

# Globalization and Media

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**Abstract:** *Globalization, as a process of rapid and deep penetration of capitalist and corporate production, distribution and consumption – both material as well as ideological, has not only changed the face of the market, media and culture the world over but simultaneously has also influenced and shaped the minds and perceptions of even the most ordinary person under the sun in more ways than one. However my research paper seeks to explore how the ongoing global phenomenon related to the world of television is in fact, affecting the very social fabric of the society in the sense that growth and influence of big media corporate houses during the last two decades has led to tremendous changes in how people view themselves and the world at large. It would also attempt to enquire as to how media in general and television in particular, tends to mediate ordinary people's perceptions of culture as is lived and practiced by them in their specific circumstances, thereby affecting their thoughts, desires, lifestyles and most significant of all, their relatedness to life, things, ideas and human relationships. Of the many trends in globalization, the one most closely and crucially related to the area of my study is 'corporate globalism', the concept rightly defined as 'a world driven by and for corporate profits' and a world in which it is the commercial needs which are of paramount importance.*

**Keywords:** Globalization Global media Media ownership Culture industry Mass media Representation

## 1. Introduction

Globalization, as a process of rapid and deep penetration of capitalist and corporate production, distribution and consumption – both material as well as ideological, has not only changed the face of the market, media and culture the world over but simultaneously has also influenced and shaped the minds and perceptions of even the most ordinary person under the sun in more ways than one. Generally seen and understood in terms of global interconnectivity and interdependence as a process enabling trade, financial market, and capital to operate internationally without any barriers and restrictions, the term globalization, though essentially an economic phenomenon, has strong political and ideological context and linkages, regulated and controlled by the most powerful group of nations and players of the corporate world. As put by Robertson, globalization, "as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992) since it is constituted by a set of processes which are intrinsic to the institutions of modernity like the world capitalist economy and the global information system. The economic aspects of globalization reveal that while one half of the world's largest economic units are nations, the other half consists of transnational corporations: "The top 200 transnationals, 89 of which are based in the USA and 25 in Japan, produce between a third and a half of world output." (Barkar, 1997: 17) Globalization thus being an economic activity on a global scale is primarily an aspect of time-space compression but the socio-cultural ramifications of this 'shrinking world' reflected in the issues of culture, texts, representation and identity are far too significant and structurally linked to the capitalist economy to be overlooked. In the opinion of Chris Barkar, global television is "bound up with capitalist modernity both as a set of economic activities and as a cultural force constituted by and constitutive of modernity. The rise of transnational television since the mid-1980s is, thus, an aspect of capitalist globalization whereby this essentially economically driven set of activities is *also* a set of cultural practices involving the circulation of ideas and images around the world." (1997: 21). This integral linkage

of globalization and culture is established by many other eminent historians, sociologists and media critics. For instance, Aijaz Ahmad who looks at globalization as the "latest phase in the history of imperialism" (2004:94), observes that "in the present global frame of massive economic restructuring represented through multinationals across the globe, cultures too have been restructured by capitalist economics into many 'variants' of the 'worldwide capitalist civilization'." (Abraham, 2007:123). It is a matter of great concern that the present phase of global capitalism has not merely penetrated economy but also 'cultural production itself.' As Arif Dirlik puts it:

The 'globalization' or 'internationalization' of the national economies, as it undermines earlier notions of national economic sovereignty, or national integration results in the reconstruction of national cultures in ways that may help counter the global forces that threaten to disrupt national existence as such. Having compromised national integration at the economic, political and social levels, national elites now express themselves in the language of so-called cultural nationalism, which proclaims national or cultural essence of one kind or another to contain the profoundly disruptive forces of Global Capitalism. Neither it should be very surprising to observe that, in many cases, these national essences are constructed to legitimize incorporation into Global Capitalism; in other words, to demonstrate that the national culture in essence is one that is consistent with, if not demanding of, participation in a capitalist economy. (156-7)

Herbert Schiller stresses upon the world economic system consisting of a global capitalist economy in which the core countries of the developed west dominate the peripheral 'developing' nations' like India. (Barkar: 21) This global domination of the capital and exclusive concentration and ownership of the communication systems and media by US controlled transnational corporations has influenced the lives, roles, identities and representations of people of all sections, caste, class and communities cutting across national boundaries but affecting the poor and the marginalized sections the most, both in terms of widening

inequality and in terms of devaluating representation. Recent Human Development reports establish the fact how after the onset of globalization and the consequent shift in economy, the disadvantaged sections are being affected in a most discriminatory way as far as levels of income and poverty are concerned. As per The Human Development Report of 2007-2008, forty percent of the world's population living on less than \$2 a day accounts for five percent of global income while the richest twenty percent accounts for three quarters of world income. More than eighty percent of the world's population lives in countries where income differentials are widening. It has become very clear by now that it is not democracy, equity, social justice, or sense of social responsibility that is going to be globalized; rather it is the globalization of the poverty due to 'trans-national, corporate tyranny', leading to unprecedented levels of inequality in the last few decades, not only across but within nations as well

This 'globalization of inequality' in an era of overpowering domination of finance capital and speculation has generated tremendous insecurity not only in the lives of ordinary persons but even amongst the corridors of affluent minority due to finance capital's unending craving for quick speculative gains. But what causes greater concern is the fact that there is very little questioning of those social and economic philosophies and frameworks that generate this inequality. In such an uncertain scenario, the central question that needs to be addressed is that given such uneven and unfair distribution of capital, resources and technology, do the poor and the marginalized sections of the society have any chance of getting a fair deal in the economy and politics of their respective nations. In a global situation where market forces have almost been granted with godlike omnipotent powers and their magic wand serves to provide answers to all human problems on earth, whatever the nature, the lives of more than seventy percent of the human population can not simply be left at the mercy of the fate. The role of the market and the corporate forces in interacting and shaping the nature of the global economy and thereby of political and social economy as well, has had far reaching consequences on the lives and identities of this huge disadvantaged global section of the society and any process at the global level that does not take into account the need for social welfare and social justice is bound to prove counter-productive in the long run.

However my area of research seeks to explore how the ongoing global phenomenon related to the world of television and the consequent concentration of corporate power in the sphere of production, exchange and consumption, in its ruthless endeavor to control world economy, is in fact, affecting the very social fabric of the society in the sense that growth and influence of media corporates during the last two decades has led to tremendous changes in how people view themselves and the world at large. It would also attempt to enquire as to how media in general and television in particular, tends to mediate ordinary people's perceptions of culture as is lived and practiced by them in their specific circumstances, thereby affecting their thoughts, desires, lifestyles and most significant of all, their relatedness to life, things, ideas and human relationships. The study would specifically attempt to analyze how shift in economic policy in favor of

globalization and corporatization has led to major shift in the image construction of women and disadvantaged sections and how under the ever growing influence of hyper-reality, these media images gradually tend to become a substitute for real men and women and their lives.

Of the many trends in globalization, the one most closely and crucially related to the area of my study is 'corporate globalism', the concept rightly defined as 'a world driven by and for corporate profits' and a world in which it is the commercial needs and not the citizen's needs which are of paramount importance. Not surprisingly, around fifty one percent of the world's top hundred economies today are corporate run economies and on top of that there are more than 63, 000 trans-nationals globally with 6,90,000 overseas associates. The growth of corporate globalism has been so huge that the actual turn over of mega corporates far exceeds the total gross national products of a particular country or that of many countries combined together. As a result, the current form of corporate globalization has led to huge increase in already existing vast inequalities around the world including in the richest nations of the world. 'The corporate ideology of globalization', as Kevin Ross puts it, has helped large media conglomerates to expand their 'global cultural empire' beyond all reasonable limits and thus has exerted great influence on the lifestyles, ways of thinking and behavioural patterns of all categories of people. As Kevin Ross expresses it:

Driven by the pure logic of profit and competition, the strategy of these corporate giants is clearly to try to get their products to the largest number of consumers that is possible. The overriding imperative is to break down what are now perceived and presented as the arbitrary boundaries and frontiers of national communities- national borders have come to seem to impose arbitrary limitations on the expansion of markets, and are regarded as anachronistic and unreasonable obstacles to the corporate imperative of rationalizing business practices and strategies." (2001:20)

In the last few decades, the corporate power in India and the world over has been expanded and consolidated on an unprecedented scale in almost all the areas ranging from securing government contracts, licenses and all kinds of special privileges to manipulation of state and government policies in a bid to maintain shared monopoly of the marketplace. The Nira Radia tapes have exposed in no uncertain way the growing vulnerability of the Indian state due to the free run provided to the corporate sector and their lobbyists. So much so that the Prime minister Manmohan Singh had to intervene to exhort them to be 'sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the common man' and almost warn them for their 'perceived ethical deficit'.

The absence of any kind of regulation of finance capital and this kind of near total collapse of restraint on corporate power has undoubtedly worsened the situation for the ordinary citizens and the poorest in today's global world where all values and relationships are gradually being subsumed under the market logic of pure consumption and pure 'commodity fetishism'. As rightly pointed out by noted economist Amartya Sen, globalization is concerned with commodity relations and has nothing to do with human

relations or as he calls it 'relations of minds'. Due to corporate controlled media and culture, the virus of this 'commodity fetishism' has invaded all walks of life in a bid to capture not only the markets but more importantly, the hearts and minds of the people through its all embracing philosophy of consumerism and commercialization. More than the trade, investments or economic concentrations, corporate globalization is trying to integrate consumer markets in the sense that there is a fierce competition to create a class of 'global elites' 'global middle classes' and 'global teens' who follow the same consumption styles and patterns so that their tastes, desires, attitudes, perceptions and sensibilities could be structured, manufactured and manipulated by the corporate houses through media and other communication technologies. The new market oriented content and images that are constantly being propagated and reinforced due to privatization of media ultimately aim to control people's thoughts and creativity so that interests of the 'minority of the opulent', could be protected and enhanced against the majority of the oppressed and the marginalized. The excessive control and ownership of media by private capital has not merely influenced the diversity of political issues and interests in favour of the maximization of private profit, it has also, simultaneously, made the structural corporate control more dictatorial in nature. Categorizing these mega corporations as 'tyrannical, totalitarian structures', eminent media critic Noam Chomsky asserts:

They (giant corporations) are huge command economies, run from the top, relatively unaccountable, and interlinked in various ways. Their first interest is profit- but much broader than that, it's to construct an audience of a particular type. One that is addicted to certain life-style with artificial wants. An audience atomized, separated from one another, fragmented enough so that they don't enter the political arena and disturb the powerful. It's completely natural. (1996)

Mass media, being a forceful pillar of democracy, has the potential to influence the political life of a country in many ways by promoting modern and secular thought, providing truthful and objective information, creating rational opinion and through expansion of public space in the interest of common man and woman. But, as the above comment shows, it is not in the political interest of corporate media to dwell upon issues which can provide in-depth political insights or ignite common man's anger and resistance against the pro rich policies of the ruling governments. As a matter of fact, the most urgent question that needs attention today concerns the near total disappearance of masses from the mass media since one finds neither the voice of the toiling masses, nor their issues and images. 'Where the masses' in mass media are, is a question that is so often being raised in the present times by eminent media critics like P. Sainath and the like as well as ordinary people. As the recent experiences and opinion shows, corporate media, due to its increasing disconnect with the masses and vested connectedness with many political outfits and individual politicians, has, for the past more than a decade, suffered from heavy erosion in its credibility and respect as the performance of especially the broadcast media shows a steady decline in its intellectual and moral standards. None

else than the Vice- President of the country, Mr. M. Hamid Ansari, in his recent statement while inaugurating the National Press Day celebrations, has pointed out that in an environment marked by "the extremely buoyant growth rates" of the media and 'minimal or no regulation,' any kind of regulation or control over media seems to have failed "due to personal predilection and the prevailing personal interest over public interest." (*The Hindu*, 2011) Similar notes of concern have repeatedly been expressed in the recent times by many eminent media scholars, journalists, intellectuals and the like. Justice Markandey Katju, the new chairman of the Press Council of India, has expressed his dissatisfaction in no uncertain terms at the process of Indian media becoming 'irresponsible' and 'wayward' and hence, the urgent need on its part for 'some introspection.' (*The Hindu*, 2011)

Economy, culture and media go hand in hand and have very close inter-linkages, as one of the top US WTO official puts it "worldwide economic and cultural harmonization is the goal. Basically, it won't stop until foreigners finally start to think like Americans, act like Americans and – most of all – shop like Americans." (Maude Barlow, 2001) This 'harmonization', as we all know, is not possible without sacrificing the interests of the most disadvantageous sections of the society and the rich diversity and pluralism of various national and indigenous cultures. Talking about the impact of these 'homogenizing tendencies', Jonathan Bignell rightly asserts that the audience is rendered as virtual and univalent as the images which are being referred to, and there is little acknowledgement of difference either within the object of analysis itself...or of difference in the specific locations in space and time of the media coverage, which is limited to the television institutions of the West and largely to Western television audiences. (2000:161)

Self promotions of one of the private channels on television-MTV as 'One World, One Image, One Channel' are sufficient to substantiate real purpose of corporate global media culture. This celebration of effacement of difference by a 'handful of private paymasters' is by now a universal phenomenon. The call made by late Steve Ross, the then head of Times Warner, at the beginning of the 1990 in his so called 'World Address' to the Edinburgh Television Festival, that the 'new reality of international media is driven more by market opportunity than by national identity' seems to have come a long way and it is indeed the common agenda of the market place that is now bringing the world together. This explains why the media in India, in spite of being free from government control, is still so 'restricted, narrow and provincial.' These global corporations seek constantly in every possible way to standardize and essentialize everything into a 'common global mode'. They look to the nations of the world not for how they are different but for how they are alike. It is certain that one of the primary tasks of corporate globalization, at the deeper levels, is, to produce a kind of 'stratified homogeneity' through absorption and co-option of all kinds of cultural distinctiveness though outwardly it seems to encourage gender, racial, ethnic and other differences in an attempt to create the 'impression of freedom.' But as pointed out by Aijaz Ahmad, these 'differences' rather than providing any 'potential alternatives to capitalism,' merely function as

'many options- within the larger capitalist frame- for the West.' In his words:

Civilizational homogeneity exists at the deepest level, the level of commodification. But, at the level of second-order reality- that is to say- in the phenomenal form of the commodity- all kinds of differences are maintained, encouraged, even manufactured- because without that diversification, the illusion of freedom and choice cannot be maintained which is the very essence of the market. (2004: 103.)

Given this background, I would now examine the emergence of global media and how crony capitalism and corporate globalization has acted to transform the nature and structure of media from public broadcasting service to conglomerate regulated transnational business enterprise through massive concentration of media ownership and huge cross media ownerships.

## 2. Emergence of Global Media

Global media is an essential component of global and corporate capitalism and one of its 'defining features'. The ownership of the media decides to a very large extent what purpose it is going to serve and whose interests would be taken into account in a decisive way. Until twentieth century, media was almost entirely a national phenomenon and hence reflected national concerns. The introduction of the wire- based international news agencies with the arrival of the telegraph and underwater cables in the mid-nineteenth century led to the beginning of global media in its initial stage. Emergence of the transnational corporation (TNC), a decisive step forward in the global capitalism, laid the basis for the emergence of the global media. This global market was strengthened to a great extent by two new media technologies- film industry and radio broadcasting services in the first half of the twentieth century. Radio broadcasting which emerged around 1920 with the establishment of medium wave frequency stations was global by nature due to the international spread of the airwaves. With the development of short wave broadcasting in the late 1920s, radio broadcasting acquired a truly global character in the sense that it provided a means to broadcast internationally from within the boundaries of a particular nation. All powerful nations at that time tried to make utmost use of these broadcasting services and by 1940, no less than twenty six nations were broadcasting in shortwave in several languages other than the vernaculars. The post World War two situations led to rapid growth of global media with the United States championing the cause of 'free flow of information' as a universal principle. This implied that transnational media firms and advertisers should now be given permission to operate globally with minimum government intervention and control. Major US transnational corporations and advertising agencies began to invest heavily overseas and commercial media too began to spread and consolidate its gains internationally. The rise of international advertising during this period was a great stimulus for the growth in global media but the global film industry, owned primarily by a few US firms, was at the forefront of decisive advance in the global media system. Yet by all means, the most significant media technology that

arrived on the scene in the post war period was television and as with other media outputs, powerful capitalist nations like America dominated and dictated the terms here too, for as late as 1961, "there were more television sets in the United States than in rest of the world combined." (Fortner, 1983:180)

Broadcasting began in India in the year 1924 with British colonial government granting a license to a private company, the Indian Broadcasting Company, to open radio stations in Mumbai and Calcutta. The company could not survive for long and was taken over by the British government as the Indian State Broadcasting Corporation. In 1936, the Corporation was renamed All India Radio which worked under the Department of Communications. After India gained independence in 1947, All India Radio was turned into a separate Department under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting with the objective of national integration and development of a 'national consciousness.' It was with this motive of national development only that Television was introduced in India in 1959 with the aim to 'inform, educate and entertain.' It began as an 'experimental telecast' in New Delhi confined to a few hours programs twice a week and regular daily transmission could begin only in 1965 as part of All India Radio services. By 1976, the government constituted the national television network, Doordarshan and in the same year, the advent of advertising on Doordarshan was a crucial event in the history of Indian television.

Till early 1980s, it was believed that communication must be utilized for promoting national development based on social justice and for enriching the quality of human life. Hence television served as a crucial resource in inculcating a spirit of national mobilization and in fighting against ignorance, injustice and inequality. Instead of catering to the consumerist urges, the purpose of television till now was to focus on fulfilling social priorities and to respond to the basic needs of the deprived and the disadvantaged. This was precisely the reason why it proved to be a powerful medium in influencing and manipulating public opinion in favor of the real issues and concerns of the masses like education, health, agriculture and the like. But things changed considerably in the beginning of 1990s with the arrival of satellite and cable television networks which led to formidable pressures by market forces in the name of competition and consumerism. What suffered the most with the advent of corporate media was the public service character of television intimately concerned and directly connected with the masses and their lives and experiences. The process of corporate globalism and rising segmentation of social and economic groups gave rise to trends in media which now largely focused on the rich and the wealthy. The Value oriented and mass based communication began to be replaced with advertiser oriented and elite based commercial venture resulting in huge disconnect with the masses and ready to stoop to any vulgar extent for the sake of providing titillating entertainment. One of the television programs recently on air on Sony entertainment channel aptly sums up their basic spirit and objective - 'anything is fine for the sake of entertainment.' (*Entertainment ke liye kuch bhi karega!*) Far from realizing the terrible consequences of its massive disconnect, television and other media is going gala

over its superficial projections of mass reality in the form of a flooding of all kinds of reality shows and various other so called entertainment programmes. In the words of prominent media and social activist, Akhila Sivdas "In television today, the marketplace has become arbiter of not only good taste and morality, it has also assumed that it is capable of comprehending what we see as developmental or social challenges. 'The market decides' is the new mantra that is being proclaimed." (2010)

### 3. Concentration of media ownership

The most significant issues involved in the area of media ownership are the degree of concentration, the degree of conglomeration and the extent of cross media ownership. Since the beginning of 1980s the pressure from United States, almost a hegemonic power in television industry and from powerful economic world institutions like IMF, World Bank to deregulate and privatize media and communications system combined with the arrival of satellite and digital technologies on the world scene paved the way for radical changes in the structure of media. After the deregulation of media through 1996 Telecommunications Act, media industry as a whole has rapidly moved towards increased 'concentration of ownership'. Even as the numbers of media outlets increase in leaps and bounds, the ownership is becoming more and more concentrated through media conglomerates undergoing huge mergers, acquisitions, buyouts and consolidations in a bid to maneuver for 'world supremacy'. In 1983, there were around hundred corporations that dominated most of the mass media, in 1990, this figure shrunk to twenty three, which in 2000 still further concentrated to nine corporations and recent figures of media monopoly show that only five huge corporations today dominate and control most of the media industry led by American AOL Time Warner and followed by the Walt Disney Company and Murdoch's News Corporation. These giant corporations with multi billion dollar budgets (Time Warner, the largest media conglomerate in the world, collected a revenue of \$ 25.8 billion in the year 2009) are, in most of the cases, vertically integrated, controlling everything from initial production to final distribution. On the basis of their core activities, three basic kinds of conglomerates operate at the level of industry, service and communications and hence many commercial television companies either have direct investment stakes in both media and non media activities or are part of those organizations or associations who are involved in it. Hence it is that these media conglomerates own numerous other forms of media besides their mainstream with the aim to create an entity that endeavors to encompass most of the consumer media needs.

This shows how media is moving towards monopoly market structure where for the conglomerates to maximize profit, they must dominate other competitors and if possible be able to eliminate all competition. This kind of concentrated and centralized management under one 'corporate umbrella' cannot lead to the creation of an international media community and can only help in the creation of 'global consumer order'. The purpose is not only to make more money but more important than that, it is to influence and mould public opinion, popular culture and political attitudes

in favor of the wealthy and the powerful. And as eminent media critic Noam Chomsky points out, this maneuvering is done in all sorts of ways: "By selection of topics, by distribution of concerns, by emphasis and framing of issues, by filtering of information, by bounding of debates within certain limits. They determine, they select, they shape, they control, and they restrict in order to serve the interests of dominant, elite groups in the society. (1992)

As a result, we can see the diversity of issues and perspectives getting much reduced and economic and political interests of the few dominating and adversely affecting the majority. These corporations have multibillion dollar budgets to dissect irrelevant events and developments related to glamour and glitter world but do not have much to do with the news and issues that are related to the life and dignity of the ordinary citizens and hence not 'saleable' or 'marketable' in the corporate world. The target audience is almost everybody who can be converted into a consumer, but what lies at its core is the interest of a small elitist, big business groups. What is pleasurable and acceptable to them would be prioritized and politicized, where as common man and woman would be forced to swallow all kinds of constructed 'truths' and low levels of entertainment in the name of 'public demand.' As Morley comments: "Television takes over from the real as the place where 'real' things happen only if they are screened." (Morley, 1996) The statement of Michael Eisner, (2004) CEO, The Walt Disney Company, further substantiates how everything on the television screen is 'constructed' and 'manufactured' for the sole objective of making money: "We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. ..To make money is our only objective."(2004)

Analyzing the politics of the gender issues, one finds that most of the mainstream media is mindlessly involved in writing about them loosely rather than in any constructive way that can lead to their real empowerment and emancipation. The way images of women are subtly constructed or propagated -either as sex objects focusing on looks and glamour or as typical traditional or modern stereotypes, makes it difficult for ordinary people, especially young formative minds, to distinguish imaginary life from real life. As eminent media critic Noam Chomsky asserts, the larger design behind the 'construction' of these false images and hyper reality is "to engage us as individuals in accepting and perpetrating particular culture and lifestyles apart from leading to reinforcement of conservative and dominant ideologies" (1997) The recent projection of Bhanwari Devi, a folk singer from Rajasthan, reflects how the media while propagating dominant ideology in majority of the cases, is heavily tilted towards savoring the 'prestige' of political leaders and building up public perceptions in their favor through character assassination of the affected woman and through shifting the focus on her alleged illicit relationships which later on might turn out to be totally false and malicious.

Since 1982 there has been rapid increase in the practice of cross media ownership. Due to additions of several new television stations to their broadcast holdings and 'affiliation' with many other types of media, media conglomerates have moved towards oligarchy kind of

group ownership' in an attempt to target various audience segments. To give a few instances, General Electric Corporation's media holdings include many television networks as NBC and Universal Pictures, Focus Features plus 26 television stations in the United States and three cable network channels. It also owns 80 percent of NBC Universal Television's distribution and production. Similarly, Walt Disney Company owns the ABC Television Network, five cable networks, 277 radio stations, music and book publishing companies, production companies, broadband entertainment for children, websites and various parks and resorts around the world. The ABC Television Network has 226 affiliated stations reaching 99 percent of all US television households. The company owns and operates ten ABC television stations in the nation's top markets. Time Warner holdings include among others CNN, the CW Network, HBO, Cartoon Network, Warner Bros. Pictures, Castle Rock and New Line Cinema and more than 150 magazines including Time, Sports Illustrated and People, besides many cable Networks, Regional and Local channels, International Channels, production and distribution to more than 125 international territories. CNN International can be seen in 212 countries with a daily audience of one billion globally. Because of such huge interconnections and inter relatedness due to cross media ownership, though we have a grooming number of channels today and hundreds of other media outlets but all of them saying the same things and presenting the same point of view. What more, many stations report the same stories at exactly the same time and interestingly, even the commercial breaks are taken at the same time. If media content and media distribution is totally in the hands of media moguls, then the extent and range of diverse views and information is bound to be affected for worse.

With media so heavily invested in stock markets and corporations, media cannot escape from this 'structural compulsion to lie' because the links between media and corporate houses are structural. They cannot afford to tell the truth for the simple reason that they cannot afford to invite the wrath of their big brothers, their corporate CEO's on whom their very subsistence depends. That precisely is the reason why issues today "have to be dressed up in ways certified by the corporate media. They have to be justified not by their importance to the public but by their acceptability to the media, their owners and sponsors." (*The Hindu* editorial, 2010.)

Many issues, particularly the issues related to growing hunger, poverty, food security, issues related to rural economy, agrarian crisis, various kinds of violence against women and highest ever inequality are readily dropped because covering them would spoil their 'purchasing power profile.' The linkages of the corporate media with the stock market and shareholders prevented the Indian media to openly speak or write about recession in 2009. They merely confined themselves to occasionally talk about 'slowdown' or 'meltdown' and that too in a very subdued manner so that the shares of the companies they are linked to are not adversely affected. Recession, on the contrary, was presented as 'Asian Economic Miracle' and media abounded with boom in economy and 'rural resurgence' 'success' stories mainly because their own success was linked to the

perpetuation of the 'psychology of the boom.' This is a poor reflection on the ethics of Indian media companies today who are invested in hundreds of different sectors including aviations, hotels, cement, shipping, steel, automobiles, textiles, education, sports, information technology and real estate, to name a few. The concentration of ownership in media has changed the very character of media from being for the people to primarily being for the corporate and stockholders. In the words of the author of 'The Media Monopoly', Ben Bagdikian, this excessively concentrated control is so "ubiquitous, and artful, that to a degree unmatched in former mixtures of entertainment, it dilutes influences from family, schooling, and other sources that are grounded in real-life experience, weakening their ability to guide growing generations." (1997)

Another crucial change that has occurred due to globalization of media is the central role of advertising, one of the most crucial arms of corporatism, in deciding the content of media. Due to colossal increases in advertising and with media becoming more and more advertisement oriented, advertising has become a major political actor in shaping the contours and ideology of the major television channels. The liberalization of Indian economy in the early 1990s has witnessed a massive expansion in the advertising sector which has largely been taken over by foreign advertisers and agencies affiliated with foreign advertising agencies. As with broader media, the advertising sector too presents the same picture of a remarkable degree of concentration, with top ten international advertisers accounting for almost half of the advertiser spending and top 25 agencies accounting for 75 percent of the advertising revenues in India. The key advertiser companies in India like Hindustan Lever, the greatest spender on advertising, (it spends 60 percent of its budget on television) and others like Tatas, Godrej, Proctor and Gamble are also the leading global advertisers with affiliations to multiple number of mega corporations. Hence the factor of 'saleability' has come to reign supreme at both national and international levels, whatever is the cost.

There is a great pressure by the advertising companies to change and shape the content of television in concordance with the type or groups of people being targeted by the advertisements. Since the ethos of what sells best and what sells quickest is all that matters the motif is no where related to 'giving the audience what they want', it is more about targeting the sections of the audience that can afford to buy the products that are advertised and hence the motif ultimately boils down to 'giving the advertisers what they want.' To make more profits, major media outlets have to sell audiences to the advertisers and the more privileged the audience, the better the advertising rates. As Chomsky opines, "Advertising industries spend billions of dollars to influence not only the choices towards their products but more dangerously to win the hearts and minds of specifically targeted groups to their ideology of greed and consumption... Whether it is television or newspapers, or whatever, they are selling audiences. Corporations sell audiences to other corporations." (1997)

The National Council for Applied Economic Research, for instance, has identified the 'very rich and consuming

classes' in India as part of an international class with similar lifestyles and consumption habits. Hence there is clear shift in emphasis by the advertisers on aggressively targeting of the body image for this particular class, as also the absurd association of beauty and success with the color of the skin or with the thinness of the body. What more, entertainment is now getting reduced to 'advertainment' and stories, reality shows, short films, editorials are becoming subtle 'advertorials'. Mass advertising, thus, is no longer limited to selling brands and products. It is gradually becoming a major tool for concentrated giant corporations to hold disproportionate power over the economy, politics and culture of global world. Due to this overwhelming influence of advertisers on broadcast media, civic values are almost entirely being replaced with commercial values since contemporary advertising embraces our 'suspicions of commercial culture' and caters to our 'willingness to believe the worst.' With market no longer being able to provide solutions or answers to people's basic economic and social problems, the advertising industry is trying to fill a very specific niche in the cultural vacuum of the market driven economies.

#### 4. Weakening of Public Sphere

The late eighteenth and nineteenth century was significant, among other things, by the rise of public sphere, when for the first time in history, individual groups became powerful enough to be able to influence political practices and shape public opinion that opposed power of the state and other powerful lobbies. But in the current stage of corporate globalization, the liberal public sphere of the enlightenment era has been taken over by giant corporations and transformed from an area of rational debate into that of manipulative consumption and passive acceptance. Interconnections between spheres of public debate and individual participation have been fractured and transmuted into the realm of political and cultural manipulations with citizens gradually being reduced to becoming spectators of media presentations, images and discourses. Public discourse is dominated by "discourse through and about objects" because it does not merely inform the audience about the products but how these new products are connected to significant domains of our life like happiness, trust, love and sustenance of human relationships.

When ownership and cross ownership is concentrated in the hands of a small number of corporate houses interlocked with the interests of business and the state, mass media become an essential component of the 'system of control'. It perpetuates the interests of the ruling class and influences mass opinion. This corporate owned media can rightly be described as 'agenda setting media' which, because of its control and monopoly over the resources, lays down the norms and guidelines for others to follow. In real terms, it is indoctrination or in popular terms, 'manufacturing consent' for the ideas and policies of the ruling class- thus preventing the scope of any real change or development for the poor and the ordinary citizens. The illusionary manner in which it appears to meet the 'real' needs of people is many a time difficult to recognize and is extremely harmful. As Lefebvre states that by intermingling the 'other' with the 'everyday life', the corporate media "can thus hold a real content,

correspond to a real need, yet still retain an illusory form and a deceptive appearance." (1991:40)

Thomas Meyer (2002) has investigated and described the processes how politics in modern democracy is colonized by modern media, leaving little scope for neutrality in public sphere. Media, though never has been 'neutral' in its approach but earlier till late eighties, at least some semblance to 'neutrality' and realistic portrayal was there. But for the last more than a decade, when the links between media and corporate world began to be 'structural', even that semblance has been shamelessly sacrificed as is clear from the 'conspiratorial silence' of media on the horrible phenomena of 'paid news' and painful exposures of Nira Radia tapes. The last two decades have seen the painful shift of media themselves into 'major corporate entities.' As P.Sainath puts it:

If the Radia tapes show us anything, they show us again who runs this country, Corporates. Not even the lobbyists who do their bidding- but would have much less clout without their backing. Not journalists who crave access to corporate titans... Today, it is no longer the issue of dominant media being 'pro-corporate' or 'pro big business', media itself has been turned into 'big business' with media corporations being involved into hundreds of businesses beyond their own concerns from real estate, hotels, mining, steel, chemicals, rubber and banks to power and sugar. Even into private treaties with other corporations in whom they acquire a stake. (2010)

Media then, having largely been converted into business houses, in an all out effort to prevent the emergence of any real issues on the scene, does everything to divert people's attention from serious and thought provoking political and socio-cultural issues and debates lest it would disturb their marketability and profit margins. Hence one finds an overdose of Bollywood related shows, fashion shows, reality shows, sex scandals, sports, cricket in particular, star wars, and virtually anything that is not serious and that reduces people's capacity to think in an independent manner. There is a manufactured design behind near total absence of any kind of hard news presented in depth, public affairs analyses, debates and documentaries. Even the issues of public interest and common concerns are getting reduced to 'a fight between two individuals' rather than two differing points of views, so that their seriousness is eroded and individuals debating the issues are elevated or demeaned to either becoming a 'hero' or 'villain' or merely 'fun figures.' As a matter of fact, some of the channels, while presenting visual account of the various significant public events, make it so comic or dramatic or sensational that it loses all its authenticity. The near total absence of 'minority' voices and the issues of rural, poor and the marginalized from public debates and discussions speaks of the wide spread and intensified commercial model of communication and broadcasting. The concerns and realities of the disadvantaged citizens as opposed to the consumers are increasingly being pushed to the margins and the discussions are largely confined within the realms of 'elite ideology.'

The various forms of entertainment also penetrate the residual elements of the public sphere with what can be

called as 'happy news', 'infotainment' 'reality news' and talk shows that emphasize personalities, crime, spy stories, miracles, superstitions and the list is endless. The subtle political message delivered through these so called non controversial, cozy issues goes well with the interests of the advertisers and the value system being propagated by them in the form of encouraging individualism, self-centeredness, consumption centeredness and celebrity status. Television intends to treat each person as an 'atom of consumption alone.' The growing emphasis on 'advertainment' and 'infotainment' restricts the development of the 'autonomous, independent individuals' and tries to create a state of dependence and adjustment where the essential content seems to be heavily tilted in favor of accepting the conditions of the society as they are and as such seem to be giving the obvious message that this situation cannot and should not be questioned.

As a result of such erosion of public sphere, the entertainment programs and advertisements presented on the television exhibit the same characteristic feature of the corporate media in the form of commodification and standardization as are visible in global economy. The overriding concern of the corporate ideology of globalization is the breakdown of all boundaries of national borders, communities and cultures in an attempt to create a hegemonic vision of culture dictated by consumer's tastes and desires. It believes in the media without frontiers and seeks to create a global community where all differences associated with ethnicity, gender, culture, class, region and religion are subsumed under one umbrella of conglomerate corporatism. As the global economic system is and has been dominated by a core of powerful Western countries led by America, the dominant strain of global media and popular culture too remains centered in the West which plays a decisive role in shaping and reshaping of media and cultural values, its entities and perceptions. Their systematic endeavor to draw on stereotypes of traditional and local cultures is a deliberate design to co-opt and assimilate them into global consumerism. The concurrence of the private television channels with this design in the form of increase in formulaic content, elimination of interests of individuals, communities and groups not in the market priorities and near total silencing of any voice of dissent is necessary to provide ideological legitimization of the ways of the corporate world and to integrate individuals into its dominant patterns of thought and behaviour.

The large scale absorption of small scale commercial and local media producers and distributors by larger corporate conglomerates ensures this integration without much disturbance to the existing social and political equations of power. The 'glocalization' of media, that is portrayal of global media in a local context, is another recent practice employed by the global media to manipulate the desires and ambitions of local groups and communities by creating a false sense of local identity. The fact of the matter is that the global media enterprises are under compulsion to link up with local partners and to adapt to their local cultures and identities for their expansion. But while seemingly adapting to local cultural differences, the real purpose is to recognize and absorb those differences within the broader framework of the 'American conception of the world.' The fact that

America can claim around 75% of the worldwide television program exports speaks for itself about America's fervent attempts to capture the world media with its life styles and perceptions. Herman and McChesney, while commenting upon the financial aggression of American domination asserts: "The US government aggressively insists upon a protection of intellectual property that provides maximum income to our industry, while displaying minimal interest in the concerns of anyone else." (1999)

The framework and the worldview that above discussed corporate media provides is bound to be highly limited and restricted. It seeks to tell us how to live, act, think and behave in a particular way and style suited to the needs and interests of the powerful and the rich. The apparently light entertainment programs, serials and reality shows, believed to be neutral and harmless, go a long way in shaping the personality and perceptions of the audience, for they intend to tell them 'what to love, what to commit to, and what to have hope in'. A sort of hyper reality is sought to be created by a combination of mass media, hyper consumer culture and rampant individualism where it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish the imaginary from the real and the ordinary from the elite. This implies that quite often, it becomes difficult to differentiate between "what advertising tells us about products, places, and people and what they are like in the real world. In the rush to sell us things, corporations have sacrificed reality; truth telling is gone." (Nelson, Nashville, 2008) This means that it is possible now to have things, lifestyles and images better and beyond the real ones and which appear to be far more attractive than the 'original objects they are representing.' In total contrast to the real world, this media created 'simulated' world, thus, seeks to obliterate any sense of an objective reality behind this make believe world of glamour and shine and seeks to reproduce and reinforce dominant interpretations of reality to ensure 'passive, relaxed and uncritical reception.' The media outlets instead of challenging the stereotypes and the images of reality reproduce them on daily basis to lead masses into a state of dependence and passive acceptance.

The whole meaning of entertainment has suffered a severe blow from being that of a serious nature to getting reduced to titillation, sensationalism and selective scandal busting. The purpose itself is no longer related to entertain people but is getting confined to align entertainment with selling and for that the various channels, at the behest of advertising houses, are vying with each other to stoop to worst possible combinations of violence, vulgarity and exhibitionism. In recent times, there has been a steep decline in ethical and aesthetic standards of various programs and constant projection of counter values like horror, shocks, death defying stunts, in a bid to make TV 'more entertaining' is playing havoc with the lives and sensibilities of people. The most dangerous aspect of this kind of entertainment is that it goes against the ethos of civil society values and even tends to erode democratic order. In a bid to enter into people's most intimate and private realms, it attempts to make them more and more sentimental. All these vulgar and dehumanizing stunts cannot be considered entertaining in the real sense of the term and contrary to their claims, do not provide any kind of relaxation and relief. The most cherished and hard won values of justice and equality are

being derided in more ways than one, sometimes explicitly through jokes and innuendos and many a times in a more subtle way by making these values a 'saleable item'.

## 5. Media and Culture

Since cultural traditions and practices are among the basic processes of political and social formations, culture has come to emerge as an important site in modern day world to understand the continued impact of colonial rule in postcolonial societies and the working of the neo imperialist forces. While discussing the significance of culture in postcolonial context, one cannot afford to ignore the contributions of British cultural critic Raymond Williams (1921-1988) in establishing culture as a 'constitutive force' that lies at the very centre of all kinds of political and social structures, ideology and its manifestations. His essay emphasizing the ordinary aspects of culture, titled 'Culture is Ordinary' (1958), rejected the hegemony of the elites or of the 'intellectual aristocracy' over the field of culture and went on to erode the distinctions of high and low culture that had earlier dominated the English scene. Contrary to Matthew Arnold and others, Raymond Williams believed that culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and direction, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressure of experience, contact and discovery, writing them into the land. (1958: 11) Williams' theory on culture has stood the test of time and culture, since his untimely death in 1988, has become more ordinary than ever, notwithstanding all the efforts for its appropriation and confinements to the corridors of the powerful rich and the elites.

Culture, according to Williams, is always political because the social process addressed by political analysis is always embedded in culture. He reversed the terms of the usual analysis by defining culture as the "whole way of life" which makes up human society, rather than being something confined and special that only develops in "contact with the best which has been thought and said in the world." Placing a counter poise to "high culture", Williams attempted to approach the study of human societies with the assumption that values, behaviors and ideologies as reflected in culture, are different from people to people and this difference must be respected since it adds up to their beauty and perfection. This collective making of culture is not something abstract but an ongoing concrete work that is always in the process of formation: "A culture while it is being lived is always in part unknown, in part unrealized. The making of a community is always an exploration, for consciousness cannot precede creation, and there is no formula for unknown experience," (1963: 334) Williams' notions of the 'structures of feeling' which goes on to include 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt', further reduced the divide between high and low culture. Many critics and theoreticians, however, expressed their resentment and reservations on Raymonds' views on culture and its socio-political ramifications. Gauri Viswanathan, for instance, finds Williams' understanding of culture 'limiting' in the sense that it does not look into 'Englishness' itself as

an 'imperial construct.' She feels that Williams "does not see imperialism as having influenced 'English cultural formations.'" (1990) Edward Said, though an admirer of Williams' 'structures of feeling, attitude and reference' which effectively raise the whole question of 'power', finds 'stubborn Anglocentrism' in his concept of culture. Aijaz Ahmad feels that in the present age of 'imperialist globalization,' any singular or 'determining' notion of culture or 'culturalism' is bound to have its own limitations. In his opinion:

(The) difficulty of speaking about 'culture' in the present climate is compounded for me further by the fact that in this era of imperialist globalization we have witnessed the rise of vast academic complexes and cultural industries which have undertaken to propagate, on the global scale, a singular ideology of what one could accurately call *Culturalism*- an ideology, in other words, which treats culture not only as an integral element in social practices but as the *determining instance*. (2004: 93)

The concept and growth of culture, thus, is integrally related to the daily lives, beliefs and socio-religious practices of the times. My paper, however, would attempt to look at culture in the specific context of the emergence of culture industry and growth of mass media.

## 6. Culture Industry and Mass Media

Culture industry, a term broadly used to include all cultural organizations and more specifically, organizations that produce popular culture such as television, radio, books, internet, popular music and films, since it is controlled by the rich and the powerful, tends to serve as an ideological tool for propagating elitist and opulent class culture. Culture today, instead of reflecting the ways of the life of the common and the ordinary people, is being relegated to certain demands which are artificially evoked and manipulated so as to cater to the interests, thought processes and lifestyles of the wealthy minority. The mass media, in collusion with capitalist and imperialist motives, restricts the development of autonomous individuals who can think and act independently in the direction of a more equitable and just society and attempts to reinforce a state of dependence and adjustment to the existing structures and ideologies in favor of the rich. Through the constant propagation of the culture of the high and the powerful minority classes, the mass media seems to be giving the message that since the whole situation cannot be altered, the wisdom lies in accepting and adapting to it as it is. The various mass-mediated cultural artifacts broadly operate within the context of capitalist mode of industrial production in which the products of the culture industry tend to exhibit the same features as other commodities of mass production which include commodification, standardization and massification. The Frankfurt school theorists during the 1930s were among the first to examine the effects of mass culture and the rise of the consumerism amongst the ordinary people and the working class. The school attempted to highlight how technology and culture was trying to emerge not merely as a major force of production but also as a formative mode of social organization and control. In the realm of culture, technology produced mass culture that led individuals to

conform to the dominant ways of thought and behavior patterns and thus provided powerful tools of social control and domination. Controlled by giant corporations, the culture industry intended to generate a highly commercialized system of culture that believed in 'selling' the homogenous values and lifestyles of the American and the imperialist way of life. This was a period of major historical shift in which mass consumption and culture was instrumental in the production of a consumer society based on homogenous needs and desires for mass produced products and a mass society where the individual gradually ceased to exist. Later, the Birmingham school in United Kingdom during the 1970s and 80s sought to 'demystify' the constructed character of cultural texts by stressing upon the 'ordinariness' of culture and the creative capacity of people to construct shared meaningful practices. Both Althusser and Gramsci contributed significantly to the Birmingham school by providing a way to explore culture 'on its own terms' through their stress on the importance of meaning, common sense, and ideology in the cultural domain. The works of Gramsci in particular helped a great deal in developing the concept of hegemony in culture, which, according to him, takes into consideration the process of making, maintaining, and reproducing the governing sets of norms and meanings of a given culture and hence the textual analysis involved 'deconstructing' the practices of 'cultural coding' so as to reveal the 'cultural habituation' behind the apparent meanings of various texts. For instance, the analysis of advertising stressed upon the selling not just of commodities but also of ways of looking at the world. Hence the acquiring of a particular brand is not merely limited to the choice of a product but is expanded to buying into lifestyles and values related to that brand. Stuart Hall in his article 'Notes on Deconstructing "The Popular"' (1981), approaches popular culture as a 'way of life' necessarily involving the struggle for and against the culture of the rich and the powerful: 'Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle,' (1989: 71). The issue of gender in relation to mass culture is a deeper one and one always feels an urgent need for the critique of culture from the women's point of view. Women in the historical debates on mass culture have been damned as 'mobs of scribbling women', to use Hawthorne's famous phrase, and been held responsible for "the debasement of taste and the sentimentalisation of culture." (Modleski, 1989:48) Many cultural artists have also held this view because of the prevalence of powerful stereotypes like masculinity being associated with power, subjectivity, production and work and femininity with emotion, consumption and passivity. Images of women in popular culture shape our understandings and perceptions of masculinity and femininity and contribute significantly to the 'making' of women.

## 7. Violence as an Entertainment Genre

The last two decades of era of global media have been filled with images of violence more than ever. Mass production of images and messages of violence is a crucial role in the hands of new imperial network and design since bombarding of viewers with violent images of a selfish, insecure and dangerous world serves as an instrument of 'intimidation

and terror' on one hand and violence is simultaneously a demonstration of power. The myriad images of violence project hierarchies of power in the form of gender, racial, sexual, class and national power that the mass-cultural marketplace intends to cultivate through its control of dramatic imagery and as various research studies demonstrate, this has a direct causal relationship to the alarming increase in violence in the society. As George Gerbner puts it: "Media violence is a demonstration of power. There is a direct causal relationship, our 15 years of research has shown, between exposure to violence and one's feeling of insecurity, one's demand for protection, and one's welcoming even repression if it comes in the form of security. That is the direct relationship." (1994)

The power to define violence and propagate its necessity in the form of presenting violence as the only acceptable form of solution or as a source of entertainment is the chief 'cultural requirement for social control.' Television cultivates exaggerated beliefs about the prevalence of violence and heightens feelings of insecurity and mistrust among majority of viewers, especially among women and the marginalized. Because it is not only a question of the presentation of exaggerated amount of violence but also how fairly and justifiably it is presented. Needless to say that the power equations while presenting violence on television screens are exercised in the same discriminatory manner as they happen to exist in any conservative, caste and class ridden society. Equally significant is the exploration regarding the contribution of these consistent violent messages to the various groups' conceptions of their own risks and vulnerabilities. Here again, it is the women and the deprived sections who have to bear the brunt because it is they who are more likely to face violence and shown as helpless victims. Various research analysis have shown that "exposure to violence-laden television cultivates an exaggerated sense of insecurity and mistrust, and anxiety about the mean world seen on television. Furthermore, the sense of vulnerability and dependence imposing its heaviest burdens on women and minorities." (1994) The motif clearly is to divert the attention of the masses from the real and serious issues through cultivating a sense of 'mistrust and paranoia in everyday life.' As one of the critics, L'Unita, rightly says that in the age of television: "a sheet of glass has been interposed between us and the world that once and for all eliminates real, tangible and sensitive awareness of others." (1990)

## 8. The issue of representation of women and the marginalized sections

In the above context, corporate media has come to acquire a central place in any discourse on postcolonial culture and media especially with regard to understanding and analyzing the politics of gender and class representation. The rapid expansion and influence of corporate media since the onset of globalization about more than two decades back has changed the very nature and character of mass media from being a public broadcaster in the service of the nation to serving the interests of the few corporate houses and projecting the issues, lifestyles and ideology of the rich and the powerful. This economic and political shift has had a profound impact in shaping the consciousness and

perceptions of large sections of the society, particularly on the issues of gender, caste and class. It is here that the issue of representation comes to acquire significance especially in the light of the 'monopoly' of the West even in postcolonial era as far as right to representation is concerned. In the words of Edward Said:

The capacity to represent, portray, characterize, and depict is not easily available to just any member of just any society; moreover, the 'what' and 'how' in the representation of 'things', whole allowing for considerable individual freedom, are circumscribed and socially regulated...Thus representation itself has been characterized as keeping the subordinate subordinate, the inferior inferior." (1994: 95).

Said looks upon culture as 'a material practice' producing representations "that embody active forms of power and is constitutive of a social order." (Benita Parry, 1992: 20) Foucault also argues that 'relations of power' play a pivotal role in the process of understanding human beings through history since meanings circulate 'within historical, social and cultural fields of power relations.'

A common feature of gendered representation is the use of stereotypes which can be defined as: "The selection and construction of undeveloped, generalized signs which categorize social groups or individual members of a group. The crude selected signs used to construct stereotypes usually represent the values, attitudes, behaviour and background of the group concerned. (1999:39-41) Stuart Hall asserts that stereotyping is a 'representational practice' that "reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'differences'", apart from that, it also tends to fix 'boundaries and excludes everything' which does not fit within the purview of those boundaries. The practice of stereotyping tends to prevail in societies and conditions "where there are 'gross inequalities of power." (1997: 258) The notion of womanhood and the female world that global media tends to represent is extremely stereotypical and restricting in the sense that in majority of the media texts, women are either represented as mothers, mother-in-laws and housewives within the framework of domestic and filial relationship or as aggressive sexual objects for male 'gaze' and utility. For Judith Butler, the process of representation is deeply rooted in the political process that looks to extend 'visibility' and 'legitimacy' to women as political subjects. In her opinion, representation is the "normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women."(1999:3)

Today there are endless ways in which media images distort, distract and render ordinary women and their work almost invisible. A sort of hyper reality is sought to be created by a combination of mass media, hyper consumer culture and rampant individualism where it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish the imaginary from the real and the ordinary from the elite. In their endeavour to 'sell' products and enhance profits, corporations have completely sacrificed reality and truthful portrayal. In the words of the eminent educationist and sociologist Prof. Krishan Kumar, "Media has created a new 'electronic reality' suffused with images and symbols, which has obliterated any sense of an objective reality behind the symbols...In (such kind of) hyper reality,

it is no longer possible to distinguish the imaginary from the real, the sign from its referent, the true from its false" (2005: 123) This means that it is possible now to have things, lifestyles and images better and beyond the real ones and which appear to be far more attractive than the 'original objects they are representing.' In total contrast to the real world, this media created 'simulated' world, thus, seeks to obliterate any sense of an objective reality behind this make believe world of glamour and shine and seeks to reproduce and reinforce dominant interpretations of reality to ensure 'passive, relaxed and uncritical reception.' The media outlets instead of challenging the stereotypes and the images of reality, reproduce them on daily basis to lead masses into a state of dependence and passive acceptance.

As is asserted by the recent psychoanalytic women writings, the represented woman is the 'bearer' and not the 'maker' of her role and meaning. The distortions and devaluations about her assume particularly alarming dimensions in the world of advertising that consistently spins out myths about women as 'lacking' in so called male centered domains and attributes. Certain critics like Lisbet Van Zoonen find the term 'representation' as misleading because it suggests the possibility of some reality or truth to be represented and ignores the relationship between the appearance or representation and subjectivity. Images in media are constructed in such a way that viewing is always 'gendered', so much so that even the female viewers get habituated to look at these images from the 'male' point of view. Apart from the male gaze, the issue of 'white gaze', as demonstrated by the flooding in the market of the whole variety of fairness creams and whitening agents, also emerges as a key element of dominant culture's hegemonic power. The present study has attempted to explore the impact of postcolonial advertisement dominated media on the representation of woman specifically in relation to their visibility, empowerment and the significant questions of agency, freedom and choice associated with the depiction of 'new' woman.

## 9. Effects of global shift on female visibility, representation and agency

The visibility of women has undoubtedly increased in the era of globalization. Corporate media's celebration of mass culture is in a way celebration of feminization, for it is heavily dependent on women as target groups in order to constitute and propagate a mass culture of consumption. Women's lives, women's struggles for democracy and equality, women's empowerment, everything is co-opted and commodified as an object of consumption. The notion of womanhood and female world that global media represents is extremely limiting and restricting in the sense of being confined to their dependency and subservience in case of projection of traditional woman and sex and beauty in case of modern woman. One finds that in majority of the media texts, women are represented either within the framework of domestic and familial relationships or as aggressive sexual objects for male 'gaze' and utility. Be it advertisements, serials, reality shows, entertainment shows, soft news, hard news, panel discussions- the underlying frame of reference is limited to family, domestic life and obedience for women and social world of work and politics and decision making

for men. So the real issue today is not 'where are the women' in media but who are these women who are being represented and how are they represented? How real and how objective is this visibility? One also needs to dwell into the 'silences' of media regards certain sections of women, who though play an extremely significant role in the development of nation's economy but do not find any place in the media representations. Which are these sections of women and why is it that their lives and issues no longer find any space?

Since the sole criteria of representation is 'what is saleable' and what promotes elite interests and lifestyles, so naturally the focus is largely on urban, rich, high profile female role models and celebrities and the poor and the rural women who constitute the majority are almost totally excluded. Needless to say, the issues related to these women also are largely ignored unless and until they assume some form of scandal or sensation. There are endless ways in which media images render ordinary women and their work 'invisible'. Earlier it used to be more of a 'symbolic annihilation' but now with the onslaught of global images, there is 'deliberate annihilation' through false and distorted visibility so that the 'real' woman remains unseen and unheard and the new market oriented and market constructed woman dominates the scene and the sensibilities. Indian television since the onset of globalization has targeted this upwardly mobile woman as prime and as far as possible an independent consumer by presenting her in a highly sexualized and aggressive manner though it invites many conflicts with their notional constructs of family and nation.

This new woman, a 'westernized representation' of Indian beauty, since now has to appeal to 'cosmopolitan lifestyles', has to have 'perfectly shaped and exercised' body to meet the exacting standards of international market. This perfectly sculpted body cannot afford to display any signs of ageing, stress or discontentment and this requires 'shaping' of not just one's body but one's whole life style and ways of living and thinking. The aggressive display of this international, 'professional' body, "a body acquired, shaped and toned" like any other professional skill, is as much a spectacle, entertainment and glamour as the market. What is disturbing is that not only the physical beauty, but even the success stories of women are molded and presented according to market demands.

Various studies show that in majority of the success stories of women that are projected on television, there is a celebration of 'individual women achievers' and there is no mention whatsoever of any kind of collective endeavors or women's movement as such. Issues of women's movement are largely ignored and those that are covered are "predominantly event-oriented." The stories of victims and survivors of violence, crime, rape, dowry death et al are either oversimplified or sensationalized or even dramatized. The rulers of the market believe that any presentation of the serious and thought provoking issues would spoil the 'buying mood' of the consumers.

It is in this context that the question of agency, freedom and choice becomes significant.

The real agency of women is located in depiction of their myriad roles, contributions and achievements in social, economic, political and cultural spheres as women of different class, caste, color, region and communities. But presentation of women in sex roles or traditional or modern stereotypes and as a homogenous category deprives them of this agency. Different categories of women are facing different kinds of problems and oppressions and consequently the location of their struggles also vary. But this heterogeneity and plurality of their realities and struggles is advertently ignored so as to co-opt and commodify the very notion of liberation and empowerment. The advertising moguls believe that the use of a particular brand of soap or shampoo or nail polish is enough to revolutionize and empower the woman who they are interested in and whose image and sensuality would fill their coffers. The market regulated media defines and depicts gender almost exclusively along the lines of sexuality. How could the issue of woman's agency come to the fore in the absence of any presentation of a real woman and the whole notion of freedom and choices that is being flouted by the market barons needs close scrutiny in the above light. Whose freedom is corporate media talking about? Is corporate devised and propagated woman free to choose how and when and where she is to be represented and how and where not to be represented. How do we control the 'normlessness' in the media in the form of flooding of channels with scenes of violence, obscenity, intrusion into individual's privacy and portraying women in a derogatory way.

And above all, how do we protect the freedom of those poor, rural, marginalized sections and especially women, who are either being totally ignored or being negatively affected? What kind of freedom and choices can a media imprisoned by profit and chained by commerce with all big media groups, structurally integrated with big business houses and gigantic conglomerates provide? Do women really have the freedom to choose how they are 'spoken for' and 'spoken about'?

Concentration of ownership brings with it its own political and economic compulsions and the issue of accountability and social responsibility gets upside down. It is the freedom of the corporate houses that comes to acquire top priority leaving little or no room for ordinary people to choose. How relevant is the question of freedom when almost all the channels and advertisements are presenting more or less the same things, same views, same images, with similar motifs and perspectives. In a world dominated by profit and sale, the 'choices' of the people too are 'structured' and manipulated according to the needs of the market. The beautifully packaged versions of physical beauty, looks, glamour, success, power et al get projected as 'freely chosen options.' With corporate being in an 'overwhelmingly dominant role' in deciding and presenting to people not only the things, the ideas, the lifestyles suited to their own personal interests, but also ways of living and looking at one's own self and the world at large, the whole issue of choice needs to be looked afresh. Corporate media believes in what Chomsky calls 'the fifth freedom' – that is – 'the freedom to rob and to exploit.' And whenever this freedom is threatened, there do emerge temporary concerns for other

forms of freedom but overriding concern and motif remains the same. And since excessively concentrated control is even more harmful and problematic than corporate ownership, such small concentrations with such uniformity of opinions and values can hardly be expected to reflect full range of freedom, richness and diversity of social needs and values?

## 10. Search for an Alternative

Since these problems are an integral part of a market dominated system of global cultural commercialization, they can not be resolved within the domain of media alone. Few countries today are willing to invest in a cultural and communication policy that does not surrender the future of their culture and society to the 'market forces'. This is adversely affecting the diverse and humane democratic cultures around the world. In this larger scenario, what is of utmost significance is to put up a strong fight to regain the space of public broadcasting. And this could be done in alliance with a broader questioning of socio-economic philosophies, frameworks and structures that generate inequalities and homogeneities in the favor of the opulent class and to the exclusion and elimination of the larger masses. To regain the centrality of the masses, it is necessary to first delegitimize the dominant value system of predominant groups. Values and opinions of predominant groups must first be unmasked as instruments of subservience and control and be replaced by human and democratic values of the subordinate and the marginalized groups which are all inclusive and all encompassing. The systems and structures of inequality and discrimination have to be requestioned, reanalyzed and reinterpreted in the context of changing economic global order. And for this, a decisive battle needs to be waged at the "level of consciousness", since the real change can only come about through the radical transformation of consciousness.

At the same time media, no doubt, being a social responsibility, what is required is a constant pressure group in the form of critical mass audience and mass movements that can alert a society when media goes haywire and can consistently pressurize the media not to forget its social concerns and obligations in the midst of the global pressures for its focus upon the 'shining' and the 'elite' India.

## 11. Future Scope of this Study

The present study could be very useful in analyzing how shift in economic policy in favour of globalization has led to major shift in the image construction of women and oppressed sections and how these media images gradually tend to become a substitute for real men and women and their lives. It should be interesting and academically rewarding to see how the mainstream ideology of global forces has affected media and literature over the past two decades. It would also be interesting to investigate how the concept of 'modernity', as presented by media, is basically rooted in the pre-existing structures of exploitation and differentiation. One could also study some of the 'new' images of women and marginalized sections in the context of 'looks', 'power', 'glamour' and 'success' and the impact of some of the role models in the field of advertisements, serials and literature. Another area could be to find out the

attitudinal differences regarding the representation of women in media in different age groups, caste, class and regions.

## 12. Academic Significance of the Project

Media today being one of the most powerful "socializing agents" can make a tremendous contribution towards advancement of women and oppressed groups by promoting a fair and accurate representation of their issues and struggles. Since media, like education, plays a major role in shaping perceptions, especially of adolescents, there is an urgent need to analyze and explore the relationships and inter-linkages between media and society at large. This interface would help us to understand how consciousness of various groups and communities is shaped, how notions of choices are projected and how they impact the society and its value system. As Judith Butler rightly puts it, media is not "monolithic" and it does not always act "to domesticate". The study should help in finding positive ways of "exploiting the dominant media".

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