

Viewers' Voices

Report of the Viewers' Forum
1998-99

Editorial Team

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FOREWORD

It would be considered today as a cliché to say that the television brings the world into our homes. But what world, and whose world invades our space through this medium? Do we share this world? Does it reflect our reality? Do we want to be a part of this new world? And how close do we feel to the medium itself? Television has today become one of the most potent factors that shape people's opinions and aspirations, and a powerful means of giving expression to them. But are we, as viewers, given a chance to express our feelings towards the medium and participate to some extent in moulding the medium to our needs?

The Viewers Forum is a public platform which helps viewers understand the viewer-media relationship through workshops, discussions and debates with people associated with media in various ways.

It is a Forum where viewers develop and give expression to their opinions on the diverse aspects of television: from analysing serials, soaps, news and current affairs programmes to sharing their analysis with the relevant persons of the television industry.

The Forum also seeks to bring about positive change - to make the medium more responsive to their needs and aspirations, and more responsible for its impact on society.

THE HISTORY OF THE VIEWER'S FORUM

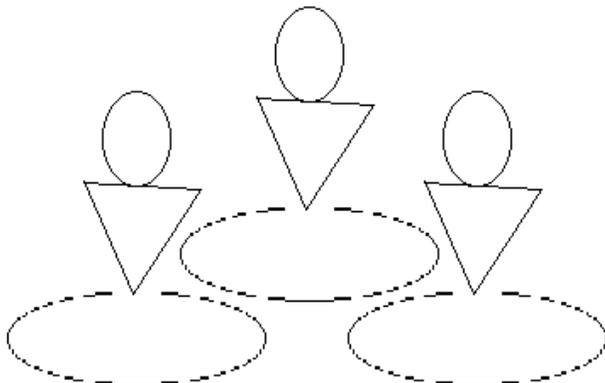
The Viewers' Forum started as an informal exercise in 1996, when members of the Media Advocacy Group established contact with a section of middle class women to share their opinions about the representation of women on television. The group dynamics that emerged encouraged MAG to initiate similar meetings with women of different sections of society in Delhi, as well as in Ahmedabad and Lucknow.

There were middle class and the lower class, married and single women, working women, including those in senior executive posts and those lower in the hierarchy, business women of both high and low income groups, women working in the unorganized sectors, urban women, rural women, women of all ages including school and college students, feminists, health activists, and so on.

The various roles women play - spouse, mother, daughter, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, homemaker, worker, friend, lover, rival - did not allow for any rigid grouping. Their different life experiences was reflected in the pronounced variation among the viewers' perceptions of themselves, their understanding of the medium, and their opinions about how they and their concerns were (or were not, or even should be) portrayed in it.

Throughout 1997, the various members of the Viewers' Forum went through a process of group formation, disintegration, and regrouping. This process reflected the variety of problems unique to each group.

The concerns of the Basti women, for example, were entrenched in the reality of their struggle for survival. They did have a presence on television, but only as victims - of government apathy, of caste, class and communal oppression.



While the middle class women were not insensitive to these concerns their problem with the medium was somewhat different. The middle class woman dominates the screen; she is present in all entertainment programmes, current affairs programmes, talk shows, soaps and serials, advertisements, etc. She is both proactive and reactive. These women

were concerned about the nature of their portrayal .

All the women were concerned with the impact of such portrayals on their children.

At the last public meeting of the Forum a new addition was made to the categories of women viewers. At the request of some of the members, a new group of viewers having some disability was formed. For these members with disability as well as for those who were working with disabled persons, there was the problem of their presence itself. As far as the medium is concerned they just do not exist. The very few times they were represented, they were figures of ridicule , horror, or pity. These viewers felt they needed to meet as a separate group and discuss and their concerns.

In 1998, three groupings emerged from the differences in experiences and expectations, across cities – first, a group of middle-class viewers, then a second group of viewers from lower socio-economic groups, and third, a group of viewers with disabilities.

The first two groups included homemakers and working women and a few students. The last group often also included the parents and guardians of the disabled, as well as those working with the disabled.

Women dominate the Viewers' Forum. The middle-class group of the Viewers' Forum in Delhi has some male members among whom are some school principals and students. The Forum group of less-privileged members is almost exclusively an all-women's group in all the three states. Interestingly, the Delhi group with disability has numerous male members.

Throughout 1998, the three groups devised their own agenda and met separately with the various key-persons involved in production - producers, directors, scriptwriters, actors and actresses, policy-makers, and so on, to share their opinions and suggestions on making the medium more relevant and socially-conscious. The report thus deals with the three groups separately.

Some reactions to the very concept of a viewers forum:

- ❖ Minal Hazarika is an engineer by profession, but she also doubles up as a financial consultant.

Through the Viewers' Forum, I feel we can provide a platform for people who are disturbed by the images shown on TV and who would like to take an active part in understanding and questioning the media.

- ❖ Suhas Kumar is an activist working in the Capital's bastis. She also writes on social issues.

The Viewers' Forum attracted me not only because it is a novel idea, but also because it is the need of the hour. Through it, we can access the managers of the media and try to make them aware of the real public opinion and their social responsibility and accountability.

- ❖ Anita Ghai is a reader in Psychology in New Delhi's Jesus and Mary Collage. She is also a person with a disability.

I chose Viewers' Forum to get an opportunity to intervene in the depiction of women, children and people with disabilities. We should aim for a media which includes the voices of all those who wish for greater mainstream representation.

- ❖ Amita Buch is a journalist interested in studying societal changes. She has worked with the Gujarati edition of the fortnightly magazine India Today; currently she is with Abhiyaan, a Gujarati magazine in Mumbai.

I am interested in sensitising the media about the viewers' preferences. I want people to look at the media in a more mature way. They should be able to select and make the best of it. And my feeling is that I can achieve it only through the Viewers' Forum.

- ❖ Shallini Mathur is a member SUREKSHA, a Lucknow-based organisation dealing with violence against women.

My objective in joining the Viewers' Forum was basically to study the impact of television on relationships within the family. Even though TV has become market-driven, I think the Viewers' Forum can bridge the gap between the viewers and the entertainment industry.

The Voices of the Less Privileged

FOR THREE YEARS, the Media Advocacy Group has been collaborating with women's organisations in the bastis of Delhi, with an eye toward sensitising media to gender and social issues. Women living and working in these overcrowded bastis are faced with many problems unique to their situation. These compulsions determine their Television viewing.

The reality of the basti

- ‘We watch television provided the ‘bijliwallas’ are kind to us’, laments Sarita the social worker who works in Gautampuri, a highly congested jhuggi cluster in the outskirts of Delhi, educating families on hygiene. Despite having applied and paid the requisite amount for a regular connection, most of the basti dwellers still await a permanent electrical connection. This leaves them with no option but to resort to illegal connections and pay bribes to keep these connections going.
- *The Ration cards have been issued.* Despite this we do not get the rations at the right time or in the right quantity. We have to keep visiting the shops. Often we don't get the rations at all. The quality of the wheat, rice, sugar is sub-standard. Moreover, we have to give money to even get a new born baby's name entered in the card. For the women living in slums, accessing even a minimal amount of food often becomes such a problem that all other issues, such as media, assume less importance. For example, during the 1998 onion crisis, when the government started selling onions against ration cards and in special outlets, these women found that they were being discriminated against. Those who could pay more were given preference over those who could not. Their comments about media coverage of this crisis was focussed exclusively on the insensitivity of both the government and the media to their needs and their problems.
- There is a great shortage of schools in the bastis. In Gautampuri, where there are 600 houses, there is only one school. Teachers often tell the children: “you are dirty, we will not pass you. If you complain to your mother about being beaten, we will not pass you.” They discriminate between children of the better off and the poorer families. They humiliate children by asking for their caste certificates or for donations. These are the ‘real’ issues of

the people who live in bastis and resettlement colonies. By focussing on these problems can't media pressurise the government and administration to redress the situation? These people look up to media for offering them support to secure from the government what has been promised to them, and what is their right as citizens. For media, however, these are merely some of the many issues of one of the many sections of society that they cater to.

■

As TV viewers, these women were dissatisfied with being a part of the larger, amorphous collective and decided early in 1998 to form a Basti Manch, which would focus on their concerns and achievements. For these women, 1998 was a year of activism. As one of the woman member of the manch put it :

We want the media to take up issues of bastis, so that the government and the administration take note of them. If even one-tenth of the time spent on advertising is used to give necessary information to the viewers, society can improve and develop. After all, the media also has social responsibility. The poor and the underprivileged form 70% of the population, and media caters to, at the most, 30-35% of the population.

Entertainment is fine, but its place is limited in life. Often the directions, necessary information, information on human and legal rights are given in the middle of the advertisements in English. This is wrong. By giving such information in English, the people of the country are denied their right to information.

■

Equally vocal was another member and she asserted :

We want our day to day struggles and problems with different institutions to get reflected in the media. We want accountability from governments and related agencies and are even willing to educate the general public about their responsibilities and obligations. Real television is our need. - *The Basti Manch*

Thus, to some extent, the Basti Manch feels trivialised by media.

The women activists of the manch who lived and worked in the bastis and resettlement colonies, felt very strongly about their representation on media - not just as women, but as women from a specific socio-economic group, facing both the general problems of women, as well as problems particular to them as members of the less-privileged sections of society. For example, while acknowledging their vulnerabilities to the issues that relate, however indirectly, with sexuality, their concern was not merely of gender (as with the middle-class women), but one of sexual crimes.

- Sulabh Sauchalayas (Public Conveniences) that have been constructed leave much to be desired. Each time one uses it, we are required to pay one rupee. This is somewhat excessive. Even the middle class finds it difficult to afford this expenditure. Even after collecting such a heavy fee, they are not cleaned. The government has entrusted the task of cleaning the sauchalayas to private contractors, who totally neglect those used by women. As for women and children, they hardly use them. Sexual harassment is a common feature in the sauchalayas. Unemployed males of the area collect near the sauchalaya meant for women, and pass lewd remarks when they use it. This has converted the sauchalaya into the most dangerous area for women and children, who are particularly at risk. Women therefore tend to use the facility at night, when it is more difficult to keep it clean and hygienic.
- Thanks to the obscenity on television, it is becoming impossible for older women to work in the bastis. Young men and even boys are looking at us differently. We are no more the good-old mausi of yesteryears; today we are women who are being looked at much the way young men look at sex objects like Karishma Kapoor or Madhuri Dixit. For Sarita, the social worker, such representation of women poses a new threat not just to her respect, but also to her authority as a knowledgeable person, giving much needed information to the community.

The formal institution of the Manch, for these women, was more than just working towards increased and more complete representation of social and gender issues in media. It meant having the space to voice their special concerns about the manner in which they and their problems are viewed and treated by media, directly to various policy makers, programmers, producers, and others working in media.

News and current affairs

An opportunity to focus on the less-privileged groups' link with T.V came up in May 1998, when the Viewers' Forum, the Media Advocacy Group, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Human Resource Development Foundation jointly hosted a three-day Video Festival-cum-Viewers' Symposium from 12th to 14th at the India International Centre in New Delhi. A key session at this Symposium was the '*Relevance of Tele-images and Content in the Lives of the Less-Privileged Women*'.

The session participants included a cross-section of women living in bastis, community leaders, trade union members, and social-workers working with them. Radhika Kaul Batra, producer and director of the serial *Helpline* being aired on Zee TV and Sudeesh Pachauri, media critic were the panelists. The discussions centred around news and current affairs programmes. What do these programmes mean to the women of the bastis? The issues of the content of these programmes, as well as the representation of their concerns was a key criticism by the women.

Given below are a sample of the reaction from the viewers

- From the news programmes on TV, we get to know the news from all over the world on the one hand, and the real faces of our politicians on the other hand. However, the

news mostly focuses more on the quarrels between the politicians and less on national development and societal concerns.

- While the news does give some coverage to certain events, yet unlike BBC, it does not do so in detail. For example, while protests in the Bhatari rape case or the Shivani murder case were shown, but the reasons why women and women's organisations protested were not properly or fully explained.
- Despite an intensive door to door campaign, we came to know that the BJP suffered a major setback in the recent elections in Rajasthan. This was largely because of the alienation of the women voters in the State and especially over the handling of the Bhatari rape case.. Women staged demonstrations against this incident. Perhaps because of this Mr. Shekhawat kept quiet. We knew indirectly, but the media did not highlight this reason behind the party's setback.
- We also heard that women actively participated in the election campaign, but strangely the media chose to underplay it. Even with regard to Shivani's case, the media initially did not give it sufficient importance. It was only after women's organisations staged dharna, that some sections of the media, decided to provide some coverage .

AFTER RAPE, WHAT?

We work with young girls at the grassroots level.

We joined Viewers' Forum so that we could highlight the problems of these young women, and give them visibility. But the question is where and to whom do we project these problems?

The main problem with TV programmes for our group is the projection of semi-nude women and increasing violence. How can we encourage the young in our group to see all this with their family?

Remove the violence. For example, *Shaktimaan* is having an adverse impact on children. They start getting aggressive; it stimulates hyper-activity. What are children learning from all this? Two years ago, there was the Thums Up ad. And now, all this. Children are learning risky behaviour, and using it in their daily lives.

I feel that all of us, along with media representatives, have to work out something. Why show what is already happening? For example, rape, why show it? What is ahead must concern us. After rape what?

Media must work out a new approach, create a new direction for the society.

Vimla of ACTION INDIA

A Candid Query from the Basti

'Why does TV never depict our problems as they really are?'

The reponse from Shashi Mehta (producer and director of *Khoj Khabar*)

You should never expect that TV would work the way you want it to. The way you look at issues that you are working on and the way media perceives it is different. Women working with the bastis or NGOs have a different commitment and approach as compared to that of the media. Still, you should be very positive as you are getting some representation and can make an impact. You should hold on to the place given to you as tight as you can.

You should send to producers of news and current affairs programmes a list of issues that interest you. Whenever I will make a programme around these issues, I will definitely call members of the Basti Manch. This way, the basti voices would be heard.

You should bring together some very articulate members from the basti under one roof and then we could do a programme with them. If there are six to seven case histories on an issue, the issue could be easily raised in the programmes.

Whenever some dharna or protest or awareness campaign is organised in a basti, you should invite producers of news and current affairs programmes.

You should make sure that every producer of these programmes has the latest list of organisations and activists working on issues that concern you.

Whenever media people come to us, they twist and turn our words. We are hurt when the full truth is not presented properly. They can show issues and cases of rape on TV provided it is done in a sensitive manner and is not ugly or provocative; as is usually the case. This is an issue, which concerns the whole of society; but the views of women are seldom aired, and the presentation is never in the way women want it.

- The Supreme Court gave directives regarding sexual harassment of women in the workplace. However, the government did not send any notification to any of the organisations or institutions. The whole exercise remained only on paper. Media should highlight such things, so as to pressurise the government.

Some news programmes were appreciated in spite of their shortcomings.

Other comments relating to news and current affairs programmes included:

- We like *Aaj Tak* very much. It is very interesting but **the duration is very short. It's only 20 minutes and within that they show advertisements.** So they are not able to give much space to news.
- **We would like to see detailed coverage of the issues as in newspapers.** *Aaj Tak* only shows those news, which are problem-related but there are no follow-ups and other details as done by BBC.
- *Ankhon Dekhi* is another good programme, covering topical issues of relevant to us such as floods, mustard oil and onion shortage crisis etc.
- **What we see on TV and read in the papers is very different from reality.** Mustard oil was still not being sold (even when the news informs us that it was available).



- The women of the Basti Manch at the Public Event organised on December 9, 1998 at the Mirza Ghalib Hall, New Delhi. Sushma Seth, veteran theatre, films and TV actress; Neena Gupta, producer and director of *Saans*; Ashok Pandit, producer and Director of *Tere Mere Sapne*; and B.M. Vyas, scriptwriter, were invited by the Viewers' Forum for the Event.



Telefiction

Most women of the Basti Manch are regular viewers of telefiction. However, compared to the middle-class home-makers their viewing of this genre of TV programmes is considerably less. The reasons are two-fold. Firstly, the electric supply is very erratic. Even if it is there, the women preferred watching the news and current affairs programmes.

Secondly, they do not relate too much to telefiction. Rather, they enjoy watching docu-fiction like *Bhanwar* because they feel it relates very closely to their lives. They face the same problems with their families, and with the authorities like the police, the judiciary, and so on. They feel that the socio-economic issues that are visually depicted in these programmes - dowry, unemployment, poverty, work situations, lack of privacy, harassment both within the family and outside by society and institutions of authority, are basically the same that they have to face and deal with in their daily lives.

For many activist members of the Basti Manch, **the teleserial *Bhanwar* was a good way of bringing reality to the forefront** even though the cases dated back to 25-30 years. *Bhanwar* is a serial that documents in fictionalised form crimes (particularly those against women), that have been resolved. The episode that featured the story of Manju, who was killed for dowry by her husband Sunil, generated many responses. While appreciating the serial, however, women activists did not hesitate to voice their feelings of frustration and anguish over the treatment of some of the details of the episodes.

- Manju is dead, Sunil has remarried and is enjoying life. Is this justice? - *Vimla* and *Shanti* of Jagori
- The indifference of the police should have been shown. - *Satyarani Chaddha*, founder of Shaktishalini, a shelter for women. (Satyarani Chaddha lost a daughter in a similar case, and had met Manju's parents.)
- Mere depiction of the case is not enough. A discussion should follow. - *Vimla*, an activist leader of Sabla Sangh
- Our judicial machinery needs to be reformed. Some of the laws need amendments. Unless it is possible to bring some change in the mind-set, these kinds of programmes do not serve any purpose. - *Maya*, a woman activist with the Hind Mazdoor Sabha

The members of the Basti Manch wrote a letter voicing their opinions to Mr. Sanjay Roy Choudhary, producer and director of Bhanwar. In his reply he had this to say: Bhanwar is a docu-fiction series that merely attempts to recreate events and cases in Indian Judicial history. It is not within the scope of the programme to either follow up or offer solutions to problems. For instance, we can hardly take it upon ourselves to reform India's judiciary. However, we would be happy to entertain any requests from

the viewers on their suggestions on how the working of the legal system can be improved and made more responsive to the needs of the ordinary people. Thank you for the interest shown in our show.

▪ On Mythological Serials

The Basti Manch members also regularly view mythological serials like *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Om Namah Shivay*, etc. They liked programmes related to Indian history and culture but had some serious misgivings about religious serials or those, which dealt with mythology.

- I appreciate *Om Namah Shivay* as it shows the tradition of our country. But I don't approve of the dresses worn by women. I also feel that men are shown in good light, whereas women are shown in bad light as they ask their children to do undesirable things. For example, Hirangaya asked her son to destroy the earth in one of the mythological tales.
- Mythological serials celebrate polygamy and illegitimate children, which sends out wrong signals to society at large.

The viewers were also concerned that these serials propagated superstitions.

- During a sequence from *Mahabharata*, a woman 'becomes' pregnant by a man looking into her eyes. These superstitions are still prevalent in India and many pandits and mullahs are making merry by playing on such superstitious fears among the ignorant.
- The serial-makers are cashing in on the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of certain beliefs held by the viewers.
- Mythological serials take the society 'backwards' while we (social workers) want the society to progress. People tend to believe every thing the serials say. I sometimes feel that these kinds of serials should be banned.

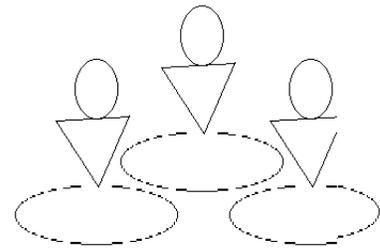
However there were other interesting viewpoints and constructive suggestions.

- I like the serial *Krishna*. They show many things like creating a duplicate (what is called cloning today) and pusphak viman (aeroplane). And now, with the progress of science, I am able to relate and believe in those things. Our culture and science was quite advanced even at that time. I always compare the modern scientific knowledge with that of our forefathers of ancient days. It is informative as well as entertaining.
- The style of the serial *Hum Log*, where at the end of each episode Ashok Kumar would conclude with a 'message' should perhaps be adopted by the mythological serials.

Daytime Viewing

In the early '90s, when the Media Advocacy Group began working with the women in the bastis they had very limited access to cable television. They primarily viewed the late-morning and afternoon soaps and serials.

The basti women's access to satellite television has gradually increased. This has provided additional channels like movie channels, as well as Zee TV and Sony, whose serials, soaps and infotainment programmes are practically identical to those of Doordarshan. This increased access also coincided with not just the Indianising of Star Plus, but also with the repeat of popular soaps and serials like *Tara*, *Campus* and *Banegi Apni Baat* in the afternoons. The continuity in watching thus remained unbroken for these women.



Women on TV



One of MAG's main objectives with the Basti Manch was to gauge their individual and collective relationship with TV programmes.

It soon became clear that the Basti Manch's identification with female protagonists is not complete. They felt that these women were alien to them; they tended to be dismissive of them rather than viewing them critically. Most basti women felt that extra-marital affairs appeared to be of primary interest in telefiction.

In general, *Aurat*, *Itihaas* and *Shanti* were appreciated. *Aparajita* evoked mixed responses. While many basti women considered this a good serial, others, like *Bhanwari* of Jehangirpuri, felt 'the theme song *Nari hai Aparajita, nari ka karo samman* (respect the woman who is Aparajita) seems to pay only lip service to women. The story of the serial does not convey this sentiment (respect). What is the point of just slogan-raising?'

Violence against women in telefiction was an issue that the women were extremely concerned about, especially when the men are shown as being able to go scot-free, as in *Hindustani*.

Likewise, they were also perturbed by the inability of the telescreen to depict the process of social change that was underway in India. For them, the portrayal of women even in so called modern serials, did not reflect any change in the status of women, especially within the family. There was no personal growth for them, they just waited for their husbands.

- The serial *Saahil* throughout shows the male point of view. **Never is the woman's point of view, her suffering brought to the fore.** Other serials also tend to focus on the husband's unhappiness and dissatisfaction with their wives; The reverse, namely, the wives unhappiness with their husbands, is never shown.

The women were agreed that housewives are rarely given the respect and honour due to them. Most often they are insulted. There were hardly any tele-images of men and women working and

living together harmoniously. Even when the girls were shown as independent-minded when young, they conformed to the stereotype after getting married.

Some spontaneous reactions:

- **I find the themes of most serials very contradictory.** During college days, the girls are shown as very modern, scantily dressed. But when they get married, they are shown as very docile, as if to suggest that their place is only **pati ke charnon mein** (at the feet of their husbands). What kind of social change are they trying to depict? Why can't the women remain modern till the end?
- **Most of the serials project women as objects of entertainment.** They never show the hardships that the women face - namely, as to how they struggle to maintain a balance between their career and the demands on the home front – irrespective of whether they belong to the middle-class or the lower-class.

The Generation Clash

The construct of the serial *Aashirwad* (Zee TV, Friday, 9.30 p.m.) triggered a very interesting discussion between members of the Dakshinpuri Basti Manch.

The serial revolves around three families. One is a conventional family where the father dictates and neither the wife nor the children can raise their voice. There is no communication within the family. The second is a single-parent family where the father pampers the daughter and they share a beautiful relationship of friendship and respect. She is free to do what she wants. The mother is dead. The third family portrays a balanced relationship between the parents and their daughter. The parents respect the daughter's point of view, consider her opinions seriously, and advise her rather than force her to accept their premises and suggestions. The serial depicts the conflict between modern and traditional values through the relationship shared between the two generations.

An elderly basti woman appreciated the depiction of the conventional family as she put it "in today's scenario children need a strict father to control them as well as advise them on what is right and wrong." They applauded the husband "who took all the responsibility of the family and carried out his duties well." They told the other participants present in the meeting that although they themselves had "dictator husbands", they shirked away from any family responsibility.

The younger women of the manch, on the other hand, were rather critical of the 'dictatorial' father and added that this form of disciplining is unacceptable. They were resentful of the media for its exposure of such unhealthy ideas of parenting. They realised that even when they dressed well and looked beautiful, parents were suspicious about their intent. They liked the second family where the daughter enjoyed the freedom to do whatever she liked.

Modernity vs. Tradition – ‘Sexuality’ as seen by the Viewer’s Forum

All the members of the Viewers’ Forum, irrespective of the social background, appreciated the ‘modern’ woman. However, there were significant differences in this general perception..

For the viewers of the Basti Manch, the outward symbol of modernity – scanty clothing of girls and women – was very negative. They were concerned and apprehensive that such imagery would increase sexual harassment.

For most of the women of the Basti Manch, life is no storybook romance. Survival is the most important issue. Given their lack of privacy and their extreme physical, emotional and mental vulnerability to sexual and other harassment and abuse, and the lack of support – financial and emotional - from the men in their lives, they prefer looking forward to rebuilding a life. Thus, for them, despite ‘mishaps’ like rape, single motherhood or seeking a relationship outside marriage, there is a future that the woman can create for herself.

The woman may start weak, but has to become strong in order to survive in their reality. They want to see this strength in the women protagonists. This is reflected in some of the following comments by these women. *‘Why do they always show girls going astray after one mishap? Why can’t they show that there are other alternatives available and she does not necessarily end up in a ‘kotha’.*

In contrast, the middle class women of the Viewers’ Forum could not accept Savi of *Hasratein* as a positive portrayal. Savi is a married woman with a child, who wants a career, falls in love with another man, and leaves her husband and child.

For them, it was inconceivable that a woman can make a career and love her priorities rather than her home and child. However, when it came to the serial *Saans*, the group (with some exceptions) felt that a man who is having an extra-marital affair should be forgiven and taken back by his wife, as men are prone to such behaviour. They felt that the other woman in the serial was manipulative and wicked.

Interestingly, in the case of *Hasratein*, the viewers’ negative feelings toward Savi changed dramatically when the actress was replaced. The earlier Savi was shown as confused, and the main focus of the relationship with her lover, in the opinion of the viewers, was physical desire.

One possible reason for this could be that the earlier actress was associated with roles in which sex played a predominant part. The new actress, however, had a public image as a serious actress. Savi’s representation changed and the viewers now felt that her relationship with the man was more intellectual than physical.

At the same time, the wife’s role increased, but as someone who actively opposed her

husband's move out of the family, and she became more vocal about her displeasure. The viewers' sympathy shifted almost entirely to Savi.

In contrast, the women of the Basti Manch were extremely comfortable with the concept of modernity as independent in mind and thought. They wanted the `modern' protagonist to be financially and emotionally independent also. They were concerned in that in the serial *Saans* the `modern' woman was giving no thought to where the finances would come from when she separated from her husband.



Women's strength, according to the members of the Basti Manch, is something that is innate to them. This strength is necessary for survival. This viewpoint came through explicitly during the meeting with Neena Gupta, director, producer and main protagonist of the teleserial *Saans* at the Public Event organized jointly by the branches of the Viewer's Forum from Delhi, Lucknow and Ahmedabad in December 1998.

Saans is a story of a woman with two children, whose husband has an extramarital affair after a decade and half of marriage. The victimized wife, (Neena Gupta) decides to leave her husband and moves in with her mother. However, she continues to be financially independent of both her mother and her husband.

For the members of the Basti Manch, the main jarring note of the serial, was the absence of Neena Gupta's concern with her financial situation, especially as she was not working and therefore had no source of income other than that of her husband and mother, both of whose financial support she had rejected. The women felt that in reality what was crucial was finance. It was this alone that is one of the chief constraints on women, and not whether they are strong or weak women.

I have been hearing for a long time that a woman is weak, she is disabled. What is the reality - are we weak or have we been made weak or have we accepted the idea that we are weak, and so become weak women? My experience is that a woman is not weak; her circumstances render her weak; her culture, her tradition makes her weak.

Look at me, I am not educated. But I work in my home. I am the head of my house. When I wake up in the morning, I feel weak - will I earn enough, will I be able to take care of my family and yet give my best to my work? As the day progresses, and I find I am coping with everything, I start feeling strong. In the night, when I look back, strength fills me - I have done everything I wanted to do, and well. I run my house and along with this, I am also giving a message to the society that the woman is not weak.

The slums and resettlement colonies where the members of the Basti Manch live and work have a fair proportion of single women, many of whom also have children. The Basti Manch members felt that telefiction did not pay enough attention to single women and their problems. These women were hardly represented. The serial *Banegi Apni Baat* was among the few exceptions

- *Banegi Apni Baat*, which gives a sensitive portrayal of a single mother bringing up three girls, is regressive to the extent that when one daughter cannot conceive, she is made to feel as though she is an 'incomplete woman', whereas in all other situations in the serial she is shown as having a very equal relationship with her husband .



Impact on children

The Basti Manch members were very vocal about the impact of telefiction, tele-imagery and tele-advertising on children and adolescents.

- The whole day children want to watch television. They don't even want to waste time changing clothes or studying after returning from school.
- The provocative, sexy scenes are having a very bad impact on youth and growing children. Sexual harassment and rape is increasing, thanks to erotic and exciting scenes shown on TV. What do they seek to achieve by showing these scenes?

The serial *Shaktimaan*, which shows the exploits of a superhero with non-human strength and powers, is extremely popular with children, who see the superhero as a role model. The women were extremely concerned about children emulating such a role model. In fact, their concern with dangerous role models has been voiced even before the *Shaktimaan* controversy started.

- We cannot see other serials on the day *Shaktimaan* is aired. The children refuse to let us change channels.
- I have heard children say to one another: jump (from a height). Don't be frightened, I'll save you. I am *Shaktimaan*.
- It is important for the serial to convey to the children that *Shaktimaan* is merely a fictional hero and that under no circumstances should they try to emulate his exploits.

Insert photo – Basti Manch 2

- Pinky Singh and Asha Singh in the serial *Aurat*



Advertisements

The Basti women were unanimous that there were too many advertisements breaking up programmes, particularly News and Current Affairs. This, they felt, caused too much distraction, and did not let them concentrate on the news. They also felt that children were adversely affected by TV ads.

- They ask for jeans, Action shoes. They do not want to eat rotis, they want chowmein and Maggi noodles.
- Ads do not show 'sachchai'- the truth. In reality, no soap (washing or detergent) can remove the die-hard (old) stains from clothes.

DEMANDS

"Real" television is our need. Media should expose the indifference and failure of the administration and reveal the suffering and discrimination that people living in bastis face. Our day to day struggles and problems with different institutions should get reflected in the media. The governments and related agencies should be made accountable to the problems of the normal people and their inefficiencies, inadequacies, failures, indifference to the problems of the people should be exposed through the news and current affairs programmes.

The opinions and suggestions of people living in bastis and from the less-privileged section of the society should be included in news and current affairs programmes.

Programmes, legal and constitutional rights pertaining to gender should be shown.

All violence against women should be covered in a sensitive manner seeking to help women instead of exploiting them.

In talk shows, women from all economic classes including those living in bastis should be included and given enough time to air their opinions and grievances.

The portrayal of women should be realistic and balanced.

Do not depict violent and derogatory behaviour especially against women.

Do not use women's bodies in a titillating manner, by showing sexually implicit scenes and scantily clad women as this provokes sexual harassment and sexual violence against women.

Do not trivialise women in fiction and advertisements.

Do not provide dangerous role models for children as programmes like *Shaktimaan* do.



Woman, Her Man and Family: The Middle-Class Woman Speaks

WOMAN IS ON THE CENTRESTAGE on television today. A large number of telefiction, but especially soaps, serials, and even some primetime television programmes, revolves around the life, loves and aspirations of the woman. She is portrayed as the daughter, the wife, the mistress, the mother, the widow, the daughter-in-law, the mother-in-law and the young career woman. The woman to whom things happen, and who makes things happen.

What is the most popular image of woman on television? She is young to middle-aged; she is self-sufficient, wants to pursue a career, and is, more often than not, fairly successful. Even in her relationship with men, and with the family, the TV woman of the late 1990s shows a new attitude

- If single, she is usually in love with a man (often married) of whom her family does not approve; this 'other' woman became a very visible part of the telefiction of the late nineties.
- If married, her husband has usually either rejected her, or is having an affair with another woman.
- Sometimes, the married woman is attracted to another man.
- If she is a successful career woman, it is just as likely she began her career to avenge or forget the men who mistreated her.

The 30-40 year-old woman of today's television is no longer quiet and submissive. Maybe she does not always leave her husband and home, but she respects her own interests and actively pursues them.

The middle-class women who watch these serials form a bond of intimacy with the women they see on television. For these women, unlike those of the Basti Manch or the Disability Forum, the larger portrayal of women is not as much an issue as are the events of the protagonists' lives. They feel an intense stake in the lives of their favourite protagonists.

When we watch a serial, we identify ourselves with the actors. I wonder whether the actors too view the serial from the audience's point of view? Do they also become the 'audience' at some point of time?

Week after week, the serials absorb their viewers as intimate yet invisible members of a family - or more often, two or three families. Far from watching it passively the viewers in fact take sides about various

characters. Their image of what the protagonist's ideal family environment should be starts to crystallize; the decisions the woman should take, the reactions she should make - all of this figures very strongly in the viewers reactions to telefiction. They are as concerned about the heroine as they would be about a friend or relative. For some, she could be a daughter or a sister. They discuss the protagonist's plight over tea, at the dinner table, over the telephone with friends, and at meetings - for them this is a day-to-day living concern.

Breathing Life into *Saans*

Saans is a serial dealing with man-woman relationship within the framework of an urban middle class nuclear family. However given the fairly uniformly dependent status of the woman within the institution of marriage, the implication of the serial extends beyond its social group.

A marriage of fifteen years (Priya and Gautam's) is breaking up as the husband gets involved with a younger working woman. The wife moves to her mother's house along with her two adolescent children.. Thus, the estranged confronts the problems of their relationship, the status of the 'other woman' and the problems of sustaining the family unit.

A sample of some general reactions to the T.V. serial, 'Saans' :

I am perfectly puzzled how a normal man such as Gautam, who has such an understanding and beautiful wife like Priya, can have an illicit relation with another woman; this in my view is a strange human foible. He doesn't even care about his children's feelings; he doesn't want his home to be ruined but so powerful is the attraction of the other woman that he leaves them all for her.

If the men in society behave irresponsibly like Gautam, then what will happen to families and to children? Gautam's wife Priya is beautiful, intelligent, educated, and totally devoted to her husband. Leaving a wife like this, Gautam has got entangled with Manisha. God knows what he sees in that other woman. True the heart is fickle. But both the lovable school-going children are so insecure and scared because their father has got involved with another woman. God alone knows why Gautam wants to mentally torture such innocent children! He is intelligent, earning well and with a happy family life, why is he ruining all this (apne pairon pe kulhadi maar raha hai) - I can't understand this. Manisha is nothing but a blot on womankind. Agreed she is lonely, depressed, but it doesn't mean that she should destroy a happy family. I want the director to unite the husband and father with his family. Or else, stop making these serials which don't have a happy ending.

I don't like (Gautam's) character, but there are such people in the world, and the serial tries to show them. I think this serial is a beautiful presentation of reality, and I wait eagerly for Mondays to find out what happens next.

The first thing I do in the morning when I wake up, is see the newspaper and decide which serial am I going see after finishing all my house and outside work. Something that will not impinge on my time, and give me peace of mind as well. Why should I see the whole lot of serials and upset myself? For me TV is a good and pleasant pastime. - *Vimla Goel, a middle-class viewer*

A SCENE FROM 'SAANS'



About the scene: Priya is being interviewed for a job. She has never worked before, but she has now decided to become financially independent of her husband.

Interviewer 1: Please give us your bio-data.

Interviewer 2: Don't you know what a bio-data is?

Priya: It gives your past working experience and relevant information. Sir, I have not worked before. I am a housewife and I am living with my mother. I want a job.

Interviewer 2: What about your husband?

Priya: Actually I don't live with him. That is the reason why I want a job. I am very efficient and I will be able to do my job.

Interviewer 1: But, we want an experienced hand.

Interviewer 2: Actually, we want a girl, who is familiar with computers, has some prior experience and preferably unmarried.

Interviewer 1: We don't mean that you are incapable of doing the job. But we can't give you an immediate reply. You leave your address and telephone number, we will get back to you.

Priya: Thank you.

Select Reactions and Responses:

Neelima (a middle-aged woman): *The scene beautifully captures a woman's dependency, her lack of esteem when she is faced with a difficult situation in life (husband leaving her for the 'other' woman). Every woman experiences this. It is like the feeling a woman has when her children become independent and she realises that they do not need her any more.*

Madhu Prasad (Reader in Philosophy, Zakir Hussain College): *Such changes come very quickly in a woman's life. One day she realises that her children and her husband don't need her any more.*

The discussion then moved to whether Priya should take money from her husband.

Meena Subramaniam (social activist and member of All India Women's Conference): *The contrasting attitudes of the two generations are presented very nicely in this episode. The mother has seen*

the world. She has lots of experience. And her reaction to the problem is well considered. Why should Gautam go scot-free? He should at least pay for the children's education.

Vibha (a middle-aged woman belonging to a business family): *I feel that what women need is attachment, not money. In a way, I feel Priya is doing the right thing by not taking money from him. She is torturing him. Otherwise, his conscience would have been clear.*

Madhu: *Maybe this is the only way she can hit back!*

Mithilesh (a homemaker with grown-up children): *In a husband-wife relationship, the wife expects emotional security, money comes later.*

Sudha Goel (a homemaker): *For fifteen years, Gautam was devoted to Priya, but then this other woman traps him and he falls prey. I feel very bad for Priya. Can't Gautam see what is happening? There are many women like Manisha. She is wicked. Just watch and see, she's lying about being pregnant so that she can hold on to the man. (Everyone agrees.)*

Ranjana (a young woman): *Men are blind. Gautam is not able to see the 'real' Manisha. She is wicked. She might have murdered her husband.*

Shashi Arora (55 years): *I identify with the mother. My daughter has been married for 13 years. Whenever I see this serial, I wonder what would happen if my daughter had to ever face this ?*

Ravina Suri (active in social work and member of Lions Club): *This happens even after 25 years of marriage. You will keep worrying all your life.*

On whether Priya is traditional or modern

Vibha: *Till Priya was with her husband, she was traditional. But, now she is changing herself - becoming a modern, independent woman.*

Usha Bhasin (member of All India Women's Conference and homemaker): *Everybody thinks she is weak, incapable of going out to work. I feel she has inner strength; she will succeed. I find women are more powerful and assertive than men in this serial.*

- Neena Gupta (producer and director of *Saans*) and Ashok Pandit (producer and director of *Tere Mere Sapne*) at the Public Event organised by the Viewers' Forum

Illus. no. 3

Hasratein: Dealing with Extra-marital Relationships



Hasratein begins with Savi as a young child. Her mother, married to an old musician who cannot fulfil her physical needs, runs away, leaving her husband and child. When Savi grows up, her professor proposes marriage, and unquestioningly, she agrees. After giving birth to a child, she begins feeling the need to pursue a career, the thought of which her husband rejects. Nevertheless, Savi takes a job and the attraction between Savi and her boss is immediate. They also share a love for music which also helps in bringing them closer. Savi leaves her home and child for her lover, who is also married with two children.

As the serial progresses, and the actress playing Savi changes, the relationship, which was initially based on physical attraction, matures to the point where emotional intimacy is just as important. Savi and her lover have a daughter.

Savi was originally played by Seema Kapur (an alluring actress who comes across as very comfortable in her sexuality). She has since been replaced by Shefali Chaya, who has a more dignified intellectual - and to some extent 'activist' - look. Sexuality is pushed to the sidelines.

According to the director Ajay Sinha, *the difference between the previous and the new Savi is, what can be called, 'warmth'. You look at the new Savi as mother, wife, sister, while the previous Savi was just another woman.'*

For many of the middle class viewers, there is an almost total identification with the serial. The serial is no longer a work of fiction, but a part of life. For these viewers, Savi of *Hasratein* posed a special challenge to their values

Hasratein forced the viewers to take a stand on both extra-marital relationships *per se* and on whether such depictions should be shown at all on TV. On the one hand, there was acceptance amongst viewers that extra-marital relationships have always existed. The issue was whether such relationships should be aired on television. Is society ready to openly acknowledge such relationships? Does the woman have a right to assert her sexuality and her choice of a sexual partner? Where do children fit in such a situation? What is the impact on the children born of such relationships?

Sample responses:

This has been going on for all the ages, since the days of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The only thing was that such relationships were kept away from public gaze. Only now have we started sitting together, watching programmes like *Hasratein*, and discussing such issues.

Now this is happening in the middle class also. Earlier this was considered as a question of the 'honour' of the house and such happenings were kept secret.

It proves that such a situation can arise. Earlier people were afraid of even talking about it. Many times, you may not be affected personally, but you may know someone who was in this situation. By watching such programmes you know how to cope with it. There are lots of people who will identify with this situation. I think this is the way TV educates, and what we should learn from it.

r. Q: Mr. Sinha, why didn't Savi get divorced from her husband?

Mr. Sinha's Answer: I am interested in depicting the real position of women in a male-dominated society. We have put women on a pedestal, calling them 'devis' and using this as a pretext to treat them differently. In fact, since all the women that men romance with are treated unfairly, I have tried to get away from the kind of depiction that men find convenient. Given this thrust, a simple solution like Savi taking recourse to a divorce will take everything away from my story.

I had problems with my husband, and we decided to live separately. But when we saw *Hasratein*, we realised what this would lead to. We decided to re-establish our family life. These serials don't reflect our lives exactly, but still we can identify with them.

See I don't agree with you when you say that extra-marital affairs are happening in the middle class. People have stopped watching soaps. Our problem is we are not strong enough. We are not able to convey our feelings to the producers. Only two things dominate TV, and they are sex and violence. Violence of thought and deeds. And it is wrong to say that these reflect the whole; they do, but only a small segment of society.

The whole thing is so disgusting.

Illus. no. 4 to come here

• Shefali
Chaya and
Harsh Chaya
in the
teleserial
Hasratein

The serial depicts one woman's suppressed sexual desires, which, when given expression, are so overwhelming, that they blur the line between right and wrong. This truth has been shown in a very effective

manner. Both Savi's and her mother's characters have been brought out beautifully. I don't accept such behaviour for myself, yet I know it happens frequently. Therefore, serials that sensitively depict human relationships should be shown.

Seema Kapur was a good actress (as a sexually attractive woman). There were some scenes that were so good that even now the viewers remember them. Shefali Chaya as Savi is all wrong. She just does not fit the role.

The character of Savi, Sushma or Savi's mother whatever... it appears to me that they represent the wrong concept of womanhood.

In the serial KT's (Savi's lover) character is able to break away from the stereotypes, yet the wife is still mired in them. Usually, a wife would do all she can to save her marriage, but here I feel with her nagging and bickering she is actually pushing KT further into the relationship.

Parents do not like their daughters or sons to marry into such a family.

Society is not homogeneous. Society is about a woman who's living with somebody else outside her marriage. Society is also about a woman who is lewd enough to get her daughter married into such a family. Both are present in society.

I do not find anything beautiful in somebody leading this kind of life. It affects the children that are born of this relationship. They face problems

In society. Look at the case of Urja (Savi's daughter by KT). How can you find anything beautiful in that?

I saw the worst form of social deviation in the *Mahabharata*. There is one scene where the queen mother gets a sadhu (her own illegitimate son) to impregnate her two widowed and childless daughters-in-law. These actions enjoyed this kind of social sanction. And today we condemn them. This is an example of the same hypocrisy prevalent in every part of

the world. We worship them on the one hand, and we condemn them on the other- and we blame somebody else.

Is the portrayal of Priya one of total helplessness? Is Santosh (of *Amanat*) actually helpless? I think portrayal is one's own interpretation. When she appears for an interview for a job, or when she looks for her identity only in terms of her relationship then I get angry with her. She has her own identity as a woman. Now is the time for her to start recognising this, and also to cope with this new emergence of her image and identity. - Amita Buch

There are many serials where a woman is shown as sitting in the house, waiting for her husband. Even in *Tere Mere Sapne*, *Amanat* and *Saans*. Again whether it is Priya or Manisha, what are they doing in their personal life? Where is their personal growth? The serials must also show these. They should try to give a new message - not that the husband is everything or that marriage is the ultimate goal for a woman.

By showing the woman as weak what change can you bring about? Is it necessary to depict women's response to many of their problems as being emotionally confused, weak and unprepared? Can't they show her responding with a balance of strength and weakness? Can't she be shown as strong and determined when faced with a problem?

Strong vs. weak women

Neena Gupta, producer and director of *Saans* firmly believes all women are weak. As she explained to the viewers:

I do not wish to tell lies or give false hopes. Hence I am showing what I am because if I show what you want me to show, then most husbands will push their wives out of the house. I am telling you what I have seen happening with my neighbours, friends, across different strata of society. Let women show a little independence, give their opinion and they are out.

At night they will either rape you or ask you to get out if you dare to speak out your mind. That's why as "Priya" in *Saans* I am not a bold person. She is a weak character. I am showing and playing Priya because I feel I am weak – Neena Gupta is weak – I am sorry but you will be shocked to hear that I feel being a woman is a curse.

If Priya didn't have her mother how would she have reacted? Now Priya has a mother so she leaves his house. If she did not have a mother she would have allowed him to have his fun and then let him come back. Because she would have had no option. There is a lot of big talk about independence of women. None of this is easy for women of her age. They do not have the habit of working outside the house. Moreover, there is a lot of competition with younger, smarter, more educated girls. Under these circumstances, how will Priya find herself a job?

So, before I bring up this point of a woman's strength I have to lay a realistic foundation. If the foundation is not realistic and honest, people will laugh. Just like when a woman becomes a pradhan, they laugh because there is no acceptance of her in this role.

A woman called me and said, "Torture Gautam. Make him comes back and fall at Priya's feet and beg for forgiveness. Only then let Priya take him back but make her torture him". I asked her why should Priya take him back at all? Doesn't she have self-respect? But later, I realised that

the difference between my opinion and the woman who had called was that while I earn my own bread and butter, this woman was dependent on her husband. While I was thinking about 'self-respect', this woman was thinking about how to raise children!

I say we are selfish, but I had money to run my house. I was financially secure, then I thought of Saans. After seeing women around me I thought that after the age of 35 women die; as though their work were only to run the house or look after children; they put on weight, the husband walks out. So I felt I had to deliver a message that life for women does not end at 35. They have all the desires. They can look good. They can start their lives all over again. Their responsibilities are over. This point will come out in Saans.

Mr. Sinha, does your child watch *Hasratein*?

Sinha- Today things have changed. Everything has become open. When, I was growing up I had a cousin from whom I used to ask about all those things which were considered bad for anybody my age . When such books used to enter our engineering college, everyone rushed to have a first look, and the book used to get torn. It was almost like raping the book..

But now things have changed. My son went to see Titanic with us. All of you must have seen it. There was a scene in it where the old women says, "We did not do these things." My son asked, "What things?" Everybody in the theatre started laughing. We told him to wait till we reach home. After coming to our home, we explained to him. Now, what he does is that whenever such a scene comes on TV, he just smiles or changes the channel. He knows it is embarrassing. I think this is better than asking his cousin, etc.

If you are saying that a ten-year-old boy does not know about these things, then looking back at my own childhood, I must say that I was precocious. I knew about these things by the age of seven or eight.

That scene when Seema Kapoor went to the bathroom... and invited KT along was vulgar. At 10 o'clock, with so many children watching the serial – this is a matter of concern to all of us.

I don't think serials influence the behaviour of any significant section of the society. A 15-year old girl who watches an extra-marital affair on TV will not go out and do the same. However, steps need to be taken not to glorify such affairs. When you legalise or glorify something, you are providing social sanction to it - this might marginally increase (in terms of percentage) such affairs in society. And this is where our social responsibility comes in. These double standards are common in USA also. A 21-year old girl can go on a date with her boyfriend and spend the night with him and no eyebrows are raised. But their President can be implicated in a sex scandal.

I have a 10-year old son and I watch TV with him for hours. And I find it very positive, just sitting with my son and watching. This way I can discuss a number of topics with him, which otherwise I would have never thought of on my own. All of us talk about parental guidance. I felt that rather than exercising control on their watching, it is better to just sit with them and offer guidance when it is necessary. Like in one episode of Just Mohabbat, the 10-year old child, in order to help a poor man, suggests that he should call the boy's parents and say that he has kidnapped him, then demand a ransom. So while I was watching the program with my son, I had this opportunity to discuss with him the pain the parents must have undergone, and he was able to see the implications of this prank in a mature way. So also with sex, gender, wife-beating, I would never have discussed these topics with my son, but since we watch them on TV together, I can easily bring them up in conversation.

TEACH KIDS TO WATCH TV

Sushma Seth, a well-known TV actress, feels that parents need to offer their children alternative sources of entertainment such as theatre, music, arts, etc. According to Ms. Seth, parents must teach children how to watch TV.



TV is a powerful medium; we have a responsibility to ensure that our children learn the right values from TV. Initially, when TV came in the 1960's, the government thought that it would merely be used for education, but then came the satellite invasion and the whole scenario changed. We should accept that there are certain things we can change and others we can't. But, we can control our children and make them watch only the right kind of television. Screen the programmes if necessary. Classify them as we do with the films and ensure that your children watch accordingly.

If we want to exercise control (over our children's viewing habits), the first change must come from us. We must exercise control over ourselves. Yet when both men and women work, the easiest option becomes to put the child in front of the TV.

Control cannot be exercised by the on and off switch. There is peer pressure from school and colleges. If we stop them at home, they will go outside to other children's homes and watch whatever they want to...Painting, theatre, musical recitals, etc. (often seen as better alternatives to TV viewing) are inaccessible for the majority of Indians.

Raksha Shukla (at a Viewer's forum meeting with the directors of *Tere Mere Sapne* and *Saans* :

When all of us sit together and watch TV, there is no dividing line. We feel we are directing the serial. The dividing line, at one level, vanishes with our interaction (with the directors). Because of such interactions, the viewer doesn't only view it as an audience, but also as a director. And when the viewer and the director become one, then the viewers feel very happy and satisfied. It is to overcome this barrier (the dividing line), that the Viewers' Forum exists. Otherwise, it is a one-way traffic: they keep showing things and we keep watching. This interaction, and the kind of change that we want, will be a regular churning between you and us. Let us see what new things will emerge from this churning.

The middle class response to advertising on television

- ❑ *The ads come in such a disgusting manner. All these ads also have actors in it. Children watch them. Should we not pay heed to this?*

-
-
- ❑ *Ads use such inappropriate spokespersons. If the ad is for petroleum jelly, they get children to ask for it, or demand it, or inform us of its use in keeping the skin soft in winter. It is so unrealistic.*



How does television portray women?

Some conclusions of Viewers' Forum (1996-97)

Most of the protagonists are young (twenties to mid thirties), urban, cosmopolitan, belonging to elite (or at least upper middle class) sections of society, and more often than not trying to establish their careers or their own business.

The traditional image of the Indian woman as patient, long-suffering, sacrificing and tongue-tied persists to some extent.

The independent woman is (with a few notable exceptions) vicious, and quite often evil.

Working women are either persistent gossip and rumour-mongers, or best suited for secretarial jobs in which they flirt with and gratify their boss.

Despite the above, professional women - lawyers, public relations officers, doctors, nurses, journalists, college lecturers, etc. - are also present.

Women are basically manipulative; they do not confront problems directly, but only through intrigues - within the family and outside.

Teenage and college girls are dim-witted, vulnerable to manipulation by boys, and helpless victims of romantic campus capers.

The overbearing, selfish and inconsiderate character of women as either daughters-in-law or mothers-in-law is the chief cause of conflict between these relations.

DEMANDS

Trivialisation of women and their relationships as seen in sitcoms like *Tu Tu Main Main* must be addressed.

Serials must not represent marriage as woman's ultimate goal for women, nor should they present husbands as all-important.

Objectification of women through advertisements as seen in Kinetic Honda, Philips Music system and the use of suggestive phrases as in the Rotomac ad

`Sab kuch dikhta hai' or `Yeh andar ki baat hai' should be taken off the air.

Advertisements often provide wrong and incomplete medical information, which misleads viewers. They should be stopped. E.g., Fair and Lovely, Shampoos with ZPTO.

There should be more positive portrayal of single women, single mothers and any woman who are shown outside of `traditional' roles.

Man-woman relationships must be depicted in a sensitive and balanced manner.

WHERE ARE WE ON TV? -VIEWERS WITH DISABILITY SPEAK.

NEARLY 10 percent of the Indian population lives with some form of disability. Disability, however, does not seem to affect even 1 percent of the characters shown on television. How do viewers with disabilities feel about their representation – or the lack of it?

We are unable (physically) to reach these places. For such people TV has become a medium through which at some level we relate to a world with which we have broken contacts. For quadriplegics and other severely disabled people TV is a window to the world.



Ten years ago, Doordarshan, in its role as public broadcaster, used to commission programmes on disability and broadcast them during prime time. Today, in a commercially driven television industry disability has become nearly invisible. The Disability Forum unanimously believes that disability deserves greater representation in media.

Doordarshan, as the national broadcasting agency, has a special responsibility in providing public service broadcasting to such marginalised groups.

The majority of disabled people have not had the opportunities which would help them compensate for their disability. They remain dependent on others. The few who have managed to gain such access have become very much part of the mainstream. What tends to happen when people think about disability is the notion, 'Oh! They can't do this, can't do that', which is very negative. I think **there should be more media representation of people with disabilities in order to harness their potential . Everybody has potential, and everybody has disability. I think the media should highlight the stories of people who have achieved success in life despite their disabilities.**

As part of my work, I have been to Bihar, U. P. and other remote areas. The problem is that people are not aware of provisions of policies relating to disabled persons. The only way to reach these people is not through Star TV or any cable network, but through Doordarshan which is the most widely telecast channel. Some of the programmes should indicate how the whole issue of disability is perceived by the people connected with it and suggest how they should use certain existing provisions . Now, how all this is projected is very important.

I really feel flabbergasted when I approach these issues. I was with a group of journalists some days back, and even they said, "Okay! You tell us what to write in our articles because we don't know." **I feel sad because we are placed on a different platform altogether.**

The Disability Forum members differed over how the media should treat the issue of disability. Should it be treated as a practical issue of development and human rights? Or should it be a matter of giving voice to a group of people who have been historically marginalized so that they may share their own feelings of turmoil and discrimination?

Those believing the first proposition felt that media ought to show how a small number of disabled people have taken advantage of the opportunities around them and achieved some amount of equality. This sort of treatment should represent equality as an urgent issue of both rights and economic necessity, as the disabled constitute 60 million Indians, or 10 per cent of the population. Others, however, felt that broadcasting the achievements of the few would ignore the psychological isolation, and the often inadvertent discrimination the disabled face in "normal" society. Television for disabled people should help them to overcome such feelings of isolation.



Material barriers can be overcome by the individual, but attitudinal prejudices can only be combated collectively. Media should project the emotional and psychological conflicts of those with disabilities so that their isolation is broken. Themes such as disabled people's sexuality cannot be addressed in the framework of "rights"; instead there are attitudinal barriers which must be addressed.



On the special episodes of *Sa Re Ga Ma*¹ for the disabled.

- I found the special episode of *Sa Re Ga Ma* very touching. But, why a special episode? If they sing equally well, then why not include them as normal participants?
- By ghettoising us, the media tends to emphasize our disability rather than our ability. Moreover, they gave prizes to all four contestants rather than picking a winner (as is the usual practice). This would not have happened if we were treated as 'normal'.

¹ *Sa Re Ga Ma* is a popular show on Zee TV to highlight people's musical abilities

The discrimination faced by disabled people in our society is in fact matched by the apathetic treatment meted out to them in the news media. News media in particular must learn to represent the disabled as human beings by showing not just disability, but ability and potential.

Some responses from the members of the viewers forum:

Whenever mainstream or prime time serials have characters with disabilities, they are never shown as 'normal' people. It is true that we have problems but not all areas of our lives are affected by them. **Normal living and disability never come together in the media. It is assumed that a disabled person must be isolated.**

Exposure to mass media shapes our beliefs about the world. By countering oversimplified images and stereotypes, media can change social perceptions. Surely television can play some kind of a role. Let's hope it does.

The media shows us confined to our homes. This is not true. We are mobile.

I feel that it is not fair to apportion the blame on media alone. Our NGOs and the disability professionals are equally responsible for this situation. We have been so involved in service delivery, that these other aspects have been ignored. A certain image has been created - maybe not intentionally, but that is what has happened. **Over a period of five decades, we have forgotten to look at disability as a rights issue. Now we must realise that things have gone wrong, and then understand why they have gone wrong.** Media doesn't show any understanding of disability and why is that? In the last few years I have noticed, that the only interaction NGOs and media have is when the former organises an event and wants news coverage. And even in this coverage, the same mainstream societal attitudes and images are reinforced. Look! These are disabled children, but they can sing! ..etc. And those images are picked up and are reported in newspapers and on TV. How many times have we taken the trouble to approach the media on matters of issues? How many people know that 10% of this country's population live with disabilities? How many of us have approached media telling them not to show disability as a matter of charity, but rather as a development issue.

The Forum for Viewers with Disability felt that when news programmes do air stories involving the disabled, they are either slotted separately, as in the post-weather "soft news" space, or they are treated in a patronizing manner. **Responses:**

We find Star TV to be the most sensitive and alert channel vis-a-vis disability. Doordarshan also telecasts certain programmes (mainly educational) but they are put in time slots not watched by many people.

Let's look at *Star News* for example. If they talk about disability, it is only after the weather. I think what we are talking about is mainstreaming. I think if there is a fashion show or a sports event involving people with disabilities, it should be reported in the same manner as

Sushmita Sen is reported. **It should be treated as a normal event, not as something which 'different' people are doing.**

I want to compliment and congratulate Ms. Juhi Sinha for the episode of *Going On* that began with the story of a girl called Anjali. She touched upon the theme of marriage between two people with muscular dystrophy, taking into account the perspectives of both families and the couple involved. No other programme or channel has ever tried to touch upon these issues. *A viewer with disability*

Juhi Sinha, Director and Producer of *Going On* (Doordarshan) has made 26 episodes on disability:

There is an irresistible temptation to see the disability and not the person; yet the moment we look beyond this vision, we find a person who has the same hopes, aspirations and feelings as anyone else. This is what I have tried to show in my programmes. I always say that my serial is not about people with disabilities, but my focus is on universal emotions. All of us feel low, all of us are unhappy about something or other - in our bodies, our lives. When we come to realise this, then our society will be much more sensitive

.Responses:

Instead of showing disability in this manner, you can have a newsreader who is disabled. If people see him or her on TV, it is bound to encourage others also. Like Jaipal Reddy, whenever he used to come on TV, people had this feeling that, despite his having suffered from polio, he has achieved something. Or perhaps the media should have a disabled person reporting on nuclear tests etc.

In one of the episodes of the *Kiron Joneja Show* dealing with depression, what irked me was that not a single participant with disability was included in the panel. Depression is not limited only to the able-bodied. We are as much victims of it. Take the case of *Manoj. He is a businessman who is also paraplegic.*

Response of the audience to *The Priya Tendulkar Show on disability*

The Priya Tendulkar Show (August 2) caught my attention. How I wish that I had an opportunity to learn from a woman in the audience who presented the reality of society in such a poignant way. Firstly, there is no respect for human life. Secondly, we have come into this world with a disability. Finally, we are women.

I hope I have managed to communicate her anxiety and despair (if that is possible). With all due respect to Priya for organising the show, isn't it possible we can be more sensitive to the issue? If media is to play a role in improving the quality of life of every human being - and that, I hope, will automatically include people with disabilities - then it had better learn to depict human lives with dignity and some ordinary "common-sense".

The audience seemed to have come with expectations that their voices would be heard. But, apart from paying some lip service, as usual, the programme didn't do anything; the panellists were totally dumb. If one is really sensitive, then the organisers need to put in a little more thought to see that the issue is handled sensitively. As a member of the audience, I felt bad and helpless. I don't think that the idea of programmes should be to evoke pity.

Photograph of meeting where viewers' forum members who are physically handicapped are visible. *insert photo no.*

Audience response to *State of the Nation in India Talks* (CNBC - 24 Aug. 1998) moderated by Paranjoy Guha Thakurta.

- I think a major problem is that such programmes don't come on mainstream channels.
- Well, I think both the speakers (Javed Abidi and Anita Ghai) did a good job of highlighting the issues. However, if these are not systematically followed up with the appropriate authorities, the program will remain only talk and never receive the serious attention it deserves. What Mr. Javed Abidi said about the 'invisible minority', and what Anita said about programming really helped to convey the reality of the issue.
- I wish to thank the Producer and Director of the programme for the episode on the disabled. The problems they face outweighs the practical solutions available to them. The programme showed how the disabled form an 'invisible minority', and how the government merely prepares policies on paper rather than providing practical services. More such programmes should be shown to enable sensitive interaction between the disabled and the able-bodied so that something concrete could emerge from these exercises.

7 crores of us would also like to see a glimpse of ourselves on TV. We know that TV is commercially driven. So we don't expect to be on it straight away. Initially, we just want a little visibility. Later, if there is money to support social causes, then we want entertainment.



Ms. Radhika Bordia, NDTV on the dilemmas faced by a working on the issue of disability.

I work with a company producing programmes largely centered on hard news, such as politics and economics. We have to fight to get news and features about disability in a prime time slot.

One problem we face is the use of politically correct language. Certain people prefer to use the term `differently able'. Others are not concerned, so I'd like to know from disability advocates whether usage makes a real difference to them.

I'll give an example. I did a feature some time back which focused on a poetry reading event for the disabled. The host was called `Crippled Aid Trust,' which immediately gave me a feeling of disquiet.

Responses of viewers with disability

* See, you can say `differently able', but ten years down the line `differently able' will also become offensive. It doesn't matter what terminology is being used.

* I also have a problem when they just say differently able. If the psychology of all this is not changed you can have the best terminology in the world but nothing is going to matter. It is the underlying dynamics - the psychological understanding – which counts. I don't mind the word `physically handicapped' as long as there is understanding of what handicap means.

Anyway, one of the shots that I had taken was a woman with one leg, who was standing on crutches behind the dais. A shot taken from the front would have ensured that her disability remain invisible. Instead, I used a shot taken from the back, which accentuated her disability.

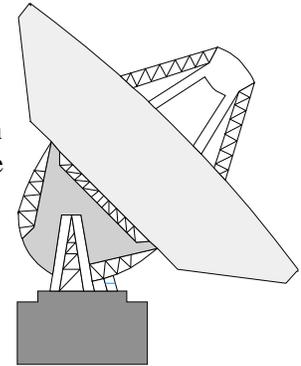
It was a very dramatic shot, which immediately got viewers' attention, but, several people, including a close friend of mine - who is a physiotherapist at the Spastic Society - said that they were very unhappy with the shot. They felt it reinforced popular perceptions about disability by zeroing in on the disability at the cost of her ability as a poet.

When I took this shot, I knew that I was using it for dramatic impact so that it would get included in the bulletin. This is a constant dilemma we have to face... we know that sometimes the sort of shots we use can highlight disability, but these are essential for making the feature more visible. That's the kind of compromise we have to constantly make.

Broadcasting for the hearing-impaired

Special programmes, like the Sunday news bulletin for the hearing impaired, were the subject of discussion at *the Viewers' Symposium* organised by the Viewers' Forum and Media Advocacy Group in collaboration with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Human Resource Development Foundation on 13th of May at India International Centre.

Ananya Banerjee, Doordarshan's spokesperson pointed out that Doordarshan is the only channel which provides a service of this kind.



Dr. Onkar Sharma from All India Federation for the Deaf, while conceding this point, expressed certain reservations. He said that **despite repeated pleas by disability advocates to improve the content and presentation of news, thus far no effort has been made to make it more friendly or responsive to the needs of the disabled viewers. Outdated headlines, lack of necessary background information, and poor presentation plague the programme.** It was also pointed out that the sign language used by the news presenter is not the most appropriate for hearing-impaired in India.

In a subsequent meeting, Mr. Sudheer Tandon, Controller of Programming, Special Audience Programme Unit, Doordarshan refuted this criticism. He stressed that Doordarshan in response to complaints had introduced around a year and a half back, certain basic changes in consultation with a prime professional institute in Mumbai. He defended the news programme as one of Doordarshan's best practices, and said that he welcomed any suggestion for further improvement. He also suggested that private regional channels be approached to provide similar services in regional languages.²

Asked by viewers whether Doordarshan allots a specific amount of time for programming on issues like disability, Mr. Tandon replied that the station faces several constraints, such as lack of funds and staff. He added that while Doordarshan did not have any fixed chart for scheduling or slotting of particular issues/programmes, such issues are, as far as possible, given importance and priority. He went on to explain that a certain amount of coverage is mandatory to mark special 'days', which are celebrated in the country or internationally. Doordarshan follows this rule. Mr. Tandon offered that if voluntary organisations want to make programmes for promoting their own causes, Doordarshan is ready to telecast them provided they fulfilled the channel's guidelines and producers agreed to pay the telecast fee.

Suggestions for mainstreaming disability in news and current affairs programmes

- Software companies (like those of Rajat Sharma) should concern themselves with the consumer problems of disabled people, and include such issues in programmes like *Awaaz*.

² Mr. Sudheer Tandon attended the core group meeting held on 25th May 1998 for planning the future initiative on the issue. Though he was not present during the Viewers' Symposium, his clarification on the News Bulletin is included in the report due to its obvious reference

- Programmes like *Awaaz*, *Janata Ki Adalat*, *Aap Ki Adalat* should interview influential news and policy makers regarding the status of disabled people's rights. These programmes could feature senior representatives from various ministries and other important public bodies responding to questions fielded by select persons with disability. For instance the representative from the education ministry could be questioned about the status of the Integrated Education policy or more specifically as to why disabled children are segregated from others in schools. Similarly representatives of the Architectural Association, the Confederation of Indian Industry, Corporate houses, could be invited and asked to update us on such vital matters as the designing of disability-friendly buildings and employment to the disabled. Alternately, the producers and directors of these Television programmes should also try and ensure that at least one issue or question concerning the welfare of the disabled is introduced in each of their general programmes.
- The National Commission on Women should include disabled people's rights in its list of priority areas.
- A calendar of events related to disability should be prepared. All news and current affairs programmes should cover the events of organisations working for people with disabilities.
- Various disabilities should be defined for the media in a resource-kit.
- Mainstream news programmes should caption their news-bulletins for the hearing impaired.
- In programmes like *Janata Ki Adalat* and *Aap Ki Adalat*, the judges should include people with disabilities and those who work with disabled people. This way, the hosts of these shows will be able to raise issues of disability with the guests on the program.
- Media critics should applaud programmes that include sensitive depictions of disability.
- Doordarshan should produce a newsmagazine program covering events and activities of special concern to the disabled.
- Programmes which are both informative and entertaining for the disabled should be produced; for example, a chat show anchored by a disabled person

Portrayal of Disability in Telefiction

Amongst the vast TV audience in India are also thousands of viewers with disability. How do these viewers relate to the occasional images of disability that are projected on the telescreen? Do the images evoke pleasure, anger, or just disgust? **Responses:**

Media is nothing but a microcosm of the society. **Media projects whatever mind-set is prevailing in the society.** Our society contains both normal people and people with disabilities. Normal people have a mind-set towards disability which is always present in the media. **Media always patronises the disabled.** Thus, whenever media projects people with disabilities, they show them as different.

All the serials on disability constantly aim at evoking sympathy. We don't want such a projection that suggests the disabled are a shunned part of the society. **What we want is for some**



characters with disabilities to be incorporated into the mainstream serials so that they are finally portrayed as a part of society.

In the serial *Zanjeerein*, there is a character called Dinesh. I am following him closely because there is a representation of us in him. So all of us wonder: will he say what we feel? There is a curiosity whether he has the same feelings we have. But for a long time now, he has not been coming. We are missing him.

Even when the disabled are absent in films and television, disparaging verbal references to the deaf, dumb, blind and lame abound. This serves to constantly undermine the confidence of the disabled. **Responses:**

Look at the way films depicts people with disability. They are seen not as human beings, but as 'objects', or sources of ridicule or evil. Even when they are not directly depicted, there is verbal abuse against them. For instance, if for some reason, the father is unable to get his daughter married, some character would remark 'just get her married to a blind or lame person'. This kind of verbal violence is going on. How would a child - or even a grown-up react to it ; Do they (the directors and producers) have no concern for this? **Apart from critically looking at what is being depicted we must also work towards a media policy that has a clear sense of direction on these issues.**

In films and telefiction, disability is used to abuse people and undermine their confidence.

In an episode of *Kabhie Idhar Kabhie Udhar* (Home TV), the main character portrayed by Shekhar Suman says, "arre tere saath to koi langadi bhi shaadi nahin karegi". (Even a lame girl won't marry you.)

There are other casually used abuses like "arre andha hai kya?" (Are you blind?) or "behara hai kya?" (Are you deaf?) in both films and television fiction.

I remember one episode of *Dekh Bhai Dekh*; there was a character with a squint who wanted to get married. And somebody in the serial very sarcastically asks him, "Don't tell me you want to marry!"

The actor, Satish Shah in the popular sitcom *Ghar Jamai* (Zee TV) threatens to cripple his son-in-law. He wonders what will happen if the son-in-law does the same to him and tells his wife, "arre agar mein bhi langada ho gaya to tu do cripple logon ko ghar mein kaise rakhegi?" (If I am also crippled, how will you handle the two of us)? This is reality for families suffering with genetic disorders like muscular dystrophy, where more than one member of the family is afflicted with the disability. **For someone who is either disabled or married to a disabled person, this sort of representation concerns them. The solutions are not so simple.**

The script writer has a responsibility. But so does the actor/actress. He or she can if they choose express their reservation about certain dialogues which are offensive to the sensibilities of the disabled.

Media is reinforcing the image of helplessness and despair that the disabled are trying to break away from. Even the alternative depiction of the powerful but villainous character of Lankesh, portrayed by Ashish Vidyarthi in *Dastaan* (Zee TV), is problematic.

Disability and gender

Both as a viewer and as a woman with disability, when I watch TV, I find that I can empathise with the pain and anguish of Priya in *Saans*, Kavita in *Thoda Hai Thode Ki Zaroorat Hai*, the extreme helplessness of Santosh in *Amanat*, and so many other characters. I am a woman and a disabled one at that. Hence I have to contend with two marginalisations.



What I am trying to say is, I agree that we all have experiences and want to share them. The alienation we feel is the same because at one level there is a disability we all experience - that of being a woman.

But, with my own existential reality as a woman with disability, I often tend to question whether my empathy is being reciprocated somewhere. Whether the media understands people who have faced the same pain, the same agony, the same anguish because of some other circumstances and have had no choices left, perhaps much like Priya at this stage. I would like to draw your attention to the kind of representations people find in the media; whether certain sections are marginalised, whether those sections find an echo in the pain shown on TV that they can share. We are sharing it - both as people and as people with disability, but I wonder whether this double echo is reciprocated by the media. – Anita Ghai

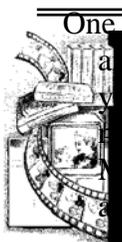


Media, disability and misinformation

In many tele-serials and sitcoms there is misrepresentation of the facts relating to disability, leading to a sort of misinformation and misunderstanding that often borders on the ludicrous. Members of the Disability Forum feel that such misrepresentation is deeply entrenched - particularly when dealing with mental disability - and despite efforts to rectify this to the extent of making an official note of it, this misrepresentation continues to persist.

Shanti is a popular afternoon serial on Doordarshan. The main story line is of a young woman, born of a raped mother, who seeks vengeance upon her father. She wants to legitimize her status and that of her mother. A boy with Down's Syndrome plays a minor role. His characterization and the ludicrous depiction of his problems were major themes of discussion at the session on *Depiction of Disability on Television* during the Video Fest of May 1998.

Some Reactions of the members of the viewers forum:



One of the serials features a boy who is mentally retarded. They get the retarded boy married and later he is shown leading a normal life. After watching this serial, parents of 7 and 8 year-old children with Down's-syndrome or mental retardation wanted a commitment from the serial that through this therapy (marriage) their children would be able to lead normal lives. Mental retardation is often related to some genetic disorder. So normally marriage is not advisable. Also it is not a therapy. Such misinformation should be checked.

Sometime back there was a programme called *Tutu* on DD. It was beautifully made and Raghuvver Yadav played his role superbly. But, I felt that the director and writer had no knowledge about the problems and feelings of mentally retarded young people. And, as in *Shanti*, the solution they presented was marriage of the protagonist with a lady much older than him, where after they lived happily. I conveyed my strong objections about this

programme to Doordarshan and urged them to stop its screening on the grounds that it will raise expectations of parents with mentally retarded children. They would be under the illusion that marriage cures all this. But D.D. didn't stop the programme because they had commissioned it.

It is not just about mentioning problems, it's about mentioning the right solutions as well; and that depends on serious research, knowledge, and some vision of what the whole problem is. I think that the character of the mentally retarded boy, as shown in *Shanti*, is a caricature. For the last 30 years, I have been in touch with mentally retarded people, but this particular one is a joker. He repeats everything that is said and that is regarded as mental retardation. I can't understand why such things are allowed to be screened on a government channel.

I haven't seen *Shanti*, but whatever experience I have with media, I think the depiction of disability on media is completely ridiculous. **This is a normal human being who just has something different about him. Whenever media shows people with disabilities, they are shown wearing half-pants, drooling, lisping and so on.** In my experience with hundreds of people with disability, I have never seen a person behave like that.

The lack of correct information – and indeed, the misinformation - presented in telefiction and films has grave consequences for people living with disabilities.

A parent with a 21-year-old spastic daughter felt that the plight of parents is too seldom shown. This particular lack of information leads to late identification of disabilities in children.

In some cases, such media stereotyping even leads to parents stigmatising their own children. Media should provide a support system by providing information on institutions like schools and colleges with special facilities and employment opportunities.

Even when media is sympathetic, it does not depict the disabled as an integral part of society. More often they treat the disabled with condescension. For instance, in the film entitled *Sparsh* a blind man is shown marrying a widow. Such depictions undermine women and the disabled: the message comes out loud and clear that the marginalised can only expect to marry or have relationships with other marginalised.

Families, just like societies, are often uncomfortable with a disabled person. Families sometimes wish to hide them. So if the serials show them as an integral part of society, others might learn to feel comfortable with them as well. If the disabled came even in small roles, our awareness would also increase.

Childhood is never spent alone, but always with parents. They give children guidance. Of course, questions will crop up when we give directions. So let us keep this in mind, that this (accepting disability and disabled persons as a 'normal' part of society) is also a direction we can give the child.

Neena Gupta on the representation of disability on TV

Frankly, in my perception, women are the most disabled strata of society. Disability is not only about not having eyes, hands and legs but also about social discrimination. It is a curse being born as a woman. Therefore as far as I am concerned women take precedence over people with physical and mental disabilities. I just want to say that people with disabilities will have to wait in the queue, because for me your turn will come after I have addressed problems related to women.

However, I agree that people with disabilities need to be depicted. But here, I feel that unlike women where I may have personal experience to guide me, on disability it would be more effective if you could give us in writing your experiences and insights on the issue. I personally cannot commit myself to using your suggestions. Nor do I necessarily accept your belief that integrating these issues into our story lines will increase awareness. It is possible that some of it may strike me as relevant to my own story, but you will have to take your chances and put in your share of work if you want people like us to take you seriously.

Dialogues on Disability

B.M. Vyas (scriptwriter) and the Disability Forum

Vyas:

There should be a dialogue between the viewers and the media. Its extent is immaterial, but a correct initiative is required. **Being an audio-visual medium, TV deeply effects us and we have to accept that. Now, the time has come for you to become serious and raise your voices.** Only, the viewers voices can give more meaning - more life - to the fiction. Both the audience groups and the industry have different perspectives and different constraints, but a dialogue between the two needs to be explored.

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we must the reality that in its infancy patient in our expectations. matter of fact, society is also similar state as our sensibilities concerned. must grow together.

There is an old saying, 'if you want me to deliver a good thing, please allow me to make mistakes'. If we follow this saying, we won't judge things according to our own point of view, but we will see them in their own context.

Viewer from Ahmedabad: When you write a script or a serial, why don't you include in it what our society thinks about the disabled? This is one point that never comes across in the serials. Suppose I am blind and I fall into a hole, what do I feel? Can you show it? Why don't you make serials on Helen Keller and Braille ?

A viewer with disability: You said TV is in its infancy. **Can't we link up our disability - even from this stage - so that the coming generation may grow up with it?** If you don't show the disabled directly, surely you can show that the hero and heroine go to a park, and show a disabled person in a wheelchair in the background. If even half a dialogue on us is shown on TV, our purpose is achieved. Accessibility is a problem for us. You can take some time away, maybe 15-30 seconds where you can show that a disabled person goes for employment, but he cannot go inside the building because there are no ramps or lifts. If you can show all this in a small way, even that might help to solve our problems to some extent. Our problem is that a stigma is attached to being disabled. If you could show, for example, a girl wanting to marry a boy in a wheelchair - just for five minutes introduce this issue in a small way; maybe it would make a difference .

A viewer working for the disabled: We realise that the initiative has to come from us if we want to sensitise the media to our visibility. **If we feel very strongly about a particular portrayal, or a particular disability in the media, I think the onus is on us. The educated people amongst the disabled should actually put pressure or lobby.**

When asked, whether he would be interested in making a serial on disability which educates both parents and society on the different issues of disability, Ashok Pandit, director and producer of *Tere Mere Sapne*, explained the limitations faced by programme makers.

- The facets and depth of a subject need to be researched if any of us wishes to create a serial, otherwise the subject will die in few episodes. Secondly, we have to see if the channel is interested because unless they gain something of it, they won't take on the programme. Still, I would like to assure you that we will try to make something for you.

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The Disability Forum has set itself some urgent tasks for mainstreaming disability in a sensitive and positive manner.

4

- ❖ **Make the media play an educative role.** Public education should not be confined to panel discussions and special documentary programmes. The best way of increasing awareness and sensitivity is by integrating disability into everyday programming, including popular serials.
- ❖ Since such programming is dependent on advertising support, efforts should be made both to lobby advertisers and to create **incidental characters** who will form a part of the each programme's environment. **Such depiction will show the disabled as integral to society without endangering the commercial value of any production.**
- ❖ Using politically correct terminology is important, but even more important is a major change in attitude and mindset. **Since derogatory terms and depictions cannot be allowed, some basic guidelines laying down `do's' and `don'ts' should be disseminated. This should be made part of a resource kit aimed at sensitising media in a nuanced way.**
- ❖ **It will be necessary to constitute an in-house advisory panel for assisting the media** in depicting disabled people's issue in a balanced and informed way.
- ❖ **We must access the media more consistently** so that they may understand the issues that disability groups have sought to address, particularly keeping in mind efforts to transition toward a rights-based framework.
- ❖ **Establish a group with responsibility for media advocacy on disability.** Such a group will monitor the media, act as watchdog, and provide assistance and direction to media.

At the end of the session, a core group was formed for this last purpose. The following participants volunteered to play key roles both in 1) taking the role of media watchdog and 2) assisting media in working towards a positive portrayal of disability in news/current affairs and fictional programmes:

- Mr. Javed Abidi, Executive Director, National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People;
- Ms. Merry Barua, an educationist associated with Action for Autism;
- Mr. Ali Baquer, Concerned Action Now;
- Mr. George Abraham, Society for Communication and Research (SCORE);
- Dr. Anita Ghai, Reader, Psychology, Jesus and Mary College and associated with *Muskan*;
- Mr. Jagdish Chandra, Lecturer, Hindu College, and
- Ms. Mridula Murgai, member of the Viewers' Forum.

AHMEDABAD VIEWERS SPEAK

AHMEDABAD IS THE most cable-conscious city in the country: over 70 per cent of its house-holds have either cable or satellite connection. As the Viewers' Forum coordinator in Ahmedabad put it, the action has shifted from `otlas' to `khatlas': before the invasion of satellite TV, the average Ahmedabad citizen would gather around the market square, or community centres, referred to in Gujarati, as `otlas': now the action has shifted to `khatlas' (cots). Television viewing has become the main leisure time activity.

Some general responses from members of the local viewers forum:

I have started watching critically.

Before I became a member of the Forum, I used to look only for entertainment and information, but now I look at it from many angles such as its impact on me and the people around me. Earlier, I used to watch anything and everything, now I have learnt to be selective. As a result I find TV viewing more enjoyable.

TV has brought the whole world to our drawing room. Now, we can see what is happening all around us from our own homes.

TV has substituted books. It has become a major source of information.

TV gives us a reason to live.

Since we don't get time to read newspapers these days, TV for especially old people like us is the only source of information.

TV is a good source of past time. It gives us entertainment as well as information.

TV brings world events to our doorstep.

Getting better informed via TV is a good way of getting accepted in one's circles of friends.

For many members, TV itself becomes a solution.

TV makes living in a joint family much easier.

For both home makers and old retired people, TV has proved to be a good companion.

For others, it reflects their lives, and gives them role models.

TV serials by and large reflect our society. At times, one can identify oneself with the characters in the serials.

TV has brought changes in our life-styles. It has for instance influenced the kind of clothes we wear.

In some cases, it has created more problems.

Viewing the love scenes of the serials in the presence of one's family is a rather embarrassing experience.

Depending on the target audience, T.V. Serials ought to be categorised into different slots like-women, children, comedy serial, family drama etc.

Viewers' choices

The members of the Viewers' For of this city, include homemakers, professionals and students from various income groups. On an average they watch 3-4 hours of television daily. They rated Zee TV as the most popular channel, followed by Sony, DD and CVO. Serials such as *Hasratein*, and *Hum Paanch* (both on Zee), and *Aurat*, *Waqt Ki Raftar*, and *Itihaas* (all on the afternoon slot on Doordarshan) are widely watched. However, Gujarati serials - *Sapna Na Vavetar*, and *Mandva Ni Juhi*, (both on the regional slot on Doordarshan) – remain the favourite. The Gujarati movie remains hugely popular.



There were significant variations in viewers' choices depending on age and income groups.

For example **students** watched Star Plus, MTV, Channel V, Zee TV, BBC, and Sports Channels. Popular programmes included *Banegi Apni Baat*, *Amaanat*, *Star News* and *Close Up Antakshari*. Some voiced a preference for channel surfing rather than settling down with one programme.

The first viewing choice of **working women and homemakers**, who watched TV for an average of 4 hours everyday, was Zee TV, followed by Sony, DD1 and CVO. *Sapna Na Vavetar* is their most favourite programme followed by *Hasratein* and then *Aurat*, *Waqt Ki Raftar*, *Hum Paanch* and *Itihaas*. TV is for them, a source of information, entertainment and tips on cookery. They maintain that it also helps develop intelligence, and stresses cultural and moral values.

Senior citizens predominantly watch DD1 and DD2. They like serials such as *Aurat*, and *Itihaas*, the Saturday Movie, and mythological serials like *Om Namah Shivay*, *Jai Hanuman*, *Sri Krishna*. Gujarati soaps and serials are also popular.

Basti women and NGOs appeared to prefer watching programmes dealing with current affairs, news and development issues.

Knob Control



In most of the families it is the father/husband who operates the remote control and thus decides the channel and programme to be viewed. This patriarchal supremacy is reflected in women viewers' choice of characters. They liked impressive dominating roles like those of Shammi Kapoor in *Chattan*, Neena Gupta in *Parampara*, Savi in *Hasratein* and Purushottam Nanavati in *Sapna Na Vavetar*

▪ **When there are differences of opinion over what to view?**

Whenever cricket matches are telecast on TV, my children don't allow me to watch any serial.

In such a situation, I have no choice but to go to my neighbour's house and watch TV.

I compromise when my husband has to watch cricket matches. Because we can watch TV throughout the day, whereas they get time only in the evening.

I have even fixed the TV viewing schedule for my son. When he comes home, he is allowed to watch TV. I have done this deliberately so that when he goes of to the other room to do his homework, I can watch my news and current affairs programmes.



Teleserials

The members of the Ahmedabad Viewers' Forum had diverse opinions about various issues related to what they viewed (or did not view) on TV – soaps and serials, docu-fiction, news, current affairs, talk shows, horror shows, comedies, etc. These ranged from positive to neutral to outright negative.

The 'Class' dimension

Most programmes on TV represent only the middle and the high class. The poorer section of the society is left out. Even DD does the same. Leave alone entertainment, even programmes on development or any such issue which can be informative to the poorer classes are never shown.

DD claims to be representative of the people of India. But, it is the rich people who are shown in soaps and serials. The themes of these serials relates invariably either, to business wars or extra-marital affairs involving the men and women.

Unfortunately TV today depicts only the problems of the rich and totally ignores the many grievances and problems faced by the poor.

News, current affairs, talk shows, infotainment programmes

~~Ironically While there is widespread public debate about the question of 33% reservation for women in politics, TV seems to be impervious to this issue as is reflected in the inadequate representation of women~~

Talk shows don't represent the people of this country. Instead of calling people to the studios, Why do they not go and talk to the people on streets or in their homes, and capture them at their natural best.

News-items in *Aaj Tak* and *Ankhon Dekhi* are very sketchy. All news especially on women should contain greater and richer details. They should strive to bring out the truth .

Discovery channel is very informative.

Surabhi informs us about various places. We also get to know and meet new people and cultures.

Docu fiction

The depiction of courts in the serials is wrong.

DD should also show programmes like *India's Most Wanted* and *Bhanwar*

Serials like *India's Most Wanted* is a socially responsible programme but at the same time it also has the potential for encouraging criminality by giving ideas to the criminal minded people.

Fiction

Sapna Na Vavetar provides us with insights about how to solve problems within our families.

Each of the characters in the serial *Sapna Na Vavetar* have their own identity.

- In today's world, where joint families are becoming rare, serials like *Ek Mahal Ho Sapanon Ka* enlighten us about the virtues of living in a joint family.

Serials *Tara*, *Shanti*, *Swabhimaan* which continue to be telecast for years on end do pose a problem. It is difficult to maintain continuity. In fact there should be some ceiling on the number of episodes for serials .

Serials should inspire the young generation to take care of their parents and not neglect them.

Comedy

Ghar Jamai is a good comedy serial.

The medium does provide information but despite a number of comedy serials, there is hardly any good entertainment. The comedies are mostly cheap.

Horror

The serials based on horror themes tends to encourage belief in superstitions . Their choice of ideas and themes is quite poor and the episodes are often not even entertaining.

All horror shows at some point or the other do propagate superstition. In fact, it should be made mandatory for the producers to insert a warning message either at the end or beginning of each such episode, informing the viewers that these stories are purely fictitious. This should dissuade people from getting carried away.

'Before making a serial, the makers should inquire about what people want.'

There should be programmes on consumer education.

TV should give legal information to women regarding sexual harassment etc.

Programmes based on consumer rights and consumer protection should be shown so that people can become aware of their rights and duties as consumers.

We need more programmes on occupational health awareness.

- There is a dearth of programmes on history and Indian culture specifically for children.

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g for female characters representing order and tradition but at the same time knowing how to fight for their rights. **Responses:**

I appreciate Santosh in *Amaanat*, Mangal Dillon in *Junoona*, Achala Sharma in *Aparajita*, Meenu and Ragni in *Surajmukhi*, Rashmi in *Sapna Na Vavetar* and Mandira Bedi in *Aurat* because these women are fighting for their rights.

Just like in the serials *Aurat* and *Shanti*, women should not tolerate injustice done to them.

I appreciate Devyani in *Parampara* and Ambika in *Itihaas* as they don't deter or compromise on principles.

The students in particular liked Santosh in *Amaanat* and Savi in *Hasratein*. More so because both Pooja Madan (Santosh) and Shefali Chayya (Savi) are good actresses.

▪ **Very serious issues related to women are treated on TV and movies in a very trivialized manner.**

While appreciating individual characters and the performances of the actresses in specific serials, working women and women living in bastis felt that the serials did not reflect the reality of their lives. **Responses:**

There should be more programmes addressing the problems of working women.

One problem that both working woman as well as the homemakers face, when they go out is how to deal with men. Though, most serials try to raise this problem, no solutions are offered.

Women from low-income groups face many problems. They have to manage the household with so little. In most of the cases, they have to bear beatings from drunkard husbands. The only hope for them is NGOs who give them strength and hope. Their husbands again oppose this but some women still go ahead. The media should highlight these struggles of individual women and the way NGOs extend them support.



Responses:

- On TV, the portrayal of a disabled or a blind person is either comical or that of pity. There is more to us than the reality of our disability. Why does the medium not look at other aspects of our existence ?
- Even sensitive writers are unable to write on issues like disability.
- In the serial *Daal Mein Kala* all the lead characters are disabled. Others treat them as comical objects.
- Our problem is much larger. Most people around us don't understand the issues/problems. What facilities do our public transport system or even railways give to us? Theatres, parks and other sources of entertainment are not for us.
- Even the kind of portrayal which media thinks is positive creates a problem for us. For instance, in one serial, a girl tries to help a blind man by helping him to cross the road, he refuses saying that he can very well manage on his own . The upshot of this is that now, if I try to cross the road, nobody comes to help me out. Just because serials show that we can manage ourselves, people have stopped cooperating. In this way the TV images are having an adverse impact on the people.
- Being disadvantaged and unable to get about, TV has helped us in knowing what's happening around.
- DD should periodically telecast programmes featuring the various government schemes for the disabled.
- If any new accessory is developed for the disabled, the media should give information to the potential beneficiaries.
- There should be an employment news programme for the disabled.
- The frequency of the news bulletin for the hearing impaired should be increased from the present once a week to twice or three times a week.
- The programmes of UGC and IGNOU should also be shown in regional languages so that more people can benefit from it.
- The names and addresses of the institutions and organisations working for the disabled should be displayed on TV.
- Disabled people should play the role of the disabled in the serials.



Advertisements on Television

With few exceptions, the viewers were generally unhappy with both the nature of advertising as well as the interruptions that it caused to their viewing of programmes.

Advertisements hammer our minds with their message so many times that we get a feeling that whatever they are saying is true. We are told that Colgate gives double protection and Pepsodent as much as 250 per cent. Though all of us know that all toothpaste be it Colgate, Pepsodent or Close Up merely freshens our mouth and nothing else.

There was no need to show a man in the Ariel advertisement because washing is a woman's job. A woman is 'trusted' more.

I like it when a man is shown in the Farex (baby food) advertisement.

The advertisement for Rexona deodorant features two women fervently stressing its 'double benefit'. I fail to understand why?

A woman is always treated as a commodity. To signify a particular characteristic of a product, it is compared to a woman's body. Or else a woman and the product are treated in the same manner as if there is no difference.

It is wrong to suggest as some advertisements do that the mere use of a particular product would automatically attract lots of girls.

True, Women are very good mothers and cooks. But there are many other sides to their personality. Unfortunately this is rarely reflected in the advertisements.

There should be some kind of a censor board(as in the case of films) in order to maintain a check on the kind of advertisements worthy of being shown on television. The channels should also be made to feel more responsible on this issue.

As a government controlled channel, Doesn't Doordarshan have a special responsibility to ensure that vulgar advertisements, such as advertisements for underwear featuring women, are not screened. Surely they are not unaware of the fact that lots of children watch T.V. The government has so far done nothing about it

Through Tele advertising we learn about all the new products launched in the market. Otherwise, there is no way by which we can know the characteristics of the product, its price, and its comparative standing vis a vis other products. .

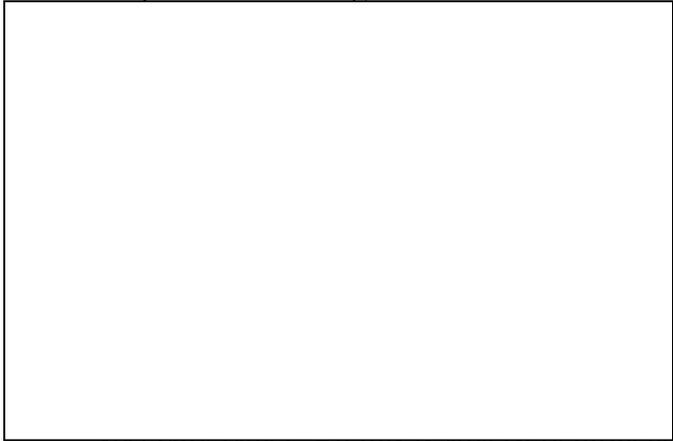
There is a mismatch in the volume control as between normal programmes and advertisements. Thus when there is a commercial break the volume automatically increases, causing a severe strain to our ears and is in short a tremendous nuisance.

There are certain public awareness advertisements like the one on AIDS where Shabana Azmi educates people. These should be encouraged.

Impact on Children

All sections of the Viewers' Forum were concerned about the impact of television on their children. For some, TV viewing stretched their children's horizons.

TV helps in the mental growth of the children.



relationship with their children.

My children don't study. They only watch TV for house, they don't switch of the TV. I get so started misbehaving with us. All this they have y keep on fighting with each other.

Games are bad for children.

Youngsters used to call their mother's names. In such a derogatory relationship with their parents

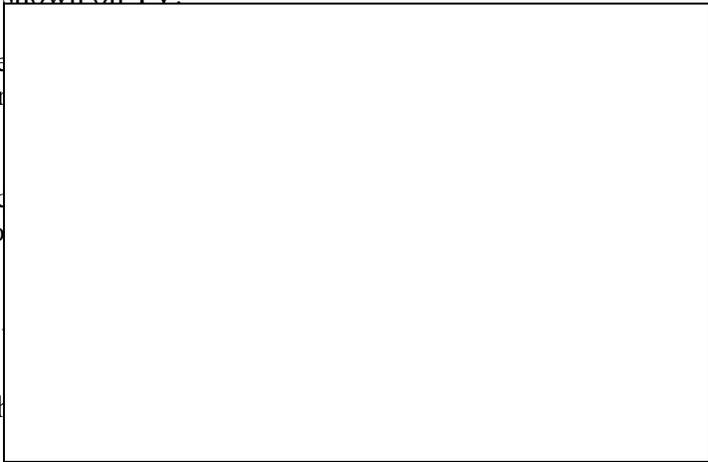
specialty father. All this is adversely influencing our children.

There is more and more violence shown on TV.

Children, adolescents, and young people in the discussions of the Viewers' Forum mentioned the impact of TV on sexuality.

- The time has now come when children are exposed to AIDS. But, it is also necessary to discuss such issues.

By citing an example of a girl named Sunanda Shah, Principal of N. R. School, it is clear that the TV is not reflecting the

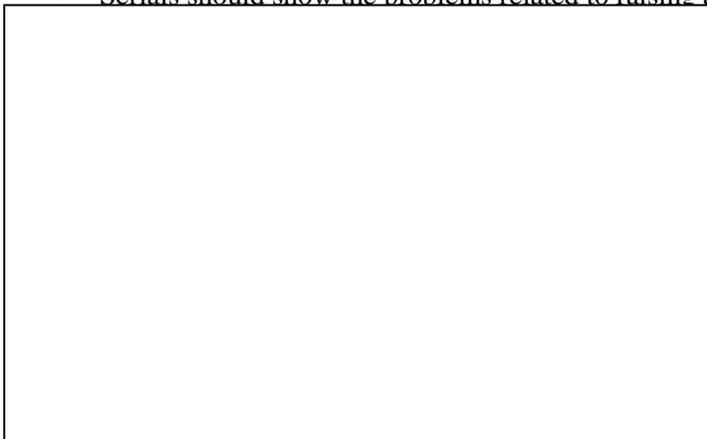


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- Serials should show the problems related to raising a child; and solutions should be suggested.



TV which address sex education and related issues

of youth and teenagers at their homes, schools or man-woman relationships.

and *Challenge* reflect college life to a certain extent. *Teacher*, I feel, is a portrayal of a very unrealistic

Viewers' Voices from Lucknow

Introduction

IN LUCKNOW, TWENTY-THREE meetings of the Viewers' Forum have been organised in the last two years. A cross-section of viewers from various strata of society as well as high school and college students participated in the meetings.

The less-privileged strata, doesn't have ready, permanent access to television. Women from this strata often work as housemaids. Their television viewing is generally confined to the short glimpses they get to see in their employers' houses. This is usually at the end of their back breaking morning session of work, any time between noon and 3pm, when they take a break. For reasons that they could not clearly specify, they seemed to prefer watching religious serials.

Middle-class women, largely homemakers, are the most avid TV watchers. Interestingly, to this category of viewers it was the trials and tribulations faced by the characters in their favorite serials which seemed to be of utmost concern, rather than the larger question of the social responsibility of T.V.

Children of class 9 to 12: Owing to the sheer pressure of studies and enhanced expectations, there are severe curbs on T.V. viewing for this category of adolescents. But college-going youngsters are keen watchers.

College students at first denied that the lifestyles shown on TV influenced them. But as the discussions got more focussed, these influences came out rather sharply.

In spite of the diverse viewing environments, viewing choices and likes and dislikes, the members did agree on certain points.

TV programmes have hampered social life of people as they have stopped visiting/talking to one another.

*Satellite television generally represents the upper and upper-middle class lifestyles. However, there were divergent views on whether this was deliberate. Some young male students felt that the directors of the serials show whatever they feel like; and in serials like *Hasratein*, their purpose is not to represent the aspirations of the people, for they couldn't care less. The students also felt that very often viewers in small towns think that whatever is depicted on TV actually happens in large metropolitan cities. Basti women added that Doordarshan sometimes depicts lower class lifestyles.*

MAG held discussions on media and politics, media and domestic violence, media and student life etc. The issue that was most widely discussed was that of broken families with a surfeit of ambitious women and egoistic fathers.

Middle class women - Responses:

- *Swabhimaan* and *Shanti* show disintegrated families - from joint family to nuclear families. They are promoting this line of thinking . Our children will lose faith in the family system altogether.
- In India, the joint family system is good, because there is a place for everyone in the family. In Western countries, there are Old People's Homes, but in India we do not think it is good to send our elders to such homes.
- Illegitimate relationships, illegitimate children, mistresses figure very commonly in many serials. But this is not the real picture of Indian society. We still have affection, love and respect for one another in our homes.
- Men are depicted as ambitious, ruthless and villainous.
- Depiction of family in *Thoda Hai, Thode ki Zaroorat Hai* is very good.

Students

- Parents go to work leaving the children to be on their own. The children naturally have a free run as far as TV viewing is concerned. Thus, serials should show ideal families so that the children learn morals and principles.
- All these serials are actually imitating *Santa Barbara* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. These programme makers have quite clearly drawn very little from the Indian experience. We don't have such families where people so easily come in and out of relationships, where people fight, manipulate or play games. We can't identify with any of the characters. These stories are entertaining but not real.
- There is a huge cultural contrast between metropolitan cities like Bombay and Lucknow. That is why it is difficult for us to identify with most of the characters and situations.
- Serials like *Saans*, *Hasratein* are very relevant. They bring home to us the changed world. Our parents were very conservative, we have changed a bit and our children are changing even more.

Serials like *Swabhimaan*, *Andaz*, *Hasratein* and *Saans* have accelerated the pace of disintegration of the joint family. The traditional Hindu woman very painstakingly inculcates the values of culture in her children. But media exposure erodes these values. The lives of the young are not reflective but imitative. Media images have a very powerful effect on them.

- *Banegi Apni Baat* shows this cultural contrast pretty well. Radha comes to Mumbai, from Kanpur, with her three daughters. When they grow up she wishes them to be independent and pursue their respective careers. But, her sister who is still in Kanpur, keeps urging her to get the daughters married off. This contrast in the attitudes came out very nicely.
- Some young girls felt that parents have a right to decide whether they want to live separately or not.
- Most of the serials have used the word 'women's liberation' sarcastically to describe women who wanted to do something, to become some one. This is unfair.
- In serials, a woman who strives for equality in her relationship with her man is either seen as a wicked woman, or becomes a butt of ridicule and joke. Thus in one of the episode of *Tu Tu Mein Mein*, both the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law demand equality but later on realise that they were wrong.
- *Just Mohabbat* is a healthy serial. (In earlier meetings, especially in Delhi, this serial evoked negative responses from parents, who said that it reinforced bad habits in children because it features children who are naughty and play pranks).

Husband-wife-child relationships

Middle-class women

- The members felt that while serials like *Amanat* are advocating that girls should be 'sacrificing' and 'patient', those like *Aurat*, *Aparajita*, *Aaj Ki Naari* and *Shanti* are encouraging girls to fight for their rights.

In *Tere Mere Sapne*, the elder son doesn't earn a penny. He is into fortune-telling and all that nonsense. Doesn't the producer/director realise that there are several thousand young men in our country who are like him and several thousand others who will be inspired to be escapists by watching programmes that reinforce such attitudes. Media has a social responsibility and I strongly feel it should live up to it.



- The Lucknow Viewers' Forum in action.

Basti women

- Men say one thing, and do some thing else.

Students

- Younger children felt that parents should make sacrifices for their children. Also, they found the tensions and fights in an average serial 'artificial', as these things don't happen in real life.

Marriage, Extra-marital and pre-marital relationships

Middle class women

Women in the 35-55 age group said that **in today's marriages, there is no place left for love or other romantic deeds. Thus, if serials like *Hasratein*, *Swabhimaan*, *Kabhie Kabhie* and *Saans* depict the need to have more of such emotions, they are on the right track.** These relationships are not shown as mere 'flings', but rather as long-term, serious relationships.

The middle-class women said that they have witnessed extra-marital affairs among women of their class, and cited many instances where they intimately knew both men and women having extra-marital affairs. They felt that this was going on long before media began to pay attention to it. In fact, according to them, media merely reflected what was going on in society. They added that **media was teaching viewers the ways and means of carrying on affairs, by conveying to them the idea that this was 'modern' behaviour.**

While conceding that men indulged in such affairs more frequently than women, many women in the group did not view the wife having an extra-marital affair as outright 'wicked'. Some of the participants felt that such relationships were more common when a woman who had an arranged marriage, went out to work after her children were old enough to be left on their own. Such **women usually outgrow their marriage, and need a partner who is on the same 'wavelength'. Such relationships are morally much more meaningful, especially in contrast to arranged marriages which are hypocritical.'**

Some women, in fact, felt that **this was needed to break the 'monotony' of marriage - 'like eating outside once in a while'.**

While many middle-class women viewers of Lucknow accepted that women who have extra-marital relationships need not be wicked, some questions still arose in their minds.

- My affair might be enriching for me. I might have the feeling I have only one life to live. But I should take into consideration the impact this will have on others, or the price I will have to pay for this enrichment.

They felt that the **institution of marriage should be preserved or else the society would break-up.**

They felt that working women are portrayed as 'superwomen' always decked up no matter what! Also, men are never shown participating in the household chores. 'This way the situations won't change',

The following are some examples of the women's diverse reactions to *Saans* and *Hasratein*.

Saans

- Extra-marital affairs are shown just for the sake of easy popularity and to make the sponsors happy. These happen in just 5 percent of the society but are present in almost 60 percent of the serials.
- He is merely having a good time and there is nothing more to it. It is not as if their was a problem of incompatibility between them. He is just enjoying the best of both worlds.
- I wonder why is it that the man has no guilt and instead calmly goes about balancing the needs of both the women.
- The other woman has ensnared him. She should repent.
- Manisha seduced him, but he is also at fault. There is no denying the fact that a woman is a man's weakness.
- When a woman loves a man, she does everything or anything for him. That is why Priya tolerates everything.
- What is it that Priya wants? Sometimes she says that she won't accept Gautam back and sometimes she cooks lunch for him!
- Woman, specially married women, don't have very many options. Thus, such confusions are natural.
- Women accept everything as long as their children are still being looked after. It is only when financial support for this is withheld that they protest. Still women hold out until the last straw.
- But, this would only encourage men to do more such acts.
- It has made people believe that men are polygamous by nature.
- A man who is having an affair will be happy to see his wife watching such a serial, as she will find his action more palatable, knowing that it is quite common.
- The serial is sending the message to the men, that if they are not to land themselves in a mess they should not be so weak. This way viewers are not encouraged to emulate this behaviour.
- *Saans* is not sending any message. What it seems to say is that no matter how educated, how intelligent a woman is, the man can easily go out and have fun. In fact, both the women are at his mercy.
- In the end, the husband and the wife should reconcile.
- If he is accepted back than the serial would send out the message that a man can wrong his family in all sorts of ways and still expect to return to them whenever he wishes.

- Hasratein
- We can't identify with *Hasratein* because the kind of society shown in the serial is open, confused, westernised and rootless. For instance, Mansi keeps changing her husband. It seems to convey the message that you should live according to your fancy and convenience.
- Savi turned against her mother because of the latter's extra-marital relationship, but later she has one with the 'hero' and even enters into a live-in relationship with him. Thus, I feel she is inconsistent.
- Savi has done an immoral act by living with a man without entering into wed-lock, so she can't be called a good character.
- She appears to be a strong character but there was no justification for her to go after a married man.
- Our society has a very superficial way of judging a marriage. If the man is playing the role of the provider, then we presume that it is a good marriage. The emotional involvement is not taken into consideration. The fact that such involvement is missing is not taken into consideration. In this way, the serial does break new ground because by doing what she did, Savi has broken away from the conventional priorities.
- Men always want change. But, KT is not just flirting around. He is seriously involved with Savi. And Savi is not depicted as a typical 'other woman', but sympathetically as a graceful woman.
- A woman should have a life of her own and not subordinate herself all the time to the requirements of society. Otherwise, she just survives, she doesn't live.
- A woman should not look for her own happiness. Priority should be given to the children because it is they who suffer. Thus in *Hasratein*, one child becomes a drug-addict and another has problem getting married. The children are neglected and they suffer because of their parent's infidelity.
- These serials show that men too can be vulnerable.
- It is right, but they are also showing a woman's awakening.
- *Hasratein* is a more balanced serial than *Saans*.
- *Hasratein* is good because of fine acting. Otherwise I don't think that for a woman to have a live-in relationship is a good thing.
- Savi has not only a good face but she acts competently as well. Otherwise if woman start behaving like her, it would be wrong.

- Savi was against her mother having an extra-marital affair, but later she also indulged in the same. Her behaviour was very strange for us.
- One thing is that Savi sticks to her decisions. She doesn't change her relationships so easily.
- In *Hasratein*, the moral angle is also introduced as evident from the problems faced by Savi/KT in getting their children married. Thus, the message it is getting across is that immoral behaviour has repercussions for the children.
- Savi is shown to be so good that people won't worry about the consequences of what she does. They would just go ahead to do what Savi is doing.
- These serials are legitimising what was unacceptable to us. What our generation found unacceptable, our children are accepting as a matter of course.
- We do not approve of illegitimate relationships. But watching them constantly, has made us immune to them and they will finally find acceptance, especially amongst the younger people.
- In *Shriman Shrimati*, where the men of two neighbouring houses eye each other's wives, it is done in a light-hearted manner. Such attractions are natural. But they never develop into proper affairs. Therefore, this is acceptable.

Instances of divorces, of men harassing their wives, so that the women would leave them free to start a new relationship, have increased as a result of the impact of the present trend in TV. Many teachers gave instances where they personally knew of this kind of behaviour. They added that the younger generation has becoming less tolerant now and more marriages are breaking up sooner today. They felt that as their TV viewing time has increased, its impact is greater on them..

• A still from the teleserial *Swabhimaan*



Students

- The extra-marital affairs of parents shown in serials like *Swabhimaan* is immoral, and has an adverse impact on society.
- Our families are very closely knit, and we have discussions on morality. When we grow up, we won't indulge in such relationships and beget illegitimate children.
- (male student) The woman's role is important. She can make or mar a relationship/family.
- (female student) Both the male and the female has a responsibility. The men don't want any part of the responsibility, so they thrust it fully upon women.



Images of women- dominating vs. traditional and submissive

The image of a woman has changed on TV. *Aurat*, *Aparajita*, *Shanti*, *Waqt Ki Raftar*, *Hasratein* and *Saans* are popular serials. They are portraying women as self-sufficient. These days, girls belonging to the middle class want to emulate their idols on TV. They want to go out and work as well fight for their rights.

Middle class women

- Priya (*Saans*) is so weak and forgiving because she lacks any financial independence.
- Priya took up a job only when Gautam walked out. Till then, she never thought about her career. She had no separate identity. And that was her mistake.
- Priya's stand that she won't take any financial help from her husband wasn't the right depiction. This is hardly seen in real life.
- Neena Gupta herself is a progressive woman who is also unwed. Still, she has made a serial where the woman is so weak.

An ordinary woman watches *Aurat* because she can identify herself with the helplessness of the woman portrayed. This way, I feel that the producers are encashing on the helplessness of the woman. The question is that of the market and growing individualism.

- Still, *Aurat* is a good serial. It shows a woman in good light.
- The dialogues (of *Shanti* and *Swabhimaan*) are vulgar, and give explicit details of relationships, which is inappropriate.
- There is not a single male or female in *Swabhimaan* who does not have an affair. This is not true in our society. If a woman even aspires to have an affair, she will be kicked out of her house.
- In *Swabhimaan*, women are shown to be very `tej'(flirts). This presents a negative picture of the woman.
- We used to derive inspiration from *Shanti*, but by watching the ambitious and fast woman in *Swabhimaan*, we get the feeling that such women will destroy the society.
- Earlier the changing role of women, as shown in *Udaan*, was positive. In *Swabhimaan* it is negative.

Basti women

- Afternoon soaps like *Aparajita* and *Itihaas* encourage woman. They say that if a man is doing something wrong, the woman should give a fitting reply (mooh-tod-jawab).

- It is not easy for a woman, as she has to struggle for everything she wants. It would be better if the man and woman cooperated.

Asked whether any of them would like to have their stories depicted on TV:

- Our stories are already there in *Aurat, Shanti, and Aparajita*.
- After watching the afternoon serials, I have learned that one should not marry a man without knowing all the facts about him.
- When it comes to depicting marital problems almost all the serials be it *Shanti, Amanat* or *Hasratein*, are always inclined to pin the blame on the woman. The husband is never accused.
- In most of the afternoon soaps, women are too strong and dominating. Sometimes, if the husbands are less educated, the wives make them feel inferior. For instance, in *Aparajita*, when Achala gets a law degree, she feels superior.

Students

Everybody preaches us to draw good things from TV. But take *Tara* for instance, is there any 'good' girl depicted in this serial? Moreover do serials ever show 'bad' girls suffering or being destined to bad fate. So, you can clearly see what message we are deriving out of it?

- Santosh in *Amanat* has been appropriately named as she is submissive, stoic and weighed upon with guilt though there is no reason for her to feel guilty. She is weak and she can't stand up for herself and that is unfortunate.
- In spite of being educated, I wonder why girls behave like doormats!
- The woman's patience is being tested in a wrong way in *Amanat*.
- Serial makers should show strong female characters so that we can learn from them.
- In *Amanat*, the hold the father has on the daughter's life is a bit too much. It is at the cost of her happiness.
- The stress on the izzat (honour) of the father is an old value. It is ultimately the children who suffer.
- I wonder what kind of male profile *Amanat* is showing. The bridegroom makes love to the bride without even looking at her face or even talking to her only to discover in the morning that she is not the girl whom he wanted to marry. This is absolutely ridiculous.
- A serial like *Mujhe Chand Chahiye* based on the ambition of a young girl does inspire many struggling girls with hope and is therefore meaningful.

Middle-class women

- It is not right to depict such immoral relationships like in *Hasratein* on TV. What are you trying to teach the younger generation- to be immoral?
- Serials should be value-based otherwise children get wrong messages since their minds are immature. Why show so many extra-marital affairs? They are not so common in our society.
- The children's attitude to their father (in *Saans*) is unrealistic. They don't seem to resent his behaviour at all. Whereas in real life, both the children and the abandoned wife harbour feelings of hatred and bitterness.
- I am a teacher and am incharge of the school hostel. I know children who come from broken families. I found the behaviour of Priya's children very unrealistic. All such children hate the fathers for doing it to their mother. But in *Saans*, they are doing just the opposite. They are in fact shown trying to please their father. Her children are not so young as to do such foolish acts to woo the father or otherwise also. It looks totally unrealistic.
- The kids are accepting their father with such complacency only because they take the lead from their mother and grandmother. If the mother had revolted, the children too would have. They are taking a cue from her.

The family influence should be so strong that the children reject the messages given by the media. Children ask so many questions, they need to be explained properly by the parents. Examples have to be set.

Students

All have TV in their homes, since they were born. However, from ninth standard onwards the pressure of studies has decreased their viewing time.

- When a child or youth is shown in a family on TV, he is not given much importance.
-

About 10% of the depiction is realistic. The indiscipline shown in schools, the dresses, the glamour, is unrealistic. This might be happening in big cities, but not in ours. We never abuse our teachers, nor do we smoke in front of our teachers. The type of dresses, which they wear, we can't even imagine wearing them in our schools. (However, one girl felt that 90% was realistic)

- Students are shown talking rudely to their parents and teachers. They are always complaining, disgruntled and indisciplined.
- Today parents have to sacrifice a lot to give their children as much as they can. But such programmes can confuse the youth, who may become more demanding.
- In very few serials are children shown studying, while in reality there is a great pressure on students to study.
- Teacher is a good serial. It shows a good teacher-student relationship; it is like what we have in our school. Such serials are realistic and have a positive impact on us.
- Today, both genders are shown studying together and speaking to each other. This is a very fair representation.
- The new image of working women inspires us to reach somewhere, and make a place for ourselves. *Aurat*, *Aparajita* and *Udaan* depict that hard work pays. But *Ghutan* also shows us that the life of suppression and denial for a woman also exists.

Lifestyles and advertising

The members also felt that **there are too many advertisements on TV.**

Many of the middle-class working women like teachers felt that TV shows big, expensive houses and all those things which they cannot buy. All this is giving rise to frustration among the middle class.

While some participants felt that only the lower class tries to ape the imagery shown on TV, others were of the opinion that **the lifestyles of the rich and famous shown on TV puts pressure on all classes to 'keep up with the Joneses'**. This pressure often leads to lowering of self-esteem, stress, anxiety, conflicts within the family, and a deep sense of inadequacy. The desire to imitate a life style beyond one's means often prompts people to adopt unfair means to acquire these symbols of power and opulence. This tendency needs to be contained. The moral dimension of struggle should be emphasised.

The lower class and students felt that the **demand for dowry has increased due to this consumerist culture which has been 'aided and abetted' by television.** People are getting attracted to the rich lifestyles and unable to achieve them, they are becoming discontented with their lives. Creams, lotions, moisturizers are making very young girls beauty-conscious and advertisements for liquor and underwear are propagating macho-stereotypes among young men.

After watching advertisements of fairness creams and anti-pimple creams, girls are getting the idea that the only definition of beauty lies in being 'fair and lovely'.

The doctors who attended the meetings pointed out that 'Melanin (the component of the skin which determines its tone) can't be reduced, there is nothing like ZPTO, (a

well-publicised ingredient in anti-dandruff shampoo), and no toothpaste can fight with germs 'all day long'. They also felt that TV **channels should be made aware that these advertisements are false and misleading.**

There was a widespread perception among members that TV shows only rich people.

- Most of the times very high class, rich and affluent families are shown. Their houses are big, and the furniture expensive. Ladies are made up and men wear expensive suits. We are not familiar with such culture and are not envious. There is not even a single bungalow in our city, like those which are shown on TV.
- Advertisements are made in such a way that they become a part of the serial. Audiences does not realize when the serial breaks and advertisement starts. This is the way they sell lifestyles. Houses are big, ambience is very affluent. Thus people are tempted to buy more.
- For day in and day out, if people will watch only rich families, their internal or business fights and their illegitimate affairs, what will be the impact on them. People will fight and break homes.
- You may call me an old-fashioned person but I feel awkward watching the advertisement for sanitary napkins with my teenage daughter (Editor of a leading newspaper).
- TV companies are owned by big business houses. They want to isolate a person and teach him to shun collectivism. That is why they show that an honest person always loses or that breaking stereotypes or being idealistic is baseless. Thus, the whole exercise is aimed at spreading consumerist culture with no concern for society leave alone the weaker sections.

Students

Media has weakened the roots of our society. The International market is gaining ground, and in order to market their goods, a certain kind of culture is promoted as the image of power.

- **Since we have been colonised by the British, our minds too have been colonised. Our fascination for the white skin, formal dresses, short hair, etc. is reflected in our images. We continue to believe in the superiority of the West. This inferiority complex of the colonised suits the international companies who can to sell their products without even needing to modify their images.** Very often a new cultural symbol is created to popularise a product - Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Rose Day, Father's Day, Friendship Day, are all being publicized to push products of Hallmark and Archies. These are false images and false needs, often justified by those who manufacture these products on the plea of promoting love.
- We find the advertisements of condoms and on AIDS vulgar and not informative. Such advertising must be restricted to information and awareness without sensationalising sex. Ads of Digjam Suitings and some sanitary fittings create false needs.

Only a few women felt that advertisements were informative; a few others said that advertisements don't influence them.

TV ADS IN VILLAGES: CHANGING LIFESTYLES

Satellite television is yet to make inroads into Nadwasarai, a village 29 kilometers from Mau, which itself is at a distance of 6 kms from Lucknow, the state capital. Doordarshan is the only available channel. Barely half the households possess TV sets although all of them have access to TV through a community TV set.

The twenty odd participants, mostly teachers of Bal Shishu Niketan who attended the workshop on the 'Impact of Television on Rural India', admitted that they saw little else besides the news and mythological serials like *Krishna* and *Jai Hanuman*.

Yet all the participants felt that television had impacted their lives significantly. Maqsood Ahmed said that his teenaged son wanted to taste Pepsi after watching the barrage of cola advertisements: the problem didn't lie in the desire to sample a Cola brand, but in its larger implications: a shift towards the consumer culture which makes you desire things you don't really need.

Mohan Singh said that while TV did show a lot of positive things, the negative points were picked up faster. Buying shampoo sachets, for example, has become popular. "Till now we managed with soap but now everyone wants shampoo." he quipped.

This business of television creating a need for consumer products, which are unaffordable and unnecessary to their lifestyles, was the common refrain. Said Phool Chand Yadav, "At times I feel bad refusing things all the time but honestly I can't afford them."

■

Mythological Serials

On mythological serials, there were diverse opinions. The students group felt that serials like '*Mahabharata*', '*Ramayana*' and '*Chanakya*' have been used for political gains. Some of the actors later became Members of Parliament. Women belonging to the lower section of the society said that they watch these serials in order to understand religion, as they can't read religious books.

Basti women

- I don't have the money to buy a TV. But if I have one, I would definitely like to watch more of the mythological serials. Because whatever little TV I have seen, those were the best.
- Mythological serials help to cut down crime as people are afraid to sin because of religion.
- We like watching the mythological serials more than reading books on them. They are important because they keep us close to our culture and old values. From *Ramayana*, it was good to know about Sita's strong sense of duty to her husband.
- Ram's behaviour is alright, but Laxman also gave up his wife Urmila. Also, if Ram was so ideal, why did he make Sita undergo trial by fire to prove her chastity?
- Ads disturb the programmes and make us lose the thread of the story.
- When I was watching *Om Namah Shivay* with my parents, my mother pointed out that Shiva does nothing without consulting Parvati. At which my father said he does the same with household matters. I agree with this. This is true.
- The *Ramayana* teaches us that we should tolerate everything. But I am not so tolerant. If my husband leaves me, I would definitely object. Even Sita, if she were alive today, would have put up more of a fight.
- Everything shown in these serials pertains to olden times. Today no one can stop anyone from doing anything he likes. My son asked me not to attend this meeting. But not only have I come, I have also brought my daughter-in-law.
- Sita is inferior in intelligence to men, therefore she crossed the Laxman Rekha.
- Women manage everything - household, outside work, everything. How can they be inferior to men?
- If men in my house try to place restrictions on me, I will first consider the merits of the case.
- The dresses worn by the goddesses are acceptable because they are goddesses. Of course today's girls can't wear such dresses.

Crime, violence, politics

News and current affairs programmes have increased political awareness in women.

Middle class women

- Everybody knows that crime and violence are present in society but it is not necessary to show this on the screen. I am a psychologist and I will support my stand by

citing an instance. *Bhanwar* carried a story where a father rapes his thirteen-year-old daughter and later poisons her when she gets pregnant. A mother brought her nine-year old daughter to me saying that this girl has become so scared of being alone in the same room with her father after watching that particular episode; she starts crying if the father tries to even communicate with her.

- This is exactly what I am afraid of. I think, these depictions should be banned.
- There might be a few such cases. But, I feel such depictions are important for the society. Otherwise incest will continue unspoken, crime will increase and the weaker person will be the silent sufferer.
- Even if you show sex and violence, there should be a cover of decency over it.
- Truth should not be sold. Producers try to sell violence and sex. Their 'neeyat' (motive) is not right.
- TV should not hide facts from the society. But the programme-makers have no right to sensationalize the issues, driven by commercial motive.

Students

- Children learn crime and violence from TV. We have seen boys on motorbikes with hockey sticks, etc. hurling abuses as depicted in serials.
- Crime and violence should not be shown in such abundance.
- Depiction of politics in serials is very real. Like in *Mahayagya* and *Junoona*, the nexus of goons, police and politics is shown very realistically.
- In *Waqt ki Raftar*, the fear of the public because of the immoral acts of the politicians is shown. This is not quite the right thing to depict.
- The depiction of politicians has become rather dismal. Thus we have serials where the good politicians and their families are shot dead and the bad ones not only escape censure but flourish as well.
- In *Hasratein*, *Swabhimaan* and *Junoona*, unions are shown only as troublemakers.
- A (trade) union is not a one-man show as depicted in *Hasratein*.
- Trade Unions should not be depicted in a negative light, as they are important pillars of democracy.
- In TV serials college students are shown as indisciplined, indulging in eve teasing, drugs etc., This is not true. It doesn't happen in our colleges. In fact these depictions demoralize us.

- Media should not be neutral. It should not suggest as it usually does that good people are weak and victims of politicians and goons. It should favor the underdog.

Ambition and rising aspiration is fine, the desire for more money and power is universal, and there is no harm in it. However, constant exposure to aristocratic lifestyle does put pressure on the young minds. Ambition is fine, but unscrupulous, ruthless and a socially irresponsible human cupidity needs to be disapproved of. Like in *Amar Prem*, it is portrayed that one can use even unfair means to achieve one's goals. This is a dangerous role model to adopt, and it negatively impacts the moral value system of the society. People have different temperaments and varying levels of patience. The ones whose patience is not enough, are easily culpable, impressed by the model provided by serials like *Amar Prem*. Most people believe that media promotes and often creates such a mentality. – a male student

- If the conscience is clear and motive is good, there is no need to have any cover of decency on sex and violence.(male student)

Annexure

Short descriptions of some television programmes

Serials, Soaps and Sitcoms

AASHIRWAD

One of the most popular serials on Zee TV. It revolves around three families and explores the conflict between modern and traditional values. The first family is a conventional family in which the father dictates and neither the wife nor the children can raise their voice.

The second is a single-parent family in which the father pampers his daughter, and the two of them share a beautiful relationship of friendship and respect. She is free to do what she wants. The mother is dead.

The third family portrays a balanced relationship between the parents and their daughter. The parents listen to and advise their daughter patiently.

AMAANAT

This serial shows a father with seven daughters and the kind of problems in raising them and marrying them off.

ANDAZ

Another serial on Zee which deals with Upper class society, the underworld, conflicts and rivalries within business families, illicit relationships etc. Violent and unconventional portrayals mar the serial.

APARAJITA

The central protagonist is thrown out of the house by her husband. She decides to hold her life together and pursue her career. She is one of those who doesn't accept defeat, In short, she is 'Aparajita'

AURAT

One of the first serials to run during the afternoon transmission. Targeting the homemakers, Aurat is the story of a woman who is trying to find a place for herself in a 'man's world'.

BANEGI APNI BAAT

The serial which had explored contemporary issues such as rape and its aftermath, abortion, unwed mothers, as well as non-sexual and non-familial relationships between men and women, continues to explore many more such urban issues of concern to the young. The saga of Richa, Ria, Ritu, Nikita, Anu, Mrs. Seth continued in 1998.

CAMPUS

The life on a college campus is portrayed with all its usual colours: ragging, group conflicts, student's union, romance, good teachers, bad teachers, local politicians taking advantage of student politics, etc.

CHALLENGE

This has a young man torn between two women and coping with college life, studies, family and father's business all at the same time.

CHANAKYA

The serial presents the story of the legendary Chanakya, minister in the Kingdom of Chandragupta Maurya, who gave India 'Chanakyaniti' and 'Arthashastra'.

DASTAN

A war of love and business fought by two business rivals, Karan and Lankesh.

DEKH BHAI DEKH

An extremely popular comedy enjoying favour with all ages and sections of the public. It takes the viewers into the home of a happy, loving joint family. When one member of the family lands up in trouble, all the others do their best to help him out, and finally come out victorious.

GHAR JAMAI

A sitcom about the ups and downs of living with in-laws, especially if you are a south Indian man married to a Punjabi businessman's daughter.

GHUTAN

About a woman who is oppressed by her husband. After a point, the woman decides to fight her oppressor.

HASRATEIN

Based on a Marathi novel by Jayant Dalvi, *Hasratein* was one of the longest running serials on Zee TV, evoking both criticism and acclaim from its viewers. From its inception in 1996 until its finale in March '99, *Hasratein* depicted a woman's desire to live life on her own terms. It was one of the first serials to openly depict extra-marital affairs.

The story begins with a little girl, Savi who grows up detesting her mother for leaving her father and running away with a married man. The father, unable to bear the shock of his wife's departure, has a heart attack and dies. Savi is adopted by her childless paternal aunt and uncle. Her aunt is always worried that Savi will go astray because of being 'her mother's daughter'. She experiences heartbreak when her childhood friend (with whom she had fallen in love) commits suicide.

Later, she marries Shyam Verma, a college professor, shortly after meeting him in a temple. When her son is born, Savi is determined to work, and though the idea is rejected by her husband, she somehow manages to secure a job.

Her incompatibility with her husband now makes every step of the marriage a difficult one, as he refuses to give her 'breathing space'. Savi becomes both physically and emotionally attracted to her boss, Krishankant Trivedi (KT), a married man with two children.

After some time KT and Savi decide to leave their families and live together. They have a daughter, whom they name Oorja.

Fifteen years pass, and KT and Savi's children have all grown up. All the children suffer some emotional consequences due to the choices made by their parents fifteen years before.

KT meets with an accident and loses his memory. He is forcibly taken back by his parents and first wife. As Savi waits for him to regain his memory and come home, she comes to terms with her anger against her own mother. In the last episode, KT's family takes him to America for treatment and Savi and Oorja are all ready to be left behind. But just as he is prepared to go, he remembers a little bit about his former life!

HUM LOG

An immensely popular portrayal of the lower middle-class. First aired in the early 1980's, it was repeated in 19 97-98 on Sony TV.

HUM PAANCH

A comedy revolving around a family with five daughters who are always inviting trouble. Though some viewers find it distasteful, the program's spirit of fun has found a wide audience.

ITIHAAS

An immensely popular afternoon serial. A saga of families and conflicts.

JUNOON

Love, money, power, and the underworld are all interwoven in this tale of two families.

JUST MOHABBAT

An Indian version of the *Wonder Years*, from the makers of *Banegi Apni Baat*. The serial shows life through the eyes of a 10-year-old boy.

MAHAYAGYA

A battle between two rival politicians who want to outplay each other and at the end of it one gets to see how dirty it can all get!

PARAMPARA

One son wants control of the family business and assets for himself. He plays games with his siblings and cheats them out of their rightful shares. The family disintegrates. Years later, their next generation attempts to bring the family together.

SAANS

Saans deals with man-woman relationships within the framework of an urban middle class nuclear family. However given the widespread dependent status of woman within the institution of marriage, the themes of the serial extend beyond the reach of its immediate setting.

A marriage of fifteen years (Priya and Gautam's) is on the verge of breaking up as the husband gets involved with a younger working woman (Manisha). The wife moves to her mother's home with her two adolescent children. This makes the estranged couple confront the problems of their relationship, the status of the other woman and the problem of sustaining the family unit. Even the extended family on both sides gets involved to resolve the crisis.

Priya refuses to take any monetary help from her husband and wants to be economically independent. With few initial difficulties, she manages to get a good job. Meanwhile, the children also try to adjust themselves to these new circumstances.

Succumbing to Manisha's wishes, as she becomes pregnant, Gautam marries her secretly at a temple. Later, she realises that her relationship with Gautam would not be accepted by his family or society. Gautam's parents suggest his going back to Priya and setting up a separate household for Manisha, whom he can meet from time to time.

Manisha, realising her compromised position, decides to leave the city and lies to Gautam that she had aborted the baby. Once Manisha leaves, Gautam proposes to go back to Priya and the family. Priya, after initial hesitation, accepts him back.

SANTA BARBARA and THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

American soap operas dealing with entangled romances, business empires etc.

SAPNA NA VAVETAR - Gujarati

The tale of a joint family and its typical conflicts. Very popular with the Gujarati viewers because of its regional flavour.

SHAKTIMAAN

A very popular serial on the lines of Superman. A silly looking cameraman in a newspaper spins a few times and become 'Shaktimaan', the most powerful man on earth. He is the savior of the poor and the helpless and has a special place for children in his heart.

SHANTI

The extremely popular saga of a woman, Shanti, who is born when her mother (a construction worker) is raped by two men. Her only aim in life is to bring the men who raped her mother to justice. Meanwhile, the two rapists have become rich and famous.

SHRIMAAN-SHIRIMATI

A popular sitcom. Two neighbourhood homes, but both the husbands have an eye for the other's wife.

SWABHIMAAN

A business tycoon dies leaving his wife and son, as well as his mistress and illegitimate son, to fight with each other for rights.

TERE MERE SAPNE

The serial opens with the Kaul family having relocated themselves from Kashmir to Mumbai along with with three sons, one daughter, the wife of the eldest son and two grandchildren. They squabble and fight, but their abiding love, mutual understanding, and ability to accept one another's strengths and weaknesses always saves the day.

THODA HAI THODE KI ZARoorAT HAI

A family, having first lost its eldest son in a riot, suffers a financial crisis. But more than that, it is the emotional trauma which engulfs their lives and relationship with one another. This serial tried to show widow remarriage but at the end for some reason decided not to do so !

TU TU MAIN MAIN

Switching from Doordarshan to Star Plus, this sitcom is a light-hearted portrayal of the day to day conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Though things become ugly on occasion, the warmth of their mutual affection is stressed time and again.

WAQT KI RAAFTAR

An immensely popular serial of the afternoon transmission. The trials and tribulations of families in changing times.

Docu-fiction, Documentaries

BHANWAR

Bhanwar is a docu-fiction series that attempts to recreate events and cases in Indian judicial history. It is very popular with all the sections of the viewers because of its sensitive handling of the brutal realities of life.

GOINGS ON

A serial which shows how disabled people must struggle to be recognized by society.

Mythological Serials

JAI HANUMAN

A mythological serial on the life of Lord Hanuman from the makers of the '*The Sword of the Tipu Sultan*'.

KRISHNA

A mythological depicting the life of Lord Krishna.

MAHABHARATA

The epic tale of the Pandavas, Kauravas and Lord Krishna.

OM NAMAH SHIVAY

A mythological serial depicting the life of Lord Shiva.

RAMAYANA

The tale of Lord Ram, one of the most popular Hindu Gods, dramatised for TV.

News, Current Affairs, Talk Shows

AAJ TAK

Produced by TV Today, this Hindi news bulletin is very popular with Hindi speaking belt of the country. With its unique style of presentation, it is often described as the most viewer friendly news program.

ANKHON DEKHI

A five-minute news capsule on DD by noted journalist Ms. Nallini Singh. This programme is a blend of a news bulletin and newsmagazine.

HELPLINE

A consumer grievance redressal programme on Zee TV. The problems range from pensions to medical negligence. A pioneering effort of its kind.

INDIA'S MOST WANTED

A pioneering effort on Indian TV along the lines of *America's Most wanted* and *Britain's Most Wanted*. It gives viewers the opportunity to feel they are assisting law enforcement authorities in tracking down absconding criminals merely by watching telly.

KHOJ KHABAR

A newsmagazine focussing on issues of gender and development.

KIRON JONEJA SHOW and PRIYA TENDULKAR SHOW

Talk shows on various issues confronting Indian society. Anchored by two women, it generally focuses on gender and development issues.

NEWS FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED

A half-hour news-bulletin designed for the hearing impaired, using both symbols and visuals.

STAR NEWS

Produced by NDTV, Star News is very popular among cable households. 1998 saw the launch of a 24-hour news channel on Star TV Network.

Music Programmes

SA RE GA MA

A popular talent competition in which amateur singers have the chance to perform for the television audience.

ANTAKSHIRI

A musical game show which has been extremely successful since its inception five years ago.