RESEARCH RETROSPECTIVE ON WOMEN & MEDIA

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The Beginning

The late 1906s and early 1970s saw the emergence of various researches involving the lack of access, control and under representation of women in the media.

"The motion to elevate the saga of women communicators from textbook footnotes to the focus of major research accompanied a growing desire to document feminist history in general". Said Mary Yodelis Smith.

Betty Freiden’s ‘The Feminine Mystique’ (1963) generally considered an inspirational text contained at its core a critique of the mass media.

A political impetus “The United Nations International decade for women in 1975-85 triggered much activity and initiated the first international reviews of research and action in the field of women & Media (Ceulemans and Fauconnier) Gallagher 1981 ‘Unequal opportunities the case of women & media.’

In 1978 Gaye Tuchman et al’s seminal study “Hearth & Home : Images of women in the Mass Media was published. She brought up the subject of trivialisation or condemnation of women in Media content amounting to their ‘symbolic annihilation’. Her study proposed a research model for analysing women & the Media and studied women as they are portrayed in the primary Media, as well as focus on the women (or lack thereof) of those media.

The feminist study of Media mainly took two angles, one the subordination of women in the profession and two the objective rather than subjective representation of women in the media or the stress on images of women in the Media.

Gradually as the studies progressed the interrelationship between these two aspects and the overall social, economic, cultural and linguistic structure of society also became the focus of studies. (Treichler & Wartella 1986).

Thus we see that today the Feminist Media studies have come a long way from being a mere straight relationship between women and Media to a multifaceted relationship between liberal, radical, socialist & cultural studies – and an assessment of how each relates to the overall political process of feminism, this structural framework was suggested by Leslie Steeves (1987) and later by Liesbet Van Zoonen (1991) who concluded with suggestions for a feminist Media critique in the framework of a cultural studies approach.
But this kind of approach makes the feminist studies very difficult to confine to one specific category. A more or less liberal study might be termed socialist depending upon the outlook of the researchers. This kind of confusion stems from the fact that the methodological legacy is borrowed by feminist workers from their male counterparts.

But as Teresa de Lauretis (1987) argues if feminists are to create new spaces of discourse to rewrite cultural narratives and to define the terms from another perspective - a view from "elsewhere" then new categories and frameworks are needed.

THE GRADUAL PROGRESS

Keeping the overall context in mind Lana Rakow in her edited volume "Women Making Meaning : New Feminist Directions in communication" (1992) contents that the mid 1980s was a feminist turning point in communication – a point at which it became impossible for communication scholars to ignore the existence of feminism and its challenge to the field.

The Essays explore current theoretical and political questions facing feminist communication scholars, and show how feminism extends the disciplined boundaries by reconceptionalising communication forms – verbal harassment, pornography – of special concern to women. Case studies examine the construction of meaning and identity through texts and discourse in terms of gender, race and class.

An Initial review of the work titled “Mass Media : The image role and social conditions of women” (1979) undertaken by Ceuleman’s and Fauconnier proposed that although there was considerable amount of research undertaken on Media, Western, particularly American women there was a considerable lack of research materials on the subject in the developing third world countries.

On the other hand Gallagher has shown that the depiction of women in mass Media is remarkably consistant throughout the world barring media controlled by governments with a strong commitment to social change. The overall picture highlighted the negative feature of media treatment of women.

There have been modifications of feminist media studies over the past two decades. Whereas earlier studies generalised the problems of women’s relation to Media the later studies brought up differences between women of different regions specially in the third world where quite different feminist agendas were called for (Bhasin & Khan 1986) “gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities”.

In Lana Rakow’s ‘Women Making Meaning’ she traces the difference between cultural and ethnic minorities of women and shows that it is possible to trace certain commonalities in women’s position in relation to culture and communication while also acknowledging the differences and specificities of their experience.
Feminists researchers object to the fact that Feminist Media studies are merely considered a separate discipline and a messy intruder. But Rakow suggest that Feminism's strength is its ability to cross disciplinary boundaries. It Britain Franklin, Lury & Stacey (1991) struggled against marginalisation of women's studies and tried to maintain a space from which to analyse the position of women in culture & society.
The 1986 study by Barrie Gunter 'Television and sex role stereotyping' is a review of research from the 1970s and early 1980s especially social psychological studies. It covers portrayal of the sexes, children and adults perception of these portrayals, their effect on children & adults, and the potential of television to 'counter' common stereotypes.
In 1987 Janice Winship in her book “Inside women's Magazines” analyses the women's magazines market form the 1950s to the 1980 exploring the relationship between editors & readers, the importance of illustrations and ideologies, the pleasures provided by women's magazines and the extent to which feminism appears to have influenced them.
In 1987 again Helen Baehr and Gilian Dyer edited 'Boxed in Women & Television,' a collection of essays on women's relationship to television as performers, writers and programme makers and as viewers. It was divided into three sections women & communication technology, programming strategies and on the screen.
“Women and Communication in an age of Science & Technology” edited by Kawakami Yoshiro recorded proceedings of the 88 Tokyo symposium on women covering women & Telecommunications, women's media, interfamily communication, women & networking, women's work and technology, contributions on women & media from Algeria, India, Israel, Japan, Philippines, Sweden & United States.
Romana R. Rush & Dona Allen in 1989 edited “Communication at the crossroads the Gender gap connection”. It is an international collection of essays presenting the ideas and experiences of women seeking to improve and expand the communications system. It also includes case studies of women's efforts to bill alternative communication strategies and media.
Four essays dealing with the relation between the study of gender and communication was published in 1989 in “Critical studies in Mass Communication 1989, Vol - 6, No. 2 under “Gender studies and communication”. These dealt with the contribution of feminist theory to communication theory, feminist cultural studies, the role of feminist scholars in communications and images of men in media research.
In the same year Pamela J. Creedon published “Women in Mass Communication Challenging Gender values” in which North American scholars covered two areas of terrain. First, Feminism's contribution to how mass communication is taught and practised, including fields such as media law and media history, secondly the status of women in the media industry. The volume concludes with two views of alternative futures inspired by the women's media and feminist theory.
In Canadian "Journal of Communication 1984 Vol. 14 No. 3" under the topic 'Women's voices in Media research', essays cover women & the press, the need for a gender perspective in media research, capitalising on the feminine voice, women and television technology.

In "Media Development 1991 Vol XXXVIII No. 2" the women's perspectives on communication includes essays on women & grassroots Communication. Interpretations of and gender differences in melodrama & soap opera, immigrant woman's use of interactive cable in Netherlands, women and international communication developments.

Rosario A Garcell in "who calls the shots?" recorded the proceedings of the 1971 International conference on women, Media & Advertising. He edited papers by participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and United States, covering public and commercial media, women and media ethics, satellites and regional co-operation, alternatives to advertising stereotypes women & new technology, political systems and women's media roles, media violence against women.

Also in 1991 Louis Bosshart edited "Femmes et Medias" which had chapters covering the situation of women journalists in Switzerland the women's press, the media as perceived by Swiss women's associations.

Another book published in 1992 was "Men Masculinity & the Media" edited by Craig Steeve. This dealt with how the media construct images of masculinity, depiction of men & their relationships how men respond to media images.

**FEMINIST THEORY AND COMMUNICATION**

In 1986 Thelma Mc. Cormack in her paper 'Doing feminist research on Women & Media' presented at conference of the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporanea Santiago de Chile reviews and updates the author's path breaking critiques of sexism in media research arguing that feminist 'angle' on research is women setting a research agenda and controlling the means of intellectual production.

In 1987 Robert C. Allen (ed.) "Channels of Discourse. Television and Contemporary Criticism" in which Ann Kaplan in the chapter 'Feminist criticism & television' surveys feminist approaches to television over the past twenty years, considers what feminist television scholars might borrow from film theory and what must be reconsidered in the light of differences between the two media.

In the same year Teresa de Lauretis in "Technologies of Gender : Essay on theory film and fiction" poses the question of how to theorize gender beyond the limits of sexual difference and the constraints that such a notion has come to impose on feminist critical thought.

"Doing research on women's communication : perspectives on theory and method (1989)" by Kathryn Carter and Carole Spitzack sets out to describe the relationship between gender, theory, methodology & methods and to make explicit the implicit assumptions which inform the research process.
It contains three sections: problematics of feminism and social science, theoritics of feminism communication studies; methods for studying women's communication.

In the book 'Rethinking Communication Paradigm Exemplars (1989) Margaret Gallagher in the Chapter 'A Feminist Paradigm for communication research' uses international examples and argues the need for a feminist analyses of the process of knowledge production & control.

Liesbet Van Zoonen 1991 in 'Mass Media & Society' edited by James Curran and Michael Guervitch discusses the main Feminist approaches to media analysis-liberal, radical, socialist & cultural and assess how each relates to the overall political project of feminism. The chapter 'Feminist perspective on the media' concludes with suggestions for a feminist media critique on the framework of a cultural studies approach.

"On Problem and policies in communication research" edited by Lees Hamelink Olga Linne (1992) Gertrude J Robinson in the chapter "The study of women & journalism from positivist to Feminist approaches" argues that the impact of feminism in communication studies in North America is still peripheral. It calls for a rethinking of the assumptions, methods and knowledge based on which communication studies are founded.

NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES
Cheris Kramarae in 1988 edited "Technology and Women's voices: keeping in Touch" which explores the impact of technological change on women's communication primarily in the United States but also in Canada and the United Kingdom putting women at the centre of analysis, these essays clarify male biases and masculist ideologies, throw up new questions and suggest fresh approaches to old ones.

The Journal of communication published an article in 1989 'Gender and the information society: a socially structured silence' which says that debates on technology have ignored the question of gender because established categories and convention of western language and thought direct attention away from this issue. New feminist epistemologies offer a renaissance in the way we conceive, create, code, use and theorize technologies. GRANITE (The Gender and New Information Technologies) presented a collection of papers in 1990 at the first GRANITE seminar which outlines the genesis of GRANITE and presents a tentative agenda for future research activities.

"Media culture and society" (1992) under the topic 'Gender and Technology' published four essays which examined aspects of gender relations and new information technologies a feminist critique of gender and technology interactions and the deficiencies of research in this field when viewed from feminist perspective.

Silvia Perez Vitoria in reports and papers on Mass Communication No. 107 studied gender differences in mobile telephone usage in the United States, the use of video in a popular communication project for women in Bolivia, cable TV viewing among middle class women in India etc.
COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

In S. T. Kwame Boato (ed) “Communication & Culture African perspectives” Pernina Malma (1989) in the essay ‘culture women & the Media’ focussed on Limited participation of women in African Mass Media arising from the top down model of the modern communication system and from cultural factors. If women are to be involved as communicators and as audience, the mass media should be combined with indigenous media.

Also In 1989 Angharad Valdivia in an essay “Some Dangers in Conducting Third World Feminist Communications Research” raised questions about the ethnocentrism of feminist research as conducted in the West, the inaccessibility of its language and terminology and the irrelevance of certain contemporary approaches to the experience of third world populations.

The development Communication Report of 1990 featured “Communicating with Women”. It included articles on women and development support communication, strategy for women’s development and empowerment, funding communication for women in development.

In Luke Uka Uche (ed) communication and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Leslie H. Steves 1992, reviews literature on women and development communication, including research on women and mass media, case studies of development communication projects, research on women and extension, in the essays women, Rural information delivery, Social Equity and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The emphasis is on information transmitted to women, rather than women’s access to communication means.

As a result of these studies the past decade has seen an astonishing popularisation of feminist ideas which are regularly articulated at the cultural level on television and most particularly in women’s magazines. But it remains to be seen whether these changes are simply cosmetic or part of a substantial transformation in consciousness.

THE INDIAN SCENARIO

One the pioneering works in this field is by Vina Majumdar (1975) Towards equality. A report of the committee on the status of women in India published by Ministry of education & social welfare.

The Audience Research Units of Doordarshan and the Indian space Research organisation have from time to time produced various impact studies such as : Women Television Rural Development. An Evaluation study of SITE in a Rajasthan Village (1980); Women’s lives and Television as a Medium for Development : An Impact study (1980); Women and Television : ISRO experience by S. R. Joshi & Hansa Joshi. This studies women from three aspects (1) Participation of women as T.V. Viewers (2) Projection of women’s issues and their images on T.V. (3) Women as Television Practitioners (1986).

In the year 1984 Kamala Bhasin & Bina Agarwal edited “women & media : Analysis Alternative & action”. The articles are divided into two sections. The first comprises analysis of the ways in which women are portrayed in
different media and the second focusses on protests made by various women's groups against existing negative portrayals and on attempts to create alternatives. In the second sections papers presented include "Media & Rural Women" A journal about women & society, consumer education for women, voices of women, friends of women, group action for change & making news.

Vimal Bala Subramanyan (1988). Published "Mirror Image the Media and the women's question" where the relationship between women & media is shown to be a complex one as the media have responded to the mood created by activities of the women's movement during the UN decade for women. These complexities are examined primarily with reference to examples from the English language print media in India: T.V. cinema & advertising are briefly covered. It also includes suggestion for changing media content.

In 1991 Seema Malaviya published communication and rural women.

In the same year Ila Joshi worked on women's dimension on television involving policy personnel & programmes.

William J. Brown and Michael J. Cody (1991) studied the effect of a prosocial Television soap opera in promoting women's status. It studied the effects of Hum Log, India's first long running television soap opera, Exposure did not make viewers more aware of women's status or issues, but the programme paved the way for greater audience involvement with subsequent Indian prosocial television programmes. Though this list is by no means exhaustive still one can see how little has been done in this field in India. However it is encouraging to note that there is an increase in awareness among researchers to focus on gender issues in the Indian Mass Media.

REFERENCE:
2. Communication Research Vol – 9, No. 1, 1982, Feminism and the Media Mary Ann Yodelis Smith.