CHAPTER-I

Understanding the Media Induced Culture: A Sociological Reflection
Mass media plays a crucial role in shaping the ideology of the society and thereby generating consciousness among the mass. However, it is important to analyze and understand the meaning of mass media in a modern industrial society characterized by capitalist mode of production and complex societal relations in order to realize the contribution of mass media in this context. As has been quoted by Natalie Fenton⁸, "the mass media refers to institutions concerned with the large scale production and diffusion of communication."

Communication is basic for the existence of any social life. Historically messages were communicated face to face and human communication was largely dependant on interpersonal relationships. But with the passage of time and industrial development a new mode of societal life and relationship began to emerge. The very characteristic of industrial society demanded public interaction beyond personal circle catering to the need of its structure, and the invention of technology introduced new methods of communication facilities that could be spread in large scale to people placed in dispersed location. Thus, new means of communications in the shape of newspaper, radio, television, and lately internet entered into the sphere as major means for public interaction. However, as the modern society evolved with all its complex dynamics, the role of mass media also has experienced certain transformation from mere

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⁸ see, for example, Fenton, Natalie, ‘Mass Media’ “Sociology”, Oxford University Press 1999(p.297)
means of communication to the shaper of ideology and a determinant force influencing the economic, social and power relation of the society.

The most important role of the mass media, as has been conceived, is to circulate awareness among the masses about the political, economic and social dynamics of the society reliably.

As I aspire to analyze women’s engagement with mass media in today’s context, it becomes pertinent to understand and assess various theories and perspectives existing in the field of media research and feminist stand on the role of mass media as an important institution in projecting women’s position in society. Women’s representation and women’s portrayal in mass media are two broad issues that has been kept in mind all through my review of literature in order to get an insight into the existing sociological thought on mass media and women.

In this chapter I have attempted to study 1. Whether mass media serve the mass neutrally, objectively and responsibly; 2. The role of market and state in influencing media; 3. Different theories and perspectives on media studies varying from consensus to critical; 4. Feminist stand on main stream thought; 5. Women and media in Indian context keeping in view the liberalized policy characterized by market economy and consumer culture.
The phenomenal growth of mass media in contemporary times needs to be conceptualized with a sociological understanding of the very context in which it is taking place. Mass media emerged as a potential requirement as society evolved from its kinship centric, tradition oriented, face to face functioning to a vast, industrial and complex one. And the growth of mass media, it may be pointed out, is inextricably linked with the present, modern, industrial society.

However, it must be pointed out that the characteristics of a modern, industrial society is based not on 'mechanical solidarity', as has been beautifully brought out by Durkheim⁹, but on 'organic solidarity' which emerged out of increased differentiated diversities and specialization. In such a society it is not only the family kinship structure but also other broader institutions such as school, professional associations and especially media play a deciding role in connecting people and creating solidarity. The second characteristic of a modern society is its techno-scientific revolution. This has led to mass production, distribution and dissemination of ideas and ideologies. Invention of print technology, for instance, can produce and distribute news in mass scale in terms of millions of copies amongst population situated in diverse locality. Likewise, television symbols and messages have been able to overcome time-space boundary and reach a huge and diversified audience. Contemporary

⁹ see, for further details, Durkheim, E., 'Division of Labour in Society', A Free Press Paper Back, 1933.
society is thoroughly intoxicated with mass circulated newspapers, magazines and television channels. The existence of mass media in today’s society has become crucial. That is how it has come to become sociologically revealing. In this context, the mass media induced communication can be sharply differentiated from direct, immediate, face-to-face, oral communication. Where as in direct, oral communication an intimate relationship is observed between the giver and the receiver, the mass media induced communication is in direct, disembodied, de contextualized and technology mediated. It reaches a diverse section of population having diverse context simultaneously. It is also different from folktales and mythological and other forms of traditional communication exercises because it is manufactured and disseminated widely. It is, in a way, more accessible and more democratic.

However, the problem areas of the media in present day society clearly make the domain a significant site of sociological enquiry. Three such broad problem areas are: first, the relationship between the state and the mass media. Modernity is also the assertion of the sovereign nation state, which often places a very important role in shaping the collective destiny of the nation. It is therefore not surprising that the state may have immense influence on the media in terms of control, political pressure and sensor. Political sociologists have been perpetually debating on this relationship between state and media. In our times, particularly because of globalization and increasing privatization of media the actual role of the state has to be examined and this question has indeed acquired a new dimension. Secondly, I also intend to see the
relationship between the mass media and the market. As news, messages and symbols are being perpetually manufactured catering to the market need, it becomes crucial to examine the role of mass media, how it packages and sells news, its biases and distortion. In this context, the question becomes relevant whether the media is truly playing a democratic role or acting as an agent of the economically powerful class. Third, it is also important to understand and examine the relationship between the media and the larger civil society. In the present scenario, it has often been argued that with the growing democratization a vibrant civil society is emerging in which mass media play an active role in creating public debate, sharing major events and news, involving the audience and raising critical issues. And it may be recognized from the above reflection that the function of mass media in contemporary times far from being simple is immensely complex characterized by all these three trends. These are state, market and civil society.

To begin with, let us think of the dynamics of the state and market relationship. It is generally perceived that modern media has an immense impact on the government and the state. It has the capacity to critically analyze the contribution in the state for the betterment of the society and expose the loopholes in its functioning. Especially after the press and mass media at large has achieved its desired freedom from the state, the general public has become increasingly dependent on the media for the information regarding the function of the state. And to certain extent media is able to fulfill this requirement of the public with its ready reach and accessibility. But how far the reports and
analysis of the media are free from any malice needs to be scrutinized. As has been pointed out by Sparks, the state and the government acting either in unison or at cross purposes can be said to influence the mass media in six roles: the censor, the actor, the masseur, the ideologue; and the conspirator. Many social analysts, though in a very subtle form, over the functioning of the media acknowledge the fact that the state still has its control, and they have also pointed out the dangers the society faces because of such delinquencies. There are various reasons why the media still needs to oblige the interest of the state for its survival and steady functioning. Firstly, though media is no more under the control of the state, it is still partially financially dependent on the state for its maintenance through advertisement revenues. Secondly, state and its machinery are one of the major sources that provide inputs to the media for the production of the news materials, and it is the state and not the media who would decide whether the information are real or cooked. Thirdly, the legal regulation of the state over the media such as censorship. State has certain authority to decide what should and should not get published in the press. Though in modern day context this censorship is generally not exercised because of the presence of a vigilant mass but it becomes explicit in extraordinary situations like war, emergency etc. One of the recent examples in Indian context may be the emergency period during 1974-77 when the state withdrew the freedom of expression of the press and thoroughly censored and determined the content of the media. All these factors play a crucial role in

10 Colin Sparks, Media Studies, A Reader, edited and introduced by: Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, Edinburgh University Press, 1996.
determining the nexus between the state and the media for the smooth survival of both. Thus, it may be observed that state has a substantial control over the media despite the perceived notion that media influences the functioning of the state though it may not be denied that many a times media has played an active role in bringing about the lapses in the state to the public's eye. And studies on mass media have been able to uncover the complex mechanisms by which the production, distribution and consumption of ideological content are managed. The study of mass communications puts an attempt to unmask the complex mechanisms by which the production, distribution and consumption of ideological content is managed to an extent by the use of state power though the coercion of the state authority has been loosened substantially in capitalist society.

On the other hand, the relationship of market and the media shares even a more close and complex bond in modern industrialized society. As has been discussed before, the media in present day context is free from the control of the state substantially and has been owned by private corporations. However, as Chomsky\textsuperscript{11} rightly points out, 'in countries where the levers of power are in the hands of a state bureaucracy, the monopolistic control over the media, often supplemented by official censorship, makes it clear that the media serve the ends of a dominant elite. It is more difficult to see propaganda system at work where the media actively compete, periodically attack and expose corporate

\textsuperscript{11} see, for example, 'Manufacturing Consent', Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in 'News: A Reader' edt by, Howard Tumber, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.166
and governmental malfeasance, and aggressively portray themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest. What is not evident (and remains undisussed in media) is the limited nature of such critiques, as well as the huge inequality in command of resources, and its effect both on access to a private media system and on its behaviour and performance.’ The commercial interests of these private corporations tend to overshadow the ethics the media is expected to exercise. As the majority of the mass media are market led, that is, operate with a profit motive; it has been observed that the content of the media is getting highly manipulated catering to its commercial needs. Media in this context work as an industry with factory like production of cultural materials best suited to the market need. It is also often observed that some of the important issues (such as human interest stories on poverty, gender, illiteracy, environment etc.) get sidelined or ignored sometimes because of lack of space which is generally sold for the commercials or for they don’t add glamour to provoke a market need. Thus, it may be concluded that the issues and events are highly manipulated and fabricated to attract the consumer and in a market led society, media as an industry produces ideology for the market and not for the public good.

It is in this context that we can examine the complexity of the media, civil society relationship. They function in a close relationship to society characterized by mutual influences. The approaches to media studies and media research varies from media’s role from consensus to conflict and ideological to hegemonic. I have attempted to review some of the important perspectives in
order to understand the extent of influence mass media may have on today’s modern complex society.

There is a pioneering set of schools of thought in sociology that believes that society is fundamentally based on shared norms and values. According to these consensus theorists, the basic aim of society is to maintain unity and harmony. They focus on social order based on tacit agreement. And social change, according to them, occurs only when it is inevitable, and it happens in slow and orderly fashion.

These theorists point out that there are institutionalized mechanisms who take care of the conflicting situations between competing groups and interests through the method of negotiation and cooperation, and thereby aim to achieve collective consensus. Media is identified as one such mechanism/institution that plays a crucial role in heightening social integration through its channel of information and communication. Another important function of media is to stimulate collective debate that leads to normal functioning of society. Media is perceived as free, autonomous institution, which is capable of giving the perspective and views of all existing competing groups in the society. This plays a proactive role in adapting to the shifting relations of power.

Liberal pluralists emphasize that media function most effectively in the context of a society characterized by free market economy, in a society liberated from the dominance of the state. The media industries run by the private individuals or groups have an edge over the state controlled media, as the former are able
to play a fair and rational role in the social functioning. The theorists point out
that the relaxation of dominance of the state over the media gives media an
unrestricted status to reflect all the important views and represent all the
conflicting and competing interests present within society. The media as an
institution functions successfully independent of any social, political or
economic interests. It is also clarified that excessive control over the private
owners over the media industry is not possible as it is often checked by the
competing interests within media institutions.

Journalists in such a context have enormous freedom to function autonomously
and deliver their own views and observations about the social dynamics. It is
often seen that in a state run media institution, the journalists are bound to work
under ‘pressured’ bias or judgment for/against certain political interest which,
in a way, restrict their perceived role in the society as a true messenger.

The consensus theorists conclude that the consumer/viewer/reader is actually
the determining factor in deciding the content of the media that s/he wants to
know (and consume) about the society because media in a free market scenario
aims to respond to the need and preference of its consumer. And as these kind
of societies(i.e. societies that are run by capital economy) are characterized as
highly fragmented, selective and rational in their approach, it is conducive for
the media in such a context to deliver products catering to the requirement of
all categories or groups that exist within these societies, and thereby proving
itself to be a mechanism that works as a true negotiator and representative for the collective functioning of the society.

While keeping the consensual role of media in mind, it may be useful to cite three broad functions of mass media identified by two proponents of functionalist tradition, R.K. Merton and F. Lazarsfield. According to them, one of the deciding roles played by media is to legitimatize the status of a group or an individual by giving them their due coverage and publicity. By doing so, media enhances the authority of the said individual or the group. Secondly, media play an influential role in reaffirming social norms. They do so by bringing about the deviating tendencies of the society that differ from the socially approved norms to the public view. This function of media help the society in maintaining its cohesion and normal functioning as the exposure of the deviant behaviour helps the society to take organized social action against it and thereby establishing harmony and unity.

However, the sociologists did point out a negative function of media in a modern complex society. They apprehend that the vast access and exposure to information through modern method of communication may in a way make the mass that consumes it apathetic towards the real problem of the society. The excessive doses of mass media may fail in its attempt to energize the average reader or the viewer and make him/her immune to the issues of the society.

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This is identified as the narcotizing dysfunction of the mass media by Merton and Lowrsfield.

To sum it up, functionalist theory of media\(^\text{13}\) emphasizes that mass media are essential to society for integration, cooperation, order, control and stability, adaptation to change, mobilization, management of tension and continuity of culture and values.

However, this consensual theory of mass media has lost its relevance to a great extent in the present complex society. There are many alternative paradigms that have contested this approach and have taken a critical stand against this view. But, this tradition definitely maintains its position as one of the pioneers on modern communication thought and is respected for its stand on the role of mass media in the functioning of society.

From a broad perspective, it may be agreed that mass media play a crucial role in maintaining the cohesion and harmony of the society through its negotiation and information channel. But it may be criticized for its embarrassingly simplistic note in which this approach deals with the functioning of the media.

On the other hand, the **critical stand on mass media** (particularly Marxist media theory in its various shades) may be considered as the most influential theory that speaks of the manipulative role of mass media in today's modern complex society ruled by capital economy. Over the period of time, critical

\(^{13}\) See, for example, "Mass Communication Theory- An Introduction", Denis McQuail, Sage Publication, London, 1983 (p. 87-92)
stand on mass media has evolved from within in order to overcome its inner limitations and attempts to present the functioning of mass media industry critically and efficiently.

Orthodox Marxism insists that mass media play a crucial role in a capitalist society in maintaining or reproducing the status quo. For Marxists, capitalist society is characterized by class domination. Mass media functions as a social tool that aims to fight the conflicting views of various class existing within the society. However, the media is highly influenced by the interest of the dominant class, the class that monopolizes the capital. It is believed that the class that owns the means of production also has its dominant control over the culture as well. Though media exercises certain level of autonomy in a society characterized by capitalist economy, the theorists recognize that the media professionals who produce the news materials are highly socialized into the dominant culture and their views reflect the internalized bias in favour of the dominant culture rather than producing a true picture of the social functioning. By doing so, the media play the role of a mouth piece of the dominant group and tend to ignore the point of view of the subordinate class. This bias causes serious damage to the interest of the latter as the readers/viewers/listeners start mistakenly accepting the media reflection as the true reflection of the society and gradually socialize into the culture represented by the media because they lack access to any alternative view point existing in the society. Media, in this case, fails to serve as a promoter of social change and instead act as a tool for the reproduction of the status quo. Thus, these theorists aim to establish that
media is highly influenced by the owners of the means of production in a society characterized by capitalist economy.

However, Marxism evolved from its rigid stand with the passage of time and changing perceptions about social functioning. Different branches emerged from within the same school of thought who attempted to build upon the theory of Marxism by modifying the original belief by questioning economism as the determining force that shapes consciousness. Althusser and Gramsci may be considered two pioneers of neo-marxism who provide a structuralist approach of Marxism. Althusser\textsuperscript{14} criticizes the basic stand of the orthodox Marxism an 'Ideological State Apparatus' that may influence and shape the consciousness of the individual. He points out that ideology transforms human beings into subjects. They are influenced and shaped by the ideological processes. The role of media in influencing the individuals and the groups to the existing ideological process is highlighted by Althusser.

It is however Antonio Gramsci\textsuperscript{15} who gave creative dimension to Marxism and enriched our understanding of civil society and ideology. However, it must be noted that Gramsci comprehended the changing character of advanced capitalism in which liberal democracy, cultural and educational institutions and other network of civil society had fairly developed. Thus, it becomes possible for him to look beyond economic determinism and take the domain of culture

\textsuperscript{14} Althusser, Louis, 'Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses' in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, London, New Left Books, 1971
quite seriously. He brought out that it is in the domain of culture that men and women articulate their consciousness. That is why, for him the notion of hegemony acquire central significance. Hegemony is not naked domination or ruled by coercive force. Instead, hegemony means the ability of the dominant class to assume the role of collective leadership and its ability to acquire consent even from the down trodden, the subalterns and the marginal classes. And cultural institutions like media, school, religion etc. play a crucial role in helping the dominant class achieve this hegemony. In fact, for Gramsci, the understanding of advanced capitalism remains utterly inadequate without the understanding of cultural hegemony. No wonder we get a new insight from Gramsci’s analysis in order to make sense of the role of the mass media. Mass media, as Gramscian analysis suggests, is thus not neutral. It is situated within the existing political context. But the Gramscian notion of hegemony is sufficiently sophisticated to make us realize that the mass media do not just blindly or nakedly portray the class interest of the dominant class. Instead it attempts to incorporate the aspirations of the other classes without however compromising with its basic thrust to dominate ideology. An example from recent Indian context may be given to make the understanding clear. The relative success of the late (2004) Indian election was projected by almost all the TV channels as a threat to ‘growth and economy’ and repeated projection of the fluctuation of the stock exchange would convey the message that the leftist policy is a threat to national interest. And this notion was very well articulated and packaged in innumerable interviews, panel discussions and chat
shows. The views of the Trade Union leaders, left intellectuals, radical university professors were incorporated in those shows to get the perspective and interests of the ‘other’ classes and groups. In other words, mass media in this context attempted to portray itself ‘democratic’ which articulated all interests. Gramscian notion of hegemony recognizes this complex process and explores the possibilities of counter hegemonies by the subaltern classes to establish their own hegemony in order to make a revolution. So, the Gramscian insight creates an intellectual space in which the contexted domain on the media and its diverse possibilities may be grasped.

E.S. Herman and Noam Comsky highlighted the manipulative role of media in manufacturing consent to suit the interest of the dominant elite. They pointed out that unlike state owned media industries the manipulative role of media, which is private, is difficult to spell out. But they in their book “Manufacturing Consent” attempt to figure out the propaganda system at work by private media. According to them, there are various factors that may influence the news to get ‘filtered’ from its original content and take a manufactured shape in order to preserve the interest of certain groups. The determining factors that fabricate the news materials identified by these social thinkers are 1. the size, concentrated ownership, wealth and profit of the dominant mass media farms; 2. advertising as the major source of income that lead to commercialization; 3. media’s dependence on its ready sources such as government, business and

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experts; 4. criticism or 'flak' as a disciplining mechanism of the media; 5. anti communism as a national religion and control mechanism. It is emphasized that the news materials systematically go through these filter constraints and only the residues are published keeping the economic and political interest of the media industry. This subtle control over the media is perceived as quite dangerous as it is not realized by the consumers and they are thoroughly convinced about the authenticity of the media. It is important to go for a macro as well as micro level analysis to uncover the truth and expose the method of media operation and its systematic bias.

Culturalist approach on the other hand argues that a ruling ideology or hegemony works by way of discourse and not necessarily through political and economic power. Media may be identified as one of the significant tools that initiate such discourse. To borrow Stewart Hall's views on mass media, media appears to reflect reality where as infact they construct it. He also categorically pointed out that though media tend to reproduce interpretations, which serve the interests of the ruling class, but they are also a 'field of ideological struggle.' Hall describes how media simply brings the unusual events to the 'maps of meaning' (that is, the cultural map of the social world which already forms the basis of audiences' knowledge) for people to make an easy sense of it. For instance, the cultural map of the social world is shown fragmented into different spheres by the media like family, politics, sports, economy etc. within

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17 see, for example, Hall, S., 'Culture, the Media and the ideological Effect', in J. Curran, M. Gurwitch and J. Woolacott(eds), 'Mass Communication and Society, Edward Arnold, London, 1977.
this arrangement some spheres, institutions and events are given more importance than others. Hall et al (1981) argue that the classification, ranking and ordering of events in themselves indicate preferred meanings and interpretation. Through its processes, media also constructs 'meaningful' and 'meaningless' contexts, 'normal' and 'abnormal' behaviours, making them a part of an acknowledged order and strengthening a common culture or a 'central value system'. A particular image of a society gets constructed representing some particular interests and not the interest of all. The groups and voices outside the consensus are seen as deviant or mad.

Hall argues that the media appear to reflect reality whilst in fact they construct it. For Hall et al the mass media -do- tend to reproduce interpretations, which serve the interests of the ruling class, but they are also a 'field of ideological struggle'. The media signification system is seen as relatively autonomous. 'The news' performs a crucial role in defining events, although this is seen as secondary to the primary definers accredited sources in government and other institutions. The media also serves 'to reinforce a consensual new point by using public idioms and by claiming to voice public opinion'.(Woolacott 1982:109). In a key paper, Encoding/Decoding, Stuart Hall18 argues that the dominant ideology is typically inscribed as the 'preferred reading' in a media text, but that this is not automatically adopted by readers. The social situations of readers/viewers/listeners may lead them to adopt different stances. For instance, 'dominant' readings are produced by those whose social situation

favours the preferred reading, 'negotiated' readings are produced by those whose social position and 'oppositional' readings are produced by those whose social position puts them into direct conflict with the preferred reading' (Stunson: 1995: 41-2). Hall insists that there remain limits to interpretation: meaning cannot be simply 'private' and 'individual'.

The most pessimistic stand against the functioning of media is taken probably by the Frankfurt school of thought who believe that the 'massification' of culture is causing serious damage to the culture of the society. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer call mass media as 'culture industry' and point out that this industry like mass production of culture by mass media restrict the society of its capacity to nourish freedom and individuality. These culture industries aim to produce safe, standardized products in order to satisfy the large demands of the capitalist economy and at the cost of the quality of the product.

Herbert Marcuse in his 'One Dimensional Man' shows his apprehension by reflecting that the modern method of communication system is an irresistible force that consume the consumers wholly and promote false consciousness among them and as a result, a pattern of one dimensional thought and behaviour emerges in the modern society. To quote his thought, 'the means of...communication...,the irresistible output of the entertainment and

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19 ibid., 180
information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers...to the producers and through the latter to the whole(social system). The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood...thus emerges a pattern of the dimensional thought and behaviour'. (Marcuse, cited in Bennett 1982:43)

In fact the critical theory of the new left is an extremely important force to reckon with as far as the understanding of the mass media is concerned. Mass media has been conceived by this school of thought as a kind of 'culture industry' that over impossibly manufactures stereotypes and images and diverts the mass from the substantial deeper issues that govern our destiny. Everything including news, sports, entertainment becomes a package, a commodity, a media spectacle, for large scale consumption. Even in Indian society, particularly in the neo-liberal economic phase since 1990s the phenomenal growth of the culture industry in terms of the proliferation of round the clock news channels and innumerable entertainment, film and music channel is severely witnessed. It may be pointed out that a large chunk of the media production becomes a celebration of the trivia. Larger issues such as the need for safe drinking water, rehabilitation of the victims of natural and man made tragedies and other issues are sidelined on the process. Thus, it becomes important to keep the critiques of the media alive.
Yet, at the same time the smell of pessimism on the writings of Adorno, Herkiemer and Marcuse needs rethinking. In this context Habermas\textsuperscript{22} becomes refreshingly different in his approach. Though he inherits the tradition of the Frankfurt school, his approach has been able to succeed in overcoming the pessimism of Adorno and Marcuse. Habermas gives tremendous importance to the public sphere for generating communicative rationality, for arousing open, transparent and rational debate on public issues which is important for democratic society. However, Habermas did point out that the democratic public space on the communicative rationality is in threat because of the increasing influence of the market, the state and the political power on media. As a result we witness not egalitarian communicative rationality, but manipulative public opinion implying distorted or broken communication. Habermas names it the ‘colonialization of life world’. He however thinks with hope beyond instrumental rationality and inspires us to strive for a space in which a vibrant public space is possible. It is in this context that the ambiguity of media in contemporary times may be seen. Yet another example from the media scenario of our country may make the understanding clear. While lot of news channels often package news for market interests, it is also a fact that these channels also create some kind of democratic public space. For instance, television programmes like ‘We The People’ and ‘Big Fight’ despite their attractive packaging and sponsorship from corporate houses have some democratic possibilities in terms of interrogating the political personalities,

\textsuperscript{22} For further details, see, Habermas, Stones, Rob(ed.), Key Sociological Thinkers, MacMilan Press, London,1998
allowing ordinary people to articulate the dissenting voices and involving the significant sections of the population - students, teachers and activists and other conscious citizens - in the debate. Habermas sees possibilities here and believes that the future of a democratic society depends on the revitalization of the public space.

Though critical perspective of media studies tends to overlook and in a way undermine the positive power of mass media as a useful institution in the society, its emphasis on the manipulative role of media in the functioning of society is highly recognized.

II

Gender and Media: A Complex Engagement

Within this framework, the democratic role of mass media in representing women’s concern may legitimately be questioned. Women form nearly half the world’s population and have achieved political citizenship in most of the societies. Yet, their status and position have remained marginal within the social, economic and political spheres. As media has been understood to be integral in representing social reality in a modern complex structure, it becomes important to analyze its role in reflecting women’s concerns in this context.

Gender may be defined as the cultural differentiation of men from women. Sociological and cultural anthropological writings of contemporary times highly emphasize the distinction of gender as a cultural construct from sex as
biological given ness. In other words, it is through family, kinship socialization, religious rituals, education and other cultural modes that men and women are trained and modulated to respond to the world in 'masculine' or 'feminine' ways. Masculinity or feminity, it is often argued, is a cultural stereotype. Not solely that, in a patriarchal society, these differences is also hierarchized. Men are often thought to be 'rational', 'objective', 'daring', 'courageous' in nature while women are perceived as 'sentimental', 'passive', 'weak' and 'vulnerable'. It is also believed that men as active doers in the public front make history, engage in production and assume the leadership where as women are desired to live in the invisible private sphere perpetually existing as passive consumers. What is sociologically revealing to note is that in a complex, industrial society mass media play an important role in shaping cultural constructs and stereotypes. The complexity of the media in the context of the state, market and larger civil society has already been examined. I now shift the focus to examine the role the media play as far as gender constructs are concerned. Two broad points may be noted before I elaborate on the said subject. First, as part of the larger society, the media too can play an important role in re enforcing the gender hierarchies. For example, recurrent media spectacles like fashion shows, beauty contests, music albums and television serials often reduce women into male gaze for consumption. Secondly, on the other hand, contemporary period is characterized by feminist voices of resistance and the steady growth of women professionals in the media. These
changing factors are also altering the culture of the media in terms of its inclination to the deeper issues affecting the lives of the ordinary women.

Before we go into details, it is important to have a brief look at different feminist voices. Various perspectives in feminism explain the subordination of women differently. Briefly radical feminism points out sex differences or biology of women as the basis of men's domination. The biological vulnerability of women leads to dependency relations between men and women, and then forms the basis of women's subordination. Another strand stresses that biological differences between women and men become significant only within cultural systems in which particular social roles and psychic structure of women take shape (Rosaldo, 1974, Ortener, 1974). Socialization produces masculine and feminine identities sexual division of labour and private-public sphere where by women are confined to the domestic sphere and men take up public roles.

Marxist feminists on the other hand attribute the subordination of women to various modes of capitalist production of which family structure and domestic labour form an integral part. Mies\textsuperscript{23} has named this phenomena capitalist patriarchy 'to denote the system which maintains women's exploitation and oppression'. While the term patriarchy denotes the historical depth of women's exploitation and oppression, the concept capitalism is expressive of the contemporary manifestation, or the latest development of this system. The

\textsuperscript{23} see, for example, Mies, M., 'Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale', Zed Books, London, 1986, p.37
man-woman relations in the private sphere are defined as a part of capitalist-patriarchal relations by this school.

The critics of Marxist theory, however, argue that in class reductionism, all social subjects and other social relations like sex, race, nationality etc. become insignificant. 'All social relations can become the locus of antagonism in so far as they are constructed as relations of subordination. Many different forms of subordination can become the origin of conflict and struggle. There exists, therefore, in society a multiplicity of potential antagonisms, and class antagonism is only one among many. It is not possible to reduce all those forms of subordination and struggle to the expression of a single logic located in the economy. Nor can this reduction be avoided by positing a complex mediation between social antagonism and the economy. There are multiple forms of power in society that cannot be reduced to or deducted from one origin of source.'

Although an economic perspective is important in analyzing women’s position in society, it is not sufficient to explain all the oppressive social and cultural practices inflicted upon women in the history of human society. According to Rubin, the analysis of reproduction of labour power does not even explain why it is usually women who do domestic work in the home rather than

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men. Explaining women's usefulness to capitalism is one thing but to say that 'this usefulness explains the genesis of oppression is quite another.' MacKinnon also argues that 'we cannot talk about everyday life without understanding its division by gender, or about hegemony without understanding male as a form of it. marxism doesnot, somehow, take into consideration the role of various other kinds of powers in society or hegemonic forces which are significant in the subordination of women.

It may be pointed out that though women are increasingly coming out of the boundaries of the domestic sphere responding to the opportunities created by new economic, cultural and social demands in the modern complex society, their visibility in the public sphere is very much constrained. They are given a restricted role to play in the society and often it has been the case that women are absent, ignored, relegated-in some discipline- to limited areas, and are commonly misrepresented. Their freedom is curtailed and restrictions are imposed on their decision making power in order to safeguard the patriarchal ideology. It is seen that mass media as a modernizing force play a contributing role in maintaining the status quo.

Mass media in present day context is perceived as an influential mechanism that act as a reflection of social reality. However, the manipulative role of mass media in projecting women's oppression as nothing but 'natural' is recognized

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26 Ibid, 163
and contested by the feminist theorists recently (esp. after 1960s) as women’s movements as an emancipatory process is taking its root around the world despite the resistance of the patriarchal society. It must be pointed out that the mainstream theorists, though have touched upon the manipulation of media in modern complex society seemed to overlook the issue of gender in their analysis. Feminist theories emerged as a reaction to this negligence as an alternative school of thought to bring out this systematic subordination of women in the society.

Media representation of women and the portrayal of women by mass media are two major aspects that women’s studies have touched upon and scanned thoroughly to disclose the role of media on women’s issues. It has been found out that women are systematically under represented in the media industries. The very under representation of women, including their stereotypic portrayal, may symbolically capture the position of women in our society – their real lack of power. It bespeaks their ‘symbolic annihilation’ by the media. For, according to Gerbner, just as representation in the media signifies social existence, so too under representation and (by extension) trivialization and condemnation indicate symbolic annihilation. Feminist studies on mass media also reveal that ‘roles of males in mass media have been shown to be dominant, active, authoritative, while females have been shown to be submissive, passive

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28 The women’s movement of 1960s and ’70s produced a political framework for feminists to challenge the media for their demeaning and stereo typical images of women.
30 See, for example, Gamble, Sarah, Feminism and Post Feminism, Routledge, 1998, p.105
and completely contented to subjugate their wills to the wills of the media males. Studies by Epstein, Tuchman, Molotch observed that the American women were found mainly on the family, food, fashion and lifestyle pages of newspapers or when they made an 'achievement' in some field as 'first woman'. It was observed by Gallagher in 1981, that women's presence in news did not exceed 20 per cent in any country. Further, when women appeared in news programmes it was mainly in relation to 'human interest stories', domestic settings and to give emotional eye-witness accounts. In 'Housewives and Mass Media' Hobson indicates the significance of media output in terms of imposing structure upon domestic work, of providing company and combating the isolation experienced by women at home. Though women's movement have helped increasing women's representation in mass media, studies emphasized that mere presence does not suffice. In one of the studies it is pointed out that the regular appearance of a female co-star seemed to increase the male dominance. Presence also enables the reiteration of stereotypes. Though over the years, women are increasingly becoming a part of media industry, their role has been trivialized and it is difficult to find women in the decision-making position. Media industry is overwhelmingly ruled by men and women's perspective is thoroughly getting sidelined on the process. The portrayal of women by the media is also a consequence of the patriarchal

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{31} see, for example, Bathla, Sonia, 'Women, Democracy and the Media', Sage Publications, 1998, p.18)  
\textsuperscript{32} ibid, p20  
\textsuperscript{33} see, for example, See, for example, Gamble, Sarah, Feminism and Post Feminism, Routledge, 1998, p.108  
\textsuperscript{34} see, for example, Tuchman G., 'Women's Depiction by the Mass Media' in Baehr, H, Gray, A.(edt), 'Turning it On: A Reader in Women and Mass Media', Arnold Publication, 1996, p.12.}
structure of media industry. Media produces materials that aim to sexualize, commodify and trivialize women. Feminists claim that it is deliberated by the media messages produced by men. This commodification of women is one of the crudest manifestation of how media contribute in further exploiting women’s status in the society.

Studies on advertising and women highlight the way mass media portrays women to sell products. With the advent of capitalist society arose a new industrial situation characterized by hoards of cheap mass produced goods. With the huge production the market required reliable consumers to cater to the need of the market unlike traditional societies where consumers looked for reliable goods. Advertisement emerged as a major means of marketing the products. The basic objective of the advertisement is to ‘persuade people to buy goods and services in a market economy’. However, as advertisements play a crucial role in impacting society in a market economy, it becomes pertinent to understand how gender is being projected through advertisements as a reflection of social reality. In one of his studies, E.Goffman\textsuperscript{35}, for example, studies the symbols of advertising in order to understand the gender relations in advertising. His findings may be summarized as follows in order to get a picture of how women and men are being projected in advertisement as a reflection of social reality. Advertisements in fact, in a way, enhance the social stereotypes to attract consumers. His first emphasis has been on relative size. According to him, generally, men in advertisements are made to appear taller.

than women. And his analysis shows that when two people are represented in art or drawings, the taller will be the one with more authority. His second emphasis is on 'feminine touch'. His analysis on the symbols of advertisements provides evidence that advertisements establish that women and men have different relationships both to objects and to each other. It is as if women don’t want to impose themselves on the objects and treat them as precious and to be admired. Men, by contrast, show the objects who is the boss, treating them as means to a particular end rather than as objects of beauty to be admired. There seem to be a contrast that constructs gender differences and relations in a specific way: men act with clear purpose, women just look on admiringly. His third illustration shows that in function ranking invariably everywhere it is seen that if men and women are depicted collaborating face to face in an undertaking, men perform the executive role. In his fourth highlight, Goffman points out the role of men and women in family relations as projected by advertisements. It is seen that in a family situation the role of men is always to protect and women and children are always protected. His fifth theme emphasizes the power relation between men and women as constructed through advertising. He found out that men are always given high social place and women’s subordination has been emphasized. It may be concluded that advertisements enhance and institutionalize the role of men and women as has been socially constructed. Men are often depicted as authoritative, protective, dominant and superior while as women are projected as feminine, artistic, subordinate and inferior.
While these critical readings of the projection of women in the media is immensely illuminating, it is equally important, as we have already stated in the earlier section, not to simplify and overstate but to see the complexity of the entire story. It has to be acknowledged that on the process of growing democratization, women education and feminist movements, the media too have become relatively sensitive. This dilemma between ideologies is reflected in the way issues are dealt by the media industries. While in a newspaper page 3 would be about fashion, beauty and objectification of women, there would also be occasional feminist reporting, editorials and articles on issues relating to abortion, dowry death, domestic violence and other sensitive issues. These days some of the leading newspapers also carry a weekly women’s page that invites feminist scholars and activists to make contributions. Likewise while a large part of the television imaging is about the trivia and seductive portrayal of women there is also slow but nevertheless visible presence of powerful feminist voices on some of the significant issues. The challenge confronting a student of sociology is to examine this complexity with openness and spirit of criticality.

III

Situating the Research Project

Women’s studies in India also emphasize that the role of mass media is biased towards patriarchy. Women are not seen as important constituents in decision-making position in government, media, and academic or other traditional
development agencies. Though women's movement in India is fighting with its
teething trouble and there is not substantial literature to contend the mainstream
thought, the feminists sociologists in India have successfully attempted to bring
out the way women in India are represented and portrayed by mass media. On
participation (or lack of it) of women in mass media Akileswari36 writes,
'statistics all over the world including the developed countries show that
women are given jobs that are unimportant, clerical, unproductive and non-
creative. Jobs and positions that involve responsibility and taking decision
invariably go to men'. She goes on to add that women form a microscopic
proportion of the total number of journalists in India. As women are not
associated with the decision making process in the media institutions of the
country, it leads to the negligence of women's issues or interests in the media
institutions. Bathla's study 37 finds out that 'it is mainly through the media
discourse of silence on women's issues and the women's movement that media
has maintained the cultural consensus. It revealed that women's issues are
largely marginalized and the women's movement was nearly missing in the
media coverage. Studies have also found out that there is no sincere
engagement of Indian media in handling women's issues. Ammu Joseph and
Kalpana Sharma38 scrutinized in some details various women's issues in India
such as dowry death, rape, female foeticide and other forms of violence on
women and pointed out the preoccupation of the press with events rather than

processes. During the course of their fieldwork, they found out from the survey that very few analysis cared to look more closely at the processes and the institutions in Indian society which has given birth to such phenomena. Although the condemnation was universal and no attempt was made to justify the phenomenon, much of the analysis remained superficial. To quote their words, ‘... “feminization” of the news process has not yet taken place. This would involve paying as much attention to the process as to the event and making a deliberate attempt to seek the views of the inarticulate majority instead of routinely reporting on the prominent and the powerful’ (p.32). Rama Jha \(^{39}\) decoded some important news items on rape case and figures out that woman are the easiest scapegoat for socio-political, religious and, in many cases, long term linguistic hegemony. She goes on to add, ‘...that also proves the importance of women’s issues and it should warn equally importantly that the distorted or sensesationalized portrayal by media harms women’s issues in the name of women’s issues. Instead of exposing and curbing these, it albeit inadvertently, incites more violence against women’.

The portrayal of women in mass media has attracted the attention of many feminist critiques. There is a universal consensus among the feminist sociologists that mass media in India are male centred, male dominated and male biased. When it comes to projecting the image of women, all types of mass media are guilty of portraying a negative image. The UNESCO Report\(^{40}\)

\(^{40}\) see, for example, Butalia, Urvasi, ‘Women and the Media’, Vidura, Vol. 17(3), June, 1980
in ‘Women and the Media’ states: ‘the perspective of women reflected in messages disseminated by the mass media expresses male concept of women. The commercial media produces message systems and symbols that create or structure prevailing images of social reality which in our set up show women as housewives, consumers and sex objects. Women in advertising are always young and attractive, they are frequently depicted as sexual objects, as in the home, and they are seldom shown as intelligent people. The mass media’s role is primarily to reinforce definitions and identities set in a framework constructed for and by men. It is clear that mass media are not only dominated by the men who run it, but also, in large part, by the men who read or see or hear it. The transformation of ordinary women into efficient managers coping with challenging development situations and performing multiple roles demands constant communication support from various media and communication’. Mankekar focuses her attention on the link between the television commercials and women and pointed out that the advertisements naturalized the gendered division of labour within the middle class family. The subject of portrayal of women in the Indian mass media has also been discussed by Mahesh and Guru in some details. They pointed out that ‘Indian media portrays women as men would like to see them: beautiful creatures, submissive, mother if their children, efficient housekeepers but nothing else. The positive side of their progress and their contributions for national

development haven't been adequately discussed in the media of communication. The values projected by entertainment media are imbibed by the audience, esp. the female audience who are conditioned to dwell upon much frivolous content by their exclusion from the serious world of hardship. The way of portrayal of women continues to be dismal'. Media's role in uplifting the status of women in Indian society has been severely criticized. And it has also been realized that mass media needs to play a constructive role in enhancing women's position in the society. As to quote Nargis Abraham⁴³, 'unless the media can show society supporting women in their fight for their rights, women will continue to be treated shabbily by society'.

However, with the onset of liberalization and the opening up of market in the 1980s, there has been a shift of portrayal of Indian women in media today. Women continue to be represented distortedly despite criticism, but the focus has been influenced by market forces in the era of consumerism. Uma Chakravarti⁴⁴ in her analysis on electronic media comments that in the field of advertisements, women are targeted not merely as consumers of goods but as desirers and active buyers of goods. The image of the successful woman whose confidence lies in her ability to be the discriminating buyer grants a new agency to women which is a new creation heralding the gender friendly globalized market. But what is interesting to note is that if one goes by the advertisements of today, there is only one India as far as the private channels

⁴⁴ Chakravarti, Uma, 'State, Market and Freedom of Expression: Women and Electronic Media', in Economic and Political Weekly' (29th April-5th May), 2000, p.17
go- a vibrant, rich, glossy urban India. It may be observed that media systematically exclude certain categories of the society on the basis of market need. ‘On an everyday representational basis rural India, where the majority of our population still lives, has been reduced to a trope figuring in a new ethnicized glossy or comic depiction depending on the product being advertised. The continuing poverty, illiteracy, inequality and vulnerability of most sections of rural men and women have been completely erased from the screen, and from the consciousness of globalized India’. Maitrayee Chaudhuri’s perspective supports the former’s view as she points out that ‘...upmarket’s magazines’ projection of a post liberalized, post feminism are now increasingly visible, where the individual corporate woman is the icon’. The feminists of today show their concern against the commercialization of media in general and its non serious engagement with broader women’s issues in particular. Media’s submission to the market need has also been severely criticized.

The above discussion gives a clarification about the context in which the research project is situated. In this context the following insights have recurred repeatedly characterized by a high degree of critical discourse that interrogates the role of media in the projection of women. It may be noted that the mass media further reinforce the already existing gender stereotypes and hierarchies by projecting women as objects of desire, stimulants for market commodities

45 see, for example, Chaudhuri, M., ‘Feminism in Print Media’ in Indian Journal of Gender Studies’. 7:2, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2000
and passive consumers. In a way in the media the unholy alliance of the patriarchy, culture industry and market capitalism has been depicted. As it has been argued, this critical insight is very important in understanding the present problem. It is also important to see and listen to other stories. It, in this context, is challenging to scrutinize the other possibilities without however loosing the essential critical thrust in which the research is situated. Take for instance, the visibility of women in newspapers and television channels. It is undeniable that more and more women are seen as news readers, reporters, camera persons and editors. This distinctive visibility of women in the public sphere does definitely convey a strong message. It seeks to interrogate the prevailing patriarchal hierarchy of public vs. private, active men vs. passive women, men as boss and women as receivers. It is not uncommon to find a large number of school and college going girls aspiring to take up a profession as challenging as war journalism or sports commentator. It is sociologically significant to note that in a recent Farhan Akthar film, Preity Zinta, the leading actress is portrayed as a war journalist after the television journalist Barkha Dutt covering war. As popular cinema conveys collective inspirations, it acquires further importance. But it is also observed that the projection of women as newsreaders or women journalists covering page 3 news is not free from objectification of women for the purpose. Young, attractive women are deliberately taken in the city page to cover glamour shows and beauty contests for easy accessibility. Likewise, the projection of women in covering the domain of games and sports is sociologically revealing. It is true that games like football, baseball, cricket has
often been seen as a site for demonstrating the vitality of masculinity and male power in terms of physique, aggressiveness, competitiveness, stamina and energy. When women begin to cover these masculine domains an interesting equation begins to take place. First, it breaks the stereotypes. A woman covering football or cricket becomes sociologically significant as a female reporter covering war. In other words, be it war or sports, women enter everywhere. But here lies the ambiguity. Some news channels often project women in this domain as merely decorative, ornamental- a feminine relief from aggressive masculinity. It is like Mandira Bedi, a glamorous representative of the Bollywood culture industry being projected in the Set-Max channel as a cricket commentator along with other male cricket specialists only to package the programme and commodify it for a huge audience. That is why the visibility of women on the media, particularly the visual media often becomes a double agent phenomena. We need to examine it more critically.