitomize these qualities in order to preserve the family from breaking. And those who are unable to come to terms with the core values of these joint family are shown in negative lights and they ruin few episodes of the smooth sailing of family life by being ‘rigid’ on their point before breaking away or understanding their follies. In KSBKBT, Arti, one of the second generation daughter in laws is shown in extreme negative light as she fights to stick to her career (and comes along with it the whole package of ‘neglecting’ her child) where as the rest of the ‘bohus’ work in the kitchen (and they are the epitome of preservers of the family happiness) and finally leaves the family. In Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki, the younger sister in laws attempt hard to caste down Parvati the elder sister in law as she is an extremely likable person in the family and later come to realize their faults and start coming closer to Parvati. In Kkusum, the aunt-in-laws of Kkusum constantly make unsuccessful attempts to prove the later wrong as they are not able to tolerate her primacy in home and family business. And it must be pointed out that in both KGGK and Kkusum, an underlying attempt has
been made to project that yet another negative trait of women is ‘jealousy’ and ‘envy’ which is universal to most women. However, ultimately, the virtues of joint families prevail.

**Relationship with male counterparts:** it is crucial to notice that women are projected as traditional stereotypes: housewives, mothers or sister-in-laws, as pointed out earlier, of their male counterparts and their independent identity has often been underplayed. It is reflected in elaborate details in all the serials. And as I (and I'm sure many viewers) would be wondering why the title of the serial *Kkusum* has two ‘K’s at the beginning (as the name is generally not pronounced that way), in one of the episodes of the serial it was revealed that the initial K stands for Kapoor the surname of her husband which celebrate the changed status of a woman after marriage as she adapts another family (along with the family name). One of the crudest possible manifestation of fragile identity of women which revolve around their father, husband or son. It must be pointed out that Kkusum is otherwise projected as an independent minded career woman but she has retained her virtues only because she has been able to sweetly blend her traditional values with modernity. And the patriarchal ideology is highly internalized by the women who would rather highlight than question the sidelining of women when it comes to projecting men as the actual inheritor of the family name (and property). *Sanjjhi*, the tele serial in Zee elaborate all through on how Kumar Sahib choose to get married for the second time as his first wife is not being able to procreate a child (read
son) despite all his love for the later. It is important, he insists without much of protest from the other members of the family, that the family name be maintained and of course he gets married to a young girl half his age and belonging to a poor needy family for nothing but to have a son! In an whole episode of KSKBT the hue and cry revolving around the lighting of a lamp before the grandfather’s photo by the grand son seems to reinforce the significance of a son to complete the portrait of a Hindu family.

✓ **Women as house wives:** as pointed out earlier most of the lead roles of the soaps are based on women who are house wives and the role of women within the domestic sphere. The plots highlighted are based on their relationship with their husband, children and family at large. *Tulsi*, the ideal housewife of KSBKBT is projected as an ideal housewife because she has been successfully able to relate with all the relationships of the family and just knows too well how to treat each relationship in a traditionally defined way. *Parvati* is a successful housewife because she acquires the virtue of being sacrificing and compromising all the time. *Kkusum* has always been able to fight with all the adverse ‘situations’ in a very coy manner. However, it must be pointed out that situations and circumstances are not as picture perfect in real life as is shown on these soap operas which are so seductive on their artificial constructs that it creates an illusion of equivalent of a real life situation. None of the ‘ideal’ women however attempts to fight against the ‘system’ but the ‘situations’. However some of the serials attempt to figure out the vulnerability and in-articulation of
women as housewives. After Neela, the uneducated and un cultured (as she is projected) house wife of a successful lawyer, learns of her husband’s extra marital relationship with her younger sister (who is comparatively more ‘educated’ and ‘modern’ than the former) is visibly shaken and her foremost concern has been ‘where will I go with these two little kids’. However later she leans on her mother for moral support and sobbingly justifies her husband’s act by saying she has not been able to live upto his expectation. And when her mother tries to console her, she resists, ‘I am not even beautiful’ and her mother asserts, ‘ I am the mother yet I take a neutral stand here. You definitely are more beautiful’. Certainly the concept of beauty may vary from person to person and neela refutes, ‘but I am not educated’. And her mother articulates with all her confidence, ‘ education has absolutely no role to play in a marital life. You are a good cook. And you have given him two kids. What else can a man ask for?’ And puts all the blame on destiny, ‘sab kismat ka khel hai’ with a finality in her tone. However, the episode definitely attempts to speak about the conflict and changing scenario of marital relationships.(23/04/02) Zee.

✓ **Women as independent beings/career women:** most of the lead women of the soaps are projected as housewives who very successfully retain their traditional Indian values. And mostly it is shown that those women who work either neglect their family or prove themselves to be failure (or atleast cling on to their male counter parts when a major decision has to be taken) in the career front. Career women projected in the soaps are rare and if
portrayed, portrayed in a negative light. *Arti*, a working daughter in law in Virani house hold (*KSBKBT*) is depicted as neglecting her children and ultimately ruins her marital life because of her career. *Kkusum*, though portrayed as a working woman, works in the framework of her family business and inspired by her talent and increasing popularity among the male members of the family, two younger *chachis Arundhati* and *Nikita* (portrayed in negative light) jump into the family business claiming their potentials despite resistance from their respective husbands and make a mockery of themselves with their dealings all through the soap. However, their joining the office was not out of their sudden recognition of their potential but the increasing popularity of *Kusum* driven by jealousy and envy; two intrinsic qualities as portrayed of women. And it must be pointed out that *Kusum*’s potential as a successful business woman has mostly been overshadowed by the ways in which she is handling her personal relationships or problems. And it must be pointed out that the serials highlight in subtle ways how career is secondary in a woman’s life where as it may be crucial for men. In one of the episodes, *Jyoti*, the elder sister of *sonali* proposes her to agree upon a marriage proposal she has brought for her. And when *sonali* resists the proposal and stubbornly points out that she wants to get settled career wise first before getting married, *Jyoti* plays a ‘balancing’ role by trying to convince her that career issue may be taken care of after marriage as well. For a man career may be important but for a woman her husband is everything (*pati hi sabkuchh hota hai*).” *Jyoti* is
otherwise portrayed as a successful career woman and her articulation definitely confirms the underlying statement that priorities for men and women are pre fixed and pre determined according to the societal norms which should be followed without questioning. And those who are portrayed as career women are generally shown as a part of the family business or in modeling or fashion designing. No prime time serial however deals with the problems and hurdles a woman face in the work front starting from travelling by public transport to harassment by the seniors on the ground of their being at the other side of the gender or problems back home pertaining to their doing ‘double shift’. In yet another serial Hubahu(Sony TV) which portrayed two identical twins Aditi and Ananya and projects the former as a housewife and the later a (successful)career woman who lives independently(i.e. without a family). In a symbolic projection when they decide to role play each other’s character as one of their childhood antics and reverse their position, the highlight has been on how they find each other’s world so different and so alien. The distinct separation of ‘private’ and ‘public’ sphere for women has been the focus of the serial. And it emphasizes more on the vulnerability and helplessness of an independent woman in elaborate detail. In the few episodes that I have watched aditi, the housewife, gets completely fascinated with her newly found independent status in a glamorous world of Dubai and seeks to have a life of that kind. But after a temporary ‘illusion’ she desperately wishes to go back to her home where she has all the security on earth. On the other side, Ananya is
exasperated with the petty domestic trivialities and wonders how women choose to live like a housewife all through their life when there is much more one can do in life. But in long run, when she gets emotionally involved with Aditi's husband and kid, she contemplates a secured life for herself rather than the superfluous world of Dubai. And if I have read the story line as it should be, the bottom line is, domestic sphere is definitely the sphere for women though they sometime get disillusioned by the 'glamour' of public sphere temporarily. This stereo type representation definitely rules out the possibility of women having a 'choice' if at all, and overlooks the existence of an overlapping possibility of private and public identity by showing 'private' and 'public' as separate.

✓ **Women as mothers:** if motherhood is a celebrated status in Indian society it is reflected in all the tele serials viewed for the purpose. Motherhood is one of the crucial amidst the range of emotional relationships in which the women characters are involved. And all through women play the role of keeping their families united and happy and taking the sole responsibility of looking after the children and bringing them up. The image of the mother is so sacred in these soaps that they reduce to be unreal. They can never take a stand against their children, would over look their children's faults and when the whole world goes against her child she is the only one who would stand by himmostly) or her and wait till normalcy is restored with all her confidence that her child can never go wrong.
The ‘other’ woman: Given the tensions marriages are facing today, a number of popular serials such as *Heena, Kkusum, Justuju* have based their story line on extra marital affairs. And some of the serials use a sub plot on extra marital relationships. This theme is carefully crafted to gain the empathy of the female viewer in her depiction as a wife. And invariably the ‘other woman’ who walks into a relationship is seen in a negative light. And ultimately as good prevails over the evil, finally the wife would definitely win back her husband after continuous struggle against the situation (and not the system). The protagonists be it *Kkusum, Heena or Neela*, fight the situation but not the system. However, in one of the serials *Sanjji*, Kanak (played by Neena Gupta), the first wife of Kumar sahib who gets married to Hansa, a young girl as the former was not being able to give birth to a child (son, to be specific) and the *Khandaan* (Hindi equivalent of dynasty) requires a son for carrying out the family name, is visibly shaken and decides to bring her husband to book under the allegation of bigamy after a lot of after thoughts. And goes through a lot of confrontation. However, the serial is not a highly rated one and the character of Kanak is not popular enough (in comparison to Parvati, Kkusum or Tulsi). Though I don’t have any evidence to prove my point I must highlight that while watching one of this episodes with one of my relatives few days back she commented that no sane woman would/should do such a thing as going against her husband in such drastic way in real life situation. Though I am quite convinced there are good chances of women going against their husbands if the later is at
fault(an I consider getting married for the second time ‘only’ for a son is not a politically correct act no matter what our traditional values and norms are) and not very sure if the same person would not react to the situation in the same manner the fact that Kanak is not a very likable character in comparison to her counter parts may be seen in the ratings. Heena, after a lot of unsuccessful attempt to bring back her ‘first’ husband from the clutches of his girl friend Ruby, returns back to her parents where she is accepted unquestioningly and later get married to a friend of her husband who understand the whole dynamics being a insider. But the pointed to be noted is that Heena is depicted as a representation of the ‘muslim women’ where second marriage is a socially accepted norm. and it would not be shown in a case of any ideal Hindu woman where society is not as permissive. Hena remains a coy, obedient and pretty one however. And everywhere the producers keep it in mind that the apple cart should not be shaken.

(And all through the serials the ‘other woman’ is ostensibly dressed in modern clothes compared to her rival and is projected as more independent(in most cases working woman and staying independent, sometimes with a degree from some foreign institution).

✓ Dress code: A significant phenomenon witnessed are the dress code followed for women depicted in all soap operas. If there are only ‘good’ women and ‘bad’ women in each families then dress codes for ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are also pre defined. It never seizes to amuse me why all the ‘good’
women have to clad in traditional sarees (and some new generation women may dispense it with salwar kurta with duppattas well-pinned) with a mangal sutra and sindoor (or atleast tikka) on their forehead and having long hair neatly combed into a bun. Here as, ‘bad’ women are dressed in western clothes (tight jeans and tops) or bright sarees with sleeveless blouses, heavily made up (bright lipstick and eye shadows) with hair cut short. It is easy to identify a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ characters in any of these serials for a novice viewers. and if these visual details of sindoor, mangasutras, make ups, hairstyles do not suffice one may look at the gestures of these women to distinguish a ‘good’ from the ‘bad’. The good girls generally are sober and docile breaking down to tears (or leaning to their male counter parts the moment the soap takes a melodramatic turn and ‘bad’ girls are those who are aggressive with weird eye and lip movements and never have been favourite among men. and it as well be pointed out that when somebody turns from bad to good then the sense of dressing changes alongwith the attitude. Esha (often shown in jeans and tight tops or western formals), the ‘other’ woman who for a short period of time enters into Kkusum’s marital life, gets involved with her husband and ruins the former’s married life is a highly qualified person with a degree from some foreign university and quite good in her business. However, after the show down and when Abhay returns back to Kkusum, Esha goes back to England, realizes her mistakes, comes back to India and attempts to pacify things ‘wearing salwar kurta and bindi’. Nikita chachi of Kkusum (otherwise dressed in ciffon sarees and
sleeve less blouse) metamorphosis in to pinned up sarees with anchal wrapped around her head when she attempts to impress upon her uncle that she is a ‘ideal’ wife and ‘bohu’ of Kapoor household which she is projected as not. And I fail to understand how and why dress codes in real life need to be changed with one’s attitude and why cannot somebody wear what she wishes to wear while sticking to her intrinsic good or bad qualities and change these qualities independently(without changing the sense of dressing). Sarla bhabi of Kkusum, Parvati of KGGK, Tulsi of KSBKBT, Neela of Justuju are the depicted as ideal women in the soaps with mangal sutra, sindoor and sarees. Though these details would not provide much relevant data I must confide all through my field work I was inquisitively watching the sense of dressings and gestures of the women depicted in the serials as there was not much of content left in those series of prime time serials I watched all days through. And I must point out that these stereo types in dress codes create a ‘falsified’ picture of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in the minds of the viewers which may not hold true in real life situation.

✓ **Larger issues:** larger issues on women are neglected in these tele serials is a point I have already made before. But it would be one sided to say they don’t deal with the issues at all. Soap operas do treat issues of sociological concern as peripheral but the issues sometimes are dealt with. And how they are dealt with(no matter how infrequently and how trivially) may be a subject of analysis. And 8 entire episodes were devoted to how the issue of rape within the joint family(which is the most under noticed yet a most
frequent phenomena if one goes by the sociological literature) is handled by the residing members. In Ghar Ghar Ki Kahani (April-May, 2002) a physically challenged woman Khusi is being raped by her relatives with whom she has come to stay. And when things come out in open the women take a stand against the culprit and wishes to bring him to book. They in fact get united and take the matter to the court where all men prefer to seat at the opposite. An attempt definitely has been made to focus on the power of women solidarity and how women empathize with a woman’s problem with more sensitivity amidst subtle attempts to project the dominant (patriarchal) point of view (like for instance, in one of the episodes, Deven, one of the culprit tries to convince his wife by saying though he is involved in the case, he did not ‘mean’ rape and also latently cautioned her with the age old threat, ’she shouldn’t go by her whim and must look into the long run impact. Who will look after the kids if he is jailed). In Kasouti Zindegi Ki four episodes highlighted on how a trick of one of the inmates (Komolika) of Basu household somehow creates the misunderstanding of the amount of gold jewelry brought by Shibani as fake and Prerna, the elder sister takes all the pain to go out and investigate who is the actual culprit and eventually expose that the gold that were give originally were real ones and the sly game has been played within the family. (and the gold jewelry includes five sets of thick gold sets to the relatives of Shivani). And the episodes focus more on the status symbol and the integrity/capability of the bride’s side and not on how a girl is looked
down upon if she has not brought enough gold in her marriage. Instead of treating dowry as a social crime the episodes indulge greatly on celebrating the ‘gift culture’ prevalent in our culture that would create a fear of institutionalizing the system rather than condemning it. And problems of working mothers/wives are some times hyped up. In Dhadkan the doctor wife/mother actually seeks the help of a psychiatric to get over the trauma of ruining her family life for her career (thought the soap has taken great pain to show the doctor in positive light where her husband and the kid donot understand her real situation) a subtle message of women should not stretch them so hard when it comes to career is definitely provided with. Yet another manifestation of patriarchal ideology requiring some in-depth analysis.

On a macro level, soap stories may seem to be repetitive and over familiar which are produced to cater to women’s leisure time activities solely for entertainment thus, not very significant. But it definitely leaves an impact on the minds of its viewers as to how the society ‘is’ or ‘ought to be.’ And, the emphasis of all the soap operas on the domestic and the personal rather than the public sphere catering to the viewer ship of an extremely gendered audience is in itself a revelation on how women’s space is traditionally been within the sphere of home and the primacy of their role as housewife/mother/daughter/daughter in law is crucial to their existence. And entertain medium plays an influential role in maintaining the status quo and recreating the traditional stereotypes blended suitably with patriarchal values in
their depiction of women in today's society rather than questioning the system biased against women.

IV

On Womanhood and Television Commercials

After the story of soap operas we now intend to look at television commercials. It is important to note that these days the media induced culture is essentially a sponsorship culture. From news to sports to films every programme is being sponsored by corporate houses. And as a result television culture is filled with commercials i.e. the advertisements that these corporate houses depict. These advertisements are not just advertisements, they are now part of the cultural goods. A little film with a narrative and a message. Advertisements have begun to exist in their own rights and in the drawing rooms of the viewers ad subtly and successfully remote controlling the desires of the consumers in a market driven society. There is a high degree of experimentation and vitality in the world of ads. With images and visuals ads have indeed become powerful. And cultural theorists have often argued that the viewers believe anything the ads talk about. Nobody is arguing that by just seeing the ads of a detergent or cosmetic or car one goes to the market and buy it. But then the recurrent bombardment of human minds by these ads seeks to create a cultural space in which some products acquire immense visibility and legitimacy. Ads do affect human responses not necessarily in a straight forward lineal fashion but in a more subtle, complex mode. Ads are sociologically revealing statements that
speaks of popular aspirations and also portrays stereotypes and images of which it means to be rich and successful, what it means to be gorgeous and beautiful and what it means to be a woman- a mother, a daughter, a house wife, a working woman or a college girl. In this section our primary objective is to identify fifty ads and study the projection of womanhood in these commercials. Because we believe a study of this kind would give us an important insight as far as the women’s question is concerned.

In a qualitative content analysis of 50 advertisements shown in commercial channels before, after or in between entertainment/news programmes the focus of my analysis has been on the depiction of women in these advertisements, its potential politics of such representation and possible impact as a consequence.

In order to understand the motive of the selected data, I have attempted to decode the theme of the advertisements given below to analyse women’s portrayal in television commercials and its possible impact on the consumers/viewers in particular and society in general.

1. Colgate tooth paste: featuring a middle class little girl

2. maggie noodles: featuring middle class kids

3. Rin washing soap: featuring middle class women(housewives) in a shop.
   male voice over explaining the importance of the product

4. Tide washing powder: featuring middle class family. House wife advocating the product.

5. Ujjala washing powder: featuring middle class housewives

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6. Sunsilk shampoo: teen age model (Samantha)
7. Vatika Hair Oil: two middle class women.
8. Breeze soap: teen age girls and boys
10. Fuji film: featuring model (Aiswarya Rai) shooting for the product.
11. Sprite beverage: featuring teen aged college going boys and girls
12. Clinic Plus shampoo: featuring middle class mother and daughter with shiny hair.
14. Kellog's cornflakes: featuring middle class school going children
15. LG washing machine: featuring middle class housewife advocating for the product.
16. Harpic toilet spray: tv star interviewing middle class housewives.
17. Medimix beauty soap: featuring middle class young woman and girl.
18. Nutrila cooking oil: middle class families in comparative perspective.
19. Nirma soap: featuring film star (Sonali Bendre) as the product ambassador.
20. TATA salt: featuring mother and daughter in the kitchen
21. Tide washing soap: featuring mother (housewife) and son
22. Hit spray: featuring house wife
23. Cinthol deo soap: featuring teen age boys and girls
24. Crack cream: featuring middle class mother and daughter
25. Nerolac paint: amitav bachan as the product ambassador. (ladki sundar hai, maa, baap bhi achhe hai, par kya ghar dekhke lagta hai ki baat ban payegi?)

26. Johnson and johnson baby milk soap: featuring mother and infant

27. Merteen mosquito coil: featuring middle class family; mother and children

28. Panteen pro-V shampoo: featuring young girl with shiny hair

29. Lifebouy soap: featuring middle class family; father (doctor), mother (housewife) and son

30. Pepsodent whitening tooth paste: featuring mother and daughter

31. Teflon nonstick pan: two chef in comparative perspective

32. Keokarpin hair oil: young girls and women with shiny hair

33. Lakme enrich lipstick: young model with glossy lip

34. Naturefresh act-light: neighbouring housewives in comparative perspective

35. Anne french hair removing cream: featuring young girl with flawless hands and legs

36. Amul shakti health drink: featuring middle class mother and son

37. Bagpiper soda: amitav bachan as the product ambassador with a patriotism theme

38. Lyzol phinile: featuring young woman housewife + doctor

39. Kajaria tiles: featuring middle class mother and son

40. Kiwi shoe polish: featuring middle class school boys playing football
41. *D' Cold cough syrup*: featuring middle class mother (housewife) and son.

42. *Parashutte hair oil*: featuring young middle class girls with healthy shiny hair.

43. *Shangini diamond jewelry*: featuring husband and wife; husband presenting diamond to the wife as a symbol of love.

44. *Lux beauty soap*: featuring Ayswarya Roy as product ambassador.

45. *Parle G biscuit*: (village background), a small village boy asking for the product in a grossery shop.

46. *Moov*: featuring middle class housewife in a joint family.

47. *Badshah kitchen masala*: featuring middle class kids; sister cooking paobhaji for the younger brother.

48. *Shaffola gold cooking oil*: featuring middle class housewives buying the product from a departmental store.

49. *Fair and Lovely fairness cream*: Young model appearing as a competent anchor for a sports channel.

50. *Fortune cooking oil*: featuring middle class joint family; housewife recommending the product.

**Data Analysis**: a qualitative reflection on the above data may be given as follows.

**Propagation of consumer culture**: the onset of liberalization and freeing of market economy has introduced a new culture in India characterized by consumerism. "Consumer culture refers to economics built on mass
consumption, as well as to a commodified symbolic universe where individual and collective identities are structured by products and advertising. With the economic reform consumer culture is at its high in India. A free flow of consumer goods in a highly competitive market has left the Indian mass with full of choices. Advertisements in today's world emerged as a means to introduce the consumer into various goods and services as a medium. Though the main objective of the advertisement is to sell products, in a context where the consumer culture is taking the better of us, I would share the ideas of Mary Ann Doenel who in her essay points out that advertising keeps alive the desire to consume because it goes "beyond the aim of selling a particular commodity" and serves to "generate and maintain an aptitude for consumption in the subject".

In today's context, the role of advertisements has gone beyond selling product and it has been able to create an illusion that the quality of life is determined on the basis of one's buying power. The television commercials under study show clearly how a conscious attempt is being constantly made to project that social relationships can be built or broken on the basis of one's consumption choices. For instance, in one of the television commercials (no. 25) on house paint, it is shown with a background where in a Hindu traditional way, a prospective groom's family have come to a prospective bride's house to decide on a right

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76 See, for example, Perry Johansson, 'Selling the Modern Woman': Consumer Culture and Chinese Gender Politics' in Shoma Munshi (ed.), Imaging of the Modern Woman in Asia (Global Media, Local Meanings), Curzon Press, Surrey, 2001, p.98

machi. Amitav Bachan, a renowned film star and the product ambassador while advertising for the product says ‘.....ladki sundar hai, maa baap bhi achhe hai, per, kya ghar thekhke lagta hai ki baat ban payegi.’ Though on the face value the advertisement seems to be saying that the particular product may be used to give the house a presentable look, the context in which this has been said has deeper social implications. It suggests that one needs to use ‘right’ products in order to achieve ‘right’ social choices in a market driven society. Consumer goods are also seen defining personal relationships. In an advertisement of jewelry (no. 43) the husband is seen presenting his wife a diamond ring as the ‘symbol of love’. The commercials also project how the use of a particular consumer good can ensure healthy lifestyle and on the process create envy among the neighbours. There are, in fact, two television commercials (nos.18,34) under study on cooking oil that give evidence to such propagation. In fact, the catch line of one of the beverage ‘Pepsi’ ‘ye dil mange more’ (no.9) advocated by renowned film stars (kareena kapoor and sharook khan) is only but one of the many examples that has been made catering to the nerve of the enhancing consumer culture in present day context.

It may also be pointed out that film stars and young models are increasingly used in the advertisements to enhance the sell of the products.

**Family as a unit of consumption:** 50 television commercials have been taken into account for the analysis, out of which 49 advertisements are having urban,
middle/upper middle class background in order to advocate their product. (no. 45 is the only one advertisement showing a rural background)

Television commercials seem to perceive urban, middle and upper middle class as having more consuming potentials. Thus, the products target these groups as their target group. By doing so, it may be pointed out that these advertisements create an illusion that India lives in this kind of a set up. Rural India has been systematically excluded from these commercials as lacking consumer potentials.

Thus, it may be noted that television commercials project family (esp. urban, middle and upper middle class family) as their unit of consumption. Most of the advertisements are shown with background where families sit together chatting, working and enjoying the products together. The relationships between parent/s and children; mother in law, daughter in law, sister and brother etc are interwoven suitably depending on the products to be projected in the commercials. Another finding that may be pointed out is that kids are used as objects of attraction in order to enhance the value of the product (nos. 1,2,14,21,26,27,29,30,32,36,39,40,41,42,45,47).

**High visibility of women:** it has been observed that out of 50 advertisements, 49 advertisements have shown women advertising for the product in some form or the other. And it may be pointed out that the television commercials often target women, for, they are perceived as the consuming potentials. Thus, it is seen that advertisements are produced keeping largely the female audience in
mind. Women are in a way used to sell products and are expected to buy the products as well. Thus, it may be concluded that women are used in the advertisements as both objects and the subject.

However, it may be pointed out that high visibility also means more distortion of the image of women. Television commercials portray women, as society wants to see them and in no way attempt to contribute for the upliftment of their position in the society. Women are shown as mere housewives or dutiful mothers whose sole aim lies in running the household, washing clothes, cooking for the family and keeping the household in good humour. An effective housewife is someone who is using the right kitchen equipment, grocery items and preparing right kind of food using right ingredients; or is using the right detergent and keeping her husband's or children's clothes spotless clean which may fetch them a lot of accolade in the office or school. To be specific, advertisements on the above mentioned products constantly use housewives as their model for their products and take their opinion on the significance of the products. (nos.3, 4, 5, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 27, 30). And it has also been noticed that if a man is shown to advocate the product (in exceptional cases), then their role is shown as professional. (e.g. no.16: Harpic spray shows a man interviewing housewives and advocating the products; no.31: Teflon non stick cooking pan shows a chef advocating the product). The study of the data clearly projects, as has been discussed in chapter-I, a systematic ritualizing of stereotypes of women in the television commercials in order to sell the product. In fact in one of the advertisements (no. 47) a little
girl is shown cooking ‘paav bhaji’ for her kid brother with a social implication that once grown up the little girl is going to very predictably take over the role of her mother. It is observed that advertisements are sexist in their approach.

One of the studied items (no:22) projects the housewife confidently claiming ‘kuin ki ghar mera hai’ confirming her sole existence within the domestic domain. It may also be pointed out that men are often treated superior despite high visibility of women in the television commercials. One of the evidence may be seen in one of the advertisement (no:1) where a little girl is shown saying ‘me bhi ladkon jaisi strong hun’. Thus, it may be concluded that though visibility of women is quite high in the television commercials, they are often projected in a very limited and distorted fashion in order not to disturb the status quo and on the process work as a proponent of the existing patriarchal ideology in our society.

**Objectification of women’s body:** The most contentious issue which attracts the attention of the feminist critique is the objectification of women’s body through advertisements. It has also been pointed out before in the argument that women are used by advertisements both as subject and object. Though women are often the target group, television commercials also keep in view the entire consumer market as the viewers of their products and advertisements are made to attract a larger audience as well. And it may be pointed out that women are used in the commercials the way the society and men in particular wants to see them. Women are often shown as young and attractive in almost all the commercials and mostly young models are shown to attract the viewers.
Out of 50 television commercials under scrutiny, 16(nos:6,7,8, 12,17,19,23,24,26,28,32,33,35,42,44,49) are on cosmetic products. And in almost all of them women are shown as objects with shiny hair (shampoo or hair oil), flawless skin (cold cream, bathing soap/moisturizer), glossy lips and so on. Their body is shown in fraction such as hair, face, neck, leg and beauty is projected to be the most important possession a woman must have no matter in whatever field she wants to succeed. In one of the advertisements (no:49), for example, a young woman aspiring to become a television anchor for sports finds her confidence back as the judges notice her after she uses a fairness cream of a particular brand and become fair. Women are projected as beautiful objects and often there is a conscious effort to commodify their body in order to sell product in particular and attract the consumer market in general. This sexual objectification of women needs attention as a social subject.

It may also be figured out that this objectification of women’s body does not limit itself to women’s product only and in almost all the products advertised, women are thoroughly used as a commodity to attract the attention of the viewers.

The above reflection on television commercials, though very limited in nature, touches upon the way women are portrayed in yet another fraction of media in its crudest form in the era of consumerism.

As a part of the field work in the electronic media as a researcher, I had series of conversations with the women professionals in the said medium to get
perspective on their participation in the production of programme materials and its possible impact on the politics of the social organization of news. In order to understand the way women are depicted in the commercial channels I observed the soap operas and television commercials for a period of one month to get an insight on the said subject. The summary of the responses and the observation is briefed as follows.

- It has been observed that news channels give priority to hard issues and human interest issues get sidelined on the process. Lack of space is said to be one of the main causes of soft issues not getting its due coverage. But it has also been found out that the State, market and/or the dominant class ideology play a deciding role in prioritizing the issues to be covered by the channels. Women's issues fall into the category of soft issues and are neglected to preserve the status quo of the society.

- Visibility of women as professionals is quite high though the sex ratio shows a clear male dominance. However, the presence of women in this profession doesn't seem to make much difference in deciding women's issues getting a priority. One of the reasons may be that women's representation is relatively less in the decision making position. Secondly, it has also been observed that women professionals have internalized the patriarchal ideology as a part of their professional socialization and on the process tend to overlook the importance of giving women's issues its due coverage. However, it has been noticed that women professionals are sensitive towards women's cause and recognize the importance of women's
issues being highlighted by the media for the enhancement of their position in the society.

- Respondents identify the professional hazards they confront being women in this profession. It has been pointed out that women have to 'double shift' as domestic domain is exclusively the domain of women, and if somebody wishes to be a career woman, she has to work extra hours. However, they have also recognized that their husbands 'help' them in household work. Segregation, if not discrimination still exists in the work front despite women's visible presence in this sphere. However, the discrimination is much subtler in comparison to its past trend.

- Portrayal of women in the entertainment channel in a way ritualizes social stereotypes and women are projected, as the society characterized by patriarchal ideology wants them to be projected. Their role is highlighted as housewives and they are mostly located in the domestic domain. Television commercials project women as young, attractive objects catering to the market need in order to sell products and objectification of women's body is consciously done to attract consumers in a society driven by market economy.