CONCLUSION

Where Do We Go From Here?
The role of mass media has become crucial in shaping the attitude and ideology of the society in present day context. And it has been observed that even after 57 years of independence, the position of women remain powerless within this democratic structure of Indian society despite the most progressive laws adopted by the Constitution. Keeping this backdrop in mind, media’s response to women’s question becomes a vital area of concern for social analysis. This research work is an attempt to explore and analyse in some details women’s engagement with mass media within the framework of the media culture in Delhi.

In this concluding chapter, I shall summarize the issues which have engaged us till now. However, I must clarify that the study on print media and electronic media have been discussed separately in preceding chapters (chapter-II & III respectively) deliberately. It has been observed that the history, context and functioning of the two mediums differ from each other in more than one way. Print media owes its origin to British era and emerged with a nationalist agenda where as the history of electronic medium is relatively new. Doordarshan was introduced in 1980s as a part of the government’s decision to spread education and information to the mass. The open sky policy in the era of liberalization and market economy opened up opportunities for private channels to establish themselves in Indian market as a potential medium to amuse, entertain and disseminate information among the consumers. Despite the variations however,
the mass media has come to play a defining role in a modern, democratic set up like India. And as the fourth organ of the State, mass media is expected to play a democratic role in representing the voice of all the sections of the society, especially the disadvantaged lot.

Women have been the subordinate and the relegated lot in the hierarchy of the division of labour in almost all the societies characterized by patriarchal culture. And as we have observed that media has the potentiality to address the question of the disadvantaged lot as a crucial instrument of the democratic society, its role in representing the cause of the women becomes a subject matter for analysis. There is a contention among the feminists that mass media works within the framework of the patriarchal structure and thus, speaks the voice of the dominant ideology neglecting the cause of women. In this study, the two broad themes that I have touched upon are the participation and portrayal of women in mass media.

The analysis showed that women’s issues are given marginal coverage in the hierarchy of organization of news. A content analysis of the print media figures out that issues that concern women (such as violence against women, women empowerment, women and development etc.) are given coverage in the newspaper mostly as event oriented stories and a lack of sensitivity is noticed as far as women’s cause is concerned. Issues on atrocity against women are given the highest coverage. However, these issues are covered as mere crime stories and there is no serious engagement to explore the root cause of such
crimes and no gender perspective is given to it as a part of the analysis. Where as stories on rape, dowry death are covered very frequently there is an absence of stories on female infanticide, feticide, police atrocities etc. That indicates women’s issues are not covered because of any sensitivity towards women but on the basis its sensational aspect. Another factor that influences the coverage of the stories depends on its availability. Where as the former stories can be obtained from the regular sources (such as police record etc.), the later needs an involvement for the issues concerned. There is no effort made to go deep into the root cause of women’s issues in the media. My discourses with the journalists figure out that the news stories are greatly influenced by the ideology of the state, market or the dominant class. Where as hard (political, business) issues are given utmost importance, human-interest stories are marginalized because of lack of space. And in order to cater to the need of the market, the mass media sensationalize and distort the news stories rather than giving it an insightful coverage. The respondents also confide that they work within the said framework and there is lack of involvement for the human interest stories they generally cover. Women’s issues are doubly neglected because the media work within the patriarchal framework and journalists working within that sphere seem to inhale the same ideology. However, it has been noticed that women’s movement of 1970s has been able to influence the media ideology to an extent, and women’s issues is gradually getting some recognition on the process.
Second, another finding shows that women are participating more and more in number in the production of news materials. My exposure to the media industries during the course of my field work reveals that though men women ratio goes strongly in favour of men, women professionals are increasingly participating in media organizations and some of them have even made it to the decision making position. And with the increase in numerical strength, women professionals have been able to find their voice in the said organization and they manage to cover issues of substantial importance rather than confiding themselves to the pages of food and fashion. The days of fighting for women toilet in the organization have become a thing of the past and women no more struggle to go to the war front to give a first hand coverage. Women have, to an extent, found their space in this field.

But it has been noticed that this representation of women is highly determined by class and social status. The women professionals encountered during the course of the study largely come from upper class, educated, urban background and most of them admit that it is the support of their family and society rather than its resistance that has helped them where they are today. And the respondents agree that there is lack of networking among women journalists as majority of them resist against reducing them to a category (i.e. women journalists) and there is no organized effort among the women journalists to give women’s issues an insightful coverage. It is admitted that though being women, give the professionals a perspective to cover women’s issues in a sensitive manner, for, they can relate to women’s problems better, it needs
much more involvement than that to make one equipped enough to give women's issues its due coverage. It has been observed that women journalists working within the framework have internalized the patriarchal ideology as a part of their professional socialization and though they are sensitive to women's issues, their race to be one among the 'men' overshadow their personal preferences.

Thirdly, another major finding points out the professional hazards faced by the women journalists in a subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) form. Though it has been observed that women have come a long way as far as their participation in the media organization is concerned, women are yet to find their due place in the society. Women professionals have admitted that they don't face resistance in this field as bluntly unlike the past trend and their visibility is accepted to a great extent. But the question of equality of opportunity is not free from its socio cultural implications. A woman in the larger framework of society is still the subordinated lot and it leaves its influence on these privileged women as well. Though women journalists tend to overlook the hazards they face, during my series of discourses with them, they come out with the discrimination they encounter being women in this field. All women journalists agree that unlike men, family is the utmost priority for women. And those married admit that if they would not have the support structure within the family and are left without any choice, 'family' has to be taken care of at the cost of their 'work'. Family responsibility including childcare is considered to be the domain exclusively for women and women.
have to do double shift if they opt to be career women as well. Some of the respondents point out that they preferred to stay unmarried as they realized it's impossible to do justice to both family and work as journalism is equally a demanding job as household work. Women professionals agree that working women face much more hurdles in the family front than that of men. Discrimination in the work front is not denied altogether. It has already been discussed that women no more struggle to be there in the organization but it is realized that segregation (if not discrimination) still exists, and dominates the culture of media organizations. However, it must be noted that women journalists in English press or electronic medium have been better placed than that of their vernacular counterparts.

Finally, the portrayal of women in the entertainment channels is not free from patriarchal influence. My observation of the soap operas and the television commercials reveal that the commercial media produces message systems and symbols that create or structure prevailing images of social reality which in a patriarchal set up show women as housewives, consumers and sex objects. Depiction of women in the commercial channels does not highlight the issues that concern women as a disadvantaged lot but aims to use them as commodity to cater to the need of the consumer in a society characterized by market economy.

The above study throws some light on the engagement of women in mass media from a sociological perspective. And the above discussion figures out
the prevalence of patriarchal culture in our society that influences the instruments of change in a substantial way. The importance of the democratic instruments like mass media in bringing about reforms has also been recognized in this context. On the basis of the findings discussed above, it becomes pertinent to realize the need for a face life of mass media in order to represent the cause of the women as a disadvantaged lot as a vital institution of social change. Though this research work does not intend to suggest policy measures as a part of its curriculum, on the basis of my involvement with the subject matter, I must suggest as a concluding remark that introduction of gender perspective in the media culture may be stressed because negligence of gender agenda by the media may keep the dominant patriarchal ways of thinking intact. And this attitude as a consequence, in a substantial way would adversely affect the women lot in particular and the over all development of the society in general.

I however do not wish to end the thesis with a pessimistic note. In fact a major lesson of critical sociological inquiry is that critical thought is different from pessimistic thought. Criticality allows one to see beyond the surface phenomena, probe into deeper issues, and interrogate the existing practice and also to see new possibilities. But pessimistic thought gets fixated at the existing order and finds no way out. It is, of course true, as our findings suggest, that the media have not yet become sufficiently sensitive to the women’s issues. And an unholy alliance of market driven consumerism and patriarchy causes severe obstacles. But then it is not right to entirely overlook some of the changes
taking place. For example, the life histories, which portrays in one of the chapters are the stories of struggle, resistance and hope. Again, in the other two substantial chapters we have seen how some of the sensitive women professionals in the media are fighting their battle and slowly but surely gaining the legitimate space in a media induced culture that till yesterday was thoroughly male dominated. We are also seeing the visibility of women, the remarkable achievement of some of them and their far-reaching consequences in altering the existing gender stereotypes.