

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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