

TV and the Elderly

A Research Study

**By
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Introduction

HelpAge India commissioned the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) to conduct a monitoring research and feedback study on the representation of the senior citizens and their concerns on television. The study had aimed at exploring the relationship between the older population and television.

In fact, in 2002, CFAR had conducted a detailed monitoring study entitled '*Representation of Specialised Social Issues on Media*' for the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. This included a segment on media and the elderly and how they were represented on TV, radio and the print media. The current study builds on that study and goes further: it has a detailed quantitative and qualitative field study of elderly viewers that provides their feedback on TV and the role it plays in their lives. It also includes the views of the TV industry and professional caregivers.

The Objectives of the Study:

- To profile the TV habits of the elderly and assess the impact TV has on them
- Examine the extent and type of coverage the elderly receive on TV - both in news and fiction. This involved a qualitative analysis of the content, treatment of the issue of ageing and/or issues that have a direct bearing on their lives. To identify the best practices and omissions in the coverage
- Present the viewpoint of representatives from the TV industry with regard to the elderly, both in terms of representation and as a target audience
- Consult professionals in geriatric care on the impact of TV on the elderly.

- Provide suggestions and recommendations from viewers and professional caregivers on improving TV coverage of and for the elderly.

Methodology

Part I: Feedback from the Elderly

Phase 1:

Quantitative Survey – Media Profile of the Elderly

On the basis of a sample chosen by a recruitment agency, a quantitative survey was conducted during October 2003, which covered 124 elderly citizens of Delhi in the 60-105 age group. The objective was to profile their media habits, their preferred TV schedule and programmes and their recommendations for their peers, children and grandchildren.

Phase II:

Qualitative Survey - Living with TV

An independent market recruitment agency was commissioned to identify a suitable sample of elderly people in Delhi based on several important criteria: that they watch TV, that they represent different socio-economic groups and communities and that they lived in different circumstances: eg, a joint family, a nuclear family, alone, widowed, etc.

From the sample, four sets of elderly people were selected for in-depth interactions. Representatives of CFAR visited elderly people in their homes and observed their daily routine, especially while they watched TV. This helped in understanding the position it enjoys in their lives and households. Efforts were also made to ascertain how TV has influenced their attitudes as well as their family social equations.

Those selected for the study included: a TAMILIAN couple who are living away from their children, a Bengali widower living with his son and his family, an aged couple living in the same house as their son but on separate floors and a woman staying with her husband who suffered from amnesia and other illnesses.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Three Focus Group Discussions were held:

- With elderly men and women living in a lower middle class locality of West Delhi who were not known to each other.
- A group of women residing in an upper middle class locality, inhabited primarily by retired Government servants. The meeting took place in the neighborhood park where they met every evening. The women were known to each other.
- The third FGD was informal and took place with inmates of an old age home. The meetings took place with groups of twos or threes and in some case on a one to one basis, as some of them were not willing to speak in front of others.

The Objective of the FGDs was to find out:

- ❖ Whether or not the elderly are happy with the manner in which older people are projected and if not what kind of representation they would like to see, etc.
- ❖ The nature of the impact of media content on them and their families.
- ❖ The role TV plays in their lives, particularly as a reflection of their social values and personal beliefs.

As the sharing made by the respondents were sensitive in nature, we have not used their real names in the report.

Phase III - Professional Feedback:

Views of representatives of the TV industry, caregivers and professionals in geriatric care were elicited to give this research study a holistic dimension. Feedback from the industry helped us to understand how the media situates the elderly in its scheme of things. Caregivers explained how they perceived the role of media in the lives of the elderly and what social, physical and psychological implications it might have for them.

TV industry professionals included:

- Rajesh Pavitrán, Chief Operating Officer, Balaji Tele-films (producers of the very popular `K' serials including *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*, etc.
- Ajai Sinha, producer and director of TV serials such as *Astitva...* *Ek Prem Kahani*, *Justujoo*, *Hasratein*, *Samay*, etc.

- Abhijit Pradhan, Senior Vice-President, JWT Contract
- Venu Gopal, Group Accounts Director, JWT Contract

Amongst caregivers, we interviewed the following:

- Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, Consultant Psychiatrist, VIMHANS
- Dr. Kalyan Bagchi, President, Society for Gerontological Research
- Neelima Mishra, Secretary, Jan Kalyan Trust, Anand Niketan Vridha Ashram

Part II: Media Content

Approximately 20 hours of TV news and fiction was monitored. In TV fiction, we looked at popular serials on the major Hindi entertainment channels such as Sahara Manoranjan, Sony, Star Plus and Zee.

In News & Current Affairs, we focused on news bulletins across news channels on four specific days, which were specifically relevant to the elderly. These were:

- International Day of Older Persons
- World Alzheimer's Day
- Central Government's launch of a Pension Scheme for the aged
- Murder of two elderly women in Vasant Kunj

An average, 'normal' day's news was also considered for the purpose of comparison. In current affairs, we looked at programmes on Aaj Tak, DD1, NDTV24X7, Sahara Samay, Star News and Zee News. Also at programmes that have specific relevance to the elderly like the medical show, *NDTV Doctor*.

Timeline:

One month from October 10, 2003 - November 9, 2003.

The report was submitted in December.

Introduction

Mass Media: Reach & Access (NRS, 2002)

Background

The media has experienced tremendous growth in the last decade, especially, television. This, in turn, has generated many changes. The most significant being its growth into a 24-hour phenomenon with television, radio and Internet- giving it a continual immediacy. Simultaneously, technology has expanded and contracted the media - it is both global and local at the same time. This all-pervasive presence in time and space, makes the media a powerful agent in human life, wielding an influence that was previously not within its power.

As a result, the media (print, radio, television and the Internet) plays a large role in reflecting the world and in changing people's perceptions of that world and even their own lives.

Television:

The National Readership Survey, NRS, 2002 states that television now reaches 81.6 million Indian homes registering a growth of over 12% since 1999. Access to cable & satellite homes has also jumped from 29 million in 1999 to 40 million in 2002 marking a 31% increase.

Today, more than 85 TV channels - terrestrial, cable and satellite - both free-to-air and pay, in different genres and languages are available to the Indian viewer. If the Conditional Access System (CAS) is implemented, there might be some churning. But certainly the TV news segment has grown exponentially with 6 new channels in 2003, alone.

According to the TAM ADEX Survey (2002), of `All TV households', Doordarshan National and DD Metro enjoy the highest viewership with shares of 16.28% and 7.8%, respectively. Cable regional channels (or local cable networks) meanwhile have a share of 7.72% followed by Star Plus at 6.94%.

In the category of Cable and Satellite households' only, cable regional has the highest share at 21.22%. Among the channels, Star Plus tops the ranking with a share of 11% and Sun TV, the Tamil entertainment channel has a share of 7.91%, Gemini and Sony TV follow with 7.76% and 4.37%, respectively.

Radio:

Access to radio in urban areas has dipped from 27 million homes to 24 million homes in the last three years. However, its presence in rural areas has remained more or less the same - 30 million homes today as against 31 million homes in 1999.

Among the 48 million adults in the country who have listened to the radio during a three-month period, 31 % or 15 million tuned in to an FM station. This represents an increase of 6 % since 2001.

Print:

Print media has increased its readership base substantially. Readers of print media are estimated at 180 million with a 52: 48% urban-rural ratio.

While daily newspapers have increased their readership, magazines have experienced a steady decline. The readership base for dailies/newspapers went from 131 million in 1999 to 156 million in 2002 - an increase of nearly 20%. Language dailies, which contributed significantly to this growth, are mainly English (in the metros), Hindi, Marathi and a clutch of newspapers from the South.

Internet:

NRS 2002 indicates that Internet connectivity increased from 4.11 million last year to 6.02 million at the beginning of 2002. The report states that the growth of Internet stabilised at 2 million per year. As many as 20% of Internet users now surf from home and 43 % from a cyber cafe.

FINDINGS

Part I - Media Profile of the Elderly

Phase I - Quantitative Survey

No commercial data is available on the media habits of the elderly. Therefore, we conducted a quantitative survey to understand the media habits of older people. A total of 124 respondents (80 male, 44 female) from different parts of Delhi formed the sample. (Table 1)

Table 1: Total Number of Respondents:

Respondents	Number	%
Men	80	65
Women	44	35
Total	124	100

Highlights of the Findings:

Over two thirds of the respondents fell within the 60-75 years age group. Five respondents were aged 85 and above. There was also a woman aged 105 years in the sample. She seemed to be a very active and an avid watcher of television. (Table 2)

Table 2: Age Break-up

Age group	M/F			
	Men (80)		Women (44)	
	No.	%	No.	%
60-65 years	12	15	9	20
66-75 years	56	70	28	64
76 – 85 years	10	12	4	9
Above 85 years	2	2	3	7
Total	80	100	44	100

The overwhelming majority of men lived in joint families and just under two thirds of women also resided in joint families. In the category of

nuclear family, two women lived all by themselves without any family or domestic help.

Table 3: Household Profile:

Nature of family	M/F			
	Men (80)		Women (44)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Joint Family	64	80	26	59
Nuclear	16	20	18	41
Total	80	100	44	100

The majority of men were retired service people. However, 17 men are still actively self-employed in business mostly a shop. Amongst women, the majority are homemakers but 11 are retired service people. The only woman who was still working ran a small shop. (Table 4)

Table 4: Occupation:

Occupation type.	M/F			
	Men (80)		Women (44)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Retired Service People	53	66	11	25
Housewife		---	32	73
Involved in shop/business	17	21	1	2

Media Habits

Over 90 per cent of the respondents watched an average of 2-4 hours of TV. A significant minority of men (10 per cent) watched between 5-7 hours of TV. TV is the only medium that all the respondents watched. (Table 5 A)

Table 5 A: Average Time Spent on TV per day:

Avg. Time	M/F			
	Men (80)		Women (44)	
	No.	%	No.	%
> 2 hrs	00	---	00	---
2-4 hrs	72	90	41	93
5 – 7 hrs	8	10	2	5
< 7 hrs	00	---	1	2

Interestingly, 50 per cent of the men read newspapers or magazines but only 22 per cent of the women spent any time on the print media and among those who did, it was between 1-2 hours. (Table 5 B)

Table 5 B: Average Time Spent on print per day:

Avg. Time	M/F			
	Men (80)		Women (44)	
	No.	%	No.	%
1 hr	23	29	8	
2 hrs	11	14	2	
3hrs	4	5	00	
4 hrs	1	1	00	

Among respondents who listened to the radio (25 men, 15 women), the average was one hour of listening time. (Table 5 C)

Table 5 C: Average Time Spent on Radio per day:

Avg. Time	M/F			
	Men (80)		Women (44)	
	No.	%	No.	%
1 hr	13	16	9	20
2 hrs	7	9	5	11
3 hrs	5	6	1	2

The Internet is totally outside the lives of the elderly. (Table 5 D)

Table 5 D: Average Time Spent on Internet per day:

Avg. Time	M/F			
	Men (80)		Women (44)	
	No.	%	No.	%
1 hr	1	1	00	-

About their favorite media, undoubtedly television topped the list. While 96% of men voted television as their favorite media, among women, radio, print and Internet didn't open a score. The Focus Group Discussions that we conducted later reinforced the finding. Men and women shared the view that TV is their favorite mass medium because of its easy accessibility.

Table 5 E: Favorite Media

Media	M/F			
	Men (80)		Women (44)	
	No.	%	No.	%
TV	77	96	44	100
Radio	2	2	00	-
Print	1	1	00	-
Internet	00	-	00	-
Total	80	100	44	100

TV habits and preferences:

Asked why they watch TV, respondents gave the following reasons in descending order: Entertainment (over 70 per cent)
Information (60 per cent men, 20 per cent women)
Loneliness (49 per cent men, 39 per cent women)
(Table 6)

Table 6: Why watch TV?

	M/F			
	Men (80)		Women (44)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Out of Loneliness	39	49	17	39
Entertainment	56	70	34	77
Information	53	66	9	20

(* Respondents did not choose any one category exclusively but rated the choices in order of importance)

The FGDs and the case studies, we conducted later again reinforced the finding that most of the elderly people watch television for entertainment. Even if, they were involved in other activities like engagements at temple, neighbourhood clubs, reading, etc. but for entertainment and information to keep them in sync with the outside world, they turn to TV. Those, who were living alone (without children) tend to watch more because of loneliness.

A large proportion of respondents watched TV alone during the day. Even in the evening, over 50 per cent of the women watched TV alone. In the afternoon and evening, men tended to watch TV with someone (spouse, children, grandchildren or household help), however; women watched it a little more often with children in the afternoon than the other categories. (Table 7)

Table 7: Whom do you watch TV with?

	Morning				Afternoon				Evening			
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Alone	46	57	17	38	20	25	20	45	24	30	23	52
Spouse	10	12	3	7	17	21	2	5	18	22	4	9
Children	9	11	7	16	16	20	10	23	21	26	9	20
Grandchildren	5	6	3	7	10	12	5	11	17	21	6	14
Household Help	8	10	2	5	4	5	2	5	23	29	7	16
Any other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	2

(Respondents ticked on multiple answers)

The respondents were divided on the question of how much TV is good or bad for them. While, nearly three fourths of the men felt 2-3 hours of TV is good for them, 55% of the women agreed with this view. However, 45% of women also thought 4-5 hours was acceptable. But, they all agreed that more than five hours was excessive. (Table 8 A)

Table 8 A: How much of TV is good or bad for you?

	Good				Bad			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
2-3 hrs	59	74	24	55	-	-	1	2
4-5 hrs	30	37	20	45	17	21	12	27
< 5 hrs (9 hrs)	1	1	00	-	63	79	31	70
Total	80	100	44	100	80	100	44	100

They felt that their grandchildren should be happy watching only 1 hour of TV per day. More realistically, a significant percentage (27 per cent men, 39 female) conceded that 2-3 hours was acceptable. That there was confusion here is borne out by the fact that 75 per cent also believed that 2-3 hours of TV per day was harmful for children. (Table 8 B)

Table 8 B: How much TV is good or bad for your grandchildren?

Time	Good				Bad			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1 hr	58	72.5	27	61	1	1	1	2
2-3 hrs	22	27.5	17	39	60	75	33	75
4-5 hrs	00	-	00	-	18	22	9	20
< 5 hrs	00	-	00	-	00	-	1	2

Favorite viewing:

As mentioned in the beginning, TV is the favorite media of the elderly and they spend considerable time watching it alone – between 2-4 hours per day was the average. In terms of programme and channel choices, they were very clear of their preferences: religious shows/channels, popular drama shows, and the news. The data therefore indicates that the elderly have much in common with younger viewers. The only significant and expected difference is their greater interest in devotional shows and channels. There are some gender differences but the overall trend was similar between men and women.

When asked to identify their favorite shows and programmes, the respondents named 40 shows: 16 were drama serials (mostly daily), 11 religious/mythological programmes and one news programme (*The Big Fight*).

For the rest, there was fantasy, suspense, film contest shows and movies. The choice for the men was fairly even between dramas and religious programmes but women gave the drama serials greater weightage.

Top 5 favourite shows of male respondents

Ramayana, Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thhi, Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki, Mahabharat, and films. Forty five per cent of the men chose the *Ramayan* as their favorite show.

Top 5 favourite shows of female respondents

Kunti, Ramayan, Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki, Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thhi, Kumkum. *Kunti* received the nod from 48 per cent – all the others received over 30 per cent of the vote. Amongst men, there was a sharp drop after *Ramayan* (45 per cent) with the next most popular show, *Kyunki...* at 26 per cent.

The most surprising aspect of these choices was the almost total absence of news & current affairs programmes. However, when asked to name their favorite channels, Aaj Tak, NDTV, Star News, Zee News, BBC and CNN were mentioned.

In keeping with their age profile, devotional channels Astha and Sanskar were next most popular channels. It must be added that this question was not answered by a sizeable section of the women. What's interesting about the responses is that only 6 (all men) have mentioned Star Plus whereas the majority of their favorite shows are telecast on Star Plus. This would seem to indicate a strong programme loyalty but a poor channel association. Or the fact that they simply tune into Star Plus and then forget about it. However, this is not substantiated by our later questions where the respondents have identified Star Plus as one of their highest recommended channels.

Table 9 A: Programmes you enjoy watching the most?*

S.No.	Programme	Men		Women	
		No.		No.	
1.	<i>Ramayan</i>	36		16	
2.	<i>KSBKBT</i>	21		24	
3.	<i>Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki</i>	19		18	
4.	<i>Mahabharat</i>	15		9	
5.	<i>Kumkum</i>	10		13	
6.	<i>Krishna</i>	13		3	
7.	<i>Kasauti Zindagi Ki</i>	8		11	
8.	<i>Kkusum</i>	10		9	
9.	<i>Guruvani/Bhajan</i>	9		10	
10.	<i>Ganga Maiya</i>	10		3	
11.	<i>Pravachan/Satsang</i>	8		4	
12.	<i>Desh Mein Nikla Hoga Chand</i>	3		8	
13.	<i>Kahin Kisi Roz</i>	7		7	
14.	<i>Piya Ka Ghar</i>	1		7	
15.	<i>Kunti</i>	1		7	
	Others	40		32	

- Multiple choice answers

Table 9 B: Which channels do you watch?

S.No	Channel	Men		Women	
		No.		No.	
1.	<i>Aaj Tak</i>	28		7	
2.	<i>Astha</i>	15		4	
3.	<i>Sanskar</i>	10		7	
4.	<i>Star Plus</i>	5		-	
5.	<i>Zee News</i>	1		3	
6.	<i>NDTV</i>	3		1	
7.	<i>Discovery</i>	3		3	
8.	<i>ETV</i>	3		-	
9.	<i>Cartoon Network</i>	1		2	
	Others	16		2	

(*Multiple choice answers)

Recommended viewing:

When it comes to recommending programmes for other people of their own age, very few responded to the question and among those who did

there were more men as compared to women. The top shows recommended by them were News, *Ramayana*, *Krishna* and *Mahabharat*. To a certain degree, this reflects their own programme preferences, which in turn are based on the age. Women also voted for *Kyunki*.

The channels received a better response. Interestingly, there were no diversity in the choice made by the male respondents. The women chose the same channels but in slightly different order. The interesting finding here is the women who did not enthusiastically identify devotional shows or channels in their preferences, now recommended them more strongly than the men. Sanskar was named by 59% while Astha by 39%.

Table 10 A: Programmes you would recommend to your peers?

S.No	Programme	Men		Women	
		No.		No.	
1.	<i>News</i>	11		3	
2.	<i>Ramayana</i>	8		1	
3.	<i>Krishna</i>	6		1	
4.	<i>Mahabharat</i>	6		-	
5.	<i>KSBKBT</i>	1		3	
6.	<i>Kumkum</i>	2		1	
7.	<i>Match</i>	2		-	
8.	<i>Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki</i>	2		-	
	<i>Others</i>	8		2	

Table 10 B: Channels you would recommend to your peers?

No.	Channel	Men		Women	
		No.		No.	
1.	<i>Astha</i>	31		17	
2.	<i>Sanskar</i>	23		25	
3.	<i>Star Plus</i>	19		19	
4.	<i>Aaj Tak</i>	16		11	
5.	<i>Sony</i>	11		7	
6.	<i>Zee TV</i>	8		3	
	<i>Others</i>	23		11	

For Children:

Once again, the women did not have much to say on this. Their only recommendation was the news (16 women). The men reinforced this

choice but also recommended entertainment shows including the `K shows, albeit in small numbers.

They are a little surer when it comes to channels:

The choices they have made here are similar to their choices for their peers: Star Plus, Aaj Tak Zee, SABe TV and Sony for the men, and Star, Zee, Sony, SABe TV and Aaj Tak for the women (in that order) Fifty per cent of the women recommended Star Plus which carries most of their favorite shows. The surprise here is that though the elderly respondents prefer to watch devotional channels and programmes they are curiously missing from their recommendations for their children.

Table 10 C: Programme you would recommend to children?

S.No	Programme	Men		Women	
		No.		No.	
1.	<i>News</i>	26		7	
2.	<i>Film</i>	5		-	
3.	<i>Ramayan</i>	4		1	
4.	<i>Match</i>	4		-	
5.	<i>KSBKBT</i>	3		3	
6.	<i>Mahabharat</i>	2		-	
7.	<i>Guruvani/Bhajan</i>	2		-	
	Others	12		2	

Table 10 D: Channels you would recommend to children?

S.No.	Channel	Men		Women	
		No.		No.	
1.	<i>Star Plus</i>	26		22	
2.	<i>Aaj Tak</i>	16		9	
3.	<i>Zee TV</i>	15		14	
4.	<i>Sony</i>	13		11	
5.	<i>SAB TV</i>	11		9	
6.	<i>Astha</i>	10		5	
7.	<i>Sanskar</i>	7		3	
	Others	20		18	

Grandchildren

Son Pari was the overwhelmingly favoured show of grandmothers for their grandchildren. The response was lukewarm towards everything else. The men did not adequately answer this question for us to arrive at any conclusions. However, men and women recommended almost the same channels for their grandchildren:

Men

Cartoon Network
Discovery
Asta
AajTak
Nat. Geographic

Women

Cartoon Network
Discovery
Nat. Geographic
Star News
Star Plus

Ten per cent of the men also recommended Star Plus to the children

Table 10 E: Programme they would recommend to their grandchildren?

S.No	Programme	Men		Women	
		No.		No.	
1.	<i>Sonpari</i>	-		21	
2.	<i>News</i>	6		4	
3.	<i>Alif Laila</i>	2		3	
4.	<i>Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki</i>	1		2	
5.	<i>Films</i>	-		2	
6.	<i>KSBKBT</i>	2		-	
	Others	3		5	

Table 10 F: Channels they would recommend to their grandchildren?

S.No	Channel	Men		Women	
		No.		No.	
1.	Cartoon Network	30		18	
2.	Discovery	23		17	
3.	Astha	21		3	
4.	Aaj Tak	11		3	
5.	National Geographic	10		9	
6.	Star Plus	8		5	
7.	Star News	3		6	
8.	Zee News	2		5	
9.	Sanskar	5		2	
10.	Sony	3		4	
11.	BBC/CNN	4		1	
12.	Zee TV	3		3	
	Others	4		4	

How do professionals look at the TV's popularity as a mass medium with the elderly?

Jitendra Nagpal, Consultant Psychiatrist, VIMHANS: *“TV being an audio-visual medium proves very friendly for the old especially those who experience problems with seeing or hearing”.*

Ajai Sinha, Producer/Director Ananda Communications: *“TV is like the baniya ke dukaan in the neighborhood. It has an easy access and caters to all your needs. Films have always been the magnified medium presenting a larger than life picture but serials have tried to bring it closer to the reality and thus have been able to hook viewers.”*

Neelima Mishra, Secretary, Anand Niketan Vridha Ashram: *“TV is a major pass time for older people and keeping one connected to the world. In fact it is only in old age that one realises the utility of TV. We have a TV in the common room but there are many inmates who have their own persona TV sets. Some of them really keep it very loud. The whole aashram*

Phase II - Qualitative Feedback - Case Studies

Profiling Four different Universe of Elderly Viewers

The four case studies we conducted with individuals from diverse social-economic backgrounds, eclectic media needs and patterns of usage clearly showed us that each individual shares a unique relationship with this medium, which is primarily guided by their existential reality.

While selecting the respondents, we took utmost care so as to maintain as diverse a group as possible in terms of health, education, income, entertainment/information needs, lifestyle, individual abilities and interests and most importantly their emotional and psychological state.

I - Mr. and Mrs. K, a Tamil Brahmin couple live in their flat in East Delhi. Mr. K (80) retired from his government service twenty years back. They have three children- one son and daughter are settled abroad and one daughter is settled in West Delhi. Their lifestyle indicates that they are deeply religious. Mr. K suffers from hearing loss and cardiac problems. Mr. K (73) doesn't have any health complaints.

II - Mr. and Mrs. G, live in their double-storey house near Ghaziabad border. Mr.G (72) has retired from Government service. Mrs. G (68) has not worked formally, but has anchored shows on All India Radio and has held painting exhibitions. Primarily a nuclear set-up, but their son, an IIT graduate lives at the first floor with his family. They also have two daughters (both are professionals) who are married and settled. Mr. G has undergone bypass surgery and Mrs. G complained of pain in her knees and bones.

III – Mrs. S who retired as a physical education teacher four years ago, hails from Muzzafrabad (in Pakistan occupied Kashmir). She lives with her husband in a South Delhi colony dominated by post partition migrants from more than fifty years. She shared an emotional and nostalgic account of her father's death during the 1947 riots. Her husband suffered a major accident because of which he was hospitalised for two years with multiple fractures in arms and legs, head injury and severe amnesia. This has left her financially broke. Her mother who used to live with them died, as she could not face the trauma of her son- in law going into amnesia. Mrs. S has always been and is still the main support (financial

and emotional) in both her marital and natal home. She has three daughters - all married and settled in different cities of India.

IV – Mr. M who hails from Bangladesh lives in a south Delhi colony dominated by Bengalis. He is a widower (74) and lives with his married son (only child) and grandchildren. Mr. M used to work with a travel agency.

Viewing Profile

Case Study I

Mr. K goes to the temple in the morning and evening. Major part of his day is spent in reading religious books, newspapers and magazines. He watches news, sports and music-based programmes.

Mrs. K spends her morning time in housework and switches on the TV in the afternoon to watch some serials. As she loves music, she usually listens to cassettes on the tape recorder. In the evening she goes out for a walk and occasionally to the temple with her husband for *aarti*. Apart from some family gatherings, they don't go out.

At night they watch TV together starting from 7 p.m. - largely serials and soaps on Sun TV. Mrs. K tells him the story of the serials while he is reading a book or a magazine. When Mr. K watches news, Mrs. K goes to another room and reads books. They also watch quiz and sports programmes.

Case Study II

Mrs. K – After her morning rituals, she does puja and meditation. Then she switches on the TV for religious programmes on Aastha Channel. Later part of the morning is spent on housework and taking care of her husband. Over lunch, she along with her husband watches serials *KKusum* and *Bhabhi* and news programmes for some time.

In the evening, while having dinner, they watch Astha, news, *Kyunki....*, and *Kahani....*

She also likes programmes on discovery and the National Geographic channels.

Case Study III

Mr and Mrs.G viewing habits are exactly the same except for the morning because Mr. G is a late riser. They accommodate each other's viewing. Husband watches "her" serials in the afternoon and she watches "his" English movies.

At 6 in the morning, after her walk, Mrs. G does some exercises while watching *Bhagwat* on Aastha channel and the 6 minutes health capsule on one of the channels. She has positioned the TV just in front of the kitchen so that she can watch TV while working. After completing the housework, at 12.30 p.m., she watches *Kasauti Zindagi Kay*, *Kumkum* and *Bhabhi* on Star Plus. *Jassi Jaise Koi Nahin* is her favourite programme, which comes at 2 p.m. on Sony TV. In the evening, after she

They watch news at any part of the day. There is no favorite bulletin or channel. Though they seemed more inclined to DD News. Mr. G hears All India Radio every afternoon from 2 to 3 p.m. as it gives him all the news. Mr. and Mrs. G had no interest in cricket or any other sports.

Case Study IV

Mr. M's is an exception. Unlike others, his daily routine is not dominated by television. His day starts at 5.30 in the morning with yoga and *pranayam*. He then wakes up the family and contribute in the family chores like dropping the grandchildren to the bus stop (also picks them back in the afternoon). After dropping the kids, he goes to meet his peers in the park. After coming back he reads newspaper and magazines particularly related to the travel industry.

He is also a member of a religious society, which organises readings and discussions of religious text and cultural events. All these engagements keep him occupied.

Though, he had initially said that he has no time for TV, his later sharing pointed out that he surfs in and out of television while his family members are watching them. In the list of programmes, we found mention of films, serials and cartoon.

Findings:

1. TV an integral part of their lives, and window to the world

One important finding is that television viewing has increased incredibly for most of them after crossing the 60 years milestone in their life. Physical limitation due to ageing was cited as one of the major reasons.

“We don’t go out much. Only, occasionally we go out and that too alone as there is no one to accompany us. My daughter lives too far”

“After my husband's illness, now I don’t go out. For the daily requirement also, I depend on local vendors who deliver goods at the doorstep. Only on Sunday, I go to the Radha Soami Satsang.”

But, more importantly, increased TV watching can also be seen as a direct sign of disengagement from the “real” world; which they feel is no longer “interested” in them

“We have served our families and the nation in our younger years. Our purpose is over. Now what good are we?”

They feel that the young generation, not just their own children, are not interested in any kind of interaction with them and this has left them with a big void in their lives.

“The youngsters don’t have the time and patience to talk to us. When we talk, it is only in monosyllables. Today, we can only interact with our peers. Our social life gets restricted this way but there is no option”

Many of them shared the view that living in a cluster with like-minded people or people with similar experiences and existential realities had helped to some extent (though they were very clear that nothing can replace what their children’s company offers them).

“There are many others like us in our colony who have retired as government servants. So we have things in common to talk about. If they don’t see us for a day, someone or the other comes and asks us our well being. We don’t sit at home in the evenings. It is necessary for us to go out and meet people. That is why we are in the temple till about 7 in the evening.”

“I make idli or sweets for the children around me. They call me Daadi. They tell me about their school activities.”

“This kind of neighbourhood is very convenient where we know people for years. We also feel safe and looked after.”

But, they added that more was required to fill the void, which perhaps has come to them in the form of a television. Thus, the primary gratification the ageing audiences sought from television is a sense of being more involved in the world, entertainment, acquiring information and passing time. Television engages them emotionally through soaps and serial, spiritually through religious programming and also serves their infotainment needs through news and information based programming.

“Television gives us some idea of what is happening around us as well keep us connected with the world. This way we don’t feel that we are sitting at home all the time. Two people sitting at home all the time can not only result in constant bickering but can also demoralise them. Television gives us the required vent.”

“It has entertainment for us. When the serials are not there on Saturday and Sunday we go to the temple.”

“If television is not there, we will sit and discuss our own problems. There is something or the other on our minds always. If not about us, we will unnecessarily sit and worry about someone else’s health or go to the STD booth and talk to our relatives. There is nothing else to look forward to, especially when you are alone and you don’t know what is going to happen next.”

Thus, to a greater extent, we can say that television has replaced lost social contacts for older viewers and in a way is helping them maintain an ongoing sense of participation in society and combat feelings of alienation and loneliness.

But, at the same time, it would be unfair for us to say that our senior citizens are couch potatoes who don’t have any hobby or other interests to pursue. Most of the men and women we met for this indepth analysis had diverse interests. Some of them had various social engagements like neighbourhood clubs, temples etc. and some liked reading and writing.

“I do a lot of reading and translation work. I was always interested in writing. Now, I am able to give it some quality time.”

While most of them seemed quite grateful to TV for filling their “empty nests”, one of them seemed skeptical about how TV has replaced any other activity.

“Before TV came, I used to do a lot of needle work and knitting. Even though we had TV from the 80s, we have started intense watching only in the last five - six years. Since serials began on Sun TV, I can’t stay away from the tube.”

However, though TV watching is not their sole activity, it surely is something which is giving them a sense of participation and inclusion in the wider fabric of life.

2. Divergent Interests

We got feedback on almost every genre of television programming like news, sports, music, crime, action, soaps, comedies, religious and information (read wildlife etc).

A look at the preferences of older audiences reveals that soaps and serial are most frequently watched by them, followed by religious programmes. News, musical shows and information programmes also emerged as their favourites.

How a production house profiles an elderly viewer?

“Television talks to the great Indian middle class, more specifically to the one with rising income. The preferences show that soaps, movies - in fact, anything that makes for compelling storytelling - works for this vast segment, including the elderly. Although, I am not aware of any research on what elderly like, but I feel that cricket being a generic passion in the country, may again also attract the elderly. Religion does work, but obviously, religion is not all they want to watch, or else the religious channels would have been figuring somewhere in the higher TRP brackets.”

Surprisingly, most of them didn’t mention comedies and sports as their favourites.

The preference for news was noticed more in men than women.

Consistent viewing habits appeared to be based on environmental factors. For example, we learnt that older women watched soaps, romance and religious shows regardless of their living arrangement, perhaps as a way of involving themselves emotionally beyond themselves.

On news channels, it didn't matter to them what they were watching. However they perceived news channels as being biased to a party or issue. Thus they were basically surfing in and out of news channels.

“Each channel has its own news. I have no particular liking for any one. I just go on changing channels when I am watching. I like to watch Tamil news because it provides me with all the news of my place.”

“I look at news anytime in the day or evening. But there is no favourite channel or bulletins.”

“I listen to All India Radio every afternoon from 2 to 3 p.m. It gives me all the news. On television, I prefer DD news because it gives simple news. But our cable operator deliberately gives a bad reception so that one can't watch DD.”

“I find programmes like Big Fight very superficial. They just talk - no information.”

Among soaps, they largely watched family dramas. All the 'K' serials were repeatedly mentioned during the discussions. They were watched mostly during prime time (between 7 – 11 p.m.). *Kyunki...*, *Kahani...*, *Jassi...*, *Bhabhi*, *Mettioli*, *Appa* were some of their favourites.

Most of them also liked information programmes on Discovery and National Geographic channels but it was mostly during the “extra time” available to them in a day. Music based programmes were another favourite. Only one of our respondents mentioned sports as his favourite genre.

3. The keyword – CHOICE

The majority of seniors actively chose the programmes they wanted. In fact, they have made their own little (or extensive) programme schedules for the day and adjusted their other activities around it. It is absolutely vital for us to look at this finding in the light of their dignity and responsibility for self being respected.

In fact, though it is true that every viewer at each stage of their life cycle makes choices (regarding media use) and these reflect not only their current needs and tastes but also their identity. These choices by an elderly viewer gain more significance because of the dynamic relationship they share with the medium.

Our study, clearly suggests that older people enjoyed more freedom on the remote when they are alone but even when part of joint families they negotiate their own viewing preferences. Also between the couple we didn't see any conflict over the choice of channel or programme. In fact they were very accommodating to each other's preferences and choices.

“Earlier, there was some clash of interests. Now that we are only two of us, usually in the morning I watch the news for sometime. In the evening, she is watching serials. So there is no question of deciding about the channel.”

“At night we watch together. Sometimes I tell him the story as I am watching. He is reading a book or a magazine.”

“Even though I am not interested I will be sitting there and reading a newspaper. She will watch and she will tell me something about the story.”

Mr. M, stays in a joint family and has little interest in television compared to the other respondents, had a “cordial” sharing of the remote. *“I don't watch serials much. But my family does. I don't sit through the entire episode, but whatever little I catch I get an idea what it is about. My daughter-in-law calls me whenever there are specific serials that I enjoy.”*

4. Changes in television content over the years getting linked with their inner conflict of “traditional” and “modern”

The elderly have long memories stretching back to the best of TV, radio, films, newspapers and even other forms of popular culture. They tend to feel that contemporary TV is very mediocre. In fact they feel that they are in some sense compromising their principles by watching the present day programmes.

“Those days on television there was more of cultural activities. Now there is more on crime and how to do crimes.”

“Earlier serials were very good. They had some messages but now it is just for entertainment. Nirmala, Srikant, Hum Log, Ajnabi, Mitti Ki Sughand, these serials were brilliant. They were based on literary classics. I still can’t forget the face of Priti Khare who played Nirmala. She is still in my memory. But today it is all saas-bahu – female dominated serials where men play a negligent role. Now vamps play roles equivalent to those of Pran, KN Singh in our times. Look at the expressions (mudra) which they make, it is repulsive. Earlier vamps like Aruna Irani used to look vulnerable. But, these women look repulsive.”

“Nowadays, I don’t like any of the films. There is so much violence and young boys and girls shown in the films. I don’t say that others don’t like it but it does not suit my taste.”

Most of the elderly also felt that today’s content was spreading more negativity.

“There are more of criminal activities on the news. More negative things in news than positive. That is also indicative of our times. Previously I could hand over my belongings to a porter. There was trust.”

“There is too much of extra-marital in today’s serials. Every man has a second wife or girl friend. These kinds of portrayals of men and women leave bad impact on children. They will feel that these things are real, accepted by the society which is not the case, at least not in our culture.”

They were very disturbed about the impact all this is having on the younger generation.

“These programmes are colouring their worldview. They feel that divorces, remarriages are natural.”

“We don’t imitate the reel world but the children do. They should make films and serials, which present good role models.”

“My four year old granddaughter cannot pronounce the word bhoot but she wants to watch only them. She watches Makdi everyday on the CD, besides Koi Mil Gaya and Baby’s Day Out, which are her favourites.”

“Serials are always showing cunning wives, scheming daughters-in-law and revengeful persons. This is sure to create very harmful impact on the society”

“In our times children were obedient to parents and were in their control. Thus parental discipline, authority and socialization were the key inputs for their value development. But now the new generation is more dependent on the media for their value development. Parents do not have much control over them. They get more influenced by media rather than their own parents.”

“Earlier they used to have moral science in school, apart from parental control, both of which are no more there. Amidst such scenario media has the greater responsibility to play an important role in the strengthening the moral and ethical values in life. On the contrary, our serials are spreading vices of hatred, revenge, vengeance”.

“These days when relatives come, I stand and welcome them. I go and get chair for my son-in-law but my son who is sitting there won’t move. I am not complaining but due to the various pressures of life, they are forgetting our culture or basic etiquette and in that TV is playing an important role.”

“We see a hell lot of difference in our children when they were students and our grandchildren. My grandson has taken a break for one year and is preparing for competition. My son never needed this break. These days children spend more time in front of TV and as a result their studies is suffering.”

“There are too many rituals and what all they show lacks rationality. They show Karvachauth in such a lavish manner, we in real life don’t do it like that. Touching feet is fine; wear good clothes also but don’t overdo it. You are showing these families to be orthodox, but at the same each son is having extra-marital affair.”

“I do not like the culture of nudity being promoted by various models and channels like MTV. The girls in skimpy dresses, dancing in suggestive poses develops the wrong perspectives among male members. This is spreading the wrong culture of viewing girls only as sexual objects. All girls are just seen as sexual objects. It does not matter then whether she

is in suit or jeans. Girls are teased and openly molested. This is the result of wrong gender values being propagated through media. Consequently right from the three year old girl to old women all feel same.”

“Television is also promoting the materialistic values. All the time all the families' settings are shown with bests of furniture, women are always shown to bejeweled and running about in best of cars, this creates aspirations and desires in the mind of young people. These young minds become “greedy” and then want to get the same riches “somehow” and “anyhow”. Fulfillment of the needs becomes critical and the means whether fair or unfair do not hold any relevance.”

But, they were also very categorical about the impact or the no impact TV is having on them.

“Television doesn't impact us. Ours is a real life, it is no play. Parvati is false and so is Tulsi. I have decided in my life that I will be myself and not get influenced by anything or anyone”.

5. Representation of older people on television

Most of the respondents shared that though there is enough representation of the elderly on TV fiction, it is largely unrealistic.

As most of them strive for company in their lives, they were not able to understand how the TV characters are not shown wanting company or in any kind of social interactions. *“Most of the serials only show these relations within the family, there is no interaction with outside people. It is unfair to show that elderly don't have any life of their own.”*

Their experiences with the joint family were also very different from what was shown on TV. This became more evident when they shared their role model on TV. The couple who said that they are fine because they have detached themselves from the *moh* (worldly affection) of their children. *“We have detached ourselves. It is much more peaceful. My son has shifted to the first floor. He comes and spends time. I cook things and send upstairs. Grandchildren come and spend time with us. In fact, it has given us freedom. If we are busy, we shut the door and when we want company, we open the door. We do fight sometimes. But all that is very minor. Till date, we are happy and have no trouble with our children. Do*

not know what the future has in store for us though. Anyway, he gets pension. So we will be independent.”

And we asked the same couple about an elderly TV character that they like. The answer was Ba in *Kyunki*. They liked the way she was respected by the family – the entire family of four generations!

“Among old people, Ba in Kyunki is the best. She is ideal. She is very adjusting, loving and compromising. She believes in just giving love to people. But, in reality there can be no such woman. I hope that I was like her but most of us have jealousy. I don’t have a big heart like hers. The way she is respected in the house. I like the way she is pampered. We also want to be respected and loved like her.”

To this her husband said, *“There are two ways – life as it is and life as it should be. Ba is what should be. She might not be real but she is an inspiration to us. Her suffering is also very natural. But one should learn to recover soon. She is a sensitive character and she doesn’t take her anger on others. It is commendable.”*

They were also appreciative of other characters. *“Bebe in Jassi Jaise Koi Nahin is a very likeable character. She is humorous, happy go lucky. Not many older women are like her today who want to laugh freely and enjoy. Have you seen any older woman laughing loudly or smiling even? And what I like specifically is that she understands her son and encourages her daughter-in-law and granddaughter.”*

“In Kumkum, again the in-laws are the adjusting type. In Bhabhi, Jhaiji and Dadaji are loving.” But at the same these characters are exaggeration. Nobody can be so good.”

“I have always lived in a joint family. Nothing happened in those days without the consent and participation of the elders or the head of the family. But, now our children feel they have to be independent and they don’t like our interference. Though they pretend to respect our wishes, but now it is just telling us what they have done and that they require our presence.”

“Daughters do consult us but it is not necessary that they should take our advice. But they do inform us about what they are planning to do.”

“I have four grandchildren. But I don’t manage to see them often. We can only expect them to keep well. We talk with them on the phone. That is better than taking a long trip on the bus to go and visit them. Once they have their own family then they don’t have the time for others. We must also understand that. Our grandchildren also don’t feel like sitting and talking with us. At least the daughter or son will do it out of some link, but the grandchildren just come out and they will wish us and then they will go back to their rooms or their friends. They don’t find anything to talk with us or spend time with us.”

Though, there were some specific elements, which they found realistic. They felt that the tussle between mother in law and daughter in law, when depicted within the range of household seems realistic, but when it crosses the boundaries, it becomes incredible and unrealistic.

“When you live in a joint family. It always happen that an outsider comes and disturbs the peace. Like in Metivoli, the sisters living together happily till they get married and their respective husbands prevent them from meeting each other. Most of these things happen in real life. Thus, we remain hooked till we see the joint family getting together blurring all their differences.”

“There is a serial Appa, where Appa who is the head of the family feels that his children don’t respect him. While this is happening, outsiders come and spoil the peace of the family. We don’t like that. Elders should not be made to suffer because of mischief by younger people. But, still we love to watch joint families. Joint family have their own merits. But, at the same time we are aware that we should make lot of adjustments and a conscious effort of being non-interfering if we want to live with our children. We should realise that though, we may continue to advice them we should not compel them to accept our suggestions. We must realise that in our times, we used to spent all our earning on our family but now children don’t like to do that. And accordingly we should not expect that from them. Serials should counsel the older people and make them realise this difference.”

When we asked the same couple about a serial that they identified with. They responded how the experiences of the older couple in the serial were a true reflection of theirs and how they were using the conflict and anxiety shown in the serial to counsel themselves.

“At 9.30, Sahana comes on Sun TV. In the serial, the three children of the couple are shown to be staying in USA while they live alone. The woman misses her children a lot. Her husband tries to make her understand that both of them should learn to live alone. He is shown to be angry with his children because he feels that once when he needed them the most, they were not there. His brother tries to make him understand that because they live so far away, it is not possible for the children to come and take care of him but he should not misunderstand their intention or doubt their love towards him. They also show that the father might be angry with the children but when the bell rings he is the first one to pick the phone. I like this serial because it makes us understand that love and affection is always there in the family. Parents must understand all this. If a child is far away and cannot be there that does not mean that he does not love you. Parents relationship with the child never ends.”

They very categorically mentioned that while the older generation inspires them to become selfless and loving we really hope that the younger generation would inspire their children to become respectful and patient.

In news and news-based programmes, most of them said that they don't remember many stories in news on older people and their concerns. *“We do watch a lot of news but, unfortunately do not remember any news item, which was specifically for older people. These days there is more entertainment and film related news, which puts me off. As I have told you am not interested in the Page 3 culture.”*

“We hear of the murders of old people in the news. For a couple of days there is a lot of attention paid to the problems of elderly people living alone, in the media, TV and newspapers, but after that it is back to only the young. When we read these things we know something negative has happened. In the afternoon we watch only the Sun news.”

“There is not much representation of the old people in news. It is more of the new generation. Most programmes are also for the new generation. I don't think I can recall anything which has old people in it.”

“The news is dependent on what comes, but generally they cater more to the younger generation. Their news content should have more for the older people. Programmes should try to help the older generation, not talk of separation, and adjust to the comforts of the older people. Even

within the media they can represent this. Bring stories and serials where importance is given to the older people. My interest is in music and dance, in the culture that is the interest for the older people.”

Only the religious programme highlights the virtues of old age. Eg. Sudhangshu's programme compares mother with Earth and her lap is considered equivalent to heaven. He endorses the values of respect for the elderly.

Feedback from FGDs

As has been mentioned in the introductory chapter, we have conducted three Focus Group Discussions with three distinct groups of men and women. Our aim was to look at the projection of the elderly from their own eyes and their assessment of the impact of television content on the society.

Following are the key findings:

1. Viewing Habits - Why they like what they watch?

Musafir Hoon Yaroon, Yatra and other travelogues – As age has decreased their mobility, they prefer such programmes, which take them to different places and cultures. *“It was wonderful to watch Mansarovar yatra. I enjoyed it more also because I know that I won’t be able to go there in this life.”*

Saas-bahu serials – They feel that these serials are not vulgar and are sending right messages to the younger generation when it comes to respecting their elders. *“In all the serials, the younger generation listens to their parents. We hope our children would learn some lessons from it”*

“One good thing is that all these serials have old people. How can a family be complete without us? We want to see how the old people are being treated in the family.”

“I still remember a programme on DD 1 where aged people were shown sitting in the park and telling their story to each other. The narrative was very realistic.”

“We want so see programmes, which show older people suffering in the hands of their children. This would make the young people realize their mistakes as well as help older people to understand what mistakes they make while handling their parenthood and other related aspect of their life”.

Sports –

Cricket is a hot favorite for most of them.

“It is fun to watch sports events and programmes.”

More importantly, they also felt that it was something, which everyone in the family or friends enjoyed together.

“When it is cricket is “more the merrier” kind of atmosphere. Even our children, grandchildren, their friends everyone gets cemented. There are no age barriers at that moment”

Cricket a rage with Old age Home inmates

“When cricket is being shown on T.V everybody in the ashram watches it with full interest They pray for the country together leaving aside their daily quarrels and ego hassles. The atmosphere in the ashram becomes good and harmonious during the cricket season. They might wait for phone calls from their dear ones all other days, but on a cricket match day, it is seen as a huge disturbance.

- Neelima Mishra

News –

News on different channels is also popular with the elderly. They surf in and out of channels looking for news - both national and international.

National Geographic and Discovery Channel – The Programmes on these channels, they find are not only informative but also entertaining. *“TV is answering many of the queries about science, about birds and animals I had from my childhood.”*

But what remained was that though they love watching animals and birds but if they had to choose between *Jassi...* and Discovery, they voted for *Jassi..* but also said that during ad breaks they will go to Discovery. The reason being that they are interested in the “story”.

Religious channels like Aastha and Sanskar - These channels are extensively watched by the elderly for the spiritual discourse by renowned religious leaders, *artis*, information on *ayurveda* etc. Most of the participants appreciated religious channels like Aastha and Sansar as “they are reviving our old culture”.

They were particularly appreciative of the fact that these channels telecast different point of views by showing preaching of various religions and

gurus. They said that the aged people enjoy these channels more is because they understand spirituality.

“In our days, it was taught in schools and also we have that required mental maturity which the younger people don’t have”.

“Whenever I want to concentrate and feel the oneness with God, I watch Aastha Channel.”

2. Compulsive viewing and obsessive attachment with certain programmes

The elderly display a significant degree of compulsive viewing and obsessive attachment to certain programmes. We find that they wait all day for their favourite shows - it gives them something to look forward to and creates a sense of anticipation throughout the day.

The elderly citizens realize that not all that goes into content can be justified as completely worth its while or the best possible way of spending time. Yet they “feel” that the fundamentals or the core idea of the stories in these serials were true to life and hence, they continue to watch them, hoping against hope that they will return to the elements with which they began.

“These days we (women at the club in the evening) only talk about how pathetic Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhie Bahu Thi has become. They should now discontinue the serial. They started with a good concept but now it is being dragged too much. I want to stop watching the serial but it is difficult because Tulsi is very dear to me. I am really disturbed that though she has done so much for the family, she has suffered. I will offer prasad at temple, if Tulsi returns home.”

“Though, I watch mostly serials, I don’t have a very high opinion about them. All serials are bad and there is not a single, which is good. But, I am compelled to watch them as I have got tangled into the story. It is just a matter of habit (a sort of addiction) or a matter of convenience because you watch them while you are having your lunch or dinner. Please don’t see it as an endorsement of the quality of the serial. It is just lack of alternatives.”

“Saas-bahu serials might be dragging and having illogical twists and turns in the story but they are giving the new generation the right messages.”

“I watch serials from 7 to 11 in the evening. I have been watching Kyunki Saas Bhi because it had a good subject but now it has become very boring and is being dragged unnecessarily.”

3. Elderly have a distinct profile as a viewers

The elderly constantly emphasize the fact that they have a distinct profile and needs as viewers. To satisfy this distinct need they find they have to choose programmes from across channels and genres, which cater to their needs. Therefore, they tend to be more loyal to programmes than to channels.

They like to project themselves as quality conscious and discerning as viewers. By the same token, they are also very conscious of programmes that are unworthy of viewing for various reasons and often feel that the presence of these programmes makes TV harmful for young people.

“My favourite is Alpha Bangla. Having lived in the villages of Bangladesh in my childhood, I love watching the countryside programmes on the Bengali channel”

“I like travel programmes like Musafir Hoon Yaron and Yatra. With decreased mobility, through these programmes, I can visit different places and cultures.”

“I loved watching the Mansarovar Yatra on TV. It was wonderful. I enjoyed it more also because I know that I won't be able to go there in this life.”

“Great Romances on Discovery is very interesting as it tells me about the history which entertained me”.

“TV is answering many of the queries I had from my childhood. Why do earthquakes occur? How do birds and animals live their lives etc? All these answers now I am getting from TV”.

“MIH channel shows artis from 6 to 6.30 in the evening which we watch with much devotion”.

“I love Khana Khazana by Sanjeev Kapoor and try his recipes.”

“Religious channels like Aastha and Sansar are reviving our old culture. Channels telecast different point of views by showing preaching of various religions and gurus. We enjoy it more because we understand spirituality. In our days, it was taught in schools and also we have that required mental maturity which the younger people don’t have.”

“Whenever I want to concentrate and feel the oneness with God, I watch Aastha Channel”.

The elderly often justify their viewing schedule and habits on the grounds that it is in sync with their identity or some dominant pursuit and activity that they are engaged in. In fact, much of the time when they talk about their television viewing they tend to link it to their core interest.

Then comes the “second best” which they watch to “accommodate” each other’s (family or spouse) preferences. Some mandatory time is set aside for such “dedicated” viewing. It is very clear that they don’t want to be perceived as “couch potatoes”.

“I am 80 years old living in an old age home. I have a TV in my room. As I am interested in selling and buying shares I only watch CNBC. Look at how different shares are fairing and then decide to buy or sell. The agent comes here and takes the money. Today only, I have sold some shares.”

“I like to watch Tamil news because it provides me with all the news of my place. News of the south. English news I like to watch to get an idea of what is happening in other places and outside India.”

They do admit that some of their viewing has to do with the need for “entertainment” and “fun”. We find that some of this linked up with specific time slots and schedules. The two schedules that stand out distinctly are late morning and afternoon and prime time. Late morning and early afternoon, after the household chores and more serious tasks have been completed they are ready for a degree of unwinding before the TV.

Moreover, as a couple, they feel the need to connect with each other. TV helps them to do this, share a meal in a more amicable mood and fill in the voids. Similarly, during late evening, after their routine outings in the park, etc., they experience a sense of desolation. Once again, TV helps them to connect with a surrogate family – that of the serial - the narrative helps them to draw parallels with their own experiences (now and then) in the family, voice their apprehensions and emotions. It can also help rid them of any uneasy emotions or thoughts.

“Television helps in self-expression. There are many things which we want to say to our family but are unable to do so directly, these serials do it for us.”

“My neighbourhood friend asked me why I do not buy another TV for myself if my husband does not let me watch serials in the evening. I got very annoyed with her. This is the time we spent with each other, why should I lose it? Women in my group have three television sets at home. They all sit in different rooms and watch TV because nobody wants to tolerate the other. It is pathetic. People are becoming superficial. They are leading meaningless lives. TV can’t replace the joy of togetherness.”

4. Rising crime reporting on TV is making them paranoid

Some of the senior citizens also said that the recent violent incidents and their media coverage has frightened them.

“We hear of the murders of old people in the news. For a couple of days there is a lot of attention paid to the problems of elderly people living alone, in the media, TV and newspapers, but after that it is back to only the young. When we read these things we know something negative has happened. “

“I am scared of going into my neighbourhood park in the evening. What if somebody attacks me?”

“I was once robbed by a young man while I was going to temple. I had 10 rupee note and house keys in my purse. I asked the man to take the money but leave the keys as I would have been stranded. He felt pity and returned me the keys. But, I wonder whether we are safe and are not seen as easy targets”.

“There is too much of crime and violence on TV. It is actually giving ideas to the criminal. Giving minutest details of the modus operand should be avoided.”

“Though coverage of militant operations and the gory picture of bomb blasts and incidents like Akshardham might be disturbing at times but it is extremely necessary to expose the general masses to these acts of violence.”

6. Concerns

▪ Unrealistic and missing representation of the elderly

Portrayal of the old is unrealistic and the “real” issues are being largely ignored by the medium. Ba in *Kyunki*. . is single character the vast majority of elderly viewers appreciated. However, at the same time, most of them admitted that there is nothing realistic about her.

The participants at the FGD said that they find the characters like Ba and the ones in *Bhabhi* too idealistic and sacrificing.

Another response, which came from some of them was the negative portrayal of the mother-in-law in some serials. *“Today the mother-in-laws have learned to be patient and compromising but most of the television serials shown them to be jealous and scheming. Why are they demeaning the women so much”*.

“There is not much representation of the old people in news or other things. It is more of the new generation. Most programmes are also for the new generation. I don’t think I can recall anything, which has old people in it.”

“We do watch a lot of news but, unfortunately do not remember any news item, which was specifically for older people. These days, there is more entertainment and film related news, which puts me off. I am not interested in the Page 3 culture.”

“Our characters are based on every day life experiences, people around us. As there is no single parameter about how the elderly feel and behave, there cannot be much generalisation in their characterisation. Also, we are trying to talk to those that the advertiser is targeting. This is dictated by who has the purchasing power

“TV doesn’t show any of our concerns. Ninety per cent of our problems are related with the lack of medical facilities. There is no social security, no hospital for us,

and no health insurance. We should be given subsidised medicines. Media has to help us pressurise the government regarding this".

"There are no concessions even for the old age homes. These nursing homes and hospitals are totally commercialised. When we go to these hospitals, we have to stand in long lines with other patients. No one gives us any preference. One tablet costs me 15 rupee. How will I afford it? TV never takes up these issues. Government sets up health camps – free health check up for all! But, what will happen next? How will we buy medicines or afford surgery?"

- **Vulgarity on TV was another major concern. The elderly were very critical about the impact it was having on the younger generation.**

"There was no need for Mandira Bedi to wear such clothes during the Cricket World Cup. But, she wore them irrespective of the fact that all this leaves a bad impression on the minds of the young children. Cricket is watched also by children who are very young unlike Channel V, which is watched for largely adolescents."

"Children feel that we are orthodox. We try to talk sense especially to our grandchildren but they don't listen to us. We also do not push them too much because this way they might stop coming to us."

"Today, kids ask us - how this girl has become a mother without marriage? We feel so awkward by these questions."

"Even the unwed mothers are shown to be very proud of themselves. This is wrong and leaves a bad impression on the minds of the children as they

are not in a position at that age to judge what is right and what is wrong.”

“TV is spoiling children. There is so much nudity. A girl goes to discos in the night in bad clothes. If the foundation is like that how can you expect her to take care of their father-in-laws later in life?”

- **Increasing Lust for materialistic life among the young**

Most of the participants also said today’s generation has a lust for materialistic life. They were divided on whether TV plays a big role in this. Some of them felt that TV is a commercial medium and no whether they show an ad, serial, news or any other type of programme, they are selling something – a life style, product, way of thinking etc. Others said that having materialistic comfort in life is not bad. If TV expresses it, fine, but they should not compel people.

They also said that there are too many rituals and dressing up shown in the serials, which we don’t find in the real life. Due to this, they are unable to relate to the serials.

“People are trying to replicate these rituals and grandeur in their lives, which is increasing materialism in the society.

“The lavish weddings shown in the serials are being copied by people who may or may not be able to afford it”.

“Children are trying to imitate many things. This whole concept of throwing a surprise party was never there before. But, today, children are throwing lavish parties, which leave a hole in the pocket.”

- **Negative portrayal of women**

Most of the participants complained that there is an increasingly negative portrayal of women on television. They said that such portrayals where women are shown as either too good or extremely bad not only gives them complex but also leaves a bad impression on the minds of the children who look up at these TV characters as role their role models.

“Even the unwed mothers are shown to be very proud of themselves. This is wrong and leaves a bad impression on the minds of the children as they

are not in the position at that age to judge what is right and what is wrong.”

- **Serials are dragging to the limit of boredom**

Most of the participants held the view that Ekta Kapoor is taking her viewers for granted. *“Whenever she wants she kills someone, then shows her alive with a new face with the help of plastic surgery. These twists in the stories have too become predictable and boring.”*

They commended *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* saying that it is something new and humorous. They described her as `honest and truthful”.

Suggestions

By the elderly, the caregivers and those involved in geriatric care

A) Promoting Mutual Respect

TV serials could preach to the younger generation that they should respect their elders and take care of them. This can be done in two ways - by showing elderly people living with their families, being respected and valued or by showing older people suffering at the hands of their children. Either way the young people will realise the mistakes they make by ignoring or ill-treating their parents. People should be taught the importance of staying together.

The expectations of the old persons should be represented - what old parents expect in the dusk of their lives from their children should be shown.

Depiction of positive role models - *"I had a wonderful mother in law who loved me more than her daughter. My daughter has wonderful mother-in-law, but such characters are now shown in reel life. "*

But, more importantly, TV should counsel older people and make them understand that they should learn to let go. *"Elderly should be taught to accept their age and be less demanding on the younger generation through serials and documentaries".* (Neelima Mishra, Secretary, Anand Niketan Vridha Ashram)

B) More programmes offering health and lifeskill tips

Tell about *ayurveda* and instead of being too technical, media should provide simple facts and tips to help the elderly to remain physically and mentally healthy.

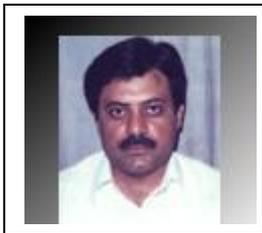
C) More niche programming and inclusion of the elderly in mass entertainment programmes

There should be a channel for older people like there is for kids, women and young people. This channel should have the following: religious/spiritual programmes, poetry/*shayari* and *kavi samelan*, music-based programmes featuring artistes from our times, archival music shows.

There should be programmes showcasing the talents of senior citizens. They should show more of musical and humorous programmes.

D) Tele-counselling

Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, Consulting Psychiatrist, VIMHANS:



“To counter the impact of TV fiction on viewers especially the elderly, what Ashok Kumar used to do for Hum Log should be attempted again. At the end of each episode, the way he explained the dilemma shown in the episode helped the viewers to come in terms with emotions it evoked in them. Most importantly, media should have programmes/channels, which carry positive messages for the old people. Positive messages would bring about a change in the way family and society looks at them. Together, we can help them to be qualitatively better citizens of the society not discarded elements who are not productive anymore.”

Use traditional knowledge and wisdom to promote the inclusion of the elderly in the family. Dr. Kalyan Bagchi, President, Society for Gerontological Research, India: *“The children should be taught from the very young age to respect their elders. We should use means of mass communication to tell them that they should treat their old parents exactly the way they want to be treated when they are old. Through religious teaching, serials and public service campaigns we can easily attempt this change in attitude.*

E) Media should advocate the concerns of the elderly

Media should play an active advocacy role in pressing government to start beneficial pension schemes for everyone irrespective of economic strata.

Media should ask the government to give the senior citizens subsidised or free health care after a certain age. If the health and pension problems were solved than 90% of their problems would be solved.

Television should advocate two of our immediate concerns – security problems (by motivating the police to start special programmes for the safety of the senior citizens) and home delivery of cooked food.

“Especially those men and women who live alone away from their children get really desperate especially when we are unwell. Even when we don’t have the strength to walk, we have stand and cook or become at the mercy of the servants who than take advantage of the situation. TV should help us advocate for a dibbawala food system especially in the colony where the old people live.”

Others

There should be a fashion shows for older people with judges like Wahida Rehman and Amitabh Bachchan. This would boost their self-esteem.

Not so happy ageing

Dr. A, a 73 years old Retd. Reader, University of Delhi

"After retirement, I tried to look into myself. Sometimes self is much more important than the person."

"Earlier I never participated in any family matters. I was not concerned much. But, now I make an effort to talk to my daughters, take care of my wife and take interest in the future of my son. It is only now that I have realised that man is a social animal and no one can live in isolation. I feel guilty for not realising this before."

"What I like on TV, my son doesn't. When he watches pop music, I quietly go out of the room. And when I switch on news or any information based programme he moves out and if I turn to his channel he comes back!"

"I don't watch serials because I can't watch it regularly. It interests you only if you are watching it without missing any single episode. Gap spoils its continuity".

"Listening to ghazals and music on the tape recorder and watching music based programmes is my first love. I regret that I never got formal training of music."

"We don't discuss much. My daughters are away and my son directly hits his room after coming back from the office".

"I do feel loneliness. Sometimes it grows right from my inner cell. A sense of nothingness develops and I try to reduce it by reading literatures"

"Whenever my grandson comes, I find him only around television. Either he goes to play cricket or watches detective, fighting, violence or the cartoon films. Today's children watch only these sort of programmes, so does he."

"Today, parents are not able to give time to their children. With both parents working, the cumulative income increases but what about the growth of the children."

"Media is not even contributing to 10 percent in the development and welfare of the society. It is only causing harm. It doesn't reflect our culture. Pop music is more popular than good music because of the promotion the former receives from the mass media. Children today don't want to read Vivekananda or Rabindranath Tagore rather they read cheap detective, violence and sex novels".

"Electronic media has given us some valuable things. I am so addicted to news that I know which news will come on which channel. At 1:30 I rush towards the television and come back after watching the news, then again at 6:30 and then at 9 p.m. "

"Sometimes my wife and son fight over the remote control and then I am required to resolve the matter. But I don't want to impose restriction on my son against his will".

"Fashion shows are only means of developing lust in the youngsters through exposing body parts of beautiful women. They are doing on the back of clothes designing and its impact is visible in the society. TV is a very strong medium but the print media is not very much effective".

"Responsibility of providing security to elderly persons is in the hand of politicians, rich people and on the other hand that of all the citizens. My brother lives in London he says that there are old homes. This is good in one way, as the Govt. doesn't want elders to live a miserable life. But other aspect is that no relative comes to visit them. Ethical and moral values are involved in it. I know so many elderly men and women whose lives are so miserable, they have every comfort but their life is surrounded by loneliness. In my opinion joint family system should be brought back. In western countries people are trying to bring the joint family system back. Our old system has some limitations but at the same time it has certain qualities. We should bring the old but the refined system back.

"Once my servant (15 years old girl) had tried to get into the habit of watching TV. I made her understand that it will lessen her interest of working and ultimately affect her income. She was in the habit of watching programme with us."

Part II - Media Content - Representation of the Elderly on TV

A) Television Fiction

Introduction

In the 2002 study conducted by CFAR for the Ministry of Social Justice Empowerment, an analysis of the representation of the elderly in TV fiction, threw up the following salient findings:

Increased Representation

- The representation of the aged had increased in TV fiction. In the last three years, they have gained visibility and importance.
- In general, TV fiction depicted the aged in a reasonably inclusive manner.
- A majority of serials dealt with families, joint families, in particular. Since the elderly are integral to the joint family, they played a major role in TV narratives.

Old Age - An Acceptable Condition

- Old age was depicted as an acceptable condition and the elderly were projected as people of relevance. In their relationships, old couples were happy in their marital relationships, and in harmony with those around them, in contrast to their juniors who were often in the middle of marital conflicts. *Ba* and *Babuji* in *Kyunki...*, *Babuji* and *Maji* in *Kahani...* typified this harmony.
- With a few exceptions, elderly characters were healthy, hearty and purposeful.
- The old were traditional but in synch with the modern world. They combined in themselves the necessary degree of wisdom and pragmatism. For instance, widows in TV serials dressed up in bright, contemporary clothes and jewelry. Most of the elderly were shown pursuing one hobby or the other. While *Dadi* and *Nani* in

Kutumb ran a gym for women, Ba of *Kyunki...* was shown taking a course in fashion designing.

Neelima Mishra:

"The Television portrayal of the elderly is totally superficial. If, in real life people were like babuji and ba, then there won't be any problem. Today the elderly don't accept their age. They are not ready to give us their control over matters. That is what is causing problems today. The young generation is also leading a very pressured and tough life. In such situations, they have to take care of their parents and children both. At this time, if the senior citizens would become demanding then it becomes very difficult for them. That is the reason why the families are breaking. I see it daily here."

Figures of Authority

- Old people represent tradition and continuity. In most of the serials, the elderly were the bedrock of the family and by inference, of society.
- Aged characters were deeply religious. Religious ceremonies depicted in serials were 'supervised' by them. In *Kyunki...* and *Kahani...*, the old parents were shown going for 'teerth yatra'.

Act as Mediators

- As the 'elders' of the family, the older characters symbolise authority. They frequently intervened in conflicts and settled issues. No generational clashes. Old people had the last word. The best example was *Babuji* of *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*. He enjoyed authority over his entire family. His grown-up sons fell to his feet begging his pardon whenever he was angry with them He slapped his foster daughter when she challenged his 'authority'.

Old age as comic relief

- Old age is a vehicle for comic relief. In *Kutumb*, the *Dadi-Nani* and their conflicting characteristics were used for humour. In *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke*, Amma was eccentric and idiosyncratic, with her own rules and regulations on how to run the house.

Areas of Concern

- **Little discourse on real problems faced by old people**

Subjects such as their failing health, inter-generational problems, financial difficulties, loneliness and the `role' of the elderly in modern, urban life – were absent. Increasingly, ageing parents are left alone, with their children either living in other cities or homes. The manner in which they cope, the problems they face, etc., were seldom dealt with.

- The elderly are often at the mercy of their children and financially dependent on them.
- From a gender perspective, the problems of old age widowhood were not tackled in any significant manner in TV fiction.
- Institutional support systems, be they medical facilities or social clubs, were ignored.
- TV fiction dealt with affluent people. There was no focus on the plight of the aged who are poor and/or `marginalised' by the social environment.



Ajai Sinha Producer and Director, *Astitiva Ek Prem Kahani*

“I made a serial on a 70 years old woman which nobody watched!”

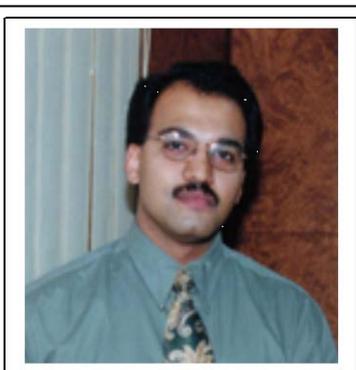
I made Samay; a story of a 70 years old woman who is trying to keep her family together; with lot of hope but due to lack of TRP it had to discontinue. Though the channel (ZEE) encouraged me, but at that time Kaun Banega Crorepati was airing and audiences were not watching anything else. I don't know what went wrong. But, the fact remains that if I made it once and the viewers rejected it, I can't take the risk of making it again.

I had targeted all age groups. Amma was such an interesting character that everybody would like to have an Amma like her. But, as one my actors told me that you are making a very good serial but would anyone be interested in watching the story of a mother!

My characterization of Amma was very different from those of today's saas-bahu serials. But, the onus of making a good effort successful truly

Current Study

The major new finding of the current study is that there is a greater degree of realism in the depiction of the elderly and of their lives. This is a **significant and noteworthy departure from the earlier study.**



Rajesh Pavitram, COO, Balaji Telefilms: *“As producers we don’t consider the representation of the aged in an isolated manner but take it as part of a whole. There is no intended message sent out - they are shown as part of society and the family.”*

The elderly continue to enjoy high representation in TV fiction. They remain pivotal characters who are active and central to the storylines. The elderly are highly respected by younger people. For example, in a new serial such as *Arzoo... Hai Tu*, (Sahara), the grandmother played by Sudha Shivpuri (*Kyunki’s* Ba) presides over the entire family and takes both the personal and business decisions.

Personal concerns regarding health and the ageing process continue to be ignored by TV fiction.

However, the last year has witnessed a shift of emphasis in the storyline of TV dramas, especially the daily soaps and new serials.

Current Sample

For a reality check, we watched serials such as *Kyunki*, *Kahani*, *Shagun*, *Des Mein Nikkla Hoga Chand*, which were part of our earlier study. They continue to be the most popular serials set in joint families with high representation of the elderly. Also, since *Kyunki...*, *Kahani...*, *Shagun* have advanced by 20 years, we have an extra generation of elderly people in these shows.

The rest of our sample consisted of serials that began after the previous study. These include, *Astitva...Ek Prem Kahani*, *Sambhav Asambhav*, *Karishma... The Miracles of Destiny*, *Saara Akaash*, *Awaz...Dil Se Dil Tak*, *Arzoo Hai Tu*, *Piya Ka Ghar*, *Kisse Apna Kahein* and *Devi*. These

serials cut across the most popular entertainment channels – Star Plus, Sony, Sahara Manoranjan and Zee.

In these serials, we find a greater diversity of situations and portrayals as well as a sense of realism that was by and large missing earlier. Since *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*, *Shagun* moved ahead by 20 years, they have also grown older. New serials have been introduced, which are trying to break the mould of *saas-bahu* family dramas: for example, *Astitva* (Zee) is about a woman in her mid thirties marrying a man 10 years her junior. *Sambhav Asambhav* deals with the theme of reincarnation, *Kisse Apna Kahein* is a Muslim social, *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* (Sony) looks at a middle class girl, a Plain Jane rising to the top of a fashion house, etc.

Younger and older

Simultaneously, there is a definite trend in popular serials to focus more on younger people. Therefore, with serials jumping 20 years ahead, we have a peculiar situation where serials are growing younger even as they grow older. Previously, the thirty-something character dominated the action of serials with elderly playing the active role of the elder statesman. This role continues but now it stretches across two generations of old people in dailies like *Kahani...* in which there is Babuji and Krishna but Om and Parvati are growing old as well.

Improbable Depictions

The portrayal of the elderly has resulted in certain improbable depictions. A character like Parvati has not aged, at all, in terms of physical appearance.

The advance in age for Om and Kamal is signalled by greying sideburns.

Otherwise, they look as youthful as before. Babuji, who must be well over 75 years old, doesn't appear altered in any significant physical or mental manner – 20 years later.

Rajesh Pavitran on Young Actors Playing Old!

*“The scenario of the elderly playing the elderly can only go up to a certain point. You would start seeing the same faces in over 70 per cent of the shows. Besides, when an elderly actor is portraying one character, the image also gets fixed in the viewers' mind, making it difficult for producers to break that mould. For practical reasons, we have had the younger people playing older characters. We have not recruited any younger actors for the older characters, the time transition that we initiated in *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* asked for it, and it was practicable to ask the same actors to continue. It would have been too odd to change actors midway*

In some serials, the older people are played by younger actors, such as the father in *Shagun*. This is not entirely convincing in terms of authenticity. However, the viewers seem willing to suspend their disbelief and accept these portrayals: the ratings for *Kahani...* and *Shagun* have increased after the 20-year shift.

Karisma...The Miracles of Destiny starring Bollywood actress Karishma Kapoor is a similar case in point. It deals with the life of its main character, Devyani, from teenage through adulthood to old age. Spectacles and a grey wig are used to symbolise her old age, but otherwise, her physical appearance remains unaltered.

Changing Roles

The nature of the problems faced by the elderly has also been re-defined. If, as we said, the older generation played the role of mediators in conflict resolution within the family, they are now also dealing with the lives of their children and/or grandchildren who are in their teens or early twenties. Since, younger people's lives involve greater interaction with the outer world – college, party, disco, romance, workplace, even crime - the older generation is forced to look outward and inward, dealing with contemporary issues outside the house as well as those within.

In this interface, the serenity of their intimate lives has been disturbed by external stimuli. They are suspicious of the outside world and its influence upon the lives of their children. For instance, Om in *Kahani* and Papa ji in *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* are anxious to the point of hysteria when their daughters visit a discotheque or return home late. Om veers between bouts of uncontrollable anger, borne out of extreme sense of paternal responsibility and excessive love.

Rajesh Pavitram on the character of Ba in Kyunki.....

“As we are talking to an audience, and we don't want to communicate characters who jut don't count much. Hence, the innovative characterisation, like for instance, of Ba, which the Kyunki storyline demanded that she be the one who holds the family together, has a lot of problem solving abilities...”

In coming to terms with the modern world, the elderly experience considerable difficulty.

Given that in real life, crimes and violence against women appears to have increased, this kind paternal or familial reaction may strike a chord with parents and grandparents of young girls.

If the reactions are somewhat melodramatic, put it down to the demands of TV soaps.

While Om is deeply agitated by his daughter's life outside the house, while his father, the ageing Babuji is shown to have distanced himself from the family's affairs. He simply offers an opinion and let's the younger generation decide for themselves. Ba in *Kyunki* remains fairly active in the affairs of the Viranis; however, she too, is no longer the center of attraction or its moral touchstone. This is a more realistic portrayal: as people grow older, they tend to become disinterested in subjects, which are not of immediate concern to themselves.

Less authentic is that except for Ba who is shown to be having some health related problems, others like Babuji and Krishna in *Kahani...* the great grandparents are still so healthy and do not need the assistance of caregivers, this stretches credulity. In *Piya Ka Ghar's* Suhasini Mulay is in a wheelchair. She is old and physically challenged though still involved in family matters. Indeed, she plays a pivotal role. While this is as positive as Pammi's father was in *Des Mein Niklla Hoga Chand*, there is little about her condition and her coping mechanisms or those of her family. Such absences should be addressed.

Some Alternative Representations

An alternative portrayal of elderly people can be seen emerging in *Astitva...* Here is a serial without adornments and the stylised presentation of other serials. It is quiet, thoughtful and restrained. Some fine acting distinguishes the serial.

While the serial focuses on Dr.Simran and her husband Abhi, it also digresses into their families, who are affected first by their marriage and then, by their separation after Abhi has an affair with a younger woman, Kiran. They are not passive onlookers, but active participants in the affairs of the couple.

Abhi's mother, for example, dislikes her daughter-in-law intensely and does everything to break up the marriage. She also does everything in her power to introduce Kiran into her son's life and bed – outside the bonds of marriage.

Ajai Sinha:

“As a creative person I am against such unconvincing representation. Most of my characters are based on real life. That is the reason why Saurabh Mathur a retired IAS officer in my serial doesn’t want to sit idle. He wants to do something productive and meaningful which is why he has started this Helpline with his brother-in-law who is again retired and with children settled abroad has a lot of time in hand. I am trying to show that aged people also have a life of their own which they should and mind you they are leading productively.

He is a sensitive man, but at times just like aged people, he can be too demanding and judging. Aren’t our aged much like him?

And isn’t it a fact that couple do have difference of opinion irrespective of their age or years of marriage. If Abhi’s parents have different ideologies, it is but natural for them to fight. I am not showing something unrealistic. Even, in Hastarein, I showed aged couples having differences.

As a subplot, the love triangle of Abhi, Dr. Simran and Kiran, causes a rift between Abhi’s parents. This leads the father to leave his own home. We are told that Simran’s father had also kept secret a marital affair that distances him from his wife and daughters.

The multiple levels at which the serial works out its themes, links the older generation to the younger, indicating similarities and differences in their life experiences. This lends the older generation an added dimension – you are reminded that the old people, too, once upon a time had ambitions and desires.

The theme of estrangement between elderly marital couples or between the generations, (in some instances, open dissension) in a modern urban setting, is a new area of exploration. It occurs in several serials: Arshad’s father in *Kisse Apna Kahein* is completely at odds with his unscrupulous son. In *Devi*, the parents disapprove completely of their son Vikram’s behaviour towards his wife Gayatri. Pammi’s departure from her husband’s house and relationship with Dev (or Raj as he is currently known) distances her from her grandfather and mother in *Des Mein Nikkla Hoga Chand*.

Ekta Kapoor, the soap queen on how were 'Kyunki' and Kahani' conceived?

"There's an old lady called Amma in my house. Looking at her, I realized how we tend to ignore and neglect the elderly people around us. That's how Kyunki... took shape.

In nearly all-popular TV drama, parents are at odds with their children including *Kyunki*, *Kasauti*, *Kehta Hai Dil*, *Sanjivani* and *Saara Akash*. This may not be the main theme, but the sense of thinking differently, of parents at odds with their children's (who are adults), is part of the plot and help create many of the conflicts in the soaps.

So, at one level, the generation gap is used to drive TV dramas. At another level, the elderly disapprove of their children's actions because these break up their homes or marriages, which the elders consider as the foundation of traditional values of Indian society. Thus, the elderly continue to stand up for their beliefs and want to preserve their families – at almost any cost.

These clashes have another important fallout. Whereas in daily serials such as *Kyunki...*, *Kahani...*, etc., the elderly voice their disapproval of their adult children's behaviour and the children usually hold their silence, in some serials we witness adult children hitting back, yelling at their parents and flouting their authority. Arshad in *Kisse...*, Vikram in *Devi*, Abhi in *Astitva* are very rude to their parents. *Karishma...*, also reflects similar a situation and exemplifies another aspect of this estrangement.

Devyani's estrangement from her two sons leads to open and often ugly confrontations.

Dr. Kalyan Bagchi, President, Society for Gerontological Research

"One of the root cause of problem for the elderly especially older women is the clash between the daughter-in-law and themselves. And unfortunately, most of the Television serials thrive on this clash for their storylines. If these serials were showing these situations sensitively, then we would have appreciated them. But, instead of sending positive messages, if there are making this rift even wider by showing overtly cunning daughter-in-laws/mother-in-laws who can go to any length of treachery and misconduct, then we will have to raise our voices.

Recently, I watched Baghban. I saw it twice and both times I had tears in my eyes. It was emotional and heart rending yes, but was it realistic? You shouldn't over do the bad sons and good adopted son formula to heighten melodrama. You compromised on the realism in the bargain.

This hatred towards her is balanced by the devotion of her grandchildren. This happens in other shows too.

In *Jassi...* Jassi's grandmother, plays a significant role as peacemaker in the family and exerts a moderating influence on her son (Jassi's father), to smoothen the path for Jassi. This bond between the youngest and the oldest in the family - may evoke a feeling of empathy and identification amongst elderly viewers, who find themselves in similar situations.

While the elderly continue to be respected by younger people, sometimes, there seems to be an unbridgeable distance that even affection fails to narrow down. However, *Jassi...* has managed to bridge that gap. In her relationship with her grandmother, her mother and father, Jassi goes from one to the other so smoothly you are unaware of the transition. It all seems so natural.

In certain instances, we find some elderly leading active lives of their own, separate from their children's. Even at her age, *Karishma...* is still running her business empire and exercises almost complete control over her family. Dr. Simran's father and his brother-in-law set up a helpline for consumer issues. Some of these issues include those that affect old people, such as government pensions.

This is one of the rare occasions when there is a man involved with issues that face people like him and us. This is a positive portrayal and realistic too. At the other end, *Jassi...* deals with Jassi's father losing his job and the sense of helplessness, insecurity and unimportance this generates in him.

Such portrayals lend more substance to the characters of the elderly – roundness, which was previously missing.

According to a recent news story in *Newstime*, Senior citizens in the southern city of Hyderabad have begun to mobilise public opinion against what they call the denigration of old people in television serials and to seek government help to solve problems facing them.

A meeting of senior citizens held in the southern city of Hyderabad called for curbs on television serials, which mock the aged. According to those who spoke at the meeting, healthy family traditions would be harmed if they are shown as "baby sitters and unwanted guests" as an anguished speaker termed it.

Other speakers were of the view that even though the media has to adopt a positive attitude to such matters, senior citizens too should come to terms with the problems of old age.

Another innovative exploration of problems facing old people, is in *Awaz...*, *Dil Se Dil Tak*. By isolating a group of people on an island after a plane hijack, the serial seeks to explore the response of people in such unnatural circumstances as well as those left behind at home who think they have lost them. The marooned group includes an elderly woman and an elderly man. Both are shown to possess traits in tune with their age: they are insecure, infirm and yet, more philosophical about life and death than their younger desperate survivors.

Rajesh Pavitrn on elderly as target audience

“We are essentially trying to talk to those that the advertiser is targeting. This is dictated by who has the purchasing power and the power to influence purchasing decisions in the family. In this equation, the elderly have often moved out, as they have already gone through the cycle and are now beyond it.

The main people consequently targeted are the housewives, the younger set...but that does not mean we do not address others as well.

Some Conclusions:

In spite of all these new trends, the old drawbacks remain: there is little discourse on the very real problems faced by old people – their failing health, financial difficulties, loneliness and their ‘role’ in urban families which are often nuclear.

The positive trends in serials such as *Jassi* and *Astitva* are commendable. They create new kinds of understanding and bonding and in the process new messages are being put out, advertently or inadvertently. Some of these are significant.

The feedback we have received from viewers is that they have appreciated these departures. These alternative serials impart a feeling that old people are distinct individuals, not just props to push a story. However, the same viewer has also become addicted to the earlier portrayal in the *saas-bahu* serials and therefore, we find there is a co-existence between the two types of portrayals. We will have to see if the new trend will continue and to what extent.

Profiling Ba of Kyunki...

from Elderly Viewers' Eyes



Ba in *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhie Bahu Thi* (Sudha Shivpuri) is a TV character admired by most of the elderly we spoke with. As a 90 years old woman heading a conservative gujarati family of over 60 people, she is seen every night by millions of viewers across the country.

She is shown to be someone who has warmth, devotion and modesty. She is respected by one and all in the family. In the beginning of the serial, she was shown to be taking up the challenge of fashion designing at her age and quite successfully too. Because Ba somehow surpasses the usual stereotypes of older women shown on TV to some extent, it was interesting to look at her attitude towards family from the eyes of the elderly viewers.

In brief, most of the viewers we spoke with said that she is the “best”. *“She is ideal as she is totally selfless and compromising”*. Some of them even said that they sometimes aspire to be like her. *“I don’t have a big heart like she has. An occasional bout of jealousy and ego always spoils our relationship with the younger members of the family”*. This confession came from an elderly viewer in East Delhi. But, there were many who said that the manner in which she is respected and pampered by her family is something that all of them wish for.

A male viewer said that she symbolises what “Life should be”. However, like him, most of the viewers also said she is an unreal character.

What message can be found here? The typical television image of old people is that of a contrasting mix of authoritative men and women. Or they are suffering and voiceless members of the large family. But, both are shown totally involved with family matters, which are conflict driven and with no or little contact with the wider society.

For many viewers, Ba’s character presents an interesting mix of both portrayals, which perhaps satisfies both sides.

While the viewers continue to admire Ba, it should be noted that the “real” life struggles remain, still absent. TV fiction should learn to create characters who can show their strength by dealing with normal human relationships, the problems of daily living and maybe even their own personal struggle to improve society, only then mass media can

B) TV News and Current Affairs

Introduction

Our earlier study showed that the coverage of social and development issues on TV news and current affairs is uneven. TV channels do devote space but usually more during the day, rather than prime time as fillers.

Elderly portrayed as victims

The elderly, like women and children, are by and large portrayed as the main human face of individual circumstance or group distress. Our sample was taken from May 2002, in the aftermath of the Gujarat riots and at a time when violence in Kashmir was on the upswing. Since news must remain constantly topical, the predominant coverage of the aged in our sample was the condition of the aged refugees in Gujarat or families of those killed in Kashmir or victims.

Other than that, Star News had an item on heat wave deaths in Andhra Pradesh, many of which were of aged people.

Representing the Elderly as Voiceless

Unfortunately, even in the coverage that they receive, the elderly are often voiceless. In the heat wave item mentioned above, an old woman was seated on the bed, half dead, and other elderly people were shown seated on the ground. But the women were not interviewed while only one male caregiver spoke.

This emphasises their marginalisation in a very poignant and even brutal manner but it does not indicate who has to be made accountable for such indifference.

Instances of Positive Portrayal

In rare instances, there were positive features or 'happy' stories concerning the aged.

In one story an elderly gentlemen is seen drinking coffee in a coffee café in Bangalore, normally frequented by young people. This was an exceptional occasion.

The only other instance of coverage of the elderly in a news item, was the death of an elderly, well-known personality. In our sample, the death of poet Kaifi Azmi was covered across news channels and in fulsome fashion.

Another personality-oriented angle is that elderly people of eminence holding important positions (in politics, arts, etc) receive fulsome coverage, beginning with the Indian Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Their pre eminence as leaders has had a salutary impact on media coverage: they send out a positive message about growing old and remaining active.

Current Findings

Background

In 2003, TV news and current affairs took a quantum leap into the present. April 2003, saw the launch of five new 24-hour news channels: Headlines Today, NDTV 24X7, NDTV India, Sahara Samay and the revamped, Hindi Star News. Also, in November 2003, DD News has been relaunched as a 24-hour news channel.

The presence of so many news channels has brought about a sea change to TV News. Whereas politics are still high on the agenda of each channel, there is considerable more space for other issues. This space was created with the help of viewer feedback in pre-launch surveys by channels such as Star News. The feedback told channels that the viewing public wanted more coverage of events, incidents, decision that had a direct bearing and relevance to their lives – local news, consumer news, news they could use.

As a result, the news channels have changed strategy. Star News has often gone to the extent of ignoring political or economic stories for a localised issue – especially crime. Other channels are also giving far more space to `people' news. At one level this has seen specific programmes on health (*Health Aaj Tak*, *NDTV Doctor*), crime (*NDTV's Crime and the City*, *Jurm on Aaj Tak* etc.) to give just two examples. Indeed, crime has become one of the most important subjects for TV news coverage. It often dominates news alongside politics.

Even channel such as SABe TV that divides its schedule between sitcoms and current affairs shows, has introduced a talk show, *Kuch Dil Se*, which

discusses issues of a more social or personal nature and with the participation of an audience. Often, issues here could concern the elderly and witnessed elderly experts in the firing line.

At another level, there is a significant increase in sports, entertainment coverage. Indians are said to be obsessed by politics, cricket and films. So NDTV India, Aaj Tak, Sahara Samay and Star News have Bollywood related shows. NDTV 24X7 even has a show like *Night Out* - the equivalent of Page 3 in the newspapers.

There are also more niche programmes across channels which are in depth and investigative. *Special Correspondent* and *Inside Story* Zee News has the edge in this respect. *24 hours* on NDTV 24X7, is a, personalised, alternative look at the lives of ordinary people. Indeed, NDTV has the greatest number of special programmes on a variety of issues – even ecology and nature. Also, NDTV India now duplicates many of the more popular current affairs shows that have been the trademark of NDTV's previous Star News: *We the People* is now *Hum Log*, *The Big Fight* is *Muqabla*. This duplication has permitted more interactive shows with the public receiving greater space to articulate its views.

Star News has a programme dedicated to rural India, *Mere Gaon Mera Desh*. This carries items of many different kinds: in an episode monitored for this sample, there was an item on a malaria epidemic in Jharkhand, flower cultivation in a UP village, poly-housing in Uttaranchal, and the use of fertilisers – you might say this is an updated *Krishi Darshan*, the very popular and informative agricultural show on Doordarshan. It offers news you do not find elsewhere.

Within news bulletins, there is more news of regional, local interest – Zee News does a one-hour show on news from around the country *Hindustan Hamara* Conversely, there are shows which concentrate on the metros: *Metro Mind* on Sahara, *City 60* on Star News and *Metro Aaj Tak*. These shows concern different aspect of life – less political, more on civic amenities, disease, local developments, education, local crafts, trends, etc. Space has been created for this alternative type of news at the grassroots level – urban and rural.

An accompanying feature is that there is much more original news on atrocities involving people, especially in rural areas, and violence against

women, or for example, female infanticide. Another noticeable trend has been far greater coverage of legal issues, both at the political level and at the human rights level. The latter becomes particularly pertinent to civil society.

All of this must be considered a positive move in the right direction because it connects the news with people's lives in a way that was less apparent before. Often, quality is sacrificed for quantity and speed leads to inaccuracies but on the other hand, the news is far more diverse, variegated and accessible in ways that it was not before.

What implications does this have for elderly people? Two-fold. Local news and interactive shows permit more coverage of issues directly relevant to their lives. As representatives of the public, they could enjoy more visibility. If they inhabited silent spaces previously, there is the possibility of their being heard now.

Sample:

For the purpose of updating our earlier findings, we looked at news bulletins across news channels on an average day. Then, we considered coverage of days that are particular to the elderly: Alzheimer's Day, International Day of Older Persons, announcement of the Pension Scheme for the elderly and the murder of elderly women in a locality of Delhi.

In our earlier study, we had found that the elderly had been included primarily as people affected by natural or manmade disasters or as background props. Has the increased number of channels and the new spaces given them more room to manoeuvre?

When we watched news on an ordinary day, we found that during the daytime bulletins and afternoons there were considerably more stories dealing with problems facing people – problems that apply to people of all ages. Thus, while there may not have been more elderly specific stories, the increased coverage on health, civic amenities, and even crime are of direct relevance to the elderly.

Partly, these stories fall into the bracket of human-interest stories, which are usually powerfully emotive. We found that often there were stories related to the elderly, which aroused your sympathy and created an emotional involvement with the news. For example, *City 60* (Star News),

had a story on lost old women at the Kumbh *mela*. The story claimed that there had been 6,000 women like her and a few men. Two women were interviewed and spoke of their plight. It was a heartrending item but focussed on how these women had been misplaced by their families. Or had been abandoned, deliberately, by their families.

This story was a worthy starting point. However, it is also the starting point for a much more in depth investigation into the plight of homeless or economically deprived widows and old people who are no longer wanted by their families and are abandoned. This is the kind of story that would help situate a particular incident within the framework of a much larger social context.

NDTV 24X7 did a story on *shehnai* legend, Bismillah Khan's deplorable living conditions. The story highlighted his small home, the difficulty he experiences in movement and quoted him describing his condition. It was a moving item and almost shamed the watching viewer. It turned out to be positive because the Central government immediately provided a grant of Rs.2 lakhs for Khan. This is a pro-active feature regarding an eminent old person. The purpose of the story was clearly result-oriented because it did not explain why such a famous personality should be penniless.

Another emotive feature concerned a young boy in Mumbai who turned to extortion in order to collect enough money for the treatment of his ailing father, a retired sub-inspector of police. After his arrest, the police learning of the reason for his crime, collected Rs. 1,60,000 and gave it to the father. The boy, however, went to jail. The father was shown in hospital, crying for his missing son and that image was as powerful as the gesture the police had made. This was once again, what he might call, an "appeal" story. It showed the police responding to a human predicament and the plight of retired people when faced with major hospitalisation.

However, once again, it missed an opportunity to look at this problem of retired people – sickness, high medical costs and the lack of social security for them. The absence of such a follow-up is worrisome because these stories are done in a vacuum.

That these types of stories do find their way into the news bulletins across channels, is commendable. What we are looking for is a little more depth, complexity and follow-up.

There is another type of story that celebrates the abilities of the elderly and depicts them as active, self-employed people. Star News did a story on an intrepid old woman who climbed onto her scooter every morning and went to conduct and attend karate classes. Her trainer and the other students, male, commend her enterprise and say she is a “inspiration” to younger people. She replies, that “health is No.1”.

This kind of feel good story has large impact: it tells elderly people that if they exercise they remain “healthy” and given that the news channels broadcast so much of the violence on a hapless public, especially women, the Karate lady could encourage more people to involve themselves in self-defence techniques.

In NDTV’s *24 Hours*, a story on women in a *janana* (female) section of a hospital found a group of older women accompanying the pregnant women who were very lively and bonding together. One woman even took the camera and used it. This kind of depiction helps to show old women in a positive light.

In *Mere Goan, Mere Desh*, we saw elderly people in a story on old people still working in Gujarat with *Khadi* (hand spun cloth). Also, an NGO promotes self-employment amongst women, included several elderly females. There was also a delightful story on an old man who has invented his own tractor and patented it.

All these stories portray the elderly as energetic with an active role to play. They need not be social discards or burdens.

Health

We looked at Doctor NDTV to understand the relevance such programmes have for the elderly, since it is of such paramount importance to them. The format of the show has an anchor ask questions of a specialist doctor. It also take questions from viewers.

In the episode we saw the discussion was on Glaucoma - a condition that is degenerative. AIIMS’ Dr. Sihota was the expert. He explained the acceleration of the condition. He described the symptoms and the treatment. However, though he spoke of the problem of “pressure” he did not fully explain how a person should reduce it and maintain a low pressure. This would be important information.

At least one old gentleman rang in with a question about foggy vision at night. He was satisfied with the doctor's reply. Another question on eye drops helped clarify dosage and strength of medication. A third questioner wanted to know the connection between diabetes and glaucoma if any. The range of questions revealed the dimensions of the condition and allowed the doctor to provide specific, additional information.

However, the anchor might play a more informed role. All she said, continually, was that people should go for regular check-ups. There was not enough on preventive care.

In another episode, the problem was shoulder pains and their cures. There were no questions for elderly people though the problem relates directly to them.

Our suggestion: the programme could dedicate a day every week to elderly people, and discuss illnesses, or conditions specific to them. They could announce this a few days in advance so the elderly remember to tune in. Also, it could provide a younger generation with more information about what to do to prevent old age related ailments.

DEDICATED DAYS

On The International Day of the Elderly, Star News carried several items on the subject in different bulletins. In one feature it had men and women speaking of their dreams for the next generation. This was very sweet but it might have been more appropriate if they had spoken of their own lives.

In another item, Star showed us elderly citizens and provided some facts and figures on the elderly in India. However, it spoke to neither the elderly nor their caregivers. And while it gave facts and figures on India's ageing population it did not tackle the question about what we can do for the elderly people in the country. Once again, we notice a positive effort diluted by lack of follow-up.

On Alzheimer's' Day, NDTV 24X7 did a story which began with figures about Alzheimer patients in India and discussed its main features. It then personalised the issue by featuring a patient at home with a care-giving family. The old lady was shown in a helpless state as a family member recalled how she was once "a dictator". The contrast was visibly moving. The story was particularly good because it also took in the

difficulties of the caregivers and gave the story a larger context, by explaining the disease and the lack of a cure. This is the kind of story we would recommend as comprehensive and yet appealing because of its personal, human angle.

Pension Scheme announcement

This July 2003 came news of the launch by the Prime Minister of a new LIC Pension scheme. Doordarshan News devoted approximately 7 minutes to the story in its prime time bulletin. First, there was the Prime Minister's remarks and the audience watching him with a few elderly people in the audience. However, the main highlights of the scheme were not given in a fact file though a voice over quickly, too quickly, went over the provisions.

This was followed by Jaswant Singh, Finance Minister interviewed on the scheme. He explains the government's point view adequately.

The same story on Aaj Tak, argues that the scheme was announced because of political pressures – it headlined the story, ``*Boodhon ke lathi*'' (the lathi of the aged). It doesn't satisfactorily explain this political pressure. It provides background to the move and highlights of the new scheme and their potential for beneficiaries. This is well presented. It also mentions that the scheme will be a burden on the exchequer but it does not clarify. The visuals show old people playing cards, carom.

The story was given adequate headline news and coverage of its provisions. However, there were no reactions to the scheme from members of the public. This missing opinion robs the news of some importance, because we don't know how it will serve the public interest.

Crime against elderly women

Two elderly sisters were murdered in New Delhi's Vasant Kunj. Aaj Tak took us on a guided tour of the scene of the crime and dwelt on the colony houses in its visuals. It quoted the investigating officer saying that there was the suspicion that the crime had been committed by renovation workers. There was some talk of the colonies and safety.

NDTV 24X7 dwelt on the blood in the apartment floor. It said the maid had been found, the phone was off the hook and the door was not forced open, some jewellery was missing. The suggestion was that the assailant/s

were known to the ladies. The maid Sheela then tells the story of discovering the bodies. And the neighbours claim they heard nothing.

These kinds of stories have two-contradictory influencing factors. On the one hand they are good because they serve as a warning to the elderly on allowing people into their homes and keeping valuables in the house. On the other, the ease with which the crime was committed, the fact that the neighbours were completely unaware of the crime, can generate considerable anxiety in old people who feel defenceless against an anonymous killer out there somewhere.

We can suggest that such stories should carry additional information: for instance, some helpline numbers. They could also get the police to enumerate some of the steps people should take as protective measures. Repetition of such information may lead to recall and serve the elderly better.

Some Conclusions:

We are conscious of the fact that a visual medium has its intrinsic strength and limitations. Very often just a face being presented or the plight being portrayed is more powerful than any articulation or speaking about it can do. The hard political story, a disaster, administrative developments, even corporate trends are often converted into stories that get shaped by some power-that-be but impacts the day to day lives of the ordinary people. The problem is one of bias.

Middle class citizens are given a voice, asked individually about what the heat wave or exam wave does to them but when it comes to the poor, there is a feeling that the story becomes more powerful with silence, they feel that they maintain their dignity better that way. We are not sure about this because having a voice is essential for self-assertion. We are not only into the business of arousing the conscience of people we are also in the business of empowering people to exercise their rights over the media as citizens.

The main outcome of our analysis of news and news channels, says that news today has become more interactive. The need to reflect all issues on the ground, the pressure of competition as well as creating brand association with specific sections of the community has begun. By the

same token there is the need to make news popular. Hence the entertainment sections to the news.

However, this has created confusion as to what is the essential character of the news, especially for old people. In our feedback some elderly people have even stated that they have gone back to watching DD News because it experiments the least. So what is pro-people is still a little vague. Meanwhile, many of the public issues that are being taken up are very complex issues and given the way the news is presented, depth is compromised and this becomes noticeable, especially when they are dealing with extremely old problems like civic amenities, the way in which a city has grown, school curriculum etc. One channel is even claiming that “experience” is the buzzword but whether that is being reflected to the satisfaction of old people is debatable point because they are not only comparing TV channels, they are comparing radio and TV when it comes to news and feels that radio sounds more authentic.

C) TV Advertising

The elderly feature in a variety of advertisements, in different types of roles and in an innovative and imaginative manner.

Some findings:

- ❖ Many of the advertising actually replay the representation on fiction. For example, the recent Nirma advertisement shows a rich joint family having dinner together (the set and background music resembling that of *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*) with old members sitting along with the rest of the family. The four daughter-in-laws get into some argument and start throwing food on each other. While this “mud-slinging” is going on, the old are just shown astonished by the behaviour of the young. The oldest of them is shown trying to ignore or detach himself from the action around and trying to finish his food. This plays on the detachment of the elderly from the world around them.
- ❖ The elderly are used by advertisers to create a brand association with older concepts. For example the advertisement of the Ayurvedic Concepts in which *Dadi Maa* is used to impress on us that the product has a traditional herbal base. In the MDH Masala advertisement, the owner of the company, an old man, appears as a symbol of tradition to reinforce the message that the packaged masala carries the same flavour and purity as the homemade ones.
- ❖ They are also present in ads of food products and mass, fast moving consumer good. Their presence is significant as it is inclusive and representative and illustrates the advertisers desire to emphasise how these products are for the entire family.
- ❖ Old people feature with the very young and generate humor. In general they are active and lively. It is the childlike quality, which the elderly share with children that is portrayed most frequently in TV advertisements. For example the advertisement of Alpenliebe, the grandchild shares the candy with his very old grandmother who is hard of hearing and in later they share a laugh together.

- ❖ Seldom are the elderly shown to be suffering or in a personal dilemma which the product will resolve. Some advertisements use certain limitations of old age to highlight a feature of their product. For example the latest LG TV advertisement shows two very aged men with visible cataract and using hearing aids standing in front of a TV shop and comparing the sound and picture quality of the various TV sets displayed. They are used to highlight LG's assets.



- The representation of the elderly is quite positive. For example, the presence of Amitabh Bachchan who has become the symbol of youthful ageing in the ad of Dabur Chawanparash, Asian Paint, ICICI, BPL, Polio Campaigns etc., inspires both the old and young.

OLD IS GOLD



Vandana Katoch, Brand Executive, Contract Advertising explains how two of the brands which feature elderly people became hugely successful.

In advertising we like to reflect life as it is and in a way that is apt for our brand. So you may find in ads a lighter, easier, friendlier tone and attitude towards elders mirroring what you actually see around you. The oldies are not ogres any more. We at Contract have a couple of standout examples of giving the elderly a very special place in our campaigns. And mind you, these campaigns did wonders for the brand.

*Years ago our Philips campaign broke through to give the fuddy-duddy image of Philips a young, with-it makeover... How? By using elderly people. You may remember this elegant old Parsi lady listening to a blast of Deep Purple while sitting over her embroidery. Her husband enters and is blown off by the high-wattage sound. He, literally, crawls to the Philips Powerhouse to switch it off. In that very first moment of silence you have the old lady's ringing protest: "**But why did you turn it off? It was so nice.**" At which point he puts the Powerhouse on again and is blasted right out of the room. You have no idea how nervous the client was about using the elderly when the task was to modernise a tired, ageing Philips image. We felt that the unexpectedness and the delightful exaggeration would stress the power of Powerhouse, which is what the youth wanted. So we went ahead with the old couple. It certainly helped Powerhouse become a 1-crore brand in record time.*

Another presentation of the aged as a force to reckon with is our consistent use of 'Dadi ma' for Himalaya Drugs, an Ayurvedic company. Mrs. Banerji, who plays Dadi ma. had played an old lady in ad films for over 30 years. When we decided to use her as the Ayurvedic Concepts spokeswoman, we decided to, fashion her as the Ayurvedic Concepts Dadi ma and nothing else.

Mrs. Banerji was as the savvy old person who knew as much about the Ayurvedic ingredients as she did about processors in computers and the hairstyles sported by the Spice Girls. The last twist made her pleasingly contemporary and made the viewers smile as well. She continues to do the slightly unexpected, which builds her bond with the viewer. In the latest Himalaya Chyavanprash commercials she is egging on her grandchildren to win in life – by taking 'no shortcuts'- 'Jeetna ho to no shortcuts' says she. This campaign makes us feel particularly pleased because we are not using her wisdom to just sell a great product but also a great value. 'No shortcuts' is a bit of counsel we all could do with. Wouldn't you say?

Mr Venu Gopal
Group Accounts Director
JWT Contract

On the inclusion of older people in TV ads

“Unlike news and fiction, in TV ads, the elderly feature in different types of roles and in an innovative, imaginative and positive manner. And there are dozens of examples to prove it. The Philips Powerhouse ad (where the old lady is listening to music & the younger guy gets blown away by the power of the music system), the latest ad for Daweoo Anchor Fridges, the Fevikwik ad (old man fishing), the Ajanta clock ad with the old lady are a few which come to mind.

All these portrayals have depth in their character, which is the primary reason for using them. And they have made a positive difference to the commercials they've worked in as consumers recall these ads till date.

One of the key reasons for using old people in ads is their ability to bring in human emotions & tug the heart in a big way. Historically ads, which have really moved people have been ones featuring older people or tiny tots. No teenager can show love & affection as a caring mom could. Thereby they become the automatic choice when it comes to communication, which brings a lump in your throat. They are also great at delivering humour, which is used liberally in today's time & age as they have a higher recall value. We had used an elderly couple for a TV commercial for Philips lighting (an astrologer reading a young man's hand) & the response to that commercial was tremendous.”

On the general perception that older people are not considered target audience by advertisers

“Even though elderly people might have lesser purchasing powers, they still act as key influencers in the family especially when it comes to purchasing white goods. No son/daughter would purchase any high ticket household durable without consulting their parents & taking into account their preferences. So it would be incorrect to say that their point of view doesn't matter. The fact remains that we do consider them as our target consumers.”

Abhijit Pradhan
Senior Vice-President
JWT Contract

On the inclusion of older people in TV ads

"Older people are generally "Lovable" and create great emotional connect. Also, they are great protagonists along with kids (the grandparent grandchild relationship)

Most old people used - depending on the script and brand of course, are usually very experienced and therefore good to work with. The only problem is that there are few good old actors - and they tend to get used quite frequently thus creating a lot of sameness in ads - which is not desirable from a brand point of view.

On the general perception that older people are not considered target audience by advertisers

"Very few mass brands would target old people specifically - old people would form part of the consuming audience - the marketer would thus take a call on whom to target - and normally it would be the young - middle age housewife. Also, India is a "young" country - where the majority of marketable audiences would be between 18-35. Yes, from that point of view, the "old" as a separate stand alone audience would be difficult to justify (compared to the US - where majority of the population is aging and they are the ones who seem to have the money!)"

Some BRIEF STORYLINES of Television Serials

Serial: *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*

Channel: Star Plus

Time Slot: 10.00p.m. Monday - Thursday

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. This year, the story has shifted 10 years ahead and the central character is their daughter Shruti who has been landing into some kind of trouble every second day!

Serial: *Kyunki Saas bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*

Channel: Star Plus

Time Slot: 10.30p.m. Monday - Thursday

Production House: Balaji Telefilms

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

Serial: *Kasauti Zindagi Kay*

Channel: Star Plus

Time Slot: 8.30p.m. Monday - Thursday

Production House: Balaji Telefilms

A family drama set in a Bengali media family. It is a tale of two lovers - Anurag and Perna. Anurag succumbs to his mother's pressure and marries Komolika. Perna later marries Mr. Bajaj to 'save' Anurag's family from bankruptcy. Now, though, they are back together, their life is no bed of roses.

Serial: *Astitva- Ek Prem Kahani*

Channel: ZEE TV

Time slot: 9.00 p.m. Sunday - Wednesday

Production House: Ananda Films and Communication

A drama set in a more contemporary setting. Simran the female protagonist is a successful doctor. She falls in love with a younger man, Abhimanyu, a struggling professional. The two marry despite family opposition. But, with the entry of another woman in Abhimanyu's life, their marriage is in trouble.

Serial: *Jassi Jaise Koi Nahin*

Channel: Sony

Time slot: 9.30 p.m. Monday to Thursday

Production House: DJ Entertainment

A lighthearted drama revolving around the female protagonist Jasmeet Walia, better known as Jassi, is one of the most popular serials on television today. Jassi works in Gulmohar fashion house and is chided by her colleagues for the big spectacles, the braces and the odd loose fitting clothes that she wears. Armaan the young chairman of Gulmohar does not bother about her appearance and instead employs her for her skills and intelligence. Jassi's parents and her grandmother are very proud of her. Jassi's father however keeps getting offended by her staying late at office due to work.

Serial: *Sambhav Asambhav*

Channel: Sony

Time slot: 8.00 p.m., Tuesday

Production House:

A weekly serial dealing with the supernatural. A father notices certain signs and behavioral characteristics in his son's wife that reminds him of his dead wife. The serial goes on to show that it is the spirit of his dead wife that has come back.

Serial: *Shagun*

Channel: Star Plus

Time Slot: 2:00 p.m. Monday to Thursday

Production House: UTV

A daily which began by telling the tale of a young girl Aradhana who goes through a series of marriage, remarriage and widowhood. After her marriage to the man she loved first, the story has moved to 20 years ahead. Now it is her daughter who is the main protagonist.

Serial: *Awaaz*
Channel: ZEE TV
Time slot: 10.00 p.m. Sunday to Wednesday
Production House

The serial deals with an attempted hijack of a plane by terrorists. The terrorists kidnap the pilots child and force him to allow them to pass security. The plan fails and the plane crashes into a deserted island. There are a few survivors. The story goes on to show how the survivors struggle to survive and how the parents and other family members back home deal with the crisis.

Serial: *Karishma...A Miracle of Destiny*
Channel: Sahara Manoranjan
Time Slot: 9.30 p.m. Monday-Thursday
Production House:

Karishma... features Karishma Kapoor as the protagonist Devyani. She plays the role of an elderly matriarch who reigns the control over the family business. The drama moves back and forth Karishma's present and her past.

Serial: *Devi*
Channel: Sony
Time Slot: 9.30 p.m., Friday
Production House: Devgan Software and Television Footprints

Gayatri an orphan living with her mama Satyen is married of to Vikram, a spoilt rich man by her scheming aunt. Gayatri is a staunch worshipper of Devi maa and believes that Devi will protect her from all evil.

Vikram hates Gayatri and decides to kill her. He pretends to be reformed and takes her on a pilgrimage to vaishno Devi where he pushes her from a cliff.

When he returns home he is shocked to find Gayatri there. He relentlessly tries to unravel the identity of this woman who claims to be his wife so much so that he sets out to prove she is an imposter. But the truth is beyond his wildest imagination.

