
UNIT 1 WOMEN AND MEDIA

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Women's Issues in India
- 1.3 Historic Status of Women in Society and Culture
 - 1.3.1 Status of Women
 - 1.3.2 Legal Status of Women
 - 1.3.3 Economic and Political Status
- 1.4 Portrayal of Women in the Media
 - 1.4.1 Portrayal of Women on Television
 - 1.4.2 Portrayal of Women in Advertisements
 - 1.4.3 Print Media and Women's Issues
- 1.5 Media as a Tool in the Crusade for Women's Education
 - 1.5.1 Women's Literacy and Print Media
 - 1.5.2 Role of Television
 - 1.5.3 Role of Radio
- 1.6 Employment of Women in Media
- 1.7 Contradictory Media Policy and Practice
- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Further Reading
- 1.10 Check Your Progress: Model Answers

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the past as well as current trends in the status of women in Indian society
- analyze media content vis-a-vis women
- identify the role of media in the education of women
- identify the reasons for the low rate of employment of women in media
- discuss the manifold contradictions between stated media policy and practice.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous block you studied the concept of development. The media play a significant role in the socio-economic development of nations. The stronger and more purposeful the communication channels, the more developed the countries and vice versa.

In this unit, we shall study recent trends in the portrayal of women and the treatment of women's issues in the media. We shall refer to relevant media studies and women's studies.

In the subsequent unit of this block, we shall study "Environment and Media", "Media and Consumerism" and "Media and Human Rights".

Activity 1

Whichever religious philosophy you may be practising, be it Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism or any religion, you may be aware that in certain religions Goddesses are worshipped with equal enthusiasm as are the Gods. You may have heard of stories in praise of the greatness, power, bravery and other positive characteristics of Goddesses. A general natural extension of this esteem for Goddesses, is a general respect for women which still exists in

society. If that be the case, the increasing incidence of female foeticide and female infanticide are cause for alarm indeed. Favouring the boy child at the cost of the health, nutrition and education of the girl child and the murder of young wives in the name of dowry have become daily features of Indian society. There are probably several reasons for this paradoxical situation. Give two reasons why girls and women are finding themselves at this unfortunate end. Explain why you have chosen to give these two reasons. Your answer must be given in about four sentences.

.....
.....
.....
.....



1.2 WOMEN'S ISSUES IN INDIA

Perhaps your answers to the above Activity go something like this. Firstly, Indian parents prefer a male child to a female one, because they assume that daughters will walk away with their dowry and thereafter wash themselves of any responsibility for the care of their parents. Secondly, it is generally presumed that a daughter will never prove herself cost effective whereas a son will later bring in wealth from his bride's family and at the same time faithfully look after his elderly parents for the rest of their lives.

These are the prejudices that women face almost daily. They simultaneously wage a double battle against problems of both kinds: these in common with society and the ones peculiar to womenkind.

Women's issues include all those areas which concern women's personal and social well-being. Amenities provided by the state for the comfort of its women citizens, and the steps taken by different organizations for improving the quality of women's lives are women's issues, as much as the prevalent social apathy toward violence against women and the on-going efforts to invite women to participate at various levels of administration.

Improvement in the status of women was a pledge taken by the makers of our Constitution. Laws have been passed by the legislature to embody these principles. In the last two decades, the women's Movement has demanded and obtained amendments in existing laws on violence against women, such as the Rape Law. Women activists raised debates about Family Law, Divorce and Maintenance, and so on. Attempts have also been made to introduce programmes for the development of women which would enable them to play an effective role in our national life.

The present status of women in Indian society is naturally based on the status accorded to them in the past. We shall examine this history in the next section.

Activity 2

Let us make a quick survey of what kind of work is done at home and by whom. For the sake of this activity, imagine that you have a brother or sister according to whether you are an unmarried female or male student, respectively. Suppose that you are both teenagers. And if you are married, that you have two children—a boy and girl, both in their teens. Now duties around the house have to be shared between them. If you were given the following checklist, which items would you allot to the female and which to the male? State your reason in the space provided.

- Dusting _____
- Dish washing _____
- Washing clothes _____
- Sewing and darning _____
- Laying the table _____
- Assisting in cooking _____
- Buying groceries _____
- Mechanical and electrical
repair work _____

If your answer in the above activity was to allot the first six items to the girl and the last two to the boy, then you could very well be discriminating against the girl in your family. You would probably teach the young boy to ride a bicycle or two-wheeler and not teach this to the girl. Or may be you would not allow the young women to play a game of volleyball with your neighbours. Let us see what experiences women have had in the recent past, and what laws have been passed to safeguard their honour and dignity.

1.3 HISTORIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

In the India of the nineteenth century, women suffered from the denial of freedom in their own homes. They were constantly subjected to repression, unnatural indoctrination, and unequal and inferior status within and outside their homes.

It was in such an oppressive scenario that movements for social reform developed within different religions. The most important of these movements developed within the Hindu religion i.e. the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj. Like the parallel movements among the Hindus, there were movements of reform within the Islamic community. A progressive movement to make educational opportunities available to women, took shape in the latter part of the 19th century. Under the leadership of a few individuals like the Begum of Bhopal, Sir Syed Ahmed in Aligarh and Justice Karamath Hussain in Lucknow, a large number of books and journals were published. They gave ample food for thought to the newly educated Muslim women.

Eminent persons like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Jotiba Phule wanted to rid Indian society of the twin plagues of religious superstition and social inequality. It was, however, left to Mahatma Gandhi and our freedom movement, to place the movement for women's emancipation in its proper perspective. Obviously, it was part of the larger movement for social reform. Though much of the impetus for the movement was lost in 1947, when India became independent, a few die-hard women leaders carried out their mission into the post-independence period.

1.3.1 Status of Women

The socio-cultural setting in which women are born, brought up and live, is the result of several determining factors like,

- types of social organizations
- patterns of hierarchy
- kinds of family structures
- value attached to women's education
- nature of the institution of marriage

Patriarchy is characteristic of the social structure in India. As a natural corollary, a girl is considered another's 'property', a guest in her parents' home, one who has to be given away and so on. Discrimination between sexes in the allocation of scarce resources such as nutrition, medical attention and education stems from the notion of greater desirability of son and inevitable transferability of daughter. This attitude is internalised by girls quite unintentionally. In her husband's home too, a woman does not acquire rights comparable to the male members. A vicious circle is thus born.

Different aspects of marriage mirror the status of women:

- Age of consent or age at the time of marriage
- Procedures for contracting and executing marriage
- The custom of dowry
- Patterns of exchange of gifts between relatives of the bride and groom
- Legal permission for having multiplicity of spouses or lack thereof
- Divorce and separation
- Widowhood and remarriage
- Laws of inheritance of husband's property

On the work front, women are faced with gender-specific work areas and roles. As homemakers, they bear the entire burden of domestic chores. While their contribution goes unrecognised, is invisible and unpaid for, it is considered their "real" work. In effect, salaried jobs are considered secondary to their domestic roles of wife and mother.

It is a sad truth that women contribute to about two-thirds of the work done in the world, yet earn only one-tenth of the world's income. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN, women in the rural areas grow at least fifty per cent of the world's food. Three-fourths of the agricultural operations are handled by women. But what are the dominant images that are being beamed at us? The image of women in the media is very definitely that of a middle class, literate, and upper caste women.

1.3.2 Legal Status of Women

In India, a series of laws have been enacted to encourage women's participation in different activities of society. Legislations have been enacted to ensure that women get the same rights and privileges as are enjoyed by men. However, discrimination against women continues to exist. Women earn less than men for the same work. They are not allowed to perform work allotted for males. For instance, we do not often see women bus drivers or even conductors.

But let us now take a look at a few important laws pertaining to women. The prevalence of child marriage in the 18th and early 19th centuries, which often led to untimely widowhood, was curbed in 1856 by the implementation of Hindu Widows'

Remarriage Act. As the national movement gained momentum in the early 20th century, a few legislations, to improve the plight of women, were passed. The plight of widows without any means of their own, led to the passing of the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act in 1929. This was later amended in 1937.

Some of the other important enactments affecting women may be mentioned here. The Hindu Code Bill of 1955 prohibited Hindus from contracting a bigamous marriage and outlawed polygamy. It gave a wife the right to divorce under certain circumstances. The Special Marriage Act of 1954, amended in 1976, treated men and women as equal in matters pertaining to property and inheritance. This is applicable to civil marriages. The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 gave women equal rights to succeed to all property of their parents on par with their brothers. The Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act of 1984 was passed ostensibly to curb the evil of taking dowry. This act had been initially passed in 1961. The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls (Amendment) Act was passed in 1986. The Factories Act, 1947 provides for protection of women working in industries. The equal Remuneration Act 1976, guarantees women equal pay for equal work. Maternity relief can be granted to women under the Maternity Benefit Act 1961.

Legal Rights of Women as Portrayed on Indian Television Today

Women not only have to fight for their legal rights but also force the legal system to examine its inherent sexist preconceptions about them. Any programme on the legal issues relating to women has to include this perspective, since it is not enough to create an awareness of what rights women are entitled to.

Doordarshan telecast a programme a few years ago, entitled **Adhikar** dealing with several legal issues. The various episodes dealt with issues ranging from property rights of women, widowhood, maintenance law for divorcees, dowry deaths, equal remuneration for equal work, and bigamy. A study by Joseph and Sharma (1991) found that excess of time and emotional investment was spent on scenes, connected to the loss of male protection—father's death, husband's estrangement or death—seen as the point where discrimination against the woman starts, with women being reminded of the horrors that awaited them if they left their husband's families or transgressed sexually. Despite the limitations of the serial, it must be stated, that **Adhikar** was found to be a meaningful programme by many women. The evidence was the number of letters Doordarshan received from them describing their problems in detail and seeking sympathetic and free legal aid.

A serial titled **Humrahi** was telecast recently. Its theme revolved around the life of a deserted woman fighting for her rights. **Humrahi** was specially designed to communicate messages on women's development and equality. It focused on issues such as women's education, the evils of child marriage, the importance of health care and nutrition and the status of women in family and society. The women play non-traditional roles. For instance, there is a widowed social worker wanting to lead her own life, who is courageous enough to take her parents-in-law to court. There was a tremendous viewer-response to the serial going by some 12,000 letters that it received in the first phase. There was support and positive feeling for strong and independent women in the serial and a considerable degree of impatience for the passive and weeping mother.

This programme indicated that it is possible to depict women in unconventional roles and hit it off with the audiences at the same time.

1.3.3 Economic and Political Status

The status of women cannot be elevated by the sheer number of legal enactments and constitutional sanctions in their favour. These legislative policies need to be translated into reality to improve the status of women. The general public ought to be made aware of these rights.

The social, economic and political position held by women in society serve as general indicators of their status. They are determined by the responsibilities, rights, roles, and opportunities for participation of women in economic and political activities. It is generally accepted that the economic status of women is an indicator of a society's stage of development. Besides, patterns of women's activity are shaped

by social attitudes and institutions, which in turn differ according to the stage of economic development. The extent of women's empowerment determines their political status. Though equal franchise and right to participate in elections are granted on paper, few efforts have been made to reserve electoral seats for women, primarily in the Panchayats, Zilla Parishads, Municipalities and Municipal Corporations. In 1974, the Committee on the Status of Women in India, in its report titled "Towards Equality", highlighted the lack of opportunities for rural women in decision-making. One of their findings was that posts reserved for women in the village Panchayats were either not filled at all or were occupied by women belonging to upper caste and well-to-do families. There were few women representatives from the weaker sections of rural society. The Committee strongly recommended the creation of statutory women's Panchayats to enable women to share power at the grass roots level.

Reservations for women are part of the larger effort by the government to ensure fair if not equal representation of all sections of the society in mainstream activities. Reservation of government jobs for women is only one aspect. The position of women belonging to the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes is worse off in this regard, despite calls for legislation from many quarters.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note :** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

I

- 1) List the three most important problems which are hindering the development of women as a whole.

.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) How could the freedom movement help women folk to establish themselves as equal to men folk ? Answer in 2 sentences.

.....
.....

II

- 1) The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, 1929 refers to

- a) Dependent majors
- b) Dependent widows
- c) Independent spinsters
- d) All of the above

- 2) The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls (Amendment) Act was passed in.

- a) 1986
- b) 1976
- c) 1990
- d) 1980

- 3) The Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act was passed in.

- a) 1976
- b) 1986
- c) 1984
- d) 1974

1.4 PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

There have been several studies of the media with reference to the manner in which they present women. These studies have found the media guilty of sexism, distortion of the image of women and propagation of sex stereotypes. Usually women are shown as playing a secondary and passive role in various programmes, episodes and films. They are depicted as mothers, housewives, sisters, sister-in-law, etc., always serving and caring for the other members of the family or community.

The reality reconstructed by the media, does not match the one encountered by women in their daily life. There is a great difference between the reality of day to day life and the so-called reality recreated by the media. In media, most realities have happy endings and desired reconciliations, which unfortunately do not occur often enough in our lives.

Activity 3

Having realised the importance of catering to their women readers, most newspapers now carry an exclusive page every week, devoted to women's issues and interests. One finds articles on beauty aids, recipes, interior decoration, fashion trends, household tips, "advice" columns, answers to questions on health, even romantic fiction. Take about a month's clippings of the "women's page" in your newspaper. Then answer the two questions given below, in the space provided.

- a) Is the subservient status of women discussed in any of the articles that you have obtained ?

.....

- b) Why is it that there is an abundance of household tips and no information at all on a topic like investing money in profitable ventures ? Find out if this is because of any newspaper policy.

.....

1.4.1 Portrayal of Women on Television

Disparity in the actual living conditions of women and those presented over the medium of television is perplexing and disquieting at the very least.

One can see for oneself the truth in the argument that television programming does not include the image of the working class woman or peasant woman. What is required, is the wholesome depiction of various categories of women. Those who belong to different backgrounds, perform different types of work and play multiple roles in their day-to-day life, all ought to be shown. Viewers have to be provided with these images lest they believe that only limited roles exist for women in society.

Consider another interesting aspect of the television programmes like the most common attributes that could be ascribed to the male and female characters. Krishnan and Dighe (1990), analyzed the plots of fictional programmes and films telecast during a sample period where the analysis had shown that the "ideal woman" was caring, concerned, maternal, supportive, helped her husband achieve his goals and did not have any ambitions of her own. She was sacrificing, unquestioning, submissive, pretty, charming, and devoted to the husband.

A deviant woman on the other hand, was one who dominated her husband and did not remain at home to look after the family's comforts, had personal ambitions, was not understanding, accommodating, etc. Or the woman was only interested in going to parties and clubs, gossiping with other women and flirting with men. Her children

were addicted to drugs, did not study, and the woman made the family situation worse by constantly quarrelling with her husband.

If we looked at the ideal male figure, the man of the house was always diligent, loyal, courageous, wise, dignified, professional in work and devoted to duty. He cared for elders, challenged authority when necessary, defended his family's honour, and fought for a just cause, say, the freedom of one's country, etc.

By contrast, the deviant male did not care for family interests, was self-centered, did not earn for the family, succumbed to the domination of the wife, and did not protect the weak.

Ideal women and men were rewarded differently, just as deviant women and men were punished differently. The ideal women won everybody's approval, whereas the deviant women became outcasts. They were reformed by being taught proper lessons by the husbands who beat them into shape, or even sometimes by children. Men, whether ideal or deviant, were rewarded or punished by the outside world. Thus, fiction programmes very clearly demarcate the spheres for women and men, constantly propagating that a woman's world is restricted to her home.

When we mention the term 'rural women', the image that is most likely to come to mind is of women working in the fields. However, radio and television programmes on agriculture are more often than not male-dominated. Most of the experts, interviewers, and model farmers are men. Although rural women form a considerable section of the agricultural work-force, they do not find a place in agricultural programmes.

Even rural development programmes on radio and television, on topics like training, credit or agricultural extension work, are addressed invariably to male farmers, that too upper class and upper caste men. The programmes never address women of marginal and small farmer sections and female agricultural labourers.

Programmes that do address women, boil down to those urging them to adopt birth control measures. It is apparent from the general theme of these programmes that women are considered illiterate and ignorant, and the singular cause for the explosion in population.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this top-down approach has failed to bring in the required results.

1.4.2 Portrayal of Women in Advertisements

Commercials often depict women using products such as soap and shampoo to enhance their personal appeal so as to be rewarded with male approval. The male concept of an ideal woman as one who is young, fair, slim and beautiful, is propagated through commercials. There is a possibility that these idealised norms, make a woman with ordinary looks, feel insecure and inferior. A market for these products is cultivated by encashing on the anxieties and insecurities of young women.

As viewers of such advertisements, we are constantly trained to identify with the "male gaze" and internalize the male-view of women. Various techniques like camera angles, special lighting, composition, framing and music are used to produce the effect of a coherent and complete world where the "real woman" is created for us.

1.4.3 Print Media and Women's Issues

In India, print media does not enjoy as widespread a reach as the electronic media because a majority of the population is non-literate. Yet, they leave their impression on both general readers and policy-makers.

It is unfortunate that events rather than processes make news. As such, violence is news, out of the ordinary events involving a large number of people. The opinions of the rich, powerful and dominant section of society receive more weightage and coverage than those of the poor and marginalised sections. A majority of women are neither rich and powerful nor in a position to influence or dominate. Also, a number of serious women's problems are neither overtly violent nor dramatic. Indeed many aspects of women's oppression are apparently so common place that they do not merit coverage. Women definitely are a marginalised lot.

Most issues of special concern to women, do not fit into the traditional concepts of what constitutes news. While atrocities perpetrated against women like dowry deaths, rape and sati receive considerable media attention, subtle forms of harassment of women at their place of work and even home, receive scarce mention. Perhaps the vociferous and visible campaigns of women's groups, against atrocities on women force the press to report these incidents. The advent of women reporters and the presence of some senior women journalists in positions of responsibility may have made a difference to the coverage of women's issues in the print media. This aspect needs to be probed.

Newspapers and magazines do not overtly pursue an anti-women line. But women are asked to model themselves after male figures and not other women who have made a name for themselves. Men are not asked to aspire after the achievements of women, in the same coin, though.

Let us examine the Population policy which is one of the prominent issues covered by the media. We can see that it barely incorporates the women's perspective. It is pertinent here to mention the media coverage accorded to the campaign launched against an injectable contraceptive, Net-En, by women's groups. In 1985, a group of feminists in Hyderabad demonstrated against Net-En being experimented on farm labour women gathered at a camp there. When the latter were informed by the feminists about the adverse effects of the contraceptive, they left the camp which enraged the officials. A report was written by a noted woman journalist and sent to **Sunday** and **The Patriot**. Neither magazine published the report. The women's groups in the country sent reports to the press. Most press personnel did not comprehend the gravity of the situation. This made it impossible for them to ask relevant questions. They failed to discuss the social context in our country which provides very few health care facilities and fewer sources of information for women.

After nearly seven years, the issue of injectable contraceptives has been revived by the press. It is apparent as to which argument it favours more. Wide coverage is given to the self-righteous statements of personnel of organizations like International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the Population Council and other related bodies which promote contraceptives like Norplant and Net-En. Also, women activities are dismissed as being "misguided feminists". They are charged with practising quite "westernized" on women's issues.

The inherent bias against women is also manifest in the page make-up of newspapers. A serious articles on dowry death with as unjustifiable a caption as "burn baby burn", is seen published alongside a cartoon. "It doesn't pay to kill wife" was the frivolous headline of a newspaper item reporting the award of life sentence to a businessman for murdering his pregnant wife. (Indian Express, Feb. 27, 1987).

Check Your Progress 2

Note : i) Fill in the blanks.

ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Krishnan and Dighe study of Indian television programmes analysed
- 2) Women contribute to about
of the work done in the world, yet they earn only
of the world's income.
- 3) The Factories Act 1947, provides for
- 4) Equal Remuneration Act 1976, guarantees women

1.5 MEDIA AS A TOOL IN THE CRUSADE FOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Non-formal education especially on matters of nutrition, health, family welfare, etc., is an effective method of teaching. It is here that the media comes into the picture. They can educate the large number of women in their audiences through regular programmes.

The health of women refers to their mental and social well-being, which is shaped as much by societal norms and attitudes as by their biological construction.

Take for instance, the birth control movement in India. The public equated it to the feminist movement, as women's organizations were among the first to start a voluntary campaign for the spread of birth control techniques among women. The success of family planning programmes depends on the presence and behaviour of such variables as social attitudes, opportunities for women's education, employment, pursuit of independent interests and career, size and sex of the family, access to health services, and general economic development.

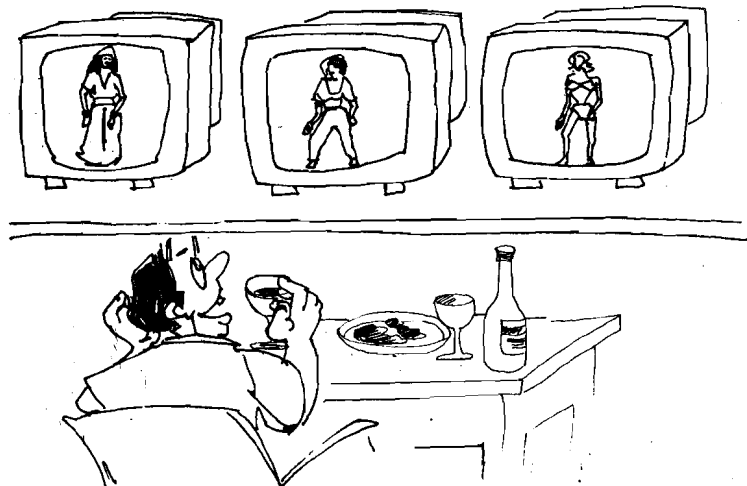
1.5.1 Women's Literacy and Print Media

Illiteracy is often considered a cause of poverty, the prime reason for the inhuman conditions in which the poor live. This needs to be strongly challenged just as much as the assumption that the poor are poor because they bear too many children. Such assumptions arise when we look at problems, divorced of their socio-economic context. In developed countries, literacy and universal primary education came after the process of development and industrialisation. In countries like China, literacy programmes were integral to the revolutionary changes taking place simultaneously and not separate activities.

A perusal of the literacy primers, brought out by government and non-government organizations, shows that they completely ignore the conditions in which people live. An exception is the programme launched two years ago by a voluntary organization in Andhra Pradesh. Named 'Jana Vignana Vedika', it published primers for literacy which contained stories of women's resistance to evils like the problem of drinking. These stories created a stir among women who then led a major movement against arrack in several villages of Andhra Pradesh. It is quite pertinent to mention here that these primers, dismissed summarily as anti-governmental, were to be banned by the government. The campaign swept the entire state of Andhra Pradesh for over a year, posing a threat to the state's exchequer because the state government gets a revenue of over rupees 800 crores on country liquor. Yet it did not figure in any programmes of Doordarshan except a brief mention on the national network.

1.5.2 Role of Television

Health programmes telecast on Indian television, focus on social problems, with a specialist doctor to answer queries in an interview format. Most of these problems relate to women and children. These programmes provide information on common diseases and their treatment. Studies have shown that more married, young, educated women watch these health programmes than unmarried ones, and that their frequency of viewing is independent of their parents' education and occupation. It has also been found that family income, family size and type of family do not have any impact on the frequency of viewing health programmes.



1.5.3 Role of Radio

All India Radio, broadcasts special women's programmes from all its stations, at least twice a week, meant for rural women. 'Nutrition' is a topic of special interest to them and UNICEF has distributed 5,000 transistor sets to Mahila Mandals so their members may listen to programmes about nutrition.

The Family Planning Units of AIR, produce programmes on the small family norms for rural audiences, industrial workers, women and youth. Information on family welfare, maternity, child health and nutrition is provided through these programmes.

Activity 4

- 1) It is said that the afternoon transmission on Doordarshan is meant for women, children and the elderly. Watch these programmes for a week to find out what roles women and girls are depicted in, for instance as housewives, professionals, unskilled or skilled labourers. You could even tabulate your observations.

Day of the Week	Title of Programme	Role of Women and/or Girls

1.6 EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN MEDIA

Research has indicated that, world-wide, employment of women in the media is low, particularly in decision-making levels. Men not only lead women in absolute numbers but also constitute the bulk of the management and top editorial ranks in the media. This is so, irrespective of whether it is a developed country or a developing one.

The UNESCO sponsored study of the new world information order, popularly called the MacBride Commission, has pointed out that "Journalists dealing with serious issues and political events are seldom women, and few women become editors or hold directing positions".

Employment figures of individual media institutions in the United States show that the common employment pattern is one in which proportionately more men are hired, especially at the top levels. Sexist bias is a conspicuous feature of the British media which are accused of biased presentation of women and sex discrimination when hiring personnel. The dominance of males in some sections of media is defended by arguing that the major carrier ladders to top positions usually involve professional and educational skills which are more common with men than women.

A survey of Indian films found that, out of 46 women who appeared as characters, only twelve were in employment and nine of these were in traditionally female jobs. A study of fiction in Soviet magazines found that no information about their employment was given in the case of 48 per cent of the female characters while the job status of only nine per cent of the men depicted, went unidentified.



However the number of women hired in the media cannot be considered in absolute terms, since the number of women looking for such jobs is still small as compared to men.

Media are not the fundamental cause of the subordinate status of women. But they can and should work together with the rest of the society to help reduce the suffering of womenkind.

Check Your Progress 3

Note : i) Answer the following in the space provided below.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Give two reasons for the low employment of women in the media.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) What did the MacBride Commission have to say about women working in the media ?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.7 CONTRADICTIONARY MEDIA POLICY AND PRACTICE

The Working Group on Software for Doordarshan popularly called the P.C. Joshi Committee, has commented in its report (1985) on the status of women. The report has a chapter on women which notes the failure of efforts to raise women's status through development measures and constitutional guarantees, and emphasizes that despite such interventions the position of women has deteriorated as brought out by the 1974 report of the Committee on the Status of Women. The report made the following observations about Doordarshan's approach towards programming for women.

A number of television programmes revolve round middle class ideologies that limit women's roles to wives and mothers. While 36 per cent of the agricultural work-force is female, women continue to be considered non-producers with absent or restricted roles beyond home. Only domestic duties are deemed their 'work'. The plurality of Indian culture and the diverse roles that women play are neither acknowledged nor communicated. Such a unidimensional projection of reality reinforces stereotype images and role specifications of women.

Urging that Doordarshan should formulate clear-cut guidelines and policies at the earliest, regarding the positive portrayal of women, the Joshi Committee Report recommended that this portrayal take note of all facets of women's lives, as workers and contributors to family survival and the national economy. It pointed out that the need of the hour was to integrate women in terms of equality in all sectors of national life and the development process.

An attentive observation of television programmes reveals that the majority of images of women are urban, middle class, upper caste Hindu and North Indian. Also, they are housewives or single, independent, self-assured, "eligible", youthful women.

Doordarshan should not ignore the contemporary Indian women's movement which has established itself as a vocal and visible lobby, acquiring validity and public space. The ban of country liquor in Andhra Pradesh is a case in point.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have described women's issues in India with regard to the current status of women in society, particularly the cultural, social, developmental, political and legal perspectives. In addition, we have discussed the trends in reporting women's issues in the media.

We have seen how the emergence of "feminism" during the last two decades has forced the media to evaluate themselves in terms of their attitude towards women working in the media, the image about women projected in the media, and the media coverage given to women's issues. Researchers have analysed media content. Their findings emphasize that the images of women transmitted by the media are essentially not found in reality.

Despite constitutional guarantees, the Government has done little in this area. And media, pre-occupied as they are with politics, have not evolved any sustained programming for and about women.

Movements of social reform set into motion a positive attitude toward the development of women in India. Many legislations were enacted in order to give women equal rights, abolish inequality between sexes, and remove external barriers hindering their self-realisation and development.

However, legal enactments cannot bring about a change by themselves. They need to be backed by the social and political will of the people.

The mass media can make a great impact on social change. On the one hand they portray, as objectively as possible, the existing social reality. On the other they interpret and recast this "reality" in their own terms. It is in the latter role that media

have been accused of perpetuating the dominant ideologies, value-systems, and conventions embedded in society.

We have discussed numerous examples of how various forms of mass media whether newspapers, radio, TV or film, have been male-oriented, relegating women to the background. The lack of presentation of views and problems of women, whichever section they may belong to, is equally bad. This has happened in the portrayal of rural women by the media. It has rightly been said that issues of utmost concern to women do not fit into the traditional concepts of what constitutes news. Shocking events, like dowry deaths and rape do get reported but not the silent sufferings of womenkind within the four walls of a home. There is rarely any discussion of the positive contributions made by women of family and society.

We have also discussed some of the important issues facing women, like Health, Nutrition, Education and Family Welfare and explained the role of TV, radio and films in projecting them before the people.

1.9 FURTHER READING

Agarwal, Binod C. and Rai, Kumkum. *Women, Television and Rural Development*, New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1988.

Bhasin, Kamla and Agarwal, Bina, eds. *Women and Media : Analysis, Alternatives and Action*, Rome: ISIS International and New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1984.

Krishnan, Prabha and Dighe, Anita. *Affirmation and Denial : Construction of Femininity on Indian Television..* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990.

Joseph and Sharma, eds. *Hit and Miss : The Media and Social Issues*, New Delhi, 1991.

1.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

I

- 1) ● illiteracy
● lack of awareness about health and nutrition
● lack of awareness about their rights (e.g. equal wages)
- 2) Our freedom movement focussed on the more urgent problems of society in addition to gaining of freedom from the British. Once focussed upon they were sought to be solved with time-bound action plan.

II

- 1) b
- 2) a
- 3) c

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The most common attributes that were ascribed to male and female characters.
- 2) Two-thirds; One-tenth.
- 3) Protection of women working in industries.
- 4) Equal pay for equal work.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discrimination against women:
Not many women are looking for jobs in the media.
- 2) The MacBride Commission pointed out that women rarely held positions in the media which required broad decisions to be taken.