

TOWARDSEMPowerMENT?

ARegional Initiative
onWomenAndMedia

A SEMINAR REPORT

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Centre for Advocacy and Research
PROSHIKA
ASMITA

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Background

The phenomenal growth of the broadcast media with no less than 50 channels being beamed into Indian homes and its aggressive 'act local but think, plan and integrate global' approach is causing serious concerns in civil society. Particularly worrying is the impact of this growth on the portrayal and representation of women and marginalised groups. For, while the media has acknowledged the fact that they are an important constituency - 90% of programmes are women-oriented - it does not see them as independent voices capable of thinking or speaking for themselves.

It is against this background that the Centre for Advocacy and Research suggested a year long initiative entitled - Women and Media: Working Towards a Regional Advocacy Initiative. It is becoming increasingly clear among those working for women's empowerment that there is a

very urgent need to engage with the media, challenge their bias and make visible the concerns of women and other marginalised sections. What has also been realised is that for such negotiations to be effective there must be a mechanism that ensures the regular monitoring and documentation of the broadcast media's handling of gender sensitive issues as also media watch groups that are regional in scope. Only a strong network of this nature would be able to persuade and influence governments to mediate between these special interest groups and the media.

It is becoming increasingly necessary to evolve and concretise the ground rules vis-a-vis media's perceptions and projection of gender issues.

Introduction

The media, especially the broadcast media, is being seen as an instrument of social change and one that is playing a determining role in influencing public attitudes, priorities and policies in South Asian countries. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly necessary to evolve and concretise the ground rules vis-a-vis its perceptions and projection of gender issues. Also to chalk out a plan of action that will enable civil society to interact with this institution and influence critical changes in the content and representation of gender issues. In brief, to create a culture that accepts gender as a vital norm and social category. For what we have here is a technology that enables those who control it to alter and create new societal dynamics and even shape our realities.

The question before us is how do we engage with the media? Do we do it laterally because there are other actors and elements involved with this issue. Or do we do it in bits

and pieces? And perhaps more importantly how do we mainstream our concerns? The media needs to be told that it is not giving the concerns related to gender and development the autonomy and importance they deserve.

Yet, at another level, it is the media and the media alone that can play a pivotal role in helping us to legitimise our anxieties and help us to be seen and heard. For it is being increasingly feared that failure to use the media could result in losing out the legitimate public space that such concerns need and deserve.

Interestingly, there is a growing awareness among TV channels that women, children and adolescents are important constituencies.

Spread of Satellite Television

For India, the pivotal year was 1982 when India played host to the Asian Games and Doordarshan beamed satellite and color transmission into Indian homes.

After decades of dreary, black and white fare that was bent on educating the masses rather than entertaining them this came as a welcome change, one that brought with it hopes and expectations of a great deal more. But it was almost a decade before Indian television notched up yet another milestone: this was in 1992 when we saw CNN's coverage of the Gulf war via cable connections. After that there has been no looking back because both international media

conglomerates and Indian entrepreneurs were quick to realise the potentials of this technology and the yet untapped billion-strong Indian market. Today, in terms of reach almost the whole country receives terrestrial or satellite TV transmissions while television ownership is estimated to be close to 80 million households.

Understandably, the fall out, both good and bad, has been beyond all expectations and initially there were rumblings from all quarters. If governments were apprehensive of the invasion of their airspace, civil society had worries about the cultural, political and ideological fall out of this opening up of the skies. For there is no facet of Indian life that has not been touched by the cable boom be it food, fashion, music, politics or even religion with god men of all hues expounding on values against back drops straight out of Bollywood! But tolerance levels have indeed gone up and with increasing numbers getting cable connected it is no longer seen an elitist, decadent culture that is the preserve of only a few.

Moreover, on the plus side it has stimulated better production values, provided a foil to state television networks and created platforms for debate and discussion of issues and concerns. State owned television services are also sitting up having realised the need for counter strategies to win back audiences they have lost.

At another level, Satellite TV has also opened the doors to new values, new attitudes and aspirations, again some

good some bad depending on how it's perceived. For if it has brought sexuality and violence into homes it has also gone a long way in creating confidence and self-assurance to a new generation.

And if India was anxious about western norms and culture swamping the Indian psyche, especially impressionable young minds, there were very similar apprehensions among our smaller South Asian neighbours of both Bollywood and western culture playing havoc with their national cultures and ideologies. And indeed there is cause for concern. The last two decades have been witness to a growing homogenisation, especially among the young that has caused cultural moorings to veritably vanish. Today, the attitude of the young, and their aspirations, the way they dress, the music they listen to, the junk food they relish and even their icons are the same because their preferred TV channels are the same no matter whether they live in Dhaka, Delhi or Kathmandu. And of course amidst all this very little is being done to reinforce NGO efforts or empower women.

On the positive side audiences are being increasingly exposed to other cultures, traditions and politics. Satellite television has, for instance, completely demystified differences between India and Pakistan that were perpetuated by politicians on both sides of the border and brought about the realisation that in many social and cultural ways, we are one and the same people.

At another level, satellite TV has also opened the doors to new values, new attitudes and aspirations, again some good some bad depending on how it's perceived.

However, there has been a “Hindigenising” of both

entertainment and news coverage by the satellite TV channels: they are clearly India centric with no effort to regionalise the fare they put out. So while a child in Kathmandu is speaking better Hindi and English or a child in Dhaka is speaking Hindi, no Indian child is picking up their languages. Trivial though this may seem what it does indicate is the need for a South Asian media initiative that will reflect the realities of the region, provide for the exchange of programmes and address this element of marginalisation. It is even being suggested that united efforts like private financial tie-ups be attempted.

Women and Media : A Historical Overview

The media's portrayal of women and their access to expression and decision-making in media has been a key concern of women's groups for over a decade.

Way back in 1985, the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi had stressed the importance of media in increasing the awareness of women's issues and concerns, analysing their causes and seeking solutions resulting in numerous national, regional and international initiatives by both governments and non-governmental organisations. These included:

- The 1986 inaugural meeting of South Asian Association for Regional Corporation (SAARC) which introduced women and development as a concern in its agenda.

- Sensitising the Media to Development and Women-South East Asian Workshop held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in January 1992.
- The Asia-Pacific Symposium of NGOs on women in Development held in Manila, Philippines in November 1993.
- The Women Empowerment Communication, Bangkok, Thailand in February 1994.
- The Second Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on women in Development, held in Jakarta, Indonesia in June 1994.
- The Asian Regional Meeting of Media Professionals held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in September 1994.
- The International Symposium on women and Media: Access to Expression and Decision-Making held in Toronto, Canada in March 1995.
- The SAARC Ministerial meeting held in Dhaka in July 1995 in the run-up to the Beijing Conference.

Every one of these initiatives had sought the inclusion of women and media issues as a central concern of the Beijing Conference and be included in the Platform for Action. More specifically they had in the wake of globalisation and the arrival of satellite television demanded:

- Some form of 'protectionism for women'
- That gender- sensitisation be an intrinsic part of women and media strategies, ideally as part of school curriculums.
- Constant reviewing and monitoring of programmes for anti-women images and messages.
- Sensitisation of key media people and policy makers.
- Build women's capacity in order to increase their access to

expression and decision making within media.

- Increase public awareness to women's issues through alternative and main stream media.
- Develop positive images of women by highlighting their achievements and strengths.
- Create links between women's concerns and that of the larger society.
- The elimination of gender- stereotyping of women in all forms of media.
- That the global media promote social change and equity between men and women.

The Toronto symposium on 'Access to Expression and Decision-making' had in fact identified the obstacles that limit women's role in media while suggesting specific global, regional and national actions. These included: networking, training in media skills, lobbying for more space for women's perspectives, taking technology to the people, increasing women's self-esteem, publicising violence against women along with positive legislation and definite governmental policy guidelines.

The pressures brought on governments and the United Nations did result in inclusion of Women and Media as a key concern in the Platform of Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. In fact, the Conference noted that though media has the potential for making enormous contributions to the advancement of women it continues to be gender-insensitive. So women's concerns are sidelined and most women, especially the poor

and deprived, have no access to expression in the media. Moreover, though increasing numbers of women are positioned in the communication sector more often than not the portrayal of women by the media is negative, degrading and stereotyped and women are still outside the decision and policymaking process.

Given this scenario, the special section on Women and Media (Section J) also detailed the specific actions that governments, national and international media systems, NGOs, media groups and media professional associations, the mass media and advertising organisations should take to:

- Enhance women's skills, their knowledge and access to information technology,
- Create and strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms to eliminate gender-biased programming,
- Promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes
- Expedite the involvement of many more women at the policy and decision-making levels.

All the governments of the South Asian region were signatories to the Declaration. In fact, the July 1995 SAARC Ministerial Meeting on Women: Towards the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing had in its Plan of Action recognised the role of media in social mobilisation through advocacy and suggested special training programmes in gender awareness for senior policy makers, planners and

youth. So it was only appropriate that a meeting be called on the eve of the SAARC Ministerial Meeting in New Delhi a year later, to assess the progress that had been made vis-a-vis the commitments made in Beijing and also to strategise future action.

Taking the initiative the Media Advocacy Group, the Department of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation organised 'The South Asia Meet on Women and Media - A Post-Beijing Initiative', in December 1996. The workshop which was attended by over 75 representatives of women's groups, the government, NGOs, media groups from the region found that for a variety of reasons little had been done to concretise the actions stipulated by the Beijing Declaration.

In a resolution passed at the close of the two-day meet, the group reiterated its concerns while calling on the government, industry, donors and individuals to also address them. These included the giving of more space and time for social issues in all their diversity and a mechanism that would enable policy makers, activists, advertisers, researchers and practitioners to regularly meet and share concerns and work out strategies. But while doing so they also wondered who would take the initiative to set up such a forum? And what inputs progressive media groups could make to public broadcasting channels to ensure maximum use of space and time. Similarly, since women make for half the population it should follow that they be given at least half of broadcast

The Resolution included giving more space and time for social issues in all their diversity and a mechanism that would enable policymakers, activists, advertisers, researchers and practitioners to regularly meet and share concerns and work out strategies.

time. But again who would ensure that such a balance is implemented and maintained? There was also the question of what initiatives the SAARC Secretariat could take on these issues or the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Media Reach

According to the **National Readership Survey (NRS) for the year 2002:**

- Television now reaches 81.6 million Indian homes and reflects a growth of 12% since 1999.
- Access to C&S homes jumped from 29 million in 1999 to 40 million in 2002 - a 31% growth rate, more than twice the growth of the Television market.
- C&S subscription has now penetrated 50% of all TV homes.
- Homes with colour TV increased from 19.4 million in 1999 to 27.8 million in 2002. The increment of 27% is in line with the growth in C&S.
- The access to Internet in the last 3 months increased to 6 million as at 2002. Growth of internet has now stabilised at 2 million p.a.
- As reach of internet increases, office is no longer the main place of access. As many as 20% of users now surf from home and 43% go to a cybercafe.
- Radio reaches 28% of the adult population - marginally more in rural (30%) and fewer in Urban markets (24%)
- Among the 48 million adults who listened to radio in the last 3 months, 31% or 15 million, now tune on to any FM station - an increase of 6% since 2001.

- FM has a larger audience base than Vividh Bharati (18%) and follows behind AIR primary station audience base of 43% of all radio listeners.
- The reader base for dailies/newspapers increased from 131 million in 1999 to 156 million this year - an increase of nearly 20%
- Language dailies, which contributed significantly to this growth, are mainly: English (in the metros), Hindi, Marathi and the clutch of newspapers from the South. The Bengali and the Assamese dailies also sustained the pace.
- Magazines overall show a decline in the reader base, both in urban and rural India. The reach of magazines has declined from 93.8 million in 1999 to 86.2 million in 2002. Magazines have lost 22% of their reach since 1999, taking into account the population growth over these years. The erosion is mainly in the general interest, film/entertainment and sports magazines, where the percentage decline on an average is over 25%.

Objectives Of This Initiative

- To build a regional women and media network that can develop the capacity and the perspective to deal with the electronic media from a balanced perspective.
- To attempt to influence the broadcast media towards a “balanced”, “diverse” and “non-stereotypical” portrayal of women especially those from less privileged strata.
- To work as a watchdog body, document complaints and take them up with the media.

Key Partners

In Nepal, ASMITA is synonymous with women's causes and as a pressure group for the advancement of women through media activism. Established in 1988 by a group of young women journalists who started the country's first feminist magazine, ASMITA has since then made forays into various other sectors in order to fulfill the existing gaps in the participation, representation and access of women to media. So media watching and monitoring has been a serious area of work for the group. For years it carried a regular column Media Watch that critically analysed the way women were being presented by the mainstream media and offered alternatives on how they should be presented.

It has also contributed to several research initiatives on media and gender policy and has since 2000 been continuously producing a radio magazine called 'Shakti' on women's issues and concerns as also useful and inspiring tips for women. Another post-Beijing initiative it has taken on is the training of journalists with a view to creating a gender conscious work force in the media sector. Fifty-four journalists, including 44 women and 10 men have undergone the course so far.

Indeed, ASMITA can clearly claim the credit for making gender issues a matter of public debate and gender policy by penetrating the social consciousness of Nepal's civil society.

In Bengali '*proshika*' stands for training, education and

action but for an estimated 1.9 million Bangladeshi men and women, it also for a holistic strategy of empowerment in all spheres of life. PROSHIKA, in fact is a development process that began in a cluster of villages in Dhaka and Comilla districts in the mid 70s. In those early post liberation days the focus understandably was to work towards freedom from poverty, to organise and unite people and make them aware of the real reasons for their situations. It was also about developing leadership and mobilisation and the creation of a society that is economically productive and equitable and genuinely democratic.

PROSHIKA also realised from the onset that for any social objectives to succeed it was imperative that it be buttressed by research activities and advocacy campaigns and at another level cooperation with like-minded development partners at both the national and international levels. So the production of developmental communication material particularly videos, audio and slide presentations has been an integral part of its activities.

In 1994, it decided to establish a policy advocacy institute in Dhaka with separate departments dealing with policy research, policy education and policy communication. It has also been doing trend-setting work in the areas of advocacy campaigns, sustainable development and increasingly on gender issues. It has been realised that for sustainable development to succeed the empowerment of women is essential. Increasingly, PROSHIKA has been mainstreaming women's development in its programmes and

today women's groups make up for 60% of its primary groups and are recipients of a corresponding proportion of its development services.

For over a decade, the Delhi-based Centre for Advocacy and Research has been working relentlessly at bringing about a change in the representation of women in the mass media, one that is more reflective of the needs and aspirations of women across the country. It has been regularly monitoring the media, conducting surveys on emerging trends and creating awareness on critical issues amongst the media. Realising that western formats for media research would not suffice for assessing Indian programming, CFAR has also developed culture-specific monitoring tools. This has enabled it to keep track of developments in content and programming styles particularly with regard to the shifting balance of gender representation and the portrayal of men, women, minority groups and marginalised communities like the disabled.

Based on its research and monitoring CFAR has been playing a pivotal role in bringing about a more widely accepted understanding of the gender perspective, building a consensus for a broadbased paradigm for media monitoring. As part of this exercise CFAR has been doing audience research to document viewer preferences. Interestingly, this sort of consistent interaction with audience groups has resulted in making them aware of their rights as consumers and in time to the formation of the Viewers' Forum. Today there are forums in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Lucknow and Mau and efforts are on to create a nationwide network and turn audiences into

active partners in the broadcasting process.

Earlier initiatives

In the run-up to this seminar, the Centre for Advocacy and Research and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation had organised a regional seminar on 'Making Satellite Television Gender Conscious' in New Delhi in November 2001. The focus of the two-day meet which was attended by participants from India and four South Asian nations was on how satellite television could be made conscious of the challenges that groups working on media representation on gender and development face at the national and regional levels.

The deliberations based on research studies done in the different countries also led to a dialogue and exchange of insights and experiences not just on the extreme representations that are seen on TV but the day to day impact of TV on women. An effort was also made to develop and consolidate the process of forming a regional network so as to enable us to address the challenges of satellite and global television and make them sites of change, influence impact and discourse. To find out ways in which significant changes and shifts can be negotiated and evolve a dialogue on matters that are feasible and doable. At another level the attempt was to form a network that will comprise of public interest groups that are conducting research and advocacy and find friends and well wishers in the industry.

The workshop assessed both entertainment and news

coverage, the monitoring of media content and media representation of both men and women and the role of the industry, especially the beauty industry. We also monitored government run channels in order to identify appropriate strategies to address women's representation.

In February 2002 another two day workshop was organised by the Media South Asia Project at the Institute for Development Studies at Sussex University in collaboration with the Centre for Advocacy and Research in New Delhi. The principle aim of the workshop titled 'Representing the Viewer and Listener: Voices of Women and Less Privileged Sections' was to bring together South Asian organisations who are interested in the issue of monitoring and advocacy from a national and South Asian perspective. Particularly interesting was the varying perspectives that were voiced by delegates on the impact and influence of the media, particularly satellite television. Participants were also introduced to CFAR's own experiences in the areas of monitoring and feedback research in order to strengthen viewer-centered advocacy.

CHAPTER 1

Monitoring Study

Gender Representation on Satellite Television – A Regional Perspective

Part A

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Channels Monitored	
Satellite Ch.	Terrestrial Ch.
Zee TV	Nepal TV
Star Plus	Ekushey TV
Sony	BTV

For the quantitative study, we looked at 50 hours and 30 minutes (101 episodes) of fiction during the early months of 2002. In all 52 episodes from satellite TV channels and 49 episodes from terrestrial channels were monitored. The result is an intensive quantitative data of prime time fiction.

1. Setting of the Serials

The setting/locales in the fiction on Satellite Channels are entirely urban.

Only on NTV (Nepal TV) are 24% of the settings rural. NTV also has a significant presence of foreign locales while on other channels it is entirely absent.

Table 1 : Terrestrial Channels

	EIV	BIV	NTV
Urban	100%	100%	51%
Rural	-	-	24%
Foreign Locales	-	-	15%

Table 1A : Satellite Channels

	Zee	Sony	Star Plus
Urban	100%	100%	100%
Rural	-	-	-
Foreign Locales	-	-	-

2. Milieu of the Serial

- The study shows that on the urban landscape, “less privileged homes” do not feature at all on Zee / Sony /Star as the favoured setting. The lives, conflicts, joys and aspirations of

the upper and affluent classes form the backdrop for the family saga on TV.

- Terrestrial Channels (5%) appear to give some representation to “less privileged homes”.
- Domestic space (terrestrial 79%:satellite 71%) is the preferred television setting for the drama to unfold. This vindicates our contention that the main storyline in serials concerns issues within the home and personal relationships/familial situations.
- The office is a far less popular setting (satellite 7% : terrestrial 2%) and so are schools and colleges (terrestrial 8%: satellite less than 1%). This implies that in spite of a very affluent lifestyle being portrayed, people are not depicted as engaging in professional or livelihood struggles. In fact, money is a ‘taken for granted’ factor.

Table 2 : Ambience of the Serial

	Satellite	Terrestrial
Upper Class Home	57%	19%
Middle Class Home	14%	55%
Less Privileged Home	-	5%
Public Space	11%	10%
Hotel	2%	1%
Office	7%	2%
School/College	1%	8%
Others	8%	-

3. Activities performed on screen

- Interaction at home is the favourite activity in all Channels - Star (84%), Sony (56%) and Zee (53%). This is centred on spending the time with each other, brainstorming and last but not the least in stormy arguments and conflicts. It is also the most popular activity across age groups.

Even the age group 14-21 years, is shown involved with verbal interactions at home rather than in school or college. This helps explain the negligible presence of the latter in the ambience of the serials.

Among the total interactions at home, women are involved in upto 57% of such exchanges. But, significantly for the men, this category is equally high at 43%. Since men controlling business empires (category of self-employed in Table 4 A) are involved in domestic situations it may be inferred that they are involved in family matters more than the family business. The qualitative data also shows that most of their interactions at office also pertains to personal relationships and problems.

- Interestingly, the other most popular activity is talking on the telephone, be it a mobile or a landline. This is especially true of Sony (15%) and Zee (11%). The telephone is more popular among those in 22-30 age group (Sony 22% and Zee 11%) and among the retired people (8%).
- Interactions in the office is the third category. Looking at the high percentage of self-employed people (82%), office interactions features as little as Sony 12%, Star Plus 10% and Zee 7%. Male interaction in the office is 79% in comparison

to female which is 21%.

- Homemakers indulge in household chores. However, what is significant is that while most of the action is set at home, the number of individuals performing household chores is almost negligible. It is just 4 % in Sony 3% in Zee and 3% on Star Plus.

Table 3 : Channel based representations of Activities

	Zee	Sony	Star Plus
Home Interactions	53%	56%	84%
Household Chores	3%	4%	3%
Office Interaction	7%	12%	10%
On the phone	11%	15%	1%
Recreation Activity	1%	6%	2%
Misc.	25%	7%	–

Table 3A : Age based Activities

Satellite Channels					
	0-13	14-21	22-30	31-50	50+
Home Interactions	70%	42%	52%	68%	77%
Household Chores	10%	11%	2%	6%	3%
Office Interaction	–	5%	12%	7%	–
On the phone	10%	13%	13%	9%	8%
Recreation Activity	–	13%	4%	1%	–
Misc.	10%	16%	17%	9%	12%

Table 3b : Gender Based Activities

	Male	Female
Interactions at Home	43%	57%
Household Chores	-	100%
Office Interaction	79%	21%
On the phone	55%	45%
Recreation Activity	56%	44%
Misc.	59%	41%

Table 3c : Occupation Based Activities

Satellite Channels						
	SE.	Prof.	H	Std	Rtd.	Misc.
Home Interactions	53%	55%	72%	51%	76%	55%
Household Chores	-	-	13%	1%	-	-
Office Interaction	22%	16%	-	3%	6%	-
On the phone	15%	14%	6%	13%	6%	7%
Recreation Activity	3%	7%	1%	7%	-	-
Misc.	7%	8%	8%	25%	12%	39%

4. Occupation

- Homemakers (26 %) top the list in keeping with the belief that TV serials target mainly adult women.
- Self-employed persons in business (25%) are the next popular category. These people belong primarily to the upper and affluent classes.

- Students (20%) form the third significant category. Both satellite and terrestrial TV channels register more female than male students.

Table 4 : Occupation

	Satellite Channels
Self-Employed	25%
Professional	16%
Homemakers	26%
Student	20%
Retired	3%
Misc.	10%

Table 4A : Gender Based Occupational Representation

	Satellite		Terrestrial	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Self-Employed	82%	18%	100%	-
Professional	48%	52%	88%	12%
Homemakers	1%	99%	3%	97%
Student	41%	59%	33%	67%
Retired	100%	-	100%	-
Misc.	93%	7%	81%	19%

5. Age of Characters

- Satellite TV focuses primarily on the 22-30 age group, far more than terrestrial (satellite 52% / terrestrial 34%).
- In fact, terrestrial channels appear to be more representative in their depiction of different age groups.
- There is also a significant presence of the older generation in Satellite Channels.

Table 5 : Age Group Representations

Age Group	Satellite	Terrestrial
0-13	2%	2%
14-21	6%	14%
22-30	52%	34%
31-50	23%	39%
50+	17%	11%

Table 5A : Gender Based Age Group Representations

Age Group	Satellite		Terrestrial	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-13	13%	87%	100%	00
14-21	19%	81%	40%	60%
22-30	53%	47%	51%	49%
31-50	45%	55%	64%	36%
50+	54%	46%	74%	26%

6. Marital Status

- On satellite channels, the representation of married characters (55%) is higher than that of unmarried ones (38%).
- On terrestrial channels unmarried persons are represented more (58%) than married ones (38%).
- Gender-based representations are interesting insofar as divorced or separated men feature more than women and among the widowed, women feature far more than men. This is explained by the presence of grandmothers - *nanis* and *dadis* - in most of the serials.

Table 6 : Marital Status

	Satellite Channels	Terrestrial Channels
Married	55%	38%
Unmarried	38%	58%
Divorced/Separated	1%	3%
Widowed	7%	1%

Table 6A : Age Based Marital Status

	Married	Unmarried	Divorced/ Separated	Widowed
0-13	-	100%	-	-
14-21	-	100%	-	-
22-30	43%	54%	1%	2%
31-50	85%	8%	1%	6%
50+	70%	6%	-	24%

7. Appearance

- The appearance of men on TV is predominantly modern (80%) as compared to women who appear more traditional in dressing and get up (64%). The traditional symbols like the *Bindi*, *mangalsutra*, *sindhoor* are visible all across the Channels.
- Homemakers are largely traditional. While the professional and self employed men and women are modern in their appearance.

Table 7 : Gender Based Appearance

	Traditional	Modern	Mixed
Male	17%	80%	3%
Female	64%	20%	16%

Table 7A : Occupation Based Appearance

	Traditional	Modern	Mixed
Self-Employed	12%	72%	16%
Professional	18%	64%	18%
Homemakers	91%	4%	5%
Students	25%	68%	7%
Retired	64%	29%	7%
Misc.	62%	38%	-

Part B

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS (Star Plus, Zee & Sony)

All in the Family

The aim of this study has been to examine the representation of gender in TV fiction. The quantitative and qualitative analysis indicates that gender representation must be seen in the context of the depiction of the family.

The family in TV fiction is shown at a crossroad: it is striving to maintain its traditional status in the post-modern era, where the only certainty is that everything is in a state of flux. The notion of family is continually changing, adapting to the reality of increasing urbanisation and even globalisation.

In the following pages we will profile the family on television as depicted in the 15 episodes of the sample. We will find that faith has been renewed in the traditional values of the Indian family system in a number of ways - from the way characters dress, to the central issues addressed by the serials. However, it will also become apparent that the traditional family has been portrayed in modern terms -

perhaps, in order to appeal to the urban audience which forms the main target audience for satellite TV fiction. The packaging of TV fiction, thus, becomes a very important aspect of its analysis.

In the packaging process we will discover that the family is constantly under threat, that conflicts within the family and their resolution lie at the centre of the narratives, that the narratives follow a dialectic process through which tradition undergoes a kind of present day *agnipariksha* and comes out with its fingers burnt but more resilient, albeit changed.

The narratives are played out in different ways, usually through a situational conflict most often involving families and marriage. More significantly, the clash between values, aspirations and adherence to expected roles, exposes the charades, hypocrisies, the inconsistencies and the fault lines of our traditional family and society.

The conflicts are almost invariably resolved within the family through traditional mechanisms. The outside world seldom intervenes. Indeed, there is considerable dramatic license in the projection of stressful situations. Events occur in the name of "reality", ignoring their "real" dimensions. Worse, there are individual violations: characters, including children, are shown to violate others privacy, inflict physical and verbal violence, as if it is their prerogative as long as it remains within the family.

The conflicts are almost invariably resolved within the family through traditional mechanisms. The outside world seldom intervenes.

What is problematic with this approach? The way `change`

is packaged. TV fiction uses “traditional spokespersons” (normally an older family member or a chosen younger one), traditional methods of family bonding, rituals and customs like fasting in a contemporary situation to resolve issues.

Sexuality often presents the greatest challenge of all. The way male and female sexuality is depicted in these serials is extremely revealing about the sexual mores within society. The man-woman relationship also illustrates ‘the packaging’ we spoke of: adultery is as commonplace in Hindi serials as it is in foreign ones. It is conducted openly and, sometimes flaunted. This frankness about extra-marital affairs may be interpreted as a sign of modernity. However, TV producers are very deliberate in such depictions. Firstly, the extra-marital affair ends in failure. Usually, the dutiful wife plays the moral card and triumphs over the confused and errant man. Secondly, the affair is lent legitimacy because the man is often ‘forced’ into a marriage against his wishes and so his extra-marital affair with a woman he loves, is acceptable, even natural. The fact that his wife is not allowed the same license is part of the typecasting so frequent in these serials.

The primarily asexual mode of newly-married couples in a majority of fiction, says two things: the articulation and depiction of sexual needs is kept deliberately low key because of our cultural aversions to such depictions. More significantly, overt sexuality has no place within the joint family dynamics: the whole purpose of the sexual act is to procreate so that the children can carry forward the ‘*vansh*’ and the family legacy. This sexual act is meant to be carried out at a ‘non-family’

time, away from children and impressionable adolescents and preferably off-screen. It is seldom depicted on television.

TV serial producers depict everything - be it marriage, sexuality or even the generation gap - simply in terms of the family. This prevents TV narratives from exploring gender issues in the modern context and ignores the impact such depictions may have on viewers with regard to the family, marriage and individual rights.

Profile

In the Hindi drama serial, 'The Family' is the defining reality in every way: it is the sum and substance of the drama serial. Almost every aspect of the drama serial can be understood in relation to the family and the family alone.

In this monitoring sample of 9 prime time TV drama serials, approximately 50 per cent of the shows are produced by one production house: Ekta Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms*.

Serials such as *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*, *Kkusum*, *Koshish*, *Kohi Apna Sa*, *Kutumb*, *Kalash* are the highest-rated shows across channels.

* (The data is based on 15 episodes across 9 serials. The figures are approximate values. It should be noted that though the total number of scenes across the 15 episodes is 125 while calculating the data scenes have been recounted to show the diversity of issues, relationships, conflicts, locations etc. The characters that have been taken for providing data are the characters who are relevant to particular episodes.)

Balaji serials not only dominate television fiction but also define its primary concerns. Balaji productions concentrate on the family, and although the family has always been central to Hindi serials, it has now acquired a renewed vigour and meaning in Balaji's productions. Balaji Telefilms treat the family as the site for everything. Even their suspense-thriller, *Kahin Kissi Roz* is situated within the confines of the family.

The Joint Family in India

The family on TV is almost invariably a joint family, primarily Hindu. Over two-thirds of the monitoring sample deals with the traditional extended family as opposed to the modern nuclear family.

The joint family in India is believed to be a unique, ancient heritage of the Indian people. The family acts as a unit of production and consumption. Having common land and property, sharing economic functions and residing in a common household with the same family deity is considered to create a unifying bond. The joint family in India is characterised by the interdependence of members on one another. This interdependence strengthens mutual emotional bonds, generates a sense of solidarity and develops family pride. The traditional family is regarded as a support system not only for emotional but even economic assistance. It is regarded to serve as a buffer to the stresses of social isolation or disputes. (Sinha, Durganand, "The Joint Family in Tradition" in *Seminar* 424, December 1994)

In this sample we have two Muslim dramas - *Heena* and *Sarhadein*. Significantly, even here the family structure goes beyond religious differences: the Hindu and Muslim families in these serials are very similar. For example, Sameer's family in *Heena* (Sony) is like Abhay's in *Kkusum* (Sony). To this extent, there is a certain uniformity in the character of the family.

The extended family may consist of three or four generations of the same family: in *Kyunki...* four generations of Viranis live under the same roof. In most cases, the joint family consists of a number of brothers and their wives and children, etc. Some are headed by a patriarch, ie, in *Kohi Apna Sa*, there is the grandfather - Baoji - his three sons and their wives, their four sons and their wives and unmarried daughters.

Gender: This joint family is predominantly a male construct. In a few instances, the daughters of these families continue to live with their parents, even after marriage. The usual circumstance is that of marital discord or divorce and less of widowhood. For example, Heena after her divorce from Sameer lives with her family. Similarly, Chhaya in *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki* and Vishal's sister in *Kohi Apna Sa* live with their parents due to marital discord. Ratna in *Choti Ma.. Ek Anokha Bandhan* remains at her parents' home with her husband for economic reasons.

Conversely, the women's families are almost entirely absent from the screen. Alternatively, female characters belong to nuclear families or dysfunctional ones. The exceptions are

the serials of Aroona Irani - *Mehndi Tere Naam Ki* and *Des Mein Niklla Hoga Chand* centre around the girls' nuclear families.

In serials such as *Kyunki...* and *Kahani...* the daughters-in-law have absentee families. Serials such as *Koshish..Ek Aasha, Kutumb, Heena, Saanjhi*, see women with parents but no extended family. Interestingly, the main female protagonist in serials such as *Kohi Apna Sa, Kyunki., Koshish., Kahani.,* have either single parents - a widower, widow - or have been brought up by a grandmother or aunt. In *Kahin Kissi Roz*, the lead female character, Shaina, is an orphan. Tulsi in *Kyunki.*, the main protagonist, goes through most of the serial without any family of her own. Her *pujari* father and her sister Kesar, surface only in fits and starts.

Thus, the joint or extended family which dominates Hindi serials is essentially the family of the lead male characters. The women belong to their in-law's homes and are defined only in terms of their husbands' families. Once they have entered their marital home, they leave their past behind. Komolika's maternal uncle in *Kasauti Zindagi Kay* places a pair of sandals before her and tells her that her feet must never enter her family's house again, because it is no longer her home.

Nuclear Families: Within this overwhelming presence of the joint family, a small space has been carved out for the nuclear family. In serials such as *Justujoo, Saanjhi, Kalash, Mehndi Tere Naam Ki*, the household consists of one

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independent family, or just one married couple (*Kalash*).

If we look at the profile of the family from an economic perspective, the basic correlation is that members of the joint family are usually rich, and work in the family business (95 per cent) while nuclear families in serials tend to be middle class. There are variations: in serials such as *Kohi Apna Sa*, *Justujoo* and *Mehndi Tere Naam Ki* the main characters, are professionals.

Geographical Space: In *Kohi Apna Sa*, the grandfather summons everyone to discuss his grandson's marriage to a woman of his choice as opposed to the family's candidate. The entire family - his sons and their wives, his grandsons and their wives, etc. - gather in the central hall, or drawing room. This geographical space is symbolic of the family's premier position in serials, especially those made by Balaji Telefilms: *Kyunki..*, *Kahani..*, *Kkusum*, *Kutumb*, *Kasauti..*, *Koi Apna Sa*. Over 30.8 per cent of all scenes in the monitoring

sample occur in the central sitting area and approximately 78.6 per cent within the house (See Table 1).

This family occupation of the central space in the house and TV frame, also reveals itself in terms of the 'open door' syndrome in these serials. Doors to individual units are never shown closed: family members wander in and out of bedrooms at will, and become constant participants in all activities, no matter how



Baa, Tulsi and Babuji (from left to right) in *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*

private a matter. Life is lived in the open, and all secrets, inevitably, spill out.

Table 1: Space Distribution

Location	Frequency	
Sitting room	42	30.88%
Dining space	15	11.02%
Bed room	36	26.47%
Kitchen	4	2.94%
House compound	8	5.88%
House corridor	2	1.47%
Public space	19	13.97%
Office	10	7.35%
Total	136	100%

78.66 per cent of the locations are within the premise of the house

This arrangement of the house has a symbolic meaning. The joint family consists of several couples who inhabit their own separate units, but all issues are resolved jointly by the family. There is a great blurring of the public and the private: there is no compunction in taking a 'personal' problem (say, trouble between a couple), and airing it in a public space (say, the living room).

A telling example is that of *Choti Ma....* In this serial, there is no joint family, but parts of two different families brought



Koyana & Sharda in
Choti Maa...Ek Anokha Bandhan

together under the same roof out of the friendship between the two leading male characters, Raghu and Shyam. Thus, the family is represented as a symbolic entity. However, here, too, all the doors in the house are open even though Shyam's wife Ratna hates Raghu's second wife, Sharda.

The lack of privacy and any sense of being separate or discrete manifests itself in the themes and plots of the overwhelming majority of the serials. In over 90% of the scenes from the monitored sample, the issues dealt with concerned the family and specifically, marriage. (See Table 2)

If, for some reason, an unknown entity enters into the family, the young man or woman are shown the 'ways' the family conducts itself in various arenas - the temple (could be inside the house, or outside) where everyone prays together, the kitchen, where the ladies cook together (the servant hovers, but the actual cooking and serving is done by the 'bahus'), the dining table, where everyone eats together (with the daughters-in-law standing behind and serving). The only space where a couple is shown alone is in the bedroom, and that bedroom is not an inviolate space: it can be invaded whenever there is need.

The family and the outside world: Thus, everybody's business is the family's business. This emphasis on the home and the family illustrates another significant aspect of these

The lack of privacy and any sense of being separate or discrete manifests itself in the themes and plots of the overwhelming majority of the serials.

serials: their world is an inward-looking one with very little interaction or contact with the outside world. For example, in only four scenes are the issues dealt with of a professional nature (See Note*** in Table 2).

Table 2 : Break-up of Issues

Issues	Frequency		Frequency of conflict	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
In and around marriage (affecting family)	92	73.6 %	57	61.4%*
Issues concerning family (other than marriage)	24	19.2%	7	21.9%**
Others (career, business deals, drug racket, potential love affair)	9***	7.2%	–	

Note: frequency scene-wise (125 scenes)

* Out of 92 scenes

** Out of 24 scenes

***Out of the 9 scenes 4 dealt with purely professional relationship.

The family's contact with the outside world is through business relationships, usually conflictual. Friends and colleagues are largely absent. There are a few exceptions but even in those instances, the outsiders, be they business associates or friends become involved in the life of the main characters (See Table 3). Esha starts out as Kkusm's friend in *Kkusum* before she becomes her husband's lover. Pratham in *Kutumb* has two good friends but they are shown primarily

in relation to Pratham’s relationship with his wife or family _ they have no independent existence of their own. Similarly, Anupam who started out as a business associate of the Viranis in *Kyunki...* falls in love with Kesar, the sister of the main female character, Tulsi Virani.

The preoccupation with the family occurs in even those serials which are not in the joint family mode. *Justujoo* is a perfect example, because the ostensible theme of the serial is adultery.

However, the extra-marital affair occurs within the family: Lalit and his wife’s sister, Neeraja fall in love and have an affair. *Justujoo* is also interesting because Lalit is one of the top lawyers in Mumbai yet he is shown exclusively in his

Table 3: Break-Up of Relationship

Relationship	Frequency	
Marital relationship	53	35.3%
Family/ blood ties	43	28.6%
Affinal relationship	9	6%
Friends and acquaintance	13	8.6%
Professional relationship	17**	11.3%
Outside marriage (extramarital, ex-lovers)	15	10%

**** 7 based on intention for deception of family member and 10 based on potential love affair or on going love affair.**

capacity as a private individual. His relationship with his colleague, Kavita, for instance, is restricted to discussions on personal matters.

In *Sarhadein*, which actually deals with the much larger issue of religion, the entire philosophical discourse is internalised in the relationship between two characters: the love between the lead pair of Aman and Chandni and its impact on their families. Indeed, the question of religious identity is very neatly characterised in the conflict between Sohail and his mother who before her marriage was a Hindu.

The Singular exception is *Choti Maa*.... Here, the private and public interact in the manner of no other serial and the main characters - Sharda and Raghu - are shown in both their personal capacities as members of the household and as professional running a garment trade.

The family at war: The openness of the family structure, of the household, is however, misleading and can be superficial. If we accept that the drama serial's obsession with the family is an affirmation of the family, a reinforcement of tradition, upon closer scrutiny, we will also discover that this notion of the family is being constantly undermined, challenged from within: the family is always under threat from the deceit and ambitions of its individual members.

The drama serial, especially daily soap, thrives on the generation of conflict and its eventual resolution. This is the source of suspense, the 'hook' which holds the viewers'

attention captive. The conflicts originate from within the family. (See Table 4).

Table 4 : Relationship Involved in Conflicts

Relationship	Frequency	
Marital relationship	25	34.72%
Familial/blood ties	24	33.33%
Affiral	10	13.88%
Others* (involves familial/ marriage/extramarital issues)	13	18.05%
Total	72	100%

* Involves non-family members

For example, 80 per cent of the conflicts are between family members. Approximately, 50 per cent of the conflicts in our sample, are related to family and marital affairs (See Table 2). Thus, the ostensible openness of the family is undermined by intrigues within the family.

Kohi Apna Sa reveals another significant aspect of the overarching structure of the joint family and the fissures within it. Rahul’s marriage to the girl of his choice, Priyanka, instead of the family candidate, Roshni, sees individuals siding with their immediate family members. Thus, Sheetal will support her son Kabir while Tushar fights with Sheetal on behalf of his mother, Raksha. Vishal (Roshni’s cousin) and Tushar (Rahul’s brother) clash with each other over Rahul and Priyanka’s marriage. This leads Khushi who is married to Vishal to utter

a sentiment which aptly describes most of the drama serials:

“Grandfather was happy thinking that the whole family had come together but now the whole family has broken up again.”

The older generation, authority/conflict resolution:

If the intrigues are located within the family so are the solutions. Outside agencies seldom intervene. If they do, they are often the ones who created the problems. Esha’s introduction into Abhay’s life in *Kkusum* creates havoc in his family and in his relationship with Kkusum.

In most circumstances, the vehicle of authority and resolution is the most obvious one. Given the strict division of the family along hierarchical lines, the elders are the fount of wisdom and authority in the family. The grandfather, the grandmother and then the mother and father use their position as elders to assert their will. In *Kkusum*, *Kasauti Zindagi Kay*, *Heena*, *Kohi Apna Sa*, *Sarhadein* to name just five serials, the grandfather, grandmother or a parent intervene, make their pleasure or displeasure known and the rest of the family falls in line.

Thus in *Kohi Apna Sa*, Baoji decides that Priyanka should not come and live in the house because of the family’s animosity towards her. There is no question of Rahul and Priyanka challenging his judgement - they must abide by it.

In *Kutumb*, the mother resolves the situation. Pratham

Given the strict division of the family along hierarchical lines, the elders are the fount of wisdom and authority in the family.

prevents his wife Gauri from attending college, saying *‘You have responsibilities towards this house. My family is more important to me than your exams’*. His mother intervenes *“She is the daughter-in-law of the house but at the same time she also has an identity as a woman”* and persuades Pratham to respect his wife’s feelings.

In *Kkusum*, when Kkusum and the family discover Abhay’s affair with Esha, the mother-in-law hands over the divorce papers to Abhay.

In other instances, change occurs through the sudden illness of the elders. Anurag in *Kasauti Zindagi Kay*, Meghna and Yash in *Kkusum*, Sameer in *Heena* have to act against their own wishes because of the ill health of their parents/ grandparents. Sameer marries Heena against his wishes. Later he divorces her and agrees to marry another girl against his wishes because his father suffers a heart attack!

Men and Women

It is within the parameters of the joint/extended family that we have to consider the gender constructs. We can broadly observe in most serials a return to a fairly rigid gender characterisation along expected stereotypes of women and men. This characterisation leads to a glorified construct of marriage for the perpetuation of the extended family.

The most popular fiction on satellite TV channels Star, Sony and Zee reveal that the meaningful shifts some TV

producers attempted in their narratives during the previous decade or the initial years of satellite television, have been undermined. Serials such as *Imtihaan*, *Campus*, *Banegi Apni Baat*, *Adhikaar*, *Sailaab*, *Dard* tried to look at issues concerning the young, or women and marriage beyond the overwhelming presence of the family.

Now, the aim is to reaffirm the family and maintain the status quo or the entrenched norms and values. However, these are packaged in a manner which (at least superficially) fuses modernity with tradition in order to be acceptable to the urban middle class viewer.

Unless we understand the process of how content is packaged, it is difficult to assess viewers' response or engagement with it. Also, any critique of content will not prove useful unless we are also able to understand what viewers encourage producers to create.

Depiction and Treatment of Gender Characteristics

If we apply these standards to the treatment of gender within the family, we will find some interesting results. The serials reassert that a woman's place is in the home. It is both her life and her domain. Among the women, about 80 per cent are confined to the kitchen, living room, dining room, and bedrooms (See Table 5 - breakup among the 80%). They enter the professional space only when they have to save their spouses or family from the clutches of others (eg, Parvati

in *Kahani.*), or when they have to say things to them which cannot be said within the house.

Table 5: Gender Representation Across Location

Location	Representation			
	Male		Female	
Sitting room	38	38%	33	32.67%
Dining space	9	9%	10	9.90%
Bed room	19	19%	22	21.78%
Kitchen	1	1%	7	6.93%
House compound	6	6%	7	6.93%
House corridor	1	1%	2	1.98%
Public space	18	18%	17	16.83%
Office	8	8%	3	2.97%
Total	100	100%	101	100%

Male representation within the premise of the house is 74 per cent

Female representation within the premise of the house is 80.19 per cent



Parvati in *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*

The women are repositories of how ‘Things Are Done’ in the husband’s family. Parvati’s role in *Kahani.* illustrates the point. She is the perfect wife, daughter-in-law, mother, sister-in-law, etc. She must look after the entire extended family and does so with astonishing elan. Such selfless virtue is seldom seen in real life.

Her husband, Om is her male counterpart. Loving to his

parents and younger brothers, calm in the face of a crisis, mindful of his wife's wishes. But his 'ideal' relationship with Parvati is very much within the mould: she takes care of the household, chooses his ties, hands him his bag. She controls the house, but this control is sanctioned (by the elders).

The pivotal characters in most cases are female. Parvati, Tulsi, Kkusum, Sharda, Heena, Muskaan, etc. Thus, despite its patriarchal moorings, the family in TV serials is seemingly pro-active in its attitude towards women. They are always in the thick of things. Importantly, they are not portrayed as victims or the oppressed. Often, a male character who is forced into contract or compromise marriage is as much the victim as the woman. For example, the ratio of men to women who are forced into marriages of convenience or agree to marry the girl/boy of their parents choice is in fact 2:1 (See Table 6)

Most of the female characters are authoritative even manipulative, seldom openly submissive. Their power may reside in the home, in the kitchen, but these serials are almost a celebration of this power. However, it is interesting that though the women's place is in the home, they are seldom shown performing any household tasks. Occasionally they cut vegetables or serve meals. Otherwise, they are shown in recreational activities, or simply talking.

However, for all their assertiveness, female characters display traditional trappings: from their *saris* and *bindis*, to their fasting rituals and *poojas*, they represent tradition with a capital T.

Again, for all their assertiveness, female characters display traditional trappings: from their *saris* and *bindis*, to their fasting rituals and *poojas*, they represent tradition with a capital T.

This is, precisely where the packaging occurs: as long as the women continue to represent tradition, the family, they can be strong, assertive and the power point in the serial.

Again and again these women work to restore the core values of the family, which are threatened by one or another member of the family. In portraying them as strong, 'active' personalities, the producers lend them a veneer of modernity.

Table 6: Parental/Familial Pressure In Marriage

Serial	Marriage by force		Parental/familial pressure/insistence to marry	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Kohi apna sa	-	-	1	-
Kasauti Zindagi kay	1	1	-	-
Sarhadain	-	-	1	1
Kyunki saas bhi kabhi	-	-	-	-
Justujoo	-	-	-	-
Kkusum	2	1	-	-
Heena	-	-	1	-
Mehendi tere naam ki	-	-	-	-
Kahani ghar ghar ki	-	-	-	-
Total	3	2	3	1

Ratio of marriages/proposed marriages borne out of force/comprromise/parental pressure of male-female is 2:1 respectively

The 'packaging process' does not exclude men. In the world of TV fiction, a man's position is also in the home (over 70 per cent are shown within the household premises), although the male characters are shown attending office (See Table 9). However, the office scenes are primarily used to continue or to resolve conflicts within the home. *Kkusum* is the best example of this: the pulls and pressures in the relationships of Abhay, Kkusum and Esha are often manifested in their professional relations at office.

Unlike cinema, television with its daily soaps and fiction can evoke a strong emotional identification with the characters and their daily predicaments and upheavals. Thus, in spite of stark economic and class variations, viewers (women in particular) can identify with the situational engagements of the female character in these serials because these are universal. For example, joint families, arranged marriages, extra-marital affairs, differences with mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law are common to all, irrespective of social or economic disparities. TV producers seek to exploit this commonality of experience and shared traditional value systems.

Symbols

We observe an endless use of religious symbols and traditional customs and norms in fleshing out the daily lives of women and men. This includes dominant dress and ornamentation codes, observation of daily courtesies and protocols, festivals and family celebrations.

Also, dialogues, actions, appearances and most importantly, the means used for conflict-resolution, continually reassert gender characteristics.

To cite some examples

There is a constant dialectic and juxtaposition of the `good' and `bad' woman through ritual, action, attire, dialogue, etc.

A `good' woman places her husband and family before herself. In *Aan* (on Zee) when `good' Shivani sacrifices her love for the family's dignity, her mother rejoices: '*Mujhe Bahut khushi hai ki teri jaise beti ne mere khokh se janam liya hai*' (*I am so glad I have given birth to a girl like you.*)

In the serial *Kkusum* (Sony) good wives keep fasts and pray for the husband's well being, the leading lady, Kkusum, enters into a contract marriage with Abhay. She fasts and visits temples regularly. She refuses to attend to any of her professional chores on a day when she fasts. Even when her husband insists she break the fast by midnight, she refuses.

'Your well being is the only reason I go to the temple and fast. I will only eat at daybreak.'

There is a constant dialectic and juxtaposition of the `good' and `bad' woman through ritual, action, attire, dialogue, etc.

Good wives are perfect home-makers who make their husbands totally dependent on them for their day to day needs and even in maintaining cordial relationships with their families. In *Kkusum*, Abhay calls Kkusum on the mobile phone to discover the whereabouts of his tie while Parvati in *Kahani*

Ghar Ghar Ki (Star Plus) takes care of one and all in her husband's family. She is admired for this characteristic. '*Usse ghar mein sabke sukh dukh ka khayal rehta hai*' (She takes care of one and all in the family)

In contrast the 'bad woman' sleeps late into the morning and prefers to hear "modern English music" rather than sing 'arti' at the temple (Avantika in *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*).

'Bad' women are not supportive of their husband's/lover's needs at home or the office. When Abhay asks Esha in *Kkusum* about his pyjamas, she rudely replies, "How should I know? Must be somewhere here." She refuses to let Abhay go to the office when there is a fire at the office saying, '*baki log sambhaal lenge tum mujhe chod kar mat jao*'. (Others will take care of it, you don't leave me)

The 'bad' woman is more interested in her own ambitions than her husband's, or his family's. "*Tumse shaadi ki hai iska yeh matlab nahin ki main ghar per bhaite raho*n (Marrying you doesn't mean that I will sit at home)." (Arti in *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*).

They marry for revenge or for other ulterior motives (Ratna in *Choti Maa.*, Nikita in *Kkusum*). They are impulsive, self-centred, combative and the least devout. Esha is told by one of her acquaintances "*Aap bhi Kkusum ki tarah mandir jaya kijeye, woh apke demag ko bure khayalon se door rakhega* (You should also go to the temple like *Kkusum*. In such a way you will be able to stay away from bad thoughts)."



Kkusum in *Kkusum*

The divide between the other woman (or the 'desired' woman) and the wife is dramatically accentuated by using a dress code to set them apart.

Wives are dressed in traditional suits and sarees, use accommodating body language (Kkusum in *Kkusum*, Leela in *Justujoo*, Heena in *Heena*, Sharda in *Choti Maa*).

Girl friends are fashionably dressed, sometimes in western clothes and are far more defiant and carefree in their demeanour. (Esha in *Kkusum*, Ruby in *Heena*, Neeraja in *Justujoo* and Ratna in *Choti Maa*.)

We consider all these depictions as predictable, formula-driven, tried and tested, traditional representations of gender.

Male Characters

The men in every serial present a mosaic of characters with different attributes. Some men like Aryaman (in *Kkusum*) are depicted as "sensitive", others like Vishal (in *Kkusum*) suffer from a male "inferiority complex".

Let us illustrate the male depiction by looking at a few character sketches of some men from popular serials.

Abhay Kapoor (*Kkusum*) - Successful business tycoon, he runs his family business. A reserved individual, not much given to laughter. Appears intelligent and soft-spoken, with a deep affection for his family. He marries Kkusum under family

pressure. Later, he has an affair with her friend Esha, a girl he thinks matches his sensibility, but he doesn't want to leave Kkusum because that would displease his family and because she is a 'nice' girl.

He is dependent upon Kkusum in practical ways - she organises things for him both at home and in the office. This is a very typical male characteristic - expecting the women around him to do all the fetching and carrying. He has double standards: he accuses Kkusum of infidelity and then leaves his family for another woman. However, he is not shown as 'bad'. His 'non-aggressive' nature is his selling point.

Lalit (*Justujoo*)

A middle-aged criminal lawyer who has achieved great success after a modest beginning. Can go to any lengths to succeed in his profession and in the pursuit of pleasure. In his interactions with his wife, a simple, unsophisticated small-town woman, he is bored and highly dissatisfied so when his wife's much younger sister comes to town to study law, he is instantly attracted to her.

For him, this younger woman represents the kind of 'modern smart' girl he 'deserved' to marry in the first place. To justify his affair, he tells Neeraja "*When I was 22, I deserved either you or a girl like you. But I did not get her. I spent my days in a small room with my unsophisticated wife... May be today I am talking like a selfish person. I am selfish, because if I am not selfish. I won't get your love.*"



Lalit in *Justujoo*

He avoids any permanent commitment. All he wants is a convenient physical relationship. When Neeraja becomes pregnant, he is horrified. He wants her to have an abortion but tells her to visit the hospital without him. She reminds him that when they went to hotel to spend time together, he gives false names so why not in this case too? He refuses: '*Nahin woh baat aur hai..tum kal apni saheli ke saath aana*'. (But that is different. You come with your friend tomorrow)

Akram (*Heena*)

He is a good friend to Sameer and eventually marries Heena. He offers tea and sympathy to Heena when Sameer divorces her. Gives Heena time to recover from her failed first marriage and doesn't impose himself on her physically. Instead, he waits for her to accept him but is insecure in the relationship as he periodically doubts Heena's love for him.

Sameer (*Heena*)

Works with his father in their garment factory. He is forced into agreeing to an arranged marriage but refuses to accept Heena as his rightful wife. He stuns her on their wedding night saying he has another woman in his life. Later, he is full of remorse after he divorces Heena because his girlfriend turns out to be unfaithful. He tries to win her back from Akram.

Amar Singh (*Saanjjhi*)

A bigamist but a reluctant one. He decides to take a

second, young wife at his brother -in-law's instigation because his first wife is childless and he wants an heir. He tries to strike a balance between the two women. He doesn't want to deprive his first wife of the physical and emotional attention at the same time he tries to protect the younger woman from the older woman's wrath. However, he is ruthless about his needs and behaves like a typical *thakur*: authoritarian and commanding. Prone to violence.

Pratham (*Kutumb*)

He is the quintessential spoilt brat, self-centred and very 'male'. He hangs out with a couple of his male buddies, likes to go to the club, dance and have a couple of beer. He likes to flirt and have girlfriends. To settle a score, he plays a trick on Gauri but is then forced to marry her to save her 'honour'.

The marriage is based on a love-hate relationship and he finally imposes himself physically on Gauri, who refused to have any physical intimacy with him. When his mother learns about this and confronts him, he is repentant. That is the first time he is shown to be sensitive. Otherwise he is a stubborn character, a little 'macho': he dresses in a T-shirt, with a thick belt and casual trousers.

Om Aggarwal (*Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*)

The 'Ram' of Indian television. He is the perfect son, brother, husband and father. A man who can be described as *maryada purshottam*. Very loving to his siblings and their



Om in
Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki

families. Most respectful and faithful to his parents. As in *Ramayana*, when his stepmother asks him to give his share of the property to her children, he hands over the property and leaves home with his wife and daughter. After initial hardship, he is able to start a business on his own. But when the mother realises her mistake and calls him back, he, dutifully, returns home.

Like Ram, twice he suspects his wife of infidelity. Early on Parvati is shown to be visiting a doctor discreetly as she suspects a brain tumor. He summons her in front of everyone and accuses her of having an affair. Again, when Parvati is stalked by a former obsessive admirer, he suspects her and is not prepared to believe her.

Anurag Basu (*Kasauti Zindagi Kay*)

A weak, vacillating creature. In love with Perna, he succumbs to family pressure and marries Komolika instead. He is kind, dutiful to his family and constantly caught between being a proper husband and caring for Perna. Spends most of the time looking unhappy.

Gender Stereotypes

The fluctuating fortunes in narratives of TV fiction and their conflict resolutions often strengthen stereotypes. If it is the 'ideal', 'good' individual, a change in fortunes may bring about a greater common good while reinforcing the same sacrificing spirit, integrity and generosity the character displayed earlier.

This is true of characters such as Kkusum, Sharda (*Choti Maa*), Parvati (*Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*), and Tulsi (*Kyunki...*).

If it is the 'bad' individual then the change manifests itself in a negative way. Kkusum's professional efficiency is always praised. `Kkusum bahut kabil ladki hai. Use is factory ko chalane mein bahut mehnat ki hai' (Kkusum is a very able girl. Her contribution in running the factory has been immense), Lalit tells the family. In contrast, Esha (who is an experienced professional!) messes up the simplest of tasks: she mixes up the addresses of a client.

Sexuality: Sexuality has a strong gender bias. Men are shown to enjoy far greater sexual licence than women. Male characters are free to walk out of an unsatisfactory marriage and into an extra-marital affair. In *Justujoo and Kkusum*, the lead male characters, Lalit and Abhay become involved with other women because they do not love their 'arranged wives'.

A woman's sexuality, usually the wife's, is ignored, repressed, transmuted. Wives such as Leela in *Justujoo*, Kkusum in *Kkusum* represent two examples. In comparison to the other woman, this type of character does not appeal to the husband. She is either "rustic" or she is not the man's "not true love". She is often pitted against male sexuality that is emotionally fragile, fickle, etc.

Men behave in an irresponsible manner. In, *Justujoo* Lalit sets up his sister-in-law Neeraja in a flat, so he can enjoy her favours whenever convenient. But Neeraja, who may be

Woman's sexuality,
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condemned as a home-breaker, is already in a vulnerable position: she is left pregnant and helpless and finally forced to accept an arranged marriage to restore the “normalcy” in the family

Again, in *Saanjjhi*, the childless ‘thakur’ taking a ‘second wife’ is acceptable. The older wife is left to mope, and deal with her altered situation without any warning, or right to redress.

In the case of *Kkusum*, the fact that there has been no consummation of Kkusum’s marriage, is never addressed: it is the male sexual need, which is important. Kkusum’s sexuality is sublimated in her acting out the roles of the dutiful ‘*bahu*’ and daughter. As we said earlier, marital sex is usually conducted ‘off screen’, a family necessity.

Situational Engagement

A meaningful qualitative analysis of the depiction and treatment of gender in television fiction, be it the daily soaps or weekly serials, needs to be conducted in the context of the core structure of the narrative that has informed daily soaps and serials over the years and across the channels. More importantly, this structure has endured the test of ratings and viewers loyalty. It has been constructed around the crisis of values, the much celebrated Indian family is facing today.

Family is the key site of the narrative. This site is on uncertain ground. Every possible situation and development

that can disturb, alter and challenge or alternatively reinforce, revitalize or revisit the fundamental structures and values, is fleshed out in the narrative. Sometimes this is achieved through juxtaposition, sometimes in a friendly contest but very often in violent conflict and clashes.

What appears common to all these situational engagements that are dealt with in an every day, commonplace fashion, is the phenomenon of marriage. Marriage is the single most important event and the most significant defining moment to guarantee a “pure relationship” or as stated in the dialogue as, “*pavitra bandhan*”. The “purity” does not translate itself into a meaningful and fulfilling man-woman relationship but is seen as vital for the lineage or “*vansh*”.

“Marriage is the path through which a new potential family is brought into being. Marriage and the resultant family is one of the main modes by which sexual activity within the society is controlled” (Bohanon, Paul. Social Anthropology).

Marriage with all its customary practices has the potential to evoke both unbridled joy and sorrow or upheavals which threaten the very rubric of the family and undermine the bonding and trust that has been built up.

Every serial exploits the numerous possibilities of bonding, conflict and assertion of values and beliefs generated by the situation of marriage.

What is critical to assess is how in each of these marital

situations, the impact on the men and women as the affected individuals and the family as an institution, is treated and the manner in which the family intervenes to resolve the situation.

We will find there is a deliberate selection of values, some affirmed, some dismissed and change is 'packaged' to ensure a convenient degree of modification whereby the family as an institution remains unchallenged, even though individuals may be affected in different ways by change.

Marriage As Family Battleground

In *Koi Apna Sa*, a daily soap on Zee TV, the personal decision by a male protagonist to marry a woman he loves rather than settle for a nominee of the family, leads to a major conflagration in the family - not a generational war but a violent conflict among peers and cousins, all of whom are young men.

The hostility between the men and their formation into camps soon spreads to the mothers and the extended family is involved in internal strife. The daughters-in-law who share strong ties of friendship with each other try to diffuse the feud. However, they are marginalized and ignored while the conflict between the men and their mothers gathers momentum and grows to violent proportions.

The battle is not between love marriage and arranged marriage but over the betrayal of a tried and tested friendship for a more recent relationship. In fact the men are so sharply

What is critical to assess is how in each of these marital situations, the impact on the men and women as the affected individuals and the family as an institution, is treated.

divided over the two women, that the resolution of the issue is not left to those affected by the problem but by those outside it. They will not allow the wife entry into the household. Instead they seek a summary annulment of the marriage.

The men justify their conflict under the pretext of acting as protectors. The woman who has been jilted becomes the “sister” whose interests need to be safeguarded in an uncompromising manner and the woman who becomes the wife now occupies the position of a “*bahu*” or daughter-in-law who must be honored and given her due place.

Interestingly, the hierarchical roles are maintained: the older siblings are the most authoritative, the sons take on the defense of their mothers and their wives are either silenced or told not to meddle in matters.

It is new wife who is stripped of all her rights. While the man’s decision to marry on his own accord is challenged, he is not deprived of his personal rights to self-expression and home.

The woman, on the other hand, faces the brunt of the situation. Her mother is unwilling to let her stay in her home, her husband is not in a position to bring her into his home. She accepts the humiliating situation. At no point does she assert her basic right to her husband’s home as his lawfully wedded wife. In fact, she is so passive that much of what happens to her happens at the behest of others.

From the treatment of the situation it is clear that neither the empowerment of the young nor of women is envisaged by the makers.

“Stable” versus “Precarious” Marriage

We are constantly reminded about the “stability” and “precariousness” of marital relationships. This relationship can be extremely enduring and enriching but it has to be compatible on many grounds. In the two episodes of *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* that were monitored, we witness a dramatisation of this compatibility.

One entire episode is devoted to what makes marriage “resilient”, “compatible”, etc. Act after act dramatizes the sense of fulfilment that the elderly couple, Babuji and Baa, experience with each other. They relive the best parts of the past, remembering intimate details of their lives and find that if anything the relationship has deepened and enriched both of them.

In contrast are the middle-aged couples, JD, Gayatri and Mansukh and Savita. They are full of foreboding, superstitious and morbid thoughts. Significantly, they are determined to break the marriage of their son and nephew (Hemant) on the grounds that the daughter-in-law (Pooja) is a “*mangalik*” -an astrologically incompatible sign for the marital partner. Hemant must divorce his wife Pooja -that is the mother’s decision.

The men - be it the father or the son - are unconvinced of her position. However, they decide that it would be difficult to persuade the women (women viewers are deliberately co-opted in this decision). They neither vehemently oppose the women or actively support them. Pooja, the woman at the centre of this persecution prefers to depend on the quiet resistance of her husband rather than demand her rights or assert her beliefs.

In other words, the man's evasive attitude and the woman's passivity is constructed in such a way that passivity appears the "clever" "intelligent" way of dealing with the problem. It legitimizes the harassment and violations that are inflicted on the daughter-in-law and to a lesser extent on the son. The underlying notion is that the family has the prescriptive right to test and try the "compatibility" of the couple to protect itself from any "adverse" or "malefic" influences and the only option open to the couple is to deal with it in as tactful and "clever" a manner as possible.

Circumstantial Challenge

Marriage, especially for men, becomes a major source of tension and stress when they are not in total command of the situation. So when a male protagonist Vishal in the serial *Kkusum*, becomes dependent on the wheelchair and confronts a circumstantial challenge he is extremely exercised about the quality of his relationship with his wife. He is uncertain about her loyalties. Is she tolerating the relationship out of a sense of "duty"? Is she feeling "inadequate", "unfulfilled"?

It is assumed that in an Indian context a dialogue between the husband and wife or marital/psychiatric counseling for their altered relationship cannot take place. The man can never acknowledge a `defect' or `guilt' of any kind.

On the other hand what is seen as “credible” and justified is the deceit and intrigue, whereby the husband tries to test her fidelity by introducing her to another man and encourages their relationship.

The woman is made a victim of a conspiracy, which her husband hatches in collaboration with a friend. The viewers are involved in the voyeuristic experience of testing the woman’s fidelity, instead of exploring the stress and strain that such difficult circumstances impose equally on the victims of disability and their care-givers, women, men and the family.

Conflictual Values

However, it is not in the details alone that marriage, as an institution, is defined over and over again. Many serials raise very fundamental issues about the rights of young people to choose their marital partners. This issue has been explored on some occasions keeping the differential context and milieu in mind. As far as the current crop of TV serials go, the idea is to entertain rather than seriously deal with complex issues.

In two episodes of *Sarhadein*, an effort is made to deal with a Hindu-Muslim marriage in a highly situational and every day manner. The focus is on how this marriage is perceived

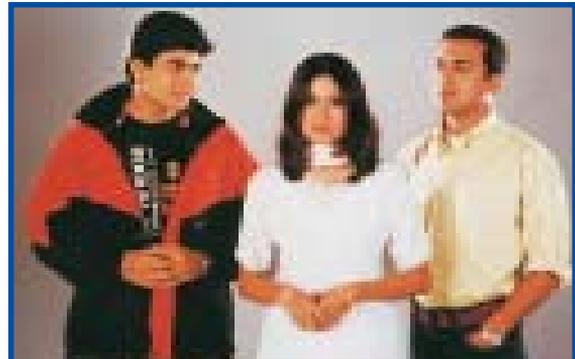
by different members of an extended family in a social milieu, which, is distinctly more divisive and intolerant today than in the past.

It is not constructed as a conventional generational and familial clash. It is more in the nature of a backlash where the intolerant and divisive mindset of the young protagonist is depicted as challenging the more tolerant, reasonable mindset of the elders. The latter are not only products of a more composite culture but have also been able to resolve the crisis of identity in an extremely quiet and private manner.

In contrast, the young, like Sohail have very mixed values, and are highly susceptible to prejudices and biases. These divergences have been captured in a very candid and no-holds-barred manner through heated arguments, stormy discussions and emotional outbursts.

It was very emphatically stated that today the major issue is not about having “Hindu friends” but whether a Hindu-Muslim marriage is viable. In one instance the young protagonist, Sohail goes to the extent of saying that how can such a marriage work when “one has to stay together under the same roof. It is not possible, while praying for one to join his hands and for the other to part his hands.”

Here again, Aman and Chandni who are the subject of



Annu, Chandani and Aman left to right in *Sarhadein*

the controversy, play a very hesitant and self-effacing role. Aman is so overwhelmed by the heated arguments within the family that he is even prepared to return to Pakistan and give up his wish to marry Chandni - a Hindu and an Indian. However, events overtake him. He finds that his Pakistani nationality causes problems and even brings the police into the situation.

The girl on the other hand, is shown belonging to a family where social exclusiveness is taken for granted. There is no question of such a marriage being contemplated. It is clearly shown that in such households marriage will not only be formalized by the head of the household but will also be done for reasons other than the happiness of the girl. The girl is depicted as having very little support and sympathy from anyone that matters and in fact, all the men in her life - father, fiancé, brother - impose their decision on her.

The men are hostile to each other and the conflict soon turns into an inter-family conflict and concludes with the personal resolve of Sohail to ensure the marriage of Aman and Chandni, even if it means facing the threats and the might of the girl's family.

In contrast in *Kkusum*, the same issue is reduced to an unconvincing and even illogical situation. In a classic case of emotional blackmail, the oldest member of the family, the grandmother, vetoes the wishes of the young and imposes her choice of partners on them.

This blackmail is conducted through the vehicle of a dying

wish and in such a context neither reason nor a logical discussion is possible.

In response the young submit unwillingly. Their opposition is expressed in attempts to plan an annulment of the marriage or divorce. The middle generation is unhappy with the coercion on the young people but are unable to support them.

Some of the reactions are influenced by traditional values, others are shaped by a more pragmatic approach. Yet none of this is fleshed out or dealt with in an internally consistent and responsible manner because as far as the producer is concerned this is not an issue worth debating, discussing and least of all, resolving. It is only meant to titillate and entertain. The producer simply gets on with all the gaiety, pomp and show that is associated with a traditional wedding.

Conclusions

What conclusions may be derived from our study?

These serials, especially those of Balaji Telefilms which concentrate almost entirely on the joint family, are extremely popular with the public. This suggests that the viewer is keen to see a strong affirmation of the family at a time when modernity seemed to have challenged its foundations.

There has been a definite resurgence of the family and traditional family values on television. This is something of a departure from the past. Earlier, commercial television on Doordarshan or private satellite television channels such as Zee, Sony saw serials which dealt with social issues and the assertion of women (*Humraahi, Pukaar, Adhikaar*), business conflicts (*Khandaan, Dastaan*), romance, etc. The family was present but it did not assume disproportionate dimension.

Now the family is being packaged and marketed as a 'dynamic entity' that allows for continuity and change. There is no contradiction here. The fusion is achieved through a constant dialectic between the two. The family is first presented as the "ideal". Then, through a series of conflicts, the family is undermined, threatened. In the process many aspects of the family and relationships within it are minutely explored or exposed. The hypocrisies, the deceits, the jealousies, the family feuds between different members are brought out into the open through the conflictual formats so popular in these serials. Often, the family ends up with mud on its face. To this

extent, the family drama deconstructs the family and reveals the enormous pressures it faces in a modern context.

This represents one of the main levels of engagement with these serials for the viewer. There is an emotional and situational truth here which is universal. These serials are almost exclusively about rich, business joint families far removed from the reality of millions of viewers. However, irrespective of class and profession, viewers are locked into family relationships of their own which are often mirrored in these serials. In some cases, viewers may find aspects which are aspirational: for example, Parvati and Om in *Kahani...*, Tulsi in *Kyunki...*, the mother-in-law in *Kkusum*, are characters viewers admire.

The conflicts which drive each of these serials are resolved in cycles. At the end and resolution of each conflict, there is an affirmation of the family. For all its faults, the family survives and is even strengthened by the conflicts within it. The message is quite clear: a family which stays together, prospers together. In none of the serials which were monitored, does the family break up though its links may break down, momentarily.

Marriage has been the main site for the assertion of the family. Indeed, the fact that individual rights are subsumed to the collective welfare of the family is no where more apparent than in marriage. Marriage is a celebration of the family. In all the serials, the marriage ceremony is depicted with pomp and grandeur as an occasion for the family to come together

The fact that individual rights are subsumed to the collective welfare of the family is no where more apparent than in marriage.

despite their differences. In modern terms what is considered a private matter between a couple, is treated as a family issue in these serials.

With family and marriage as the bedrock of the serials, gender constructs are reinforced along stereotypical lines even though these are often disguised as modernity. This illustrates the packaging process. Women are given pre-eminence in the serials since they play such a pivotal role in the family. However, it is only within the packaging of the family that they have any importance. They have no separate lives of their own, they belong completely to their husband's family and represent the power of tradition. They may be assertive, authoritative, rather than meek and submissive, but their strength derives its power from the assertion of tradition and the family.

Advocacy

From the point of view of advocacy, there are several areas of concern.

Serials promote the belief that the family is a private affair and above the law. **Gender groups need to pay attention to this because the issue of “Rights” goes beyond morality and ethical values to the recognition of the individual’s legal rights and that their transgression requires proper legal redress.** Moreover, these TV fictions could be powerful instruments for raising consciousness on “gender rights”.

The one-dimensional portrayal of men and women is problematic. Neither male nor female characters are multi-faceted. They are black and white, good or bad, wise or foolish, etc. There is no effort to present rounded characters with strengths and weaknesses. Men and women are shown only in the context of the family, within a domestic environment dealing with issues within the family. They never face or step out of these roles.

It goes without saying that some effort should be made to create multi-dimensional characters, if for no other reason than they would be more interesting.

Since they are confined to the family arena, individuals have no relationship with the outer world. There is little connection between their lives and the world beyond the front door of their homes. To that extent, the family exists in a social vacuum. This is problematic from the point of view of social realism. **To depict the family as an end in itself without any interest in or interaction with the larger community to which it belongs, is contextually extremely limited. Efforts should be made to locate the family within a social framework.**

This lack of realism is a major concern. In terms of presentation and settings, the family is essentially the same kind of family with new names and faces - rich, self-employed families who live lavish lifestyles in opulent homes. The rest of the Indian reality does not intrude upon this structure, either in terms of other, less wealthy families, or even in terms of its

own narrative logic. For example, rich family homes in India are filled with people who work for the families: cooks, cleaners, drivers, gardeners, *dhobi* etc. However, in the TV drama serials, with a few honourable exceptions, there is no domestic help. The rich women in the family are shown cutting vegetables!

Given the fact that we have stark social disparities, it is important that TV channels, sponsors and producers be sensitised to the ethical problems of presenting such lavish and even irrational lifestyles. There must be rational and believable proportions to it.

The exclusiveness of much TV fiction which omits far more than it includes, requires rigorous advocacy. If television is to hold up any kind of mirror to society, or represent a popular history of the times, it must become more pluralistic and representative.

Without jettisoning tradition it is possible to deal with subjects other than the family, in particular the joint family. Urban India presents infinite possibilities for narratives of many different kinds, dealing with the day to day lives of the people. Efforts should be made to contextualise the family and then move beyond it.

NTV Entertainment Programs

NTV entertainment programmes mostly deal with socio-political issues rather than inter-personal relationships as is in the case of Indian satellite channels. Also, women do not play key roles because the socio-political sector is not considered their domain. There are some exceptions to this: Parvati in the tele serial *Samjauta*, a Dalit and a daughter of a poor, single parent plays a revolutionary role for the Dalit community and brings about social reforms.

Women are primarily shown in traditional roles. In *Tarang*, a telefilm, Bhawana, is the only professional woman. Seldom is she shown conducting any professional activity.

Hijo Aajaka Kura, the most popular entertainment programme of NTV, represents women as cunning. They are rude and cruel to servants. Maiya Malikni frequently scolds and discriminates against her maid, Shova, a lower class girl child. The mother-in-law in the serial *Ekchhin* looks very funny and silly and is interested in gaudy make-ups and childishly expects to be admired.

There are some positive women characters in NTV programmes. A woman character Amita of the tele-film *Antare* is very assertive.

In Asian societies, women's sexuality and intimate relations with male friends are restricted. Many women are 'punished' if they lose their chastity or are thought to have done so. In *Tarang* the husband, Raj, baselessly assumes that his wife Bhawana is close to her musician friend and he is irritated with her. Viewers react differently to such stories. Some may find Raj foolish. However, the majority of the viewers think that wives should not have close friendship with men as it creates misunderstandings.

In *Parajit*, a serial based on extra-marital, the root cause is poverty. One of the main protagonists, Nilam is betrayed by her boyfriend but he persuades her to get married

to his friend. He also promises to provide for her financially after marriage. She marries the friend, Sagar , who is unaware of this plot. Even after marriage, Neelam maintains her relationship with her boyfriend and bitterly humiliates her husband. Unable to tolerate more, the husband leaves the house. The boyfriend also leaves her and she is left helpless. This telefilm suggests that women have no wisdom, sincerity and judgement and are thus victimized.

In *Catmandu*, a serial produced by UNICEF Nepal office, the feeling and attitudes of today's generation have been properly reflected. The serial successfully shows the emotions and problems of the young relating to independence and careers with respect to girls. However, the serial highlights the urban youth and totally neglects the rural areas where the majority of youth resides.

NTV also runs three mythological shows, namely *Mahabharat*, *Vishnu Puran* and *Chandrakanta* which have been produced by different Indian producers. These serials are quite popular among Nepali viewers. In both *Mahabharat* and *Vishnu Puran*, the female characters play subordinate roles while men are the central focus.

In *Chandrakanta*, the women protagonists are very powerful, committed, bold and dedicated to their mission. In the monitored episodes, Queen Kalabati, Damini Ma, Princess Chandrakanta, royal official Barkhare are seen to lead an army, execute a very dangerous plan for the sake of country, etc. Where they feel that they have been deceived, they have bravely opposed injustice.

Thus, apart from a few exceptions, most of the women characters in NTV entertainment programmes are weak, subordinate and 'inferior' to the male characters. This kind of dominant trend is unfair and unjust but in accordance with the prevalent social reality. However, it certainly does not lead us towards the path of female empowerment and gender equality.

Protibimb – A serial on Alpha Bangla

It is a widely watched serial in Bangladesh. In the serial, the women are overshadowed but the men which reflects contemporary reality. These 'harmless' women are the epitome of virtue. There are elements of protest but no great degree of opposition. Women have no agenda besides keeping their families happy and they do so through compromise and reconciliation. The patriarchal structure is thus kept intact with this peaceful approach towards problem resolution.

Serials from BTV and Ekushey TV

With violence and sex becoming increasingly predominant in mainstream cinema, television has become the recreational tool for the middle class viewer. The sentimental Cinderella Syndrome where girl meets boy is the preferred theme on local channels. Unfortunately there is no major breakthrough in the portrayal of women. The two serials selected for this study are family dramas, each with its own thematic difference. Men and women do not fall under the categories of good and evil. Each has his/her vices and virtues. In the family drama *Durer Akash*, we are asked to believe in the harmless reality of middle class women who do not possess big ambitions. This drama is basically a reflection of the present day middle class in Bangladesh, who have no struggles, no apparent conflicts. Today, this middle class with its traditional mindset remains a benign section of society. The element of modernism in the serial is false or imposed. The characters portrayed are beaming with happiness despite all odds. No risks are taken to incorporate characters with issues which will threaten middle class values - the divorcee, the abandoned or single mother, the young woman are carefully avoided. Woman with a certain boldness, who asserts her rights was portrayed in *Ebong Beyea* but it is fiction in every sense. The aggressive mother and the conspiring father are comedians and distinctly, unreal.

CHAPTER 2

Seminar Report

Inaugural Session

Setting the Agenda

Akhila Sivadas

Executive Director, Centre for Advocacy and Research



(Panellists (from left to right) D.K. Bose, Mir Muneer, Madhavi Mutatkar, Anna Leah Sarabia and Akhila Sivadas

The whole effort at this seminar is to build a regional initiative that will enable us to advocate on gender and development on satellite TV channels from a regional platform.

What has been observed is that with only one state-owned channel dominating the eighties what seemed a negotiable issue for the women and media groups has in the nineties drastically altered. Media has grown

dramatically and proliferated into a number of TV channels and mediums. In the process it has become very powerful. More importantly, television has exploited the consumer's zeal for it and initiated a process of creating a new consumer, encouraging new family dynamics and at opportune moments even mediated between the government and the citizens.

- This workshop will look at the monitoring that has emerged in both fiction and news, both quantitatively and qualitatively and the kind of currents or trends that are emerging. The so-called cultural revivalism that we witness in every serial or the effort to re-package tradition is not always glorified. In fact it is often depicted as a source of stress and debate in many serials but only till it is re-invented in many ways. Among the viewers this results in an internal debate about their own experience with traditional values and norms, the good and bad that they experience. But soon the pitch gets queered because they are at the same time tending to internalise all the distortions that serial makers lend to this clash between tradition and modernity. They often present the latter as a poor alternative, which goes against our age-old norms.
- The main consumer of all this today is the homemaker. She has become articulate, vocal, not only as a consumer but as an integral part of every process and dialogue that is going on. And the family is the site where everything is happening. This is the base at which we must start questioning and generating new gender values. The questions before us are: How do we engage with the media? How do we resist it? How do we combat it? How do we stay ahead of the media? We need knowledge if we are to stay ahead of the media, the kind of knowledge that comes from rigorous empirical research,

combined with an understanding of content and reception.

How do we mainstream women’s issues with existing vehicles without leading to any kind of any co-option, fan clubs or being part of a narrow lobby group that just clamours for some immediate change?

How can the development sector ensure constant and concrete support from the media for articulating and legitimising the alternatives, creating space for perspective that are gender-inclusive and sensitive?

D.K. Bose

Consultant, Development Communication, O&M

Since this meeting will conclude a process that has been the subject of two earlier meetings the purpose of this particular session is to provide a backdrop, a recap of the two earlier sessions so as to enable us to arrive at a plan of action for the future. So this session will basically focus on:

How do we mainstream women’s issues with existing vehicles without leading to any kind of any co-option, fan clubs or being part of a narrow lobby group that just clamours for some immediate change?

- The issues that we are confronted with or have to deal with vis-a-vis media and gender.
- The challenges that we face in the work we do.
- And finally a concrete resolution on media’s perception and projection of gender issues.

Participants

Gender and development experts, academicians,

donors, concerned NGOs, grassroots workers and media practitioners.

Keynote address

Madhavi Mutatkar

President, ZEE TV

I feel the time has very definitely arrived for a regional initiative to strengthen gender issues on the electronic media because women in this region share a common culture and a heritage be it in dress, attitudes or values. But before we look at the challenges in today's context it's important to understand the media's own compulsions, to understand the nature of the beast we are to deal with.

- Private channels have become an indispensable part of our lives like water, gas and electricity.
- They have provided the platform for our creative people to make their mark on the global stage.
- In many ways they have brought about the real empowerment of women, at least a lot of women. A housewife sitting with the remote in hand is the queen of all surveys with FMCG companies and the white goods industries vying for her attention.
- Surveys have revealed that viewership is heavily skewed in favour of entertainment to the order of 90 to 95% vis a vis news.
- Entertainment is largely feminine dominant so the housewife is important to TV channels. This forum must not make the mistake of ignoring this fundamental reality.

- The soaps on the main Hindi channels, all have the same storyline, the same melodramatic, tear-jerking situations. They propagate their values by strongly endorsing the patriarchal system, by glorifying the hugely suffering *bahu* or *biwi*, or *maa* or *beti* and glorifying traditions of dubious merit.
- This seems to be a recent phenomenon.
- If a *saas-bahu* tear-jerker is successful on one channel there is immediate commercial pressure to put another pair on air. These elements are more pronounced on Hindi than on regional channels where female protagonist are more in the nature of the women professionals trying to reconcile careers, and families as most urban women do today.
- The Hindi belt is behaving differently because television is all about aspirations and the economics of the industry are based on these aspirations. From no refrigerator to a small one to a big one and so on. Arousing a desire in the viewer and earning in the bargain is what advertising is all about.
- So too the serials. The characters are from a real life middle class backgrounds. No Hindi serial in the last few years is based on the rural or semi-urban background.
- Lastly, the issue of cable penetration and TRP. Today monitoring is being conducted in around 49 towns and cities and the Hindi-belt's small town biases are getting reflected in the TRP. Serials based on regressive representation of women are getting a boost from this particular rural segment.
- Urban Maharashtrian or Bengali viewer has remained loyal to Alpha Marathi or Alpha Bangla, throughout the two years that they have been in existence. Interestingly, this virtually coincides with the period when portrayal of women on main Hindi channels became a matter of great concern.

These are the issues that have to be resolved within the macro commercial television framework of a free electronic media.

Anna Leah Sarabia,

Executive Director, Women's Media Circle
Foundation, Philippines

- Content producers tell us they want to entertain, communicate and educate, but in truth television is used by the media industry to sell products, ideas and ideologies.
- The never-ending drive to improve television technology is not to deliver better content but the means to an end.
- Technology can become the excuse for doing things in a certain way. It does not, for instance allow for women camera operators the excuse being the weight and the complexity of television cameras.
- A programme is supposedly created to reflect our lives, but in fact created to interpret for us what the media industry, consciously or not, wants us to think reality is.
- We need to constantly seek feedback and see how we can influence events and thoughts and how they affect women who for centuries have been silenced by culture, by political power, by religion, by laws, by traditions, by superstition. Hearing another woman speak is the key to our existence.
- Media and advertisers use stereotypes as a technique for sending out messages. Stereotypes are symbols that are projected again and again on the audiences. And like a bad habit this creates stupid formulas.
- Programmes should choose and shape subject matter to

Content producers tell us they want to entertain, communicate and educate, but in truth television is used by the media industry to sell products, ideas and ideologies.

interest and involve both men and women, create new role models, redefine roles and help viewers to see issues from women's points of view.

- Media practitioners must understand their own role in the current paradigm of power. Media is an instrument of power, and whoever controls the media has the capacity to shape our reality.

D.K. Bose

- We need to convert the realities into challenges, see them as the issues that confront us.
- Media has commercial compulsions: how do we achieve our goals, our objectives without dislodging them?
- Media is probably as sensitive as us but the process of evolution of media content does not always reflect that sensitivity. What should be done to enable the sort of constant interaction that will result in the sensitisation of media culture?
- How can television empower women and what role can it play in building up their issues and concerns?

Madhavi Mutatkar

In the Indian context television ratings are always looked at from either the female or what we term as female 15+ or female 30+, etc. Our findings and research have shown that women have the remote control in their hands. This has resulted in:

- The emergence of many niche channels, including the news channels.

- Channels are doing very little in terms of change or experimentation because audiences do not respond positively to changes.
- Costing is a factor. Even 10 seconds is a lot of time as far as viewership and costing is concerned and in today's scenario the main business goal of Hindi channels is to generate money.
- The kinds of programmes being beamed by the mainstream channels are not what women in the cities want to watch. In fact many women who do have a mind of their own, are now going to their regional language channels and watching what they want to watch and what they feel is right to watch.
- The rural belt is now identifying itself with the Hindi channels therefore, the content we are getting is basically created to suit the rural viewer.

During the dialogue that followed the panellists were asked a plethora of questions:

- How do you build the core capacity of people who not only monitor media but also creatively and otherwise engage with it continuously and not just on an one-off issue?
- How do they work together to form an effective lobby?
- We talk of a knowledge bank based on vigorous analyses of empirical reality. However, there is no one reality as people say, but several realities of women, so how can one talk of about just one reality?
- What is the follow up to a complaint? Who is following it up, who is reporting on it, etc.? What kinds of advocacy tools are required?
- How can development groups be brought into this process?

- How can strategic changes be brought about? And what are the strategic changes needed to keep up with changing realities?
- How do we end extremes in programming in being either completely based on top-down education that Doordarshan was doing or going over board on providing entertainment as the satellite channels are doing today?
- What of the role of women in media? How free are they to work on their visions and what were the challenges they confronted?

Media Experts & Practitioners

- Empirical research entails an understanding of all the dimensions that go into the making of this environment - content analyses, reception studies and the media's own compulsions and seeing them as a challenge. Also, a core capacity that has an understanding of development and gender perspectives, media and communication and the differences between a consumer and a citizen.
- Today, the homemaker feels all the tensions of society, the community and the nation sitting at home in front of the box. She is assuming public dimensions in a private space. So when we are talking about tapping this capacity we are talking about addressing the influence that media and communications has on this group of audience and working with them at both national and a regional level.
- Ideally, development groups could work with women and media groups from their platform but because media and communication is growing into a very specialised activity and

becoming very powerful, the development groups will have to set aside time and resources to engage with the issue.

- Engaging with media involves examining content and more critically the reception of viewers. Today, the television viewer is not a passive viewer. CFAR studies have revealed that the homemaker is often better informed than say a working person who after a long day at work doesn't want to be disturbed with an information overload.
- Need to create platforms that provide for diverse opinions, aspirations and expectations. Be it a two-year-old or a 70 year-old, television is a great leveller. They are equally childlike, impulsive and addicted to television. CFAR has set up Viewers' Forum in different cities with a newsletter that connects them. They have organised public hearings for people who are basically committed viewers.
- Need for informed lobbying by development groups so as to reshape strategy. This advocacy cannot be confined to a programme or a specific issue but needs to engage with the effects of media and popular communication on the more vulnerable sections of society.
- Media activists should bring about a balance in programming by going back to the media owners, channel managers with the information that they have gathered through content analyses, viewers forums, link up the two and provide suggestions.
- The media practitioners from countries such as Nepal shared their experience of having to constantly negotiate within media institutions because men in power do not give an inch without a fight.
- They stated that, "we have to struggle for a better image of a

woman because the patriarchy will not allow it to change without a struggle. And this is the reality. We must grab every opportunity to create change. It is important to have all the facts, figures and surveys but it is more important to be determined. You have to put your foot ahead and you have to make people realise that you exist”.

SESSION-1

Monitoring TV Fiction From a Gender Perspective

Manju Thapa

Editor, ASMITA, Nepal



Women’s empowerment and gender equality are very much a part of Nepal’s basic development agenda but the media has not given serious regard to these issues. In fact there is a deepening of gender discrimination and various obstacles being created to halt the development of an equitable and just society.

- During the period of this study, none of the Star Plus serials dealt with less privileged groups or rural society. But Nepal TV did.
- Characters, both male and female, are primarily from the economically active age group of 21-50 years. Children, the elderly people get very low presentation. On NTV there was not a single girl child in the 24 episodes that were monitored.
- Women were mostly confined to their homes and their concerns limited to familial concerns, relationships and

conflicts, personal feelings, etc. STAR has introduced some bold and dominating women characters but these positive temperaments have not been accepted as typical of the average womenfolk.

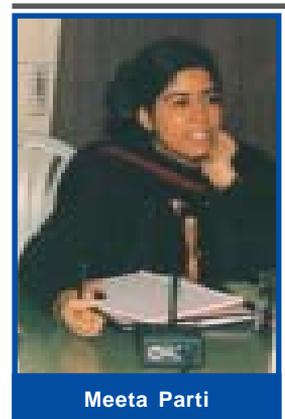
- Marriage and living with a spouse is thought of as the standard life for all. Widowed and separated individuals are marginalised.
- The study noted that on both channels - 68% on STAR and 100% on NTV- women are shown as submissive and passive homemakers. But there was not a single male character with a submissive nature.

Meeta Parti

Centre for Advocacy and Research, New Delhi

We did a qualitative analysis of the portrayal of gender and related issues of seven prime time serials on Zee and Sony. The analysis based on approximately 30 episodes revealed:

- Rigid gender characterisation irrespective of channel.
- This was reinforced by dialogues, actions and appearances, and conflict resolution.
- Formula-driven, true to tradition representation and depiction of women.
- Constant repetition results in a strong identification among viewers with what a character represents.



Meeta Parti

Nargis Jahan Banu

Proshika, Bangladesh

The misrepresentation and total distortion of gender

issues by the audio-visual media has long been a concern of the women's movement in Bangladesh. The effort of this study was to identify the problems and suggest positive changes.

The problem lies in that:

- Only a handful of women work in media.
- Decision-making is in the hands of men who uphold patriarchal social values.
- Lack of commitment and clarity of gender concepts are resulting in distortion of images, vulgar representations and the promotion of stereotypes of women.
- Women are systematically motivated to remain in the world that has been designed for them.

Since those who control the media are those who promote it, initiatives must focus on convincing the controllers to change the prevailing notions of recreation and education. The participation of everyone involved in the production - scriptwriters, designers and programme managers - is also crucial, as is that of concerned human rights and women's groups.

During the ensuing dialogue the panel of media practitioners were asked specifically about:

- The prevalence of violence - verbal, psychological and to a lesser extent, physical. It was occurring almost every 15 seconds.
- Tradition being shown as a point of stress. It is not working, it is leading to other distortions, deviations and instability. At one level, TV serials are questioning tradition at another they



Nargis Jahan Banu

are repackaging change. So viewers are left to negotiate their space between the two.

- A commitment from media that it will portray “gender rights” because that is something a regional group can take up collectively. There can be no better medium than satellite television for conscious-raising on such issues as the right to education or right to literacy.
- Viewers may favour the lifestyles depicted in the serials because it is a sort of escapism. But doesn’t the industry have a responsibility to break this habit?
- To say that the audiences want it is a very simplistic way of looking at things. If media with its power can’t shake what is patriarchal, unjust and unfair, who can?
- Liberties taken with portrayal of legal processes especially with issues like divorce which can be very misleading. *In Saanjhi*, the wife is expected to stay on in the house after the husband remarries. Aren’t you giving ideas, which are not even legally valid?
- Do characters always have to be black and white? Are grey characters not accepted?
- The sameness of looks and lifestyles, now, is such a bore. Can’t we attempt to negotiate within the process of dialogues? If, one grandmother tells her granddaughter to wear a *sari* or wear a *salwar kameez*, could another grandmother not say “Oh! But I like her in shorts.” Would such a shift require only the channels’ dynamics or does it require viewer dynamics also?

The media practitioners - Madhavi Mutatkar (President Zee TV and Mir Muneer, Script Writer for many popular serials

since late 80s - explained the industry's own limitations and compulsions:

- Directors resort to physical action because if a scene is too verbal it becomes boring. At times necessary to dramatise scene and the reactions of other characters.
- Similarly, liberties taken with regard to legalities to dramatise the situation. People don't think of the logic of the situation but they reject it when it becomes unreal and illogical. *Saanjhi*, for instance, tries to tell the audience not to entertain this kind of a relationship and as the serial progresses we do emphasise the rights of a woman.
- Stereotyping - good woman always shown in traditional clothes, a vamp with a cigarette in her hand - is a kind of coding. Should not be done that way but it is the easy way out. People involved in scripting, and directing, whether it is music, words or body language use symbols that are familiar to the general public to manipulate the impact.
- Frankly, the audience who matter to the TRP are not keen on a serial like *Choti Maa* which has a rural background and a lower middle class look or feel about it. Prefer something like *KKusum* because the look is nice, the sarees, the sets, etc.
- Serials that follow traditional norms and values are more successful because they deal with the same patriarchal values that exist in people's minds, because it's about their own beliefs. Both the commercial and state televisions in the region have benefited from this attitude.
- Television is a hungry medium and changes are always necessary in this scenario. But we have created our own Frankensteins in audience-viewing patterns, so to wipe it out

Stereotyping - Good woman always shown in traditional clothes, a vamp with a cigarette in her hand - is a kind of coding. Should not be done that way but it is the easy way out.

completely in one shot is not possible. You need patience where the audience is concerned. It is a gradual process that has already started with *Choti Maa*. But commercial considerations are there. Can at best hold out for six to eight months.

- Zee Network has started with niche channels where they do not show this kind of thing. But there has to be a channel, which sustains this entire network.

SESSION II

Monitoring News From a Gender Perspective: Seeking a Consensus on Methodology, Approaches and Outcomes

Jai Chandiram

President, International Association of Women in Radio and Television

The morning session looked at the question of accountability and responsibility. There is an absence of analysis within media organisations except perhaps from the point of view of market information and vis-a-vis serials because they are the big money-spinners.

It was noted that:

- Media feels it is accountable only to the market and not to the people who use it. Particularly affected are poor women and the differently-abled who keep saying, “Where are we?”

Where are our lives? Where are our interests ? We are invisible, poor.”

- But as a result of these analyses concerns are being voiced in the media with people being invited to give their point of view on various issues.
- Need to look at good and bad practices and at the role of broadcasting and advocacy; because so far the media is only reflecting what is happening, and the question of advocacy, of public service does not arise.
- It has been noticed that in depth news on women and development issues has a niche of its own. If these stories are spread over a period of time the audience stays with it because they are trying to follow and understand their own situations.
- News is largely seen as a masculine public space. So who are the newsmakers?
- Women reporters are largely slotted only for soft stories. Increasingly, wider spaces are being given to them but often not to all.

Md. Nayeemul Islam

Bangladesh Centre for Development Journalism and Communication, Bangladesh

I will share some of the moot points from my paper:

- A study done on women in journalism in Bangladesh five years ago revealed that in a country of 130 million only about 4% percent of women work in news organisations.
- There were only four women reporters in the whole country of 130 million people. One of them went into television and we



Md. Nayeemul Islam

have not been able to replace that girl in the print media.

- But there are quite a few women reporters, in the electronic media because they are part of a team and don't travel alone. So it is not risky to be a reporter. But this is not possible in a newspaper .
- Since the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the third largest party are all women they get a lot of air time. But what are they doing? Are they representing the women?
- Press freedom sometimes comes into conflict with how we should portray women. Perhaps a gender-index could be developed and we could have some commonality and common understanding on those things.
- During the SAARC Summit, Musharraf, Vajpayee and the Prime Minister of Nepal stole the show. The other four belonged to smaller countries and two were women.
- A recent ETV report on a clash in Dhaka University had only men commenting on what was going on. On the same day there was a political meeting of the Opposition, which is now the Awami League. Again, it is only the male leaders who were questioned by the reporters though we have a prominent women called Motia Choudhary who has vast experience in politics and could have had a different perspective.
- Even if women are shown their voices are not heard. This is not fundamentally different from how we treat women in the entertainment programmes.

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Manju Thapa

Executive Editor Asmita, Nepal

I monitored seven news bulletins from NTV when the SAARC Summit was taking place at Kathmandu so understandably it dominated all the programmes.

- Out of 69 clips, only 4 news items directly concerned women issues. They related to the regional agreement on the anti-trafficking convention, the visit of the leaders wives to national parks, the release of an audio cassette of religious songs written by a woman. And a woman religious leader being publicly honoured with her spouse.
- Women as experts and professionals were only presented in the visuals.
- The only women who were heard and the only time they were heard was when Chandrika Kumaratunga and Begum Khalida Zia spoke during the inauguration session. The Prime Ministers of India, Pakistan and Nepal dominated the media. The others leaders were not given much space by the Nepal media.
- Women were presented in passive and subordinate roles as wives of country heads, in the audience at public gatherings and as ordinary citizens.
- Quantitatively they were very low in number.
- Similarly, young and beautiful women were seen only as assisting during the inauguration and closing ceremonies of the Summit. Women rights' activists have condemned the portrayal of women as objects of beauty in public programmes.
- Direct coverage of women and women-related issues, the gender perspective in newsmaking was completely ignored.

Similarly, seven bulletins of **Saat Baje** of STAR News were monitored. I found that:

- Women's involvement as journalists was more than on NTV. They were there as newsreaders, as reporters of hard news, sports and weather and as experts.
- But opinions of ordinary women were excluded. For example, many political leaders and civilians from Pakistan and India were asked to comment on the Pakistani President's speech against terrorism but no woman was asked to comment barring Benazir Bhutto. Likewise, comments on Priyanka Gandhi's involvement in the election campaigning in UP was sought only from males.
- The researcher must be aware of current women-related activities. Coverage of news in the contemporary print media and TV news could be tallied with these findings.
- Must look at how news has looked at men and women as affected people and given coverage to their opinions as concerned people and the general public.
- Male /female involvement as journalists is another important indicator. Noticed that the women journalists who were monitored were not gender-balanced in their information collection and presentation.
- One positive aspect noted was that no derogatory or insulting language was used against women in any of the programmes.

Akhila Sivadas

When we did this monitoring we looked at both the national channel Doordarshan and Aaj Tak during the week when the SAARC Summit was on. We found that:

- In quantitative terms, the national channel dominates because it covered the whole gambit of the meet and took up virtually two-thirds of the bulletins.
- It was done in as politically correct manner as possible and an attempt was made to create a fairly sharp public opinion, which was nationalistic.
- Aaj Tak did not devote so much space to the Summit. Rather it used the Summit as a backdrop for depicting the Indo-Pak relationship as potentially more entertaining than informative or analytical. Their cameras captured gestures, glances, etc., and kept the audience in the grip of what was happening. The rest of the space was devoted to politico-development stories situated in a political context and dealing partly with the human-interest or development aspects of the issues. The latter was never entirely independent or a stand-alone.
- The concerns about the missing gender and development perspective can be dealt with at the level of viewer reception rather than at the level of content. The viewers get the feeling that national security is an important issue, unless this is resolved all other issues of governance and development have to take a backseat. There are some who are a little more critical in their relationship with content. To this section of the viewers in particular women, they find the presentation about such complex concerns such as national security over simplified and misleading. It draws comments like “What can I say about this? I can’t talk about it. I don’t know much about it. I can understand what the news is visually communicating to me but the I don’t know the background to it.” In both cases there is often very little engagement with the news.
- It is unfortunate that when it comes to the 24-hour news

channels no attempts are being made to craft news differently and try and reach out to a far wider audience and also to create a sense of urgency and import over so many issues that get lost in the conventional manner that news is packaged.

- Most human dimensions are not integrated in a report though it is possible with a 24-hour channel especially in the afternoon. It would enable the channel to reach out to a new set of audiences, something that is important even from the marketing point of view.

Bulbul Monjurul Ahsan

Chief News Editor, Ekushey TV Bangladesh

We are running the first-generation, first terrestrial private channel in Bangladesh. According to statistics in India more people watch entertainment than news but in Bangladesh it is the other way around. Our 11 P.M. news has for the last 2 years had the highest audience in the country more than all the satellite and local channels because after decades of autocratic censorship people are now hungry for news. I would like to say that :

- In a 22 minute or 25 minute slot with an average of 19 news-related items it is not possible to maintain a gender balance. Because in news bulletins we are looking for hard news, breaking news. Prompted by our viewers we have started a programme *Deshjode*, meaning `Countrywide`. It's a supplementary programme of our national news in which we covered rural issues and issues that don't make the main news bulletins.
- Media watchdogs and media monitors should not just look at



Bulbul Monjurul Ahsan

news but also for a new mindset.

- If we really think that our people, our rural people, our masses should come onto our screens, if it is our agenda I think we should not be waiting for the donors' prescription. We should take it up and more important make it a continuous process.

Arnab Goswami

NDTV (which produces Star News), New Delhi

We are oversimplifying the whole issue of gender perspectives when we:

- Expect a reporter to do an equal number of sound bites from men and women so as to balance the report from a gender perspective. How do two comments on a story, one from a woman and one from a man solve the problem?
- Specify the number of women who die in a tragedy. It is not the numbers that make the news and we should not look at such news reports from the gender perspective not unless the number of women was particularly large or it was an incident involving women. It does not tell the story.
- Look who narrates a story. The bias is not at the level of a woman looking at the story more sensitively or a little more immaculately. It really makes no difference whether a reporter is a man or a woman, a Muslim or a Hindu.
- There should not be a bias in covering the news itself. And the bias happens both ways. Our channel was the only one that did a clip on an interesting or more worrying aspect of these riots in Gujarat regarding the full and active participation of women. Not just the victims but as the perpetrators of the violence. Why were we the only ones to do it? Is it that the

The bias is not at the level of a woman looking at the story more sensitively or a little more immaculately. It really makes no difference whether a reporter is a man or a woman, a Muslim or a Hindu.

woman in TV or in media, in particular in TV, can only be presented as victim, or as a person who is at the negative end of government policy a situation or whatever?

- Similarly, with something like the Women's Reservation Bill. Why did all the stories and discussions revolve around whether it was good or bad? Moderate voices are not heard because they don't make for good TV. In a 6-7 minutes discussion they will not provide instantaneous excitement and tension on the programme. Similarly, no effort was made to look at other options; of expanding the House, creating more constituencies etc., because we in TV also look at the entire issue from extremes.
- There is a definite problem and a bias in media organisations that a woman will do a pure feature story with more sensitivity. That she will find more humane angles to the story. That is the most derogatory attribute you can give to a reporter - that she can only be sensitive or humane, that she can't cover hard news.
- I think there is a great deal of tokenism insofar as coverage of women is concerned, under the garb of providing human interest stories, of covering issues that concern women. I feel if one just looks at key issues that only women express concern over it is also something to be concerned about.
- The stereotyping of issues: On World Water Day the experts were women, the aggrieved party were women. The discussion-persons were women. It's as if the only people who consume water were women! My point is have we stereotyped water as an issue that concerns only women? Just as one does not generally find women's voices in hard political stories, one does not find male voices on these issues. This is something

we must acknowledge and look at a little more seriously.

Tapa Nath Sukla

Advisor, Nepal TV (NTV)



- I agree that news is news. You don't have to balance gender in every news bulletin unless some specific issue is there to be dealt with.
- There are many more female journalists now but they don't want to cover gender issues because they fear that their other colleagues will call them feminist.
- Nepal TV is doing feature stories and current affairs programmes where we do balance gender issues.
- Our news viewership is very high as compared to our entertainment programmes because in entertainment we face a lot of competition from Star TV, Zee TV and other Indian satellite channels. But in news we don't have any competition because viewers want news from Nepal.

Akhila Sivadas

I would like to make a few points in terms of what has been said:

- It is the people, men and women who can make the difference in news that is constantly talked about. More important a certain kind of reporting will emerge. Neerja Choudhury, for instance, found out that the number of women who died in the Bihar earthquake in 1974 was so high because it was the women who went back home to bring the babies
- Media is not always sensitised to the kinds of things that it

should report. We need to open our eyes to these differences and look at them from a different point of view.

- How do we identify women and relate to them? And do they have an identity even when they are the leaders of their country?
- How do we portray women? We need to look at ourselves when we are presenting views, particularly about women: the sort of innuendoes about their lives and the kind of voyeurism witnessed in the Natasha Singh story which the media would not do about men, when covering similar incidents.
- One thing that emerges from this is the need for methodology in research. There is a wider role for women and their voices need to be heard. The question is how do we do it? It is not just a question of balancing a woman's voice with a male voice. It's also a question of the women perspective which does not get reflected.
- So if we are to have an informed and interested audience, gender perspective is more important than just reflecting gender in the news. If village women in Bangladesh are asking where are we in the news, if that is how they are thinking and feeling then news people need to reflect on the perspectives they are giving to the wider audience and whether they are representing their interests.

During the discussion that followed a host of questions were directed at the panellists on the issues that they had brought up during their presentation, including:

- Anita Ghai (Reader, Psychology, Delhi University): You say it doesn't make a difference if a story is covered by a man or a

woman. But when I look at disability I find that most of the issues that I and my fellow women are interested in such as sexuality, reproductive health, the education of our children and so on and so forth, when the reporter, be it man or woman speaks only to one voice, which is the male voice from within the disability sector, the interest is always focused on the hard issues of the disability sector, employment, access etc. Doesn't gender then make a difference?

G o s w a m i

- It is a point that is taken into account when a reporter is deputed on a story. But with many issues it is much easier for a woman to get access to more information especially from women.
- A woman cannot or should not try to cover a hard news story differently.
- There is also a stereotyping of issues by news organisations. Some, like water and concerns of marginalised communities are generally covered by women though they are not issues only women should be looking at.
- Such sensitivities should not be stereotyped. Both men and woman should be encouraged to look at news of a certain kind though if a reporter does only feature-based reporting for a couple of years it may be impossible for them to move into hard news.
- There is also a lot of stereotyping about women. For instance, if you put them in hard news situations they will become hysterical we must try to eradicate this attitude.

Anna Leah Sarabia

- Need to get rid of the alibis and train a woman reporter to travel alone on assignments rather than be accompanied by male colleagues.
- Objectivity is a myth. There are no 10 commandments on how a story is written - "The observed changes with the observer". Journalism schools teach certain rules and those on the news desk also believe in them and believe that they can never be changed, but this perspective has to be changed.
- The facts that go to make a story will differ from individual to individual, from gender to gender and because of the writers, own experience in their lives.
- We live in a patriarchy and it is impossible for the woman to not absorb the values of this system, to not be influenced by the dominant class. It is up to us as individuals to change, to reflect on what we are actually saying, what values we are transmitting. Are reports done with an eye on the TRPs ?

Goswami

- As far as TRP's are concerned, nobody monitors it on a day-to-day basis.
- It's a question of making a choice. How far are you willing to go in trying to be populist? Are these channels being voyeuristic for themselves or because it will appeal to the masses? When a channel does a extensive day-by-day bulletin by bulletin coverage for an entire week of the Lakme India Fashion show are they truly covering fashion or something else? And why do they get a woman reporter to do it?

Are these channels being voyeuristic for themselves or because it will appeal to the masses?

- Who's defining all these issues for us? It is somebody who is sitting on the news desk of that channel, who has a warped perspective on things.
- Similarly, there is the assumption that UP coverage is all about giving nitty-gritty details, caste politics and who beat up whom. But has anybody done a survey on whether it worked or whether it sold? The viewer in rural India, is in my view more aware of TV and the subtleties of news reporting and is capable of making a more informed comment about it than the person sitting here.
- The whole thing of being populist? NDTV was told it was anti-national, that it had compromised the national interest by beaming the tape of President Musharraf's press meet at the Agra Summit. However, there is no doubt about who watched which channel during that Summit.
- Populism and appealing to the lowest common denominator works once in a while.
- After the communal clashes in Gujarat, we were blacked out. It's also a testament of the times we are living in, that the CM or somebody can just give an order and the cable operators will just blackout a news channel at a time like that. Who's playing to the gallery then? It is also a testament of the strength of the media that we were brought back.
- Gujarat also raised the question of whether popular interest should be identified with the interest of the government?

Jai Chandiram

- Research studies have shown that when you show pictures of violence against one community, the other one does become

more vulnerable.

- Our own research in the field showed that when a community is named it becomes even more insecure and the way you handle news particularly when people are insecure and unsure can trigger off reactions.
- This is particularly so in rural areas where there are more of one caste or another caste. Then, the vulnerability of the minors becomes a big concern.

Goswami

- There is certain degree of tokenism and to some extent a farce in all this. To use only terms like “minority community” or “a certain community” and not “Muslim”. When people are not just being killed but butchered, not just by the dozens but by the hundreds, you can exercise restraint by saying that I will show one news story once, and not show it over and over again. But if I take a decision that I am not going to show any violence at all and just take some sound bites from the government and show some shots of empty streets, then also I am not being completely fair. If you show a girl on whom acid is being thrown and ask her what happened, your attempt is not to incite communal violence but you are actually telling the story as it is.
- National responsibility is when you are told not to flash the news that the hijackers of IC-814 in Kandahar are being released till they leave Delhi and you don't. And we showed that responsibility because we knew the reasons for the embargo but you can't do that in a riot situation. You can't not show the visuals.

Often, as a viewer I have felt that the reporters were insensitive towards the victims as well as the viewers. When someone is dying or someone is lost, especially during the earthquake to ask “*aapke kitne aadmi mar gaye, and kaise mar gaye?*”. Riots are man-made but an earthquake is a natural disaster: why sensationalise it?

- I saw this clip from Star News which you just showed. I also noticed that when the man was speaking his wife was sitting in the background holding the child in a fuzzy frame. I think it's extremely offensive when you push the subject of the story into the background. That is where gender bias comes, in when a woman who is the subject of your two minutes of tokenism is pushed into the background.

Some Other Views

- The perspective question is wider and more difficult because there s not much in the hard news despite the need for it. A woman reporter will probably ask a different question of the PM, which might not be of interest to others.
- There is a need to understand and redefine hard news. To look at its values and the impact it's going to have on women, in terms of their interests.
- An outside regulator must look at what's happening in the news.
- Sometimes even in hard news women journalists are bringing in perspectives, which are little different and their work is being recognised simply because they are bringing in another perspective and more sensitivity than others.

There is a need to understand and redefine hard news. To look at its values and the impact it's going to have on women, in terms of their interests.

ANNEXURE I

Television History of India

The first television broadcast in India took place from a temporary office in Delhi. The year was 1959. This was a purely educational exercise, since the political establishment under Prime Jawaharlal Nehru believed television should be used to spread knowledge and information, not entertainment. Public service broadcasting in the BBC tradition was the blueprint and originally, radio and television in India were both managed under All India Radio as a government institution.

Throughout the 1960s, there were various TV educational projects that culminated in scientist Vikram Sarabhai's highly ambitious SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Education) experiment which tried to use television to educate rural populations.

It was only in 1967, that radio and television were bifurcated and Doordarshan was created as the central

television authority, still wholly financed and managed by the government. Television would remain under government control till the satellite broadcasts of the 1990s. In 1998, AIR and Doordarshan were granted autonomy by the government under the Prasar Bharati Act and since then the Prasar Bharati Corporation manages the day to day affairs of both though the government continues to support it financially.

Television had to wait till the early 1980s to see its history unfold. The pivotal year was 1982. That year, India hosted the Asian Games in New Delhi, and for the first time, satellite and colour transmission was introduced on Doordarshan.

The nineties saw another major turning point: the introduction of satellite TV broadcasts, via cable connections. The first broadcasts came from CNN's coverage of the Gulf War. Realising the potential of the technology, Indian entrepreneurs and international media conglomerates suddenly turned their eyes towards the untapped Indian market and the nineties experienced an explosion, the tremors of which are felt even today.

TV Penetration

In terms of reach, television has spread throughout the country and in 2002 almost the entire country can receive terrestrial or satellite TV transmissions. Television ownership is placed at approximately 80 million homes. Cable TV, introduced in the high rise apartments of Mumbai during the late seventies and early eighties did not develop until the arrival of satellite television broadcasts. Today, the industry claims-

40 million cable TV homes with a concentration in the West and South.

TV Fiction

The bias for education and against entertainment continued on Doordarshan until the early eighties. Until then, Doordarshan produced a minimal number of in-house dramas and comedies. In 1984, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry linked TV entertainment to commercialisation and the opportunity to use satellite transmission for a nationwide broadcast. Therefore, it introduced what was famously called the “Sponsored Programme”. Programmes in this category were produced by independent private companies or individuals and telecast prime time on the national channel, DD1, after they found a commercial sponsor. Programmes in this category could be of different entertainment genres but primarily they were of three types: dramas, situational comedies, song and dance shows.

The first major serial introduced under this scheme was *Hum Log* - about the life and travails of a lower middle class family based in Delhi. There followed what came to be known as the ‘Golden Era of Indian Television’ as independent producers flocked to Doordarshan with the support of advertisers who suddenly discovered the immense potential of television to reach a mass though primarily urban audience.

The 1980s saw drama serials such as *Buniyaad*, *Khandaan*, *Tamas*, *Nukkad*, *Udaan*, *Mr. Yogi*, *Nirmala*, *Ek Kahani*, *Darpan*, *Pukaar*, and sitcoms such as *Yeh Jo Hai*

Zindagi, Wagle ki Duniya, etc. Two of the most successful programmes, the mythologicals *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* also belong to this period. Such was the popularity of these epics that mythologicals continue to be a staple of television fiction on Doordarshan.

Many of the drama serials centred around the family but others explored socially relevant themes: *Buniyaad* and *Tamas* were about Partition, *Udaan* and *Pukaar* explored the condition of women at home and in professions.

Satellite TV fiction

Zee Television, the first Indian satellite entertainment channel, began in 1992. It was devoted to Hindi TV dramas, sitcoms, game shows and music shows. Since satellite and cable TV came for a price, it was essentially an upper and middle class phenomenon in urban India. Keeping this in mind, Zee TV's entertainment sought to appeal to its target audience. Thus the dramas and comedies were about well- to-do urban families. Zee was an instant hit in the west and north with serials such as *Tara*, *Banegi Apni Baat* and musicals such as *Antakshiri*.

Its success encouraged the introduction of other private channels, including Asianet and Sun TV in the south and then Sony in the North. Such was the success of satellite entertainment that Doordarshan was forced to introduce its own entertainment channel - DD Metro in 1993. DD Metro saw many successful serials including the comedies *Dekh Bhai Dekh* and *Shrimaan Shrimati* and serials such as *Ghutan*,

Sea Hawks and *Dard*. These shows were a mixture of family-based dramas and family business rivalries. On DD1, Doordarshan introduced the first daily afternoon soap, a precursor to the evening one, with *Shanti* and *Swabhimaan* both of which were instant hits. The trend has continued: today, Doordarshan and the private satellite channels telecast daily afternoon soaps.

The next major player was Star Plus which until this stage had been an English entertainment channel. In 1998 it went partially Hindi with dramas and sitcoms such as *Saans*, and *Tu Tu Main Main*. These were the most successful shows on the channel - the first was about a family's response to adultery, the second a comedy between a mother-in law and daughter-in-law. In 2000, Star Plus went entirely Hindi. This would mark another important date in the history of Indian television. It saw the introduction of *Kaun Banega Crorepati* with film idol, Amitabh Bachchan as the anchor. From the day it began, July 3, 2000, the quiz game show, based on the English programme, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, took the satellite TV audience by storm, recording unprecedented viewership figures. Star built on its success by introducing two daily nightly soaps - *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* and *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*, produced by Balaji Telefilms which has become the single most successful production house in the country with popular serials across different satellite channels.

Kyunki.. and *Kahani..*, spawned endless clones and across channels, family dramas dominate the afternoon and evening schedules. Simultaneously, *Kaun Banega Crorepati* led to the production of many game shows. Television

comedies are also shown on all channels but are not nearly as popular, primarily because of their poor quality.

N e w s

The boom in news television has taken place in the last four years. Before that, news was the preserve of Doordarshan that broadcasts bulletins in different languages with two prime time bulletins in the evening. Under Rajiv Gandhi there was an effort to open up current affairs to private producers and it was a success with programmes such as *Janvaani* which saw ministers being questioned by members of the public, being very popular. There followed *The World This Week* and *Tonight* – a daily news show on DD Metro.

With the advent of satellite television, CNN and BBC were received in Indian homes and this led Indians to start up their own news channels. 1998 saw the launch of Star News, followed almost immediately by Zee News and BiTV News. The South also saw channels such as Asianet and Sun, etc., devote considerable space to news and current affairs. Due to the uncertain political climate of the 1990s, regional conflicts and 09/11/01, news channels have been greatly in demand.

In response to the popularity of Star News and Zee News, DD was forced to start its own news channel, DD News which had to fold up last year due to high costs. The India Today group launched Aaj Tak on January 1, 2001 and has already become the most popular news channel in the country.

ANNEXURE II

Women and Media
Working Towards A
Regional Advocacy Initiative

March 23, 2002
Amaltas Hall, India Habitat Centre,
New Delhi

Agenda

9.30 a.m. - 10.00 a.m. **Welcome**
10.00 a.m. - 11.00 a.m. **Inaugural Session**

**Strengthening Gender Issues on the Electronic Media:
*The Challenges in Today's Context***

Chairperson : **D.K.Bose**, Consultant, O&M
Speakers : **Madhavi Mutatkar**, President, Zee TV
 'Can Channels Respond?'
 Anna Leah Sarabia, Women's Media Circle
 'Creating Content for Media on Women'
 Akhila Sivadas, Executive Director, CFAR
 'Women and Media: Why a Regional Initiative?'

4.30 p.m. to 4.45 p.m. Tea Break

11.15 a.m. - 1.30 p.m. Session 1

Monitoring Fiction from a Gender Perspective: *Seeking a Consensus on Methodology, Approaches and Outcomes*

- Chairperson** : Akhila Sivadas, CFAR
Discussants : Manju Thapa, Asmita
Meeta Parti, CFAR
Nargis Jahan Banu, Proshika
Panellists : Mir Muneer, Scriptwriter for *Saanjhi, Choti Maa*
Madhavi Mutatkar, President, Zee
Aarati Chataut, Programme Producer, NTV

2.30 a.m. - 4.30 p.m. Session 2

Monitoring News from a Gender Perspective: *Seeking a Consensus on Methodology, Approaches and Outcomes*

- Chairperson** : Jai Chandiram, President, IAWRT
Discussants : Akhila Sivadas, CFAR
Md. Nayeemul Islam, BCDJC, Bangladesh
Panellists : Bulbul Monjurul, Chief News Editor, Ekushey TV
Amab Goswami, Correspondent, Anchor Person, NDTV
Tapa Nath Sukla, Advisor, Nepal TV

4.30 p.m. to 4.45 p.m. Tea Break

4.45 p.m. - 5.45 p.m. Session 3

Wrap Up and Future Initiatives

ANNEXURE III

Women and Media: Working Towards A
Regional Advocacy Initiative

List of Participants

Aarti Chataut, *Program Producer/ Host, Jagriti Program, Nepal TV*

Akhila Sivasdas, *Executive Director, CFAR*

Anita Dighe, *IGNOU*

Anna Leah Sarabia, *Director, Women's Media Circle, Philippines*

Anita Ghai, *Reader, Psychology, JMC, Delhi University*

Anuradha Mukherjee, *Programme Coordinator, CFAR*

Anuradha Nagraj, *Reporter, DPA*

Anjali Nayyar, *Population Council*

Arnab Goswami, *Reporter and Anchor NDTV*

BulBul Monjurul Ahsan, *Chief News Editor, Ekushey Television*

D.K. Bose, *Consultant, Development Communication, O&M*

Divya Saxena, *Freelancer and Member, Viewers' Forum*

Gouri Srivastava, *Deptt. of Women's Studies , NCERT*

Kumud Sharma, *Centre for Women Development Studies*

Latika Padgonkar, *formerly with UNESCO*

Madhavi Mutatkar, *President, Zee Television*

Manju Thapa, *Editor, ASMITA Women's Publication House, Nepal*

MD.Nayeemul Islam Khan, *BCDJC*

Meeta Parti, *Sr. Programme Officer, CFAR*

Mir Muneer, *Renowed TV Script Writer*

Minal Hazarika, *Coordinator, Viewers' Forum*

Maitreyee Saha, *Freelance Journalist and Media Researcher*

Monnika Chopra, *Media Analyst*

Nargis Jahan Banu, *Information and Documentation Resource Centre, Proshika*

Pinki Solanki, *Media Researcher*

Shalini Agarwal, *Programme Officer, Japan foundation*

Shyamala Shiveshwarker, *Formerly Asst. Editor, The Hindustan Times*

Sevanti Ninan, *Media Critic and Columnist with The Hindu*

Suhas Kumar, *Social Activist, Member of Viewers' Forum*

Tapa Nath Sukla, *Consultant, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Nepal*

T.V. Padma, *Panos Institute*

Vimla, *Member, Viewers' Forum*

ANNEXURE IV

Brief Story Lines of the Serials we have monitored

Serial: *Koshish Ek Aasha*

Channel: Zee Tv

Time Slot: 8.30p.m. Monday

Production House: Balaji Telefilms

A young girl, Kajal, is tricked to marry a 'mentally retarded' man. She rebels but is forced to remain with him because of her concern for her mother's illness. Soon she discovers that her husband's illness was 'curable' but his step mother has been trying to prevent his recovery to safeguard the interest of 'her own' children. Kajal vows to fight for her husband rights.

Serial: *Kohi Apna Sa*

Channel: Zee Tv

Time Slot: 9.30 p.m. Mon-Thurs

Production House: Balaji Telefilms

By a quirk of fate, three childhood friend, Khushi, Shruti and Sanjana, marry three brothers in the same extended family. The economic status of the three units which live under one roof differs dramatically. The three girls also come from varying

backgrounds. Khushi belongs to an upper class family and is married to the richest of the brothers. Shruti, an orphan who lives with a widowed aunt, marries the least affluent brother. Sanjana, the only friend who is shown to be working, marries the young brother, whose family belongs to the professional middle class .

Threatened by the close relationship between the three young girls who enter their home as 'bahus', two of the mothers-in-law plot to break up the friendship. The third mother-in-law, who is not so well off as the other two, is a sweet-tempered woman and supportive of the new brides.

Kohi Apna Sa is the story of these three friends and how their relationship withstands up the stresses of their situation in their married home.

Serial: *Choti Maa.. Ek Anokha Bandhan*

Channel: Zee Tv

Time Slot: 9 p.m. Mon-Fri

Production House: UTV

Choti Maa. begins in a village on the bank of a river, where a young girl loses her mother to its turbulent waters. Koyna is inconsolable till she finds a strange woman lying unconscious near the same spot where her mother was presumed drowned. She brings this woman home and names her *Choti Maa*. She declares that the woman is her mother come back to life, and that she will not let her go. Raghu, her father, resists, but gives up in the face of the daughter's insistence.

The woman doesn't seem to remember her past and quietly accepts her new life and her new name - Sharada.

Soon the villagers start gossiping about the relationship between Sharada and Raghu, which forces them to marry. They are supported by only two people - Raghu's best friend Shyam and a village woman.

Raghu, who has to pay off a huge debt, leaves for the city to make some money. He is accompanied by Shyam. In his absence, Sharada is subjected to verbal and psychological abuse from the people Raghu owed money. She handles the situation well, and takes great care of Koyna. The bonds between the girl and her '*choti ma*' deepen.

In the city, Raghu and Shyam meet rich, spoilt Ratna. Ratna falls for Raghu and gives him the capital to start a sari shop. Raghu goes back to his village and pays off his debt. Ratna's dreams of getting married to Raghu are shattered when he brings back Sharada and Koyna to the city. Ratna pledges revenge. She tricks Shyam into marrying her so that she can maintain close proximity to Raghu and starts poisoning Koyna's mind against her *Choti Maa*. Raghu and Sharada start a garment factory.

Serial: *Justujoo*

Channel: Zee

Time Slot: 8.30 p.m. Tuesday

Production House: Ananda Films and Telecommunication

Successful lawyer Lalit falls in love with his wife's sister, Neeraja, who like him, is in the legal line (she is training to be a lawyer), and is smart and 'modern', unlike his wife Leela, who is simple and unsophisticated, and whose entire life revolves around her husband and two daughters.

Initially, Neeraja fights her growing attraction for Lalit, but then she succumbs. They have an affair, and Neeraja's guilt at deceiving her sister is not strong enough for her to stop seeing her 'jijaji'. She starts talking of love and marriage, and that's where the story takes a turn : Lalit is seen to want Neeraja's company for fulfilling his physical desires, and for fulfilling his deep need for a woman who is 'deserving' of him; Neeraja, on the other hand, is dreaming of marriage and a stable relationship. Currently Neeraja is pregnant with Lalit's child, and Leela has started to suspect her husband of having an affair.

Name of the Serial: *Mehndi Tere Naam Ki*

Channel: Zee Tv

Time Slot: 8.30p.m. Wednesday

Production House: K K Film

The story of a nuclear family with four young daughters who have contrasting personalities. It takes us through the trials and tribulations of their lives.

Serial: *Saanjjhi*

Channel: Zee TV

Time Slot: 8.30 p.m. Friday

Producer : Neena Gupta

Middle-aged, childless 'thakur' Amar Singh is persuaded into taking a 'second' wife, in the hope of an heir. Kanak, his 'barren' wife, resolves to make the much younger Hansa (who marries because in exchange Amar promises to free her father from debt) miserable. She treats the younger woman with acute hostility, and employs all sorts of ruses to make Hansa give up and run away. But she fails, and Hansa sticks on. The 'thakur' tries to strike a balance between the two women. He doesn't want to deprive his first wife of her 'wifely

rights', and gives her physical and emotional attention. At the same time he tries to protect Hansa from Kanak's wrath.

Serial: *Sarhadein*

Channel: Zee TV

Time Slot: 8 p.m. Mon-Fri

Production House: UTV

Sarhadein is a Hindu-girl-Muslim-boy love story, again a theme which has long played out in commercial Hindi movies. The fact that the star-crossed lovers are from India and Pakistan, lends the story a contemporary edge. While in Malaysia, Chandni, a Hindu, falls in love with Aman, a Muslim.

The two families are deeply unhappy. Chandni's father uses his influence and arranges for Aman to be taken in custody for illegally entering India. Aman manages to escape, and a '*nikaah*' is solemnised. But there doesn't seem to be a happy ending for the couple. Chandni's father arranges for Aman to be kidnapped. Her father tells her that Aman has deserted her, just as he had predicted. When Aman returns, after his release, he finds Chandni missing.

Serial: *Kutumb*

Channel: Sony

Time Slot: 9.30 p.m. Mon-Thurs

Production House: Balaji Telefilms

Kutumb starts off as a campus romance, with Pratham and Gauri indulging in the typical '*nok-jhonk*', so familiar to us from Hindi movies. The name of the game is humiliation, and Pratham does his best to put out Gauri. After one trick too many, Gauri and Pratham have to marry in order to 'save' Gauri's 'honour'..

On their wedding night, Gauri announces that the game has just begun, that their marriage is not the end but the beginning of Pratham's miseries. Gauri does not allow him to touch her, and gives him a mouthful whenever he tries to get near her, but maintains a very cordial relationship with his family. Her mother-in-law becomes her best ally. Much to Pratham's displeasure, she encourages Gauri to continue college. (Pratham wants her to take care of the family like other 'bahu's' do. His intention is to deprive Gauri of freedom, and force her to live within the constraints of the home.)

Nursing a wounded ego, Pratham forces himself upon Gauri one night. Gauri is devastated. His mother, too, is furious, when she knows what he has done. Pratham repents and Gauri forgives him. Now, their relationship is heading towards normalcy.

Serial: *Kkusum*

Channel: Sony

Time Slot: 9 p.m. Mon-Fri

Production House: Balaji Telefilms

KKusum, a young middle-class girl who earns her living as a lowly employee in a big construction firm is 'selected' by the firm's owner's wife to be her daughter-in-law because of her strong '*kundali*'. Mrs Kapoor believes that Kkusum's luck will save her son Abhay from all potential danger.

Much against Abhay's wishes, the marriage is contracted for one year. But Kkusum, with her pliable nature and devotion wins his friendship. They become friends (strictly platonic), and colleagues at work, and things are going swimmingly till Esha walks into their life. She starts off being Kkusum's friend,

but soon, betraying Kkusum's trust, becomes sexually involved with Abhay.

Abhay walks out of his marriage and starts living with Esha. Meanwhile, as the result of one 'intimate' contact with her husband, Kkusum becomes pregnant. Once she, and Abhay's family, comes to know about Abhay's affair with Esha, Mrs. Kapoor asks her son to divorce Kkusum. But the discovery of her pregnancy prevents the signing of the papers.

Abhay refuses to accept that the child is his, saying that Kkusum has had an affair with his friend Aryaman. At this, Kkusum leaves the house, and goes back to her parents. But she continues to work in the office, now as a partner with Abhay, with the blessings of her in-laws. Recently the story has taken another twist. Abhay is shown becoming closer to Kkusum and distancing himself from Esha. Esha reacts with anger, and fights to get Abhay back.

Serial: *Heena*

Channel: Sony

Time Slot: 9.30 p.m. Friday

Production House: RT Entertainment

Sweet, docile Heena is rejected by her husband on their wedding night, because he is in love with another woman. But she forbears with great endurance, and tries to win over Sameer with her determination to be a good wife. She remains in character even when Sameer divorces her, and she is offered marriage by Akram, her husband's friend. She accepts the proposal, and marries Akram, but is shown to have residual feelings for Sameer. Currently, Akram is shown suspecting Heena of softening towards Sameer. Heena, the 'perfect wife',

neither raises her voice nor tries to clarify anything. She just suffers in silence.

Serial: *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*

Channel: Star Plus

Time Slot: 10.00p.m. Monday - Thursaday

Production House: Balaji Telefilms

A family drama drawn on the lines of the great epic *Ramayana*. Om and Parvati the eldest son and daughter-in-law of the family are the thread, which keeps the family together. Is very popular with all generations of viewers.

Serial: *Kyunki Saas bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*

Channel: Star Plus

Time Slot: 10.30p.m. Monday - Thursaday

Production House: Balaji Telefilms

A family drama set in a Gujarati business family. This serial is topping the popularity charts since its inception two years ago. It tells the tale of the Virani's - Babuji and Baa with their children, grandchildren and now great - grand children.

Serial: *Kasauti Zindagi Kay*

Channel: Star Plus

Time Slot: 8.30p.m. Monday - Thursaday

Production House: Balaji Telefilms

A family drama set in a Bengali media family. It is a tale of two lovers - Anurag and Purna. Anurag succumbs to his mother's pressure and marries Komolika. Torn between love and 'duty', the story of the two lovers goes on.