CHAPTER V

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We live in a society that is still patriarchal at its roots, a system which perpetuates male domination and female subordination. This social structure is continually reinforced through male control of all the institutions which shape society including the family, the educational system, government, the courts and of course, the media.

There has been unanimous agreement that the images of women projected by the media constitute the main obstacle to eliminating discrimination against women throughout the world and preserve and perpetuate traditional sexist attitudes towards them.

Present research which was aimed at making a critical analysis of television programmes in relation to women and to examine the impact of television programmes on television audience through the study of their attitudes has confirmed the patriarchal bias in the media output.

The image of women that emerges on the basis of the critical analysis of television programmes including news and commercials is highly stereotypical.

It is found that women and women's concerns occupy low priority in both regional and national news. News programmes largely ignore women's participation in society and give discriminatory treatment to women's issues. Thus the first hypothesis "Women are least visible in the news" holds true.

Women are more visible in the commercials as opposed to the severe under-representation of females in other types of
television programmes. But the qualitative representation of this highly visible female is far more alarming. Advertising like an insistent drill uses women to titillate viewers. The woman catches the attention and thus the reason for sale becomes the woman and not the product. Use of woman in advertising is due to the attitude of society which promotes materialism and has no qualms in treating women as objects.

Commercials promote stereotypical image of women of being interested only in domestic affairs and having no interest in public affairs. Further they give the impression that women at home have no valid interest in their life except to worry about the perfection of their house, their clean shining floor, immaculate laundry and cooking. And to add insult to injury commercial depict as if women enjoy the household drudgery. These commercials romanticise the housework and motherhood. The needs and desires of women are depicted in terms of her nurturing and caring role within the family.

So it is the wife, the mother and the daughter-in-law who invariably wash the shirts of their men-folk. Not only does the Indian man seem to be incapable of washing his own clothes, but in a commercial he scolds his wife for not doing a better job on his shirt! Whether it is the cooking oil or the pressure cooker, it is the wife who invariably uses it. The man is exhorted to buy a brand of pressure cooker to show his love and affection for his wife! When the precious son catches cold, it is never the father but invariably the mother who applies a popular brand of balm on his chest—with miraculous result.

Cold creams, expensive and fancy soaps and moisturising
lotions are all for women. It would seem that even in winter the man has no need for skin conditioners. However, in case of life insurance policy or a credit card, it is always the man who purchases these items of conspicuous consumption.

Commercials also seem to channelise the children in sex-role stereotypes and thus primarily entail the status quo. Girls are shown imitating their mothers in domestic chores—cooking, serving and cleaning young boys, on the other hand are shown engaged in sports activities, imitating their fathers in bestowing approval on their mother's cooking. It is rarely the growing girl but invariably the growing boy who needs nutritive drinks, mixed with his hot mug of milk. So a majority of the commercials shown on television are openly anti-woman, treating her only as a sex symbol or a household dud. Hence the second hypothesis "Women in advertisement are prey to blatant sensationalism where commercial interests are promoted by exploiting womanhood and sex" proves to be correct.

Entertainment programmes in all types of format (TV fiction and cinema) on the other hand emphasize the dual image of woman as decorative object and as the home and marriage oriented, passive person, secondary to and dependent on man for financial, emotional and physical support.

Except for a few prime time serials like Udan, Humaraai— which attempt at breaking old stereotypes, others communicate the message that the dominant traditional image of woman as the appropriate one and fail to provide any alternative role models to counteract such stereotypes.

In the majority of the morning serials women are ridiculed in
one way or other. These serials cast women as jealous, nagging, gossipy or stupid and vain. The general pattern emerging from all these serials is one that seeks to convince the viewers that women deserve their degradation.

In the afternoon serials we do find certain efforts undertaken in creating positive image of woman. But they too lack concrete and sustained efforts.

Serials in the regional transmission do not make any serious handling of women's issues except for a couple of serials. Others project the stereotypical image of women.

In the prime time programmes we find many serials that present a positive characterisation of women. Woman of prime time serial is strong, warm and fallible - a more believable human being. She is not merely sought as a sex object and is most worthy of emulation.

In the dramas and telefilms the projection of woman is on stereotypical lines. Woman is cast merely in the roles of typical mother, daughter and wife and is used to act as an adjunct to male activities.

Films shown on television fail to reflect or deal positively with changes in sex-role perception and behaviour occurring in contemporary society. The film perspective is essentially a male one and female roles are highly stereotyped. Assessed by standards of social realism, the films shown on TV fall very low. As an instrument of value change too they fail miserably because they reinforce and glorify the traditional values.

Women are objectified and made into mere sex symbols in almost all films. Their physical qualities are accentuated and
The roles allotted to the women are stereotypes i.e. that of a mother, wife, daughter, mother-in-law or the girlfriend. They are hardly depicted as individuals with thoughts and feelings. They play mere functional roles which have only subsidiary relevance. Thus they are never allowed to go beyond these functional boundaries allotted to them. They are mostly portrayed as victims, the sufferers and their lot is condemned even through films.

The films shown on television glorify the Sati Savitri image of woman with the message that Indian woman should be a slave to her husband's wishes whatever that may be and do his 'Seva' till her last breath. These type of films use women as tear jerkers in melodramatic situations. Thus women viewers are mostly persuaded to identify themselves with these eternally suffering, tearful characters. As such women viewers can hardly draw any strength from such films.

The sectoral, awareness generating and other programmes also cast women in secondary roles. Women are numerically under-represented in such programmes and hardly appear as competent or experts. Women are included in these programmes not for their intelligence but for adding glamour. Thus, most often than not, women are included but not to display superior knowledge with respect to men.

Women are allowed to be experts and comperes in children, health and women's programmes. But in other programmes such as current affairs, agriculture, quiz and programmes on science and technology, they are not included as experts.

Contentwise also, these programmes do not in any way help
women. They fail utterly in creating new dimensions in sex-role perceptions.

Children's programmes are intended in preserving status quo and instilling stereotypical values in the young mind. Youth programmes are biased towards women, they do not explore fully the potentials of girls and fail to make any fruitful contribution towards women's cause.

Even women's programmes which are specially designed for women, lack insight into the magnitude of the problems faced by women and touch women's issues in a superficial manner without exploring their intensity. Further they reflect upper and middle class point of view. There are hardly any programmes concerning the lives of lower and labour class women. There is no concrete effort on the part of programme producers in creating self-awareness among women and no initiative in changing patriarchal value system. Hence, the third hypothesis "Women's dimension is not integral part of all programmes shown on Doordarshan but is merely confined to the 'women's programmes" could not be accepted in fully as women's programmes too failed in their purpose.

Agriculture and rural programmes are almost entirely male oriented. They ignore women's role in agriculture and give the impression as if agriculture is male prerogative. Various roles played by Indian women in the rural economy find no place in these programmes.

Current affairs programmes convey the message that women hardly have interest in worldly affairs, their entire interest lies in the private affairs, legal awareness programmes lack
women's perspective. Only health programmes are better produced and are well balanced.

Whether it is documentary or celebrations, audience contact programme or literary discussions, time and again the view emphasised is that women play a subsidiary role in the sphere of information and knowledge. In interviewing males the emphasis is on their education, ambitions, achievements where as when interviewing females the emphasis is on their family life. So both the content and pattern of these programmes make it difficult for women to visualise the things other than home front.

Thus, on the whole these television programmes in no way help to create a positive image of women but project and reinforce negative image of women. The main trend in the portrayal of women in television programmes, news and commercials is women playing secondary roles to men. Men are cast as masters, doers and intellectuals with women as their supporters admirers and entertainers. Thus, the fourth hypothesis "Women are under represented in general and occupy less central roles than men in television programmes" holds true.

The coverage of women, women's issues and women's point of view suffer from two deficiencies. Firstly, women are ignored by the television with the result that the coverage is absent, or very casual. Secondly, they are vitiated by biased social attitudes which make it difficult for women to redefine their roles.

Further the analysis of the audience reactions to television programmes reveal that majority of the audience do not watch
television programmes critically.

The results of the analysis of the questionnaire show the poor response from the audience. This is because most of the audience have failed to comprehend the meaning of positive and negative images of women.

News (both regional and national news) are least watched by women audience as compared to men, as they consider them drab and boring. And also because women audience felt news did not reflect adequately women and their concerns. Hence, the first hypothesis with regard to the second phase of research that "News is least watched by women than men" holds true.

As far as serials are concerned, they are watched more regularly by Dharwad audience as compared to other programmes on television.

Although majority of the women viewers did not watch television serials critically, they did appreciate and desired more women oriented serials. Whenever such serials have been telecast, majority of them have watched those. These audience considered the afternoon and prime time serials to have projected women more positively than regional and morning serials. Further the audience wished that the women oriented serials along with focussing on women's problem should provide an alternative image of women so that viewers could visualise alternatives.

On the other hand, the male audience neither watched these serials critically nor did they wish any changes in the present pattern of serials. Although they did appreciate the serials like Udan, Mriganayani, Sangharsh, they preferred more social serials. The male audience considered the women serials to be all right
once in a while but they did not want them to be regular features. Such attitude on the part of male audience showed the scant regard for women's emancipation and lack of awareness about the gravity of problems faced by women.

As far as projection of women in the serials is concerned most of audience did not find anything amiss with stereotypical or negative projection of women. Audience, especially women viewers are so used to representation of their roles in serials that they did not perceive anything wrong in the stereotypical projection.

Films (both Kannada and Hindi) telecast on Doordarshan perpetuate the view that the male is in every way superior to the female and reinforced the traditional values, attitudes and behaviour patterns. They fail to offer any alternative image of woman and only propagated sex stereotypes. Inspite of such negative projection, majority of the Dharwad audience did not find anything wrong in the treatment of women in these films.

Audience who liked and appreciated the women oriented serials like Udan, Humrahi also seemed to like the films which only stressed women's subjugation. It is apparent from the analysis of audience reactions that majority of them watch television programmes more with a receptive frame of mind than with a critical frame of mind.

It is the audience from high socio-economic background with higher educational qualifications who watched serials and films with feminist perspective and analysed the programmes more critically. But they formed a small minority. It appears that the second hypothesis "The awareness of female stereotypes is
positively related to high socio-economic and educational level", proves to be correct, if we consider the reactions of this group.

As regards to other T.V. programmes audience preferred the programmes of afternoon transmission to morning and regional transmission. They also considered that the afternoon programmes projected women more positively.

Television advertising is the main target of attack from feminists because of its negative, harmful influences on millions of people, which help to strengthen and perpetuate sexist attitudes towards women.

But as evident from the response, Dharwad men seem to be quite oblivious of such negative projection of women in advertising. Compared to men, women viewers were found to be more critical of negative and stereotypical projection of females in advertisement.

Most of the women audience felt that the advertisements either used woman as sex object, whose only goal in the life is to be beautiful and by being beautiful get the man whom she wants to marry. Advertisements also promote the role of woman as a housewife - the eternal kitchen maid, child keeper, home-decorator and domestic slave. They felt the constant repetition of such stereotypical images of women in television advertisements, suggest that in reality, women look and act in similar or even identical way. So it is high time that the advertisements project alternative images.

It is further observed that the audience imbibed some of the prevailing social attitudes in the society, that were reflected in the television programmes.
The social attitudes of the male viewers reveal that they are more conservative in their thinking and they accord lower status to women. Compared to men, women audience are more conscious about their position in the society and oppose many of the prevailing social attitudes. But there is a subtle influence of television on the social and self image of women as most of them do not perceive anything wrong in the treatment of women and women's concerns.

So the analysis of the viewers' reactions to the television programmes revealed that viewers with a high socio-economic status watch television programmes critically.

The rest, having internalised the values, promoted by television accepted the image of women on television as neutral. Further, women viewers were found to be little more critical of the projection of women on television and hoped for the change in the status quo. Doordarshan programmes seem to influence the formation of attitudes and the development of self perception as majority of the viewers support traditional and subordinate rules for women in the society.

The Indian TV, conditioned by the commercial films and dominated by male producers is no different from other mass media regarding the image of woman it reflects.

The TV has failed to pose itself as a progressive medium in terms of its content. It not only reflects the prevailing and well-entrenched attitudes towards women, strengthens and reinforces the stereotypes but also distorts the images. Such relentless negative representation has the effect of validating women's inferiority as real and natural.
Instead of negative stereotyping programmes need to project women in more positive ways, as persons seeking to and capable of controlling their own lives. Both men and women need to be portrayed in ways that encourage mutual respect and a spirit of give and take between the sexes.

More women should be involved at all levels of mass communication programming, production, distribution, reception and consumer levels—so that the women's point of view could be reflected. But at the same time it is also necessary to work towards changing women's self-perceptions. Television has to play a meaningful role in evolving and directing measures against a cultural value system which at present not only accords women lower status but frequently leaves them unaware of the fact.

In view of television's role in influencing and shaping values and attitudes, particularly of children, Doordarshan should ensure that every programme considers the issue of gender equality. The serials, dramas and commercials which depict women only in traditional and stereotyped roles and use them as sex objects or in ornamental roles should not be allowed to be telecast. The commercial films which promote the negative and derogatory images of women should not be telecast.

Positive projection of women should be an integral part of all Doordarshan's programmes. Children's programme should project the values of equality between girls and boys and seek to break sex stereotyping.

Doordarshan should, thus, produce programmes that can improve the status and image of women. It should telecast regularly programmes which make women aware of their rights so that they
are free to assert themselves as human beings, morally, socially and politically co-equal to men. Women and women's concerns should be integral part of all the programmes produced on Doordarshan.

Television has a great potential as a vehicle for social change and could exercise a significant influence in helping to remove prejudices and stereotypes and promoting women's integration into the development process as equal partners through its programmes.

So what is needed is the building of a positive man-woman relationship based on equality, dignity and mutual respect. The often neglected women's dimension should be taken note of and made an inherent part of all media output.

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