
UNIT 1 PRINT AND OTHER MEDIA

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Mass media have become an integral part of our lives. The issues related to media, identity and gender are integral to the disciplines of media and gender studies. The reason is the popularity and diversity of media as source of mass consumption and its influence on constructing ideas and generating debates. The media scene in India has expanded in the recent times as there is a plethora of media choices available to the audiences. The media structures and systems have also undergone a sea change due to privatization and globalization. All these developments influence media projection and representation of various issues - including gender. Gender representation is a major area of concern - what media portrays gets assimilated into the minds of the audience and influences them in various ways. In this Unit we shall discuss the role of media and its representation of gender.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- Describe various functions of Mass Media;

- Explain the role of media in representation of genders; and
- Critically analyse the stereotypical representation of gender in media.

1.3 MASS MEDIA

We all are familiar with different forms of media such as newspapers and magazines, television, radio, digital media and the folk media. The rapid advances in communication technology have had an impact on the way messages are delivered to the audience. Before we proceed to understand the term 'Mass Media' let us first be clear about the term 'mass' McQuail (1994) has summarized the concept of mass as

- Large aggregates
- Undifferentiated
- Mainly negative image
- Lacking order

British sociologist John Thompson (1995) observed that the term 'mass' conjures up the image of a vast audience comprising many thousands, even millions of individuals. This may be an accurate image in the case of some media products, such as the most popular modern-day newspapers, films and television programmes; but it is hardly an accurate representation of the circumstance of most media products, past or present. Webster and Phalen (1997) argued that in order to be a mass, the audience "must be of sufficient size, that individual cases (e.g., the viewer, the family, the social network) recede in importance and the dynamic of a larger entity emerges" (Webster & Phalen, 1997, P. 9). Thus 'mass' essentially refers to a large, heterogeneous, amorphous, undefined group of people.

Encyclopaedia Britannica (1980) has defined mass media as "means of communication designed to reach and influence very large numbers of people". Janowitz's (1968) considered media as "technological devices (press, radio, films, etc.) to disseminate symbolic content" (Janowitz, 1968, page. 41).

Media are those means of communication which help

- Transmit messages to large, heterogeneous, anonymous masses living in different regions of a locality, nation or the world;
- Transmit message rapidly and instantaneously;
- Large group of people in different locations to receive the same information in the same language, although translations of the main points can simultaneously be displayed in subtitles.

Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975) defined mass communication as a technology which helps a message to be transmitted among a large number of people at the same time. Thus, it includes newspapers, magazines, television,

radio, cinema and internet. Defleur says that the study of mass communications should be able to throw significant light on:

- a) The impact of the society on a medium,
- b) The various processes involved in the working of mass communication systems, and
- c) The influence of medium on society.

1.3.1 Functions of Mass Media

Media perform many functions, first and foremost they are considered as the watch dog of society with a responsibility of keeping an eye on various systems in a society and their sub-systems. Mass media are regarded as powerful intervening factors in the process of modernization and social development. According to Lee Thayer, there are four basic functions of communication which can be represented by Four I's: Informative function, Influencing function, Instructive function and Integrative function.

Informative function: One of the primary purposes of communication is collection and dissemination of information. In 1969, media writer Marshall McLuhan said that the world is a global village. Its size is shrinking due to development of technology, transport, and telecommunication. The function is primarily performed by mass media which gives information related to political, social, legal, environmental, economic, social and cultural events and issues around the world. Earlier information was spread by traditional media such as folk songs, theatre, nautanki, public announcements, tamasha etc. We have become increasingly dependent on each other and cannot function without information about the environment. People learn about news, events, and products, changes in policy, ideas, and philosophies through mass media.

Influencing function: According to David Berlo, the purpose of media is to influence.

The purpose of influencing may be to alter the receiver's general beliefs, values, understandings, attitudes in a desired way. Influencing helps to create a common pool of ideas, strengthens feelings of togetherness through exchange of messages. It helps in uniting people through solidarity and understanding. News coverage in mass media has an element of persuasion. Most obvious media messages designed to persuade pertain in advertising. Newspapers package their opinion in the editorial section.

Instructive function: Another important role of media is to instruct or to educate - in this role; media aims to supplement and support classroom teaching and enhance the instruction process. It is most effective when the instructor relates media teaching with the instructional objectives. In addition media also act as educator - the masses learn politics, music, art

and various other subjects from media. People subconsciously imbibe various kinds of behaviors and attitudes from the media.

Integrative function: One of the purposes of communication is integration -in a community, the integrating mechanisms which become embedded in the socio cultural fabric are - literature, art, folklore, mythology, belief, celebration of festivals and get together, at special occasions. Newspaper reading is a solo activity but it provides a forum to those who read a common basis of information. All mass media serve this function by giving people a sense of belonging to community by being exposed to the same contents and giving common areas of discussion:

- Social integration messages or mass media, slogans, posters, songs are special efforts to this direction.
- Appeals to people in calamities, war, accidents bring people together.
- Mass media provide uniform information to people and are a tremendous integrating factor, e.g. people may be reading newspaper in isolation or watching T.V. programme in isolation.
- Isolated societies can be brought together.
- We come to know about unknown communities.
- It is possible to involve people in community and national programmes relating to health hygiene or any other.
- Shared knowledge and shared experiences are created by mass media, creating a common bare for community.

Check Your Progress 1:

- 1) *Can informative and influencive functions of mass media be co-related? Explain.*
- 2) *What are the differences between Instructive and integrative functions of mass media?*

Agenda Setting: Paul Lazarasfeld and Metron argued that one of the important functions of media is to set the agenda - to focus public attention on key public issues that media considers important and the priorities of media strongly influence the priorities of the public.

Cultural promotion: Media also perform the function of transmitting traditions and customs from one generation to another, from one community to the other. It thus serves to preserve the cultural heritage of a country.

Entertainment: Mass media have emerged as important sources of entertainment for widespread audiences. Television, radio, live shows,

theatre, cinema, magazines all provide entertainment to people. The media design their programs so as to entertain the masses and in order to secure the attention of the largest possible group of the population and try to maximize their revenues through advertisements. It is even argued that in democratic countries like U.S., but for the entertainment function, media would run out of business. In communist countries like Sweden, Pakistan, etc where the media is state-owned, the focus on entertainment is less as the emphasis is more on politically and socially oriented programs.

Social Change & Development: Media acts as a tool for development and social change in various sectors such as health, family planning, non-formal education, gender issues and thus promotes welfare of the people. Media can also act as a tool in the crusade for women's education. All India Radio, broadcasts special women's programmes from all its stations, especially for rural women in which information on family welfare, maternity, child health and nutrition is provided through these programmes.

1.3.2 Dysfunctions of Media

Media also has certain dysfunctions. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton termed it 'narcotizing dysfunction' of media - according to them the receivers get drugged into inactivity as if under influence of a drug turning them into passive individuals. With constant viewing, there is confusion about the problems and issues dealt with in the programs and the viewers are not able to take any action. The mass media drugs the viewers to its various programs by making them available at a fixed time every time. Addictive use of the internet and watching serials, films on television can be placed in this dysfunction. The functions served by the media could be different among individuals and even for the same individual in different points in time. For example, the entertainment function of media can be both functional as well as dysfunctional as a steady flow of entertainment may hamper other activities and interpersonal communication of the receiver.

1.4 THE CONCEPT OF MALE GAZE

Before we discuss media representation of gender in detail, let us first examine the concept of Male Gaze. The term "the male gaze" can be traced back to Laura Mulvey and her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" published in 1975. She believes that in films; audiences have to 'view' characters from the perspective of a heterosexual male. Though introduced as part of film theory, the term is often applied to other form of media and often used in critiques of advertisements, television, and the fine arts. Mulvey incorporates the Freudian idea of 'phallocentrism'. Specifically relating the phallogentric theory to film, Mulvey insists on the idea that film and cinematography are inadvertently structured upon the ideas and values of patriarchy.

Mulvey discusses several different types of spectatorship that occur while viewing a film. She argues that viewing a film involves subconsciously engaging in the understanding of male and female roles. The “three different looks”, as they are referred to, explain just exactly how films are viewed in relation to phallogentrism.

The first ‘look’ refers to the camera as it records the actual events of the film.

The second ‘look’ describes the nearly voyeuristic act of the audience as one engages in watching the film itself.

The third ‘look’ refers to the characters that interact with one another throughout the film.

The concept of gaze is one that deals with how an audience views the person presented in the media. Mulvey identifies three “looks” or perspectives that occur in films:

- How men look at women;
- How women look at themselves;
- How women look at other women.

She distinguishes between two modes of looking for the film spectator: **Voyeuristic** and **Fetishistic**.

Voyeuristic looking involves a controlling gaze and Mulvey argues that this has associations with sadism: ‘pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt - asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness’ (Mulvey 1992, P. 29).

Objectification of Women in the Media

Objectification is the representation of woman in media as an object rather than as a whole human entity. This happens in many contexts including advertisements and cinema. Feminist scholars say that the objectification of women involves the act of disregarding the personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a female; and reducing a woman’s worth or role in society to that of an instrument for sexual pleasure that she can produce in the mind of another. Media often portrays women in vulnerable and easily overpowered situations. Some images will focus only on a part of the body, a leg, a neck or a headless torso that verifies objectification and introduces the concept of Fetishisation - it intends to reduce women to disembodied parts of their anatomy.

Fetishistic looking involves the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous. This builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The erotic instinct is focused on the

look alone. Fetishistic looking, Mulvey suggests, leads to overvaluation of the female image and to the cult of a female movie star.

Check Your Progress 2

What is male gaze of mass media? How is it different from the cinematic media?

1.5 REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN MEDIA

We have already seen that mass media comprise the range of Print Media, Electronic Media, New Media and Folk Media aimed to reach out to large widespread audiences. Internet can also be considered as mass media due to its wide outreach across boundaries. Mass media is a significant force in modern culture. Sociologists refer to this as a mediated culture where media reflects and creates culture.

Media Representation refers to the construction of 'reality' in mass media such as people, places, events, cultural identities etc. Mass media have often been seen as cultural industries where 'meanings' as we perceive and understand them, are produced - representation is the method employed by the mass media to purvey messages to the audience. Representation involves not only how identities are represented in the media but also how they are constructed in the processes of production and reception by audience, for instance, the issue of 'the gaze' discussed earlier. When we speak of the image society projects of its women, we have in mind the ideal womanhood or its popular stereotypes or the position of women in terms of the vision of poets, artists and prophets relating to women.

Media projection of women has been an area of great concern. Various studies have revealed that women are shown as playing secondary and passive roles in television programmes and films. The images constructed in media do not match the ones faced by women in general and working women in particular. Moreover media accessibility is largely confined among women in middle and higher classes. Factors like poverty, illiteracy, discrimination and male domination restrict the media utilisation of a vast majority of rural as well as urban women. At the community level, even where community radio and television are available, either because of the presence of men, or due to social inhibitions, women are unable to utilise media.

Let us take an overview of the projection of women in different media.

1.5.1 Print Media

The print media which include newspapers, periodicals, newsletters and other channels are relied upon by the people as credible source of information, education and entertainment. Print media continues to grow in India and influence the general readers as well as the policy makers. However, they have less outreach among women as compared to electronic media.

In the history of print media, we find that in India Printing came first in Goa in 1556 and penetrated into Calcutta and inland provinces through the coastal towns. The first printed newspaper of India was in English, edited and published by James Augustus Hickey, an ex- employee of the East India Company. This newspaper was known as the “Bengal Gazette”. Its first issue was published on January 29, 1780. English Journalism in India rose out of the needs and interests of an alien population in the metropolitan cities that were the headquarters of the British provinces. When it was taken up by Indians it still maintained its orientation towards European life and culture, with an added flavor of Indian culture and religion in the initial years. Later, when the Indian nationalist movement became strong, newspapers became committed to Indian national needs and political freedom. In all the national movement events such as - Jallianwala Bagh massacre, non- cooperation movement, Cripps mission, Quit India Movement the press was a direct participant and it is even argued that the nationalist press underwent the same kind of suffering as the freedom fighters.

Since the freedom struggle days of newspapers in India till today, print media has undergone a sea change. Large numbers of newspapers are published in English, Hindi and variety of regional languages in multiple editions providing in-depth analysis on various issues. Technological revolution has modernized the print media. Recently almost all newspapers have internet editions. For example, the Hindustan Times or Indian Express or Times of India can be read on the internet through their net editions. Most major newspapers have a dotcom name for their site. One of the chief characteristics of Print media is that they offer extensive news coverage and in depth treatment of themes. They provide a large variety of coverage, through different kinds of writings, than any other media in India. The main limitation, however, is that they can be read only by literates.

Most issues of special concern to women do not fit into the traditional concepts of what constitute news. Nonetheless, newspapers cover women’s problems drawing the attention to policymakers to issues requiring immediate attention such as the adverse sex ratio, infant and maternal mortality, crime against women and the poverty on women and their families. In the past few years there has been an improved and increased reportage of issues related to women in the print media.

Incidents such as that of the gang rape case of December 2012 have started to occupy important slots like the editorial, feature news, front-page news etc. However, women's visibility in the news is still dominated by sensational stories of glamour, sex, domestic violence and other forms of violence. Stories like women coping with adversity or building their lives are largely missing. Issues affecting women, their vast experiences and their lives, barely find their way into the mainstream media. Likewise, very few informative pieces or feature columns are published for women informing them about their legal rights, or about their potential for political activity. Many other studies have also established that when women appear in the news, they are mostly projected as passive victims or passive reactors to public events in news media and they hardly appear as speakers or participants in public event.

There has been a spurt in recent years with regard to women's magazines. The journals are mostly qualified for modern society and could be said to be positively harmful to the development of women as conscious individuals aware of themselves and aware of the society around them. If a woman wins a beauty contest, magazines or newspapers in particular give much importance to the news and even print her photographs on the cover page but at the same time if a woman gets any honour or prize she gets limited coverage. Here, the difference of judgment in women's issues is quite marked in media. Similarly, the daily newspapers focus on rapes, atrocities, crime, sexual harassment and abuse of women prominently in their columns. Besides Sunday and Saturday supplements, special glossy editions on women's leisure, fashion, beauty and other luxurious news items with erotic photographs are issued from time to time by daily newspapers (Dhar & Pattnaik, 1996, P. 11-13).

1.5.2 Radio

After the invention of telegraph, telephone and film, the most dramatic developments of the 20th century has been the invention of radio waves. Sound broadcasting started in India in 1927 with the proliferation of private radio clubs. The operations of All India Radio began formally in 1936, as a government organization, with clear objectives to inform, educate and entertain the masses. When India attained Independence in 1947, AIR had a network of six stations and a complement of 18 transmitters, the coverage was 2.5% of the area and 11% of the population. Rapid expansion of the network took place post-Independence and AIR today has a network of 229 broadcasting centres providing 100% coverage and about 132 million estimated radio sets in the country.

Radio has emerged as an important medium of mass communication due to its immediacy and intimate nature. Broadcasting in India has to cater to millions of people with widely different tastes. Radio has an inherent

advantage to overcome the major barriers of illiteracy, lack of efficient means to reach the remote places and poverty which prevents access to mass media.

Radio programs in India have been largely confined to reinforcing the prevailing attitudes thus perpetuating a status quo. Although women's programmes are broadcast over all AIR stations, there is overemphasis on themes of beauty aids, recipes, interior decoration, household tips etc. Over a period of time the role of women as producers and contributors to economy is being projected, though in a limited manner.

The advent of FM radio in India in 1999 gave a fresh lease of life to the radio industry when the Government of India decided to allow private players to enter the FM broadcasting sector with a 10-year licensing period. It was only after the successful launch of FM Phase II that the industry began to see rapid and robust growth of radio. Although like AIR private FM Channels have also dedicated afternoon slots for women but with no different content or themes.

Community Radio is a new development in the field of broadcasting in India. Community Radio is by the community and for the community. It provides the opportunity for representation the people from different ethnic, social and religious backgrounds and gender. Community radio media has a number of attributes that makes it an effective tool in promoting women's participation in decision-making processes and governance structures. It is not controlled by corporate and government interests which allows it to speak to issues independently. Community radio uses local language that makes the information and the discussions on various issues accessible to local communities. It transcends literacy barriers, which allows and encourages a great number of women to use it as their primary source of information.

Check Your Progress 3

Point out the major characteristics of gender representations in Print Media and Radio.

1.5.3 Television

Television became popular in the 1950s, but ideas for sending pictures over long distances date back to the 19th century. In 1926, Scottish television pioneer John Logie Baird (1888-1946) demonstrated the first television system. T.V is a multi-media system predominated by the visual medium. T.V can transport the viewers to the actual scene of action to see things as they happen. Having a television set in the home has become essential

in today's society and we depend on it to entertain us with its sitcoms, serials and other entertainment related programmes, and to inform us about current world issues.

In India, given the enormity of illiteracy, especially among women, radio and television exposure is considerably higher than print media exposure. The electronic media offers women entertainment and information in a homebound environment. The tremendous popularity of television and its ability to reach a vast audience with illiteracy being no barrier led to the idea of using television as a channel for information on development among several governments/ administrators. From the mid- seventies television began to be used to promote development oriented messages among the Indian population. But there was no exclusive focus on women's problems and their development. In the absence of a comprehensive media policy in India, television content emphasizing entertainment has grown to such an extent that today all television channels are oriented towards commercialization. Though television in India began with the avowed goals of education, modernization and development, today's satellite channels have done more damage to the cause of women's development by regressing to highly negative values that impede women's empowerment.

Gerbner and Gross (1976) argue that television is the central cultural arm of society, serving to socialize most people into standardized roles and behaviors. They suggest that television cultivates people's beliefs about how the world works more through the sum total of interactions, behaviors, and values present in television content than through finite attempts to persuade.

Hum Log was the first Indian soap in 1987 which kept millions of viewers across India glued to their T.V sets. The serial discussed issues of family planning, freedom of choice to find a life partner or job and the role of women in society. Another popular TV soap of early years, *Buniyaad* had strong women's roles while *Humraahi* focused on the rights of women to equal education and employment, to choose their own marriage partners, and to determine whether and when to have children.

With the advent of soap opera producing production houses like Balaji Telefilms, television soaps took a new form. Women were basically seen as performing a decorative function and being marginal to national growth and development. Their primary place is seen as being within the home and this value is reflected in the content and setting of most of the television programmes. The plural nature of Indian culture and diverse role that woman play is neither acknowledged nor communicated. This results in reinforcement of the stereotyped image and role specification of woman in uni-dimensional projection of their reality. Most of the soaps shown in Indian television are sexist. Even the so called matriarch (supposedly the

head of the home) shown in some of the TV soaps victimizing the younger daughters and 'bahus' (daughters in laws) of the house and teaching them how to be 'good'. Most of these serials wrapped in tradition of male chauvinism discourage women to aim for more than a loving husband, happy children and a modern home. The woman is portrayed as a glamorous doll whose physical beauty is her only asset. The sacrificing role of women in every serial is highlighted, as it poses no threat to the patriarchal structure. Women are all the time portrayed in roles where they are seen as compromising and negotiating.

Gender stereotyping is also very much evident in television portrayal of men and women in their appointed roles. Invariably, masculine personality attributes are emphasized and women in the world of television are presented in role of domestic help, a wife, a mother etc. and they are portrayed as submissive and engrossed in common family affection and duties. As against this, men are depicted as employed, competitive. Women shown in similar competing roles with men are far less in number and are considered to be oddities and deviations from norm, trait wise though there is a stereotype portrayal of women being congenitally much more than men. Even when women are presented as power holders, the patriarchal context is unmistakably present. The attributes of power and aggressiveness is portrayed as something unnatural to a women and a challenge to the male ego. In families in which the gender roles are largely traditional, television may tend to serve to reinforce such gender roles. In this way television certainly plays a role in the construction of gender roles. You will learn more about this in the next unit of the same block of this course.

1.5.4 Advertisements

Advertisements are yet another prominent and integral part of television viewing. Due to its persuasive power, advertising is the best known and most widely discussed form of promotion. Advertising persuades and motivates consumer about the advertised products, service or ideas. Advertising plays an important role in persuading the public to change their attitudes towards a product, service or idea. The constant flow of advertising images of gender, types of persons, social classes, and other groups influence our social learning process.

In the world of advertising, men and women have consistently been portrayed in stereotypical ways. Men are portrayed as more autonomous than women, with men portrayed in many different occupations as compared to women being shown as housewives and mothers. Men were far more likely to advertise vehicles, business products, or job websites, while women were found mostly in advertisements for domestic products. Some common sights of women as seen in advertisements are as shown cooking in the kitchen, washing bucketsful of clothes, or bandaging wounds of their husbands and

children. Men were far more likely to be shown outdoors or in business settings while women were shown primarily in domestic settings. Thus, a clear public-private gender divide emerges through advertisements.

Advertisements also project women as the torch bearers of cultural heritage as advertisers have long been enamored with women and culture. Advertisements of a major life insurance company picture the transformation of the *sindoor* of woman into the company's logo. Most of LIC advertisements picture the women left all alone, helpless, susceptible to exploitation if the husband does not have insurance. These advertisements tend to promote the idea of insurance as more important for women than men. Like television serials advertising also depicts woman as superwomen who manage multiple roles of wife, mother, career woman and so on, and be glamorous as well. In some advertisements we observe the perfect multi tasking done by the modern women who take care of the domestic responsibilities and aspire to fulfill their professional commitments with great perfection and ease.

In the advertisements women are predominantly employed to promote products and services. In every item they are utilized whether it requires their presence or not. Even in masculine accessories women are presented. From these advertisements a desirable value can be discerned. Women are portrayed as sex objects who are probably cast to titillate the viewers by exposing their body parts. Women are shown wearing revealing clothes and take leaning and yearning postures - signs of incompleteness or lack of security. Women and their body parts sell everything- food, clothing, cars, computers, men's shaving lotions and underwear. Even in commercials of the products consumed mostly by men- male perfume/deodorant, briefs, male soaps etc. women are used as models exposing their bodies.

Fair complexion, tall, slim and beautiful looking women are the ideal ones and dark complexion is propagated as a major hindrance for self development, and even marriage. Utmost care is taken to reinforce the idea that overweight bodies and dark complexion are a disqualification for the self development of young women. Fairness creams and beauty soaps shower promises to bring their dreams come true. Diets are being suggested to maintain figures, or conceal one's real age. All these beauty creams and soaps are meant to construct and narrate a new value, a new norm, a discourse which promotes a certain stratum of society and excludes others. It is propagated in such a manner that this becomes a common sense, a discourse of whole Indians. (Roy, 2012, P. 4)

1.5.5 Cinema

Gender representation in Cinema has been discussed in detail in Unit 2 of Block 2 of MWG 003. However, while discussing gender representation in media, it can be said that women characters in cinema are often devoid of a realistic projection and end up on screen as stereotypes. A 'good' and

ideal woman in Bollywood, has traditionally been long-suffering and submissive, chaste, and is inclined to make sacrifices for others especially the male members in the household. The 'bad' woman on the other hand, has been depicted as Westernized, blond-haired, individualistic and sexually aggressive, ready to lead men into ruin. The Hindi film industry has repeatedly reinforced the notion that the glory of ideal Indian womanhood lies in the tolerance she shows toward society and men, even when she is unjustly treated and brutally victimised.

The narratives of Hindi cinema have undoubtedly been male dominated and male centric. Themes have been explored from the male audience's point of view. The heroine is usually secondary to the hero. Her role is charted out in the context of any male character which is central to the script. It may be the hero, the villain, the father, the boss, an elderly male figure etc. She is devoid of any independent existence and her journey throughout the film is explored in relation to the male character. This kind of straight-jacketing limits the women's role to providing glamour, relief, respite and entertainment.

Some film-makers dared to explore subjects from the women's perspective. *Mother India* (1957) a Hindi film epic, written and directed by Mehboob Khan is a strong political statement on a woman who can do anything to establish that justice has been done even while remaining within the framework of marriage and motherhood. She defied the micro state of being a biological mother in order to fit into the framework of becoming the mother of the nation when she shot down her own son to save the honour of a woman of the village. The sati-savitri image underwent a radical make-over probably with Nutan, who, without showing skin, made a powerful presentation in strong roles such as Seema and Bandini while Geeta Bali promoted the image of a mischievous tomboy, also a positive deviation from the sati-savitri image.

During 70s actors like Jaya Bachchan, Smita Patil and Shabana Azmi stripped glamour off the female lead's character and played roles that were as important as that of the hero. Some contemporary films like *Chameli* (2003), *Cheeni Kum* (2007), *Paa* (2009), *Ishqiya* (2010), *No One Killed Jessica* (2011), and *Dirty Picture* (2011) have pictured extraordinary themes and portrayed women as central to the story line. These films have forced creators to take a fresh look at the different roles played by women and introspect into the kind of typecast that were being perpetuated earlier.

1.5.6 Women and ICT

The term Information and Communication Technology (ICT) relates to a range of technologies, including computers, satellite and wireless technology and telephones. Central to these is the Internet, which provides the mechanism for transporting data in a number of formats including text,

images, sound, and video. All these combine to form our networked world which reaches into every corner of the globe. Additionally, ICT deals with the application layer, the systems that enable information to be collected and distributed, analyzed, and processed. In other words, ICTs are information-handling tools - a varied set of goods, applications and services that are used to produce, store, process, distribute and exchange information. The new information technologies (ICTs) have allowed women to link and network with each other more effectively and share information and resources faster. The women's movement has increasingly used the electronic medium to for advocacy and build solidarity.

The new media or global media are capable of a much higher degree of interactivity than those offered by traditional communication technology. The use of computer in one form or the other is an integral part of most of the modern communication techniques. Women's use of ICTs is not equal to their share in the world's population. This gender inequality is evidenced in both developed and developing countries, although often more pronounced in the latter. While women are joining the Internet community and making their presence felt on-line, the degree of participation by women is still lower compared to rates of male participation. The reasons behind women's unease and refusal to participate are complex and often interwoven with cultural barriers.

There is a need to incorporate gender awareness in policies, planning, implementation and evaluation of ICT projects to encourage women's participation as ICT users, managers and vendors. Evidence from a number of telecentre evaluations underlines that women's use of ICTs increases when women are managing or teaching in the centres. At a basic level, women's ability to be actively involved with the Internet is troubled by the financial costs connected to the Internet. Purchasing equipment and software, paying monthly Internet server costs, and training costs for classes and upgrading all require a financial investment from the user.

It is critical to build human capacity. Users must have the ability to effectively use ICT tools. Without adequate education and training, infrastructure investments will yield little. Teachers, school children, health professionals, citizens, and business people must have the knowledge needed to take full advantage of distance learning, e-healthcare, e-government, and e-business applications. New media is clearly an 'emerging' area of knowledge both in terms of access to and use of technology by women. From a feminist social sciences perspective, there is a need for an exploration of the understanding and practice of citizenship as articulated by women using new media. The Internet has the possibility to provide a space for the diversity of opinions and realities that constitute our complex social world.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have seen how the media have emerged as a huge and pervasive industry in recent times. Media perform many functions - which go beyond informing, educating and entertaining. They provide a forum, persuade, motivate and also transmit culture from one generation to another. We also read that there are some dysfunctions of media hence media needs to be used with care. This becomes all the more important as media is so intertwined in our lives that we do not truly comprehend on a conscious level how much influence the messages have over us. The images and messages pertaining to gender can be stereotypical in nature and can influence or reinforce our thinking process and behavior patterns in many ways at various levels. At times we are exposed to images that are so unrealistic and unattainable for an average receiver that we become discontented with our real lives. Images of common gender stereotypes found in the media have a powerful influence over how society expects a particular gender to behave. Going beyond the stereotypes will do a great help to the cause of women in Indian society. Media need to create space for more progressive representations of women to do justice to women and their changing roles in society.

1.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Define and discuss 'Mass Media'.
- 2) Discuss various functions and dysfunctions of Mass Media in modern society. Make linkages to gender issues wherever relevant.
- 3) Explain the concept of 'Male Gaze' in reference to Laura Mulvey's theory.
- 4) 'Media plays an important role in Gender representation.' Comment

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UNIT 2 GENDER ON TELEVISION

Vinaya Nayak

Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 Definition
- 2.4 Indian Television and Gender
- 2.5 Historical Perspective
- 2.6 Newsreaders in Indian Television
- 2.7 Cable Television and Gender: Soap Operas
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Unit End Questions
- 2.10 Glossary
- 2.11 References
- 2.12 Suggested Readings

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Television is often referred to as a 'woman's' medium. This feminisation of the media arises from the programmes aired on television and the manner in which television programmes are consumed. The fact that television, unlike cinema or theatre is watched inside one's home, allows for an assumption that the principle audience are women; therefore the content or programs such as soap operas and serials are generally made with a female spectatorship in mind. Another important aspect that leads to the female centric nature of television is advertising. Today, upper class women have been considered decision makers and therefore targets of the advertising message, it only follows that the content of the programme must find favour with female viewers. Of course, we have to examine this connection more vigorously and it is important to understand that the notion that television is a woman's media is at best an assumption, as belonging to all genders obviously television programs are watched by members of households, belonging to all genders.

However, this perception of television perhaps also enables a closer scrutiny of how women are portrayed on television. The representation of women in the mass media has been closely scrutinised by media commentators, critics, academics, researchers and within the women's movement. In the case of television, with its avowed female spectatorship, the representation of gender becomes a complicated issue.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

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

- Develop a perspective on gender on television;
- Identify some of the key ways in which gender has been looked at on television;
- Critically analyse the representation of gender on Indian television;
- Discuss the history of popularity of television in India; and
- Explain how gender has been represented in various genre such soap operas and serials.

2.3 DEFINITION

Early studies of gender on television, particularly in the United States and in Britain tended to address two primary concerns, firstly, the manner in which women were stereotyped or misrepresented on television and secondly the study of the television industry and its structures of employment. Based on the general notion that the dominance of men in positions of power resulted in a skewed representation of women, these studies suggested that the presence of male camera operators, directors and producers tended to objectify women's bodies and perpetuated to stereotypes in the representation of women.

These studies found that overwhelmingly television produced stereotypes of women, either encapsulated within the domestic sphere as wives and mothers or outside the domestic sphere as embodiments of the beauty stereotype - young, slim, fair and objects of sexual desire. Contemporary television programs however, both in the west and in India have grown beyond the scope of such studies primarily because several new genres of programmes, such as reality television, game shows, and quiz shows have evolved and earlier genre such as soap operas and serials have mutated in interesting ways. What exactly is mutation here? Did you mean 'evolved'? Whatever you have thought kindly elaborate it.

As far as the pattern of ownership was concerned in the early days of television, there were very few women in positions of power, and the studies suggested that this was reflected in the nature of programs. Today, women do occupy positions of power in the television industry. However, it does not necessarily mean that this has resulted in more 'progressive' representation of women. The representation of gender is a complex phenomenon and perhaps the mere presence of women producers and directors does not change that. And as the various genres continue to evolve therefore the representation of gender sometimes transcends, sometimes reinforces and sometimes creates new stereotypes.

For instance on Indian television, soap operas that generalised as *saas-bahu* (mother-in-law and daughter-in-law) sagas have been very popular; of late reality television programmes such as Bigg Boss have as contestants some popular stars of the soap operas as their ‘real’ selves. They may portray traditional *bahus* and wives on the soap but appear as their modern selves in the reality shows. In programs such as Roadies on MTV and *Khatron ke Khiladi* (in which contestants undergo physically gruelling tasks) on Colours, the notion of that men/boys are physically superior than girls/women is challenged when both male and female participants perform the same physical tasks and are expected to perform with the same efficiency. However the programme also enables the playing out of other stereotypes like ‘girls are more quarrelsome than boys’, girls who are aggressive are ‘forward’ or that boys feel the need to ‘protect’ the female participants and so on.

Any discussion of gender on television also necessitates a discussion of genre and spectatorship. In the simplest sense genre refers to how television programs are classified and organised. A primary classification of television programmes is fiction and non-fiction. Soap operas, Serials, and situational comedies or sit-coms would be some examples of fictional programs while news programs, talk shows, quiz and games shows, contests, and recently reality television are examples of non-fiction genres. Apart from this narrow division of genre, time slots i.e. the hour in which a program is aired can also alter the content of the program. For instance primetime soaps (usually between six or seven in the evening to about ten in the night) would differ vastly from day time soaps. In the United States, fictional programs like day time soap operas are usually based on the saga of family turmoil such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, usually catering to a more female viewership, while evening soaps or serials such as *ER*, *House M.D*, *CSI*, *24*, *Friends*, and *How I met your Mother*, are examples of medical dramas, crime or detective shows, and situational comedies (respectively), which cater to both the male and female adult viewers. Genres are also culturally informed, for instance soap operas in India are vastly different in content from say the American soaps, and enjoy prime time slots in India.

2.4 INDIAN TELEVISION AND GENDER

Before we proceed to examine gender on Indian television, let us take a brief look at the history of television in India. As compared to other media like print, radio and film, television has a very short history of a little over 50 years. Television was introduced in 1956 with a small grant of 20,000 US dollars from UNESCO, to set up a pilot project that would study the use of television as a medium of education in India. In 1959, with an additional aid from the US government in the form of equipment and the sale of transmitters at a subsidised price from Philips, a weekly half hour service

was beamed from Delhi to a radius of about 40- Kms. This small experimental beginning did not galvanize very quickly into the nation-wide phenomenon that Television was to become. Until 1965, this was India's only experiment with television, when a daily service from Delhi was introduced.

Seven years later, 'Kendras' or stations were set up in Bombay and subsequently in Srinagar, Calcutta and Madras with emphasis on education and development. However, in 1982, there was a shift in the agendas for television in India and it changed from education and development in rural India to commercial and entertainment oriented programs in urban India by introducing a national channel called Doordarshan. The introduction of 'entertainment' along with 'instructional' programming significantly altered the nature of television programming.

In the absence of local entertainment genre Doordarshan programmes drew from myriad sources as diverse as Hindi cinema, American soap operas and Mexican Telenovellas. A hybridised genre needed to be created that would address two needs, firstly the project of 'development' and 'literacy' through television and secondly the more commercial/capital project of making content interesting enough to engage and tutor viewers in the practice of watching and understanding (elucidate a bit more about this) television. The 'developmental soap opera' was born of this union. Among the several social concerns that Doordarshan highlighted, the emancipation (did you mean empowerment) of women and national integration or the fostering of a nationalistic spirit among the viewing public were the primary objectives.

2.5 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The first soap opera or serial as Doordarshan defined them was *Humlog*, sponsored by Nestle and Colgate and produced by a private company. The popularity of this soap has been variously documented and perhaps justifiably seen as prototype of how Doordarshan and subsequently private channels defined the genre of soap operas and serials.

'*Humlog*' was the story of a large lower middle class family that perhaps lived in Delhi. The serial led the viewer through the trials and tribulations of this family which was weighed down with problems that had to be read as pan-Indian social problems; the family dealt with issues like the father's drinking problems, their difficulties in raising daughters in a male-dominated society, and monetary issues that this large family grappled with in every episode. The series also made their struggle heroic, thus endearing them to the audience. Veteran film actor Ashok Kumar summed up each episode and hinted that most of this family's problems were because of their large number and hence the need for 'family planning'.

Humlog was followed by a large number of serials on social themes. In addition to the socio-cultural themes, the Doordarshan serials also explored patriotic, mythological, and historical issues, such as *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* and *Rajani* that were inevitably based on the day-to-day lives of middle class families.

As for representation of gender; with women's empowerment as a primary concern, Doordarshan serials showed women as 'progressive' or modern figures. Sitcoms like *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, a comedy that revolved around the daily lives of a young couple, the wife was shown to be a working woman and both the husband and the wife seem to share domestic responsibilities. An early series *Rajani* narrated the story of a young housewife who fights corruption in institutions of the state, like the municipality that affects the functioning of the domestic sphere. *Trishna*, based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* adapted to the Indian context, explored similar conflicts between gender and class, and just as the novel did, questioned the role of women in society. *Tamas* set around the partition of India, sensitively portrayed the violence and the position of women in the midst of such political turmoil. Serials such as *Nupur* - about a young classical dancer, who sets about honing her craft against all odds, or *Udaan* the story of a police officer who fights to perform her duty challenging a patriarchal society, endeavoured to represent women as brave and intelligent people, willing to fight to fulfil their dreams.

However, while an attempt was made to break through stereotypes and present more 'modern' or more positive and empowered representation of Indian women, the patriarchal attitudes of the State were still apparent. This could be traced for example in public service messages/ advertisements shown on television media; for instance, the advertisement on birth control that largely placed the primary onus of family planning on women rather than on men.

While reading gender, one must realise that it is a complicated exercise and the depiction of gender cannot be classified in simple terms as 'positive' or 'negative' nor 'progressive' or 'regressive', as there could be more shades to it.

Check Your Progress

- 1) How did Doordarshan Kendras emerge?
- 2) Name at least two serials of Doordarshan that were very popular. What, according to you, are the reasons for the popularity?

2.6 THE NEWSREADERS OF INDIAN TELEVISION

The presentation of news has become quite popular and Doordarshan had framed a different kind of ambience for a news reader. If you still come across DD News channel or the news section of your local Doordarshan, you will notice, the way the presentation is taking place. You may note that depiction of gender is very patriarchal and bureaucratic, especially with Doordarshan. Female news readers are always shown in Indian traditional sarees and male presenters are always in western formals. With the emergence of different cable television, which you will study in detail in the next section, the news presentation saw some changes. Like Star News, Zee News, or NDTV 24x7, for instance did not present their news readers in this pattern as Doordarshan. Rather, female newsreaders were often shown in western formals and other Indian ethnic garments. The colours of clothes previously very subdued, also changed to include brighter hues.

When it comes to the number of newsreaders, these appear to be an equal distribution of male and female newsreaders. Today we have news anchors, commentators, and reporters. However, the gender equality is not reflected in different kinds of news, for instance, sports news is dominated by male reporters. Similarly, in news anchoring there is a dominance of males, especially in Prime Time news. Most of the channels have male news anchors, or news readers, very few have female newsreaders. But gradually the scenario is changing.

2.7 CABLE TELEVISION AND GENDER: SOAP OPERAS

Until the early 90's Doordarshan was the only television channel up and they enjoyed monopoly in television media. The first whiff of competition to Doordarshan's monopoly came in the early 90's. Cable television, although present, by some accounts since the early 80's, became popular in India in the mid 90's. Individual cable operators, who began by showing movies, soon began to beam news video magazines. The 'live' cable cast of the Gulf war on CNN sealed the popularity of cable television. By the mid-90's satellite broadcast via cable had Indian cities weaned away from Doordarshan. The Star Network owned by the Hutchinson Whampoa Group used the satellite ASIASEAT 1 to broadcast three international channels-MTV, Prime Sports and BBC. In 1992, Subhash Chandra bought slots from the HW Group to broadcast ZEE TV, India first private Hindi language channel.

With the advent of the private channels, there was a change in the content of entertainment programmes. Uma Chakravarti suggests that while the national network telecast serials that had regional and local stories, like *Gul Gulshan Gulfam* set in Kashmir, or *Dil Dariya* set in Punjab, or *Malgudi Days* set in Karnataka, the private channels seem to erase the local for an

ambiguous, 'urban' Indian milieu. And unlike Doordarshan serials that inevitably narrativized rural India and the urban poor; these serials were inhabited by the upwardly mobile and the affluent characters who displayed all the trappings of a global, cosmopolitan lifestyle while still being steeped in tradition, where the honour of the family was of primal significance.

Private channels, like Star Plus, Zee TV, Sony and much later Colours also positioned soap operas as against serials as the preferred genre. *Tara, Banegi apni baat* and *Campus* were some of the early soap operas but marked a historical shift in the nature of entertainment on television. Balaji Telefilms, owned by the mother-daughter duo of Shobha and Ekta Kapoor, produced the most famous soap opera for Star Plus was *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*. Henceforth, *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* set the trend for other to follow.

Shoma Munshi, in her book *Prime Time Soaps Operas on Indian Television* (2010), suggests that the popularity of soaps can be attributed to various carefully crafted production techniques, plush sets, and story lines that seem to resemble Bollywood movies. The protagonists of the soaps became decidedly female and drawing heavily from the Ramayana and the Mahabharat and gods and goddesses from the Hindu pantheon, heroines embodied the virtue of Sita, Parvati, and Laxmi. The undivided Hindu family became the focus of the soaps and virtuous and brave heroines of these soaps always did the right thing, but never overstepped the boundaries of traditions and morality. In *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, Tulsi, a middle class girl, marries into the rich Virani family and often made difficult and brave choices that united the family and kept them 'true' to their traditions. The series ran for eight years and covered about 70 years in the life of Tulsi. Tulsi in the latter part of the series turns a blind eye to her husband's mistress, while continuing to perform her duties as a wife.

Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi was a trendsetter, and soaps that followed had similar plots. Clearly defining a new modernity for the Indian woman-global, cosmopolitan but still intensely traditional and an embodiment of Indian values and morals.

In the last few years, soap opera themes have undergone a shift; while the soaps in the early part of the decade had moved away from the social reform themes popular in the Doordarshan era, current soaps have revived the genre by addressing social concerns centred on women's empowerment. *Balika Vadu* on Colours set out to address child marriage, and *Na Aana is Desh Mere Laado (Laado)* on the same channel, female infanticide. However, given the nature of the narrative of soap operas, after the initial few years the series end up meandering towards the largely established genre of family dramas and soap heroines continue to embody the virtuous femininity that has become the staple for Indian television.

Interestingly, alongside the creation of the stereotype of the virtuous heroine, soaps have also created the 'vamp' or the 'negative' character. The negative characters represent the antithesis to the heroine and also in many ways the freedom to transcend traditions. Many of the early 'vamps' were shown to be working women, unapologetic of their ambitions and desires. For instance, Payal of *Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, or Pallavi of *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki*. The newer soaps, however, have characters like, Ammaji and Kalyani Devi from *Laado* and *Balika Vadu* respectively representing a deeply patriarchal and feudal order.

Soap operas are ever changing and a fluid genre. They have been a site for reading representation of gender, stereotype and many ways as small capsules of contemporary life. It may well be fair to suggest that they are conceived for a female spectatorship, however to perceive them as either as the site for positive representations of gender or deride them as regressive would be a limit perspective.

An interesting exercise would be to read gender in those programs that are not avowedly for a female spectatorship such as reality television or talk shows. How is gender represented here? Shows like *Swayamwar* on NDTV Imagine does not allow for an easy reading. In the first season of *Swayamwar*, a controversial female starlet, considered to be a media hype, interviewed potential grooms, put them to various tasks in order to win her hand and in the end got engaged to the proverbial last man standing. The protagonist, in the process of the series, was adopted into this larger TV family where actors played traditional roles of brothers and friends ubiquitous in the great Indian marriage. Despite the commercial trappings, the series could be seen to affirm the notion of choice, and also the absolute power of television that can transform a rather risqué personality and project her as the ideal bride, and a potential wife and *bahu*, an interesting example again of the fluid nature of the interplay of gender on television. The same show in the subsequent season, starred showed another controversial protagonist, this time a male, going a step actually telecast the wedding of the winner. If the first season affirmed a woman's right to choose the second season had a bevy of beautiful young women willing to supplicate themselves in order to marry male protagonist on air.

Beyond this portrayal of female and male protagonists in television soap shows, the neo-liberal era saw some changes in their projections. Women became more bold and ready to take up the psychological patriarchal inhibitions through serials like *Afsar Bitiya* on Zee TV. The serial though set up in a traditional small town of Darbhanga, where the main protagonist, Krishna, successfully acquires the post of Block Development Officer. Or *Hitler Didi* on Zee TV, where the protagonist, Indira, is shown as never stepping back and creating a phobia in her locale about herself, she shows that woman should never be taken for granted as a docile and meek character.

Soap shows changed thematically as well. On the one hand we saw comedy serials like *F.I.R* in Sab TV, as Inspector Chandramukhi Chautala has been shown as a typical Harayanvi girl, posted in the police station, Iman Chowki. Her behavioural pattern, her attitudes, her robust nature, and her accent of using the language in the local fervour, brings out the depiction of a different kind of woman. On the other hand, we have *Kuch Toh Log Kehenge* on Sony Entertainment, where extra-marital affairs have been dealt with such finesse that the need for love, care and affection at a later stage of life becomes such a pivotal emotion to survive and struggle through everyday life. Serials like *Na Bole Tum Na Maine Kuch Kaha* on Colors, where Megha, a dutiful daughter-in-law falls in love with Mohan, the next-door selcentred bachelor.

There are innumerable serials and soap shows which has marvellous themes regarding neo-liberal society or so-called today's modern life, where gender could be easily traced down to. But amidst all these, *Maryada...Lekin Kab Tak* on Star Plus crossed the borders of heteronormativity. It is the first serial in the Indian television industry where homosexual love between two men has been portrayed. The main characters, Gaurav and Karan, have been shown in love despite Gaurav being married. Although the serial began on a different tone, the angle of gay love has been depicted with authenticity.

The attempt here is not criticise the representation of gender on television for an inaccurate portrayal of women and men and the performance of gender roles. It would be unfair to put the onus of exemplary representation of gender on television producers and suggest that by transcending stereotypes, television can perform an agential role in equalizing gender relationships in society. The notions of femininity and masculinity are far more complex and several representations of gender exist side by side in society and find expressions on television.

Activity:

Which is your favourite serial? Jot down the reasons for liking it amongst all the serials you watch.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

Television represents this complex set of cultural mores; it plays on familiarity and elements of surprise to keep the viewer engaged. The representation of gender should be analysed within the same axis; ratings, trends, and genre specific demands allows for less exacting and more temporal and multifaceted representation of gender. The viewers should not be seen as victims of televisual narratives, as they negotiate, accept and reject the stereotypes presented on television.

2.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Watch two soaps on different television channels. Analyse the representation of the protagonist in both the soaps. Compare and contrast their projections.
- 2) Critically analyse the representation of women participants in two reality shows of your choice.
- 3) Watch two or three news telecasts on any television channel of your choice. Identify the women news makers and their projections.

2.10 GLOSSARY

Bigg Boss	:	Bigg Boss on the channel Colours where contestants spend several days locked in a house and performing everyday tasks and playing games demanded of them by an unseen voice called the Bigg Boss.
Roadies	:	Roadies a contest show where contestants ride on motorbikes across certain sections of the country and sometimes abroad, getting eliminated on the basis of performance in various tasks.
Soap Operas	:	Soap operas are non-fictional programmes, where the narratives are never resolved, and keep the audience engaged in several different plots lines and characters.
Serials	:	Serials are non-fictional programmes that differ from soap operas, in the manner in which there is a closure of the narrative at the end of each episode.
Sitcoms	:	Sitcoms or situational comedies are usually shorter in duration than soaps or serials and are inevitably shot in studios. The narrative is often resolved at the end of each episode.
Telnovellas	:	Mexican soap operas often called Telnovellas combine the soap opera genre with a social message or moral.

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UNIT 3 A PAINTING AND SCULPTURE OF THE WEST: RENAISSANCE AND AFTER

Megha Anwar

Structure

- 3.1A Introduction
- 3.2A Objectives
- 3.3A Renaissance Painting and Sculpture
 - 3.3.1A Renaissance Religious Arts: Divine Masculine Figurines
 - 3.3.2A Renaissance Religious Arts: Portrayals of Sufferings
 - 3.3.3A Renaissance Religious Arts: Divine Feminine Figurines
- 3.4A Renaissance Painting and Sculpture: Women in Art
- 3.5A Painting and Sculpture: Later centuries
- 3.6A Let us sum up
- 3.7A Glossary
- 3.8A Unit end questions
- 3.9A References
- 3.10A Suggested Readings

3.1A INTRODUCTION

By now you have undoubtedly become conversant with the key terms and concepts in relation to gender studies. You must have discovered and learnt that issues of gender impact and infiltrate all aspects of our existence - there is no getting away from it. In various units of MWG 001 and MWG 002, you have already studied the difference between sex and gender and engaged with the idea that gender is not something we are born with but something that is socially and environmentally constructed. The way in which our gender is constructed determines almost everything we do: how we dress, our physical behaviour, the language we use, our interactions with our family, friends, and our demeanour in the professional and educational spaces we inhabit.

If gender affects everything then surely it plays a role in our cultural productions -art, sculpture, cinema, architecture, dance - as well. Think for instance how society reacts to the idea of a boy wanting to learn *bharatnatyam* or a girl wanting to become a drummer in a rock band. Gender stereotypes and notions of propriety (what is appropriate behaviour for which gender) can put constraints on us that we do not even notice or acknowledge. However, the question of gender goes beyond the issue of what creative fields are available or closed to which gender. If we are to carry out a detailed and nuanced analysis of the relationship between

gender and art we must also address questions such as: how is gender constructed in and through art? Does our gender determine our response to art? These are some of the central issues that we will take up in this unit.

As you can imagine, this terrain is a vast one, particularly because men and women have always produced art. It would be impossible for us to discuss all artistic corpuses from across the centuries and across the globe. This unit will, therefore, selectively give you a sampling of some major landmarks in western art history, starting with the Renaissance, and draw your attention to the ways in which gender functions within these.

3.2A OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Define the relationship between gender and art;
- Analyse the representation of art and response to art;
- Evaluate how gender functions in the major landforms of art history;
- Describe the variety of paintings and sculptures ; and
- Compare and contrast art and sculpture of the Western world during Renaissance and after that.

3.3A RENAISSANCE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

When considering Western art it might be useful for us to begin with the Renaissance. The Renaissance was a cultural-literary movement in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries. Some of the greatest and most popular writers (Shakespeare, Marlowe, Sidney, Spenser) and artists (Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Botticelli) lived and worked at this time, transforming forever the cultural heritage and artistic practices of the world. The word Renaissance literally means “rebirth”. You may ask what was being reborn at this time. It is difficult to explain the magnitude of the developments taking place, but for the time being let it suffice to say that new ideas and developments in literature, art, and politics were overtaking a traditional, medieval system of thought. For the first time a secular art and literary corpus (plays and poetry) developed that was not entirely contained by the demands and prescriptions of the church. Even religious art (art sponsored by the church) or poetry (Donne’s religious sonnet’s for instance) gave expression to a whole new understanding of the relationship between the human being and God. And ultimately, the whole conception of what it meant to be human/mortal underwent a drastic revamping. In other words, man himself was reborn as ‘Man’ during the Renaissance. As you can see, we cannot escape gendered terms such as “man” since these were very much ingrained in the culture of the times.

3.3.1A Renaissance Religious Arts: Divine Masculine Figurines

We will begin this unit, therefore, by examining the construction of ‘Man’ in Renaissance paintings and sculptures. The examination of these will enable us to determine the constitutive values, politics and ideologies of this age. The necessity of “reading” cultural artefacts lies in the fact that through them we may uncover the foundational “inner” principles of the historical-cultural moment in which they were produced. It is crucial to remember that artworks are never simply the result of individual artistic genius at work. The artist’s creation is always symptomatic of the prevalent ideas of his/her age. Furthermore, the artist’s work must be understood as contributing to and intervening in the world in which it is produced and consumed.

With this background let us take up the figure of the male nude that has come to epitomise the Renaissance dream. The High Renaissance gives us Michelangelo’s *David*.

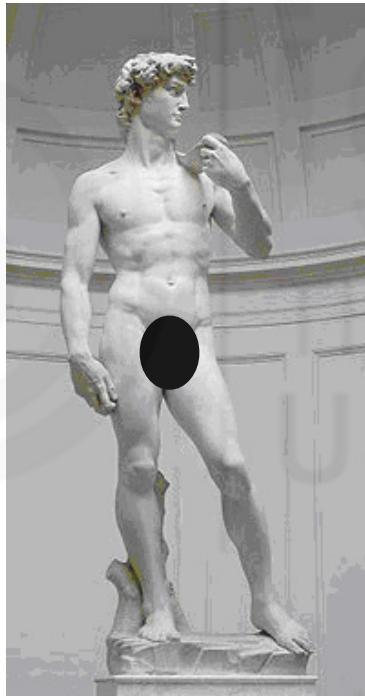


Fig. 3.1: Michelangelo’s *David*. Source: @upload.wikimedia.org

The first thing that strikes us about this statue is the overpowering ‘full Monty’ effect. Here’s a 17 feet tall Biblical figure, sculpted out of marble, brandishing a full frontal nudity that vehemently asserts male physicality. The open celebration of the disrobed body of an archetypal Old Testament prophet-patriarch becomes a striking and unabashed celebration of the body and disrupts the **post-lapsarian** correlation between nudity and shame. Located in Florence, Italy, this figure of solitary splendour, magnificently symbolised a towering and defiant individualism. The sheer scale of the sculpture epitomised the human agent shedding his medievalist self-effacement, no longer afraid to take centre-stage as an epical, titanic

superman. It is clear that Renaissance man surmounts the legacy of the Fall, as the nude body is 'reborn' in its perfect, dignified and beautiful avatar.

We deliberately use the word 'beautiful' to describe Michelangelo's David because the David is both beautiful *and* male. Despite the 'masculine' elements of the figure - etched sinews, flexed muscles - the figure symbolises the Renaissance-art ideal of beauty - something that is seen conventionally as a 'feminine' attribute today. Importantly, this 'universalism' of being is deeply Renaissance in its ideal of a unified, holistic view of human possibility. Caravaggio's *Bacchus* also typifies this androgynous quality: his body is muscular but his face is flushed and rather effeminate. Such a conception of the male is pagan and pre-Christian. Additionally, the figure of the 'beautiful male', by compromising an unmitigated 'virile' aggressiveness, shakes to the core homophobic fears of emasculation and feminization.

Another example of the male nude is Michelangelo's fresco (painting on wall), *Creation of Adam*, on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. This centrepiece fresco sums up the full glory and significance of man's arrival in the newly created world, opposing Calvin's Puritanical assertion of man's irredeemable sinfulness. In this, God and his heavenly family of angels and cherubs together occupy one half of the frame; the other half is taken up and dominated by a single figure: that of the easily reclining Adam. Adam is at perfect ease in the divine presence, proudly and easily nude in his relaxed and unselfconscious, self-accepting posture.

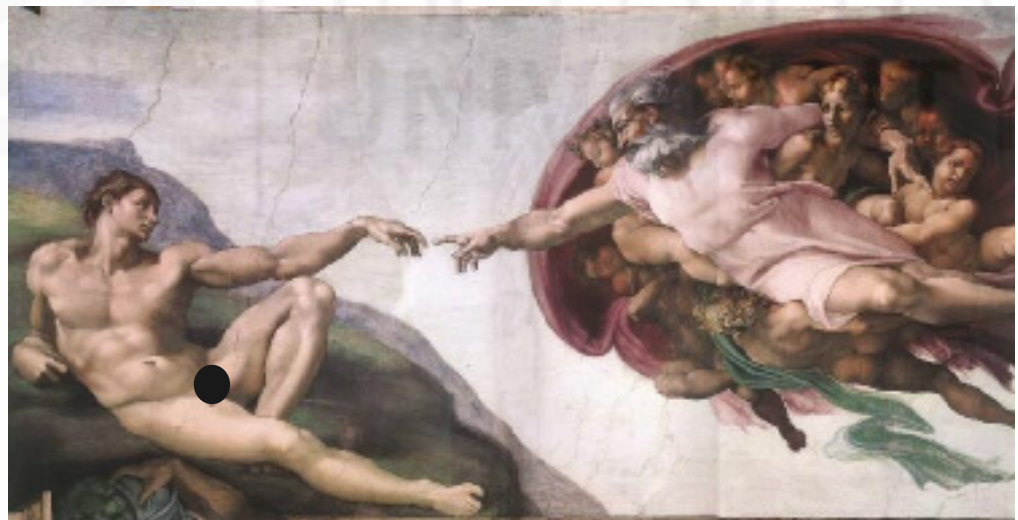


Fig. 3a.2: Michelangelo's Creation of Adam. Source: @4umi.com

Far from being cowed by God's presence and authority, Adam's laid-back body language bespeaks a confident assurance that the Creator needs him as much as Adam needs the Creator. God's outstretched arm and hand, reach out for Adam's, sign of a deep relationship. And it is the newly forged relationship of equality and intimacy between Man and his Maker that is foregrounded.

These seemingly subversive and secularizing narratives of the *David* and *Creation of Adam* are made possible by the fact that these masculine figures embody the politico-religious liberality of the Renaissance. As a result, two Biblical figures get re-configured as ideals of beauty and human agency, an androgynous nudity and sexuality that can stand/lie fearlessly even in the presence of God.

If, on the one hand, the perfect male-nude dominated Renaissance art, on the other hand, the broken and beleaguered body of Christ and other Christian martyrs captured the imagination of all artists. Just as the idealised male body expresses the progressive ideological tendencies of the Renaissance, the battered bodies of the saints articulate another politics that reveals a whole new face of the Renaissance.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Point out at least five differences of portrayals by using examples from religious art.
- 2) How would you view male nudity in Renaissance religious arts? Explain.

3.3.2A Renaissance Religious Arts: Portrayal of Sufferings

Artists through the medieval age and the Renaissance tirelessly depicted the unjust persecution visited on Christian martyrs by Roman soldiers and commanders. You can check out some of these examples like, Michelangelo's *Crucifixion of St. Peter*, or Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* and *Flagellation of Christ* in the hyperlinks given in References section at the end of the unit. These horrific and gory portrayals of suffering were, as one might imagine, never an end in themselves, in that they were not merely an unmitigated celebration of the heroism of the martyred saints. The lessons that the audience were supposed to take home after witnessing a 'moment' of martyrdom (albeit in and through art) were far from purely religious ones. The suffering of the martyrs became a module to instil in the people the patience to endure not religious, but a different kind of suffering - the secular kind - the roots of which lay in feudal economic deprivation and political disempowerment.

The trope of the early Christian martyrs was now reconfigured in body-imagic art representations as meek embodiments of uncomplaining suffering enjoined on a 'true' Christian. Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* (1599-1600), for instance, entirely elides and bypasses the early Christian

martyr's potential for radical resistance, depicting him instead as a helpless victim, ineffectually raising one hand to stop his assassin from landing the final blow. Prone on the ground, with his tormentor looming large over him, he is divested of agency and has no option but to accept the leaf of martyrdom held out by the angel on the cloud above. The same helplessness of the martyr is foregrounded in Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Peter* (1600) as well. St. Peter here is reduced to a powerless being, desperately trying to raise his torso to examine the details of his own crucifixion. One might go so far as to suggest that the Church, deploying the power of the image, is here implicitly reminding the ordinary medieval individual that his/her condition is no different, and has no reason to be. There is little he can do or indeed ought to do to change the fate meted out to him by a divinely ordained fate. For to rise up in rebellion would be tantamount to rejecting the martyrdom handed out by the hovering angel, and to question God's plan for our life. The best and perhaps only option available to the individual, therefore, is a quiescent and fatalistic one: to lie back, much like St. Matthew, and await God's hand of mercy.

As you can see from the above discussion, artistic representations of the male body are never apolitical. The body of the gendered subject is always enmeshed with and embedded within a particular politics. The masculine body is not just an aesthetic, abstractly sexualised entity. It is constantly appropriated by artists in ways that turn the body into a site through which other ideological impulses can be read.

3.3.3A Other Renaissance Arts: Divine Feminine Figurines

The arguments made with regard to the depiction of the male body can also be made about women in art. The most fascinating aspect about the representation of women in Renaissance art is the multiple ways in which artists have approached the treatment of the body. At one end, we witness the sexualisation of the sacred, the divine, while at the other end of the spectrum we encounter the artist's desperate attempt to sublimate female sensuality. Let us first consider this second tendency.

A useful thing to remember about the Renaissance is that it found a lot of its inspiration and subject matter for art, philosophy and literature in Classical knowledge (Greek/Roman). The Renaissance also meant a revival of ancient traditions and ideas. As a result, Renaissance artists avidly painted Classical personages - both historical and mythological.

Venus, the goddess of love, was one such favourite subject for artistic enterprises. The Renaissance's artistic corpus overruns with glorious and magnificent representations of Venus, captured in all her splendour, for instance, Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*, Giorgione's *Dresden Venus* and Titian's countless paintings of the goddess.



Fig. 3.3a: Botticelli's *Primavera Venus*. Source: @windows2universe.org

In Botticelli's *Primavera*, Venus is the central figure in the midst of a whole host of other mythological figures. While all the other characters are 'active', in that they are *doing* something, Venus, stands mutely and somewhat passively, objectively observing all the action surrounding her, never participating in it. The painting depicts Zephyr's rape of Chloris, the latter's transformation into Flora, Mercury pointing heavenward (a neo-platonic sign reminding us that the highest love is the love for God), and the three Graces, interlocked in a circular formation that is a sign of mutual, reciprocal love. In short, all kinds of love find space in this painting - from the carnal to the divine - and yet, Venus, who by virtue of being the goddess of love is the cause of all this action, stands distanced and separated from all of it. She's converted into a Marian figure: Christian, chaste, asexual and 'pure'.



Fig. 3a.4: Giorgione's painting *Dresden Venus*. Source: @patricknicholas.files.wordpress.com

On the other hand, Giorgione's painting *Dresden Venus* (also known as *Sleeping Venus*) radically alters the figure of Venus. For the first time we have a female nude in a reclining position. There is an underlying sensual implication in the painting as well, created by Venus's raised arm and the placement of her left hand on her groin. The landscape in the background mimics the curves of the woman's body and this turns the human physiognomy into a natural, organic entity, in harmony with its surroundings. Venus's face and body are not abstract and inhuman or unrealistically idealised as in Botticelli. Instead they are infused with warm, blended tints which add reality and decorative richness to her being. The painting arouses the viewer's sexual interest which is matched by Venus's attitude of modesty as she attempts to conceal her body. Titian's paintings bring even more depth and character to the figure of Venus. Giorgione's *Dresden Venus*, set against a natural landscape, is markedly domesticated in Titian's *Venus of Urbino*.

The pastoral deity is now located indoors. If Giorgione's Venus was passive, withdrawn, dreaming and inaccessible then Titian's Venus is seductive, alluring and directly communicating with her audience - her gaze is focussed on the viewer outside the painting while Giorgione's Venus's eyes were decorously lowered. The Venus of Urbino reveals no coyness, hesitation or sexual prudery. Like Giorgione's painting, here too Venus's hand is placed on her groin. In this case however, instead of trying to cover it she seems to be drawing the viewer's attention to her private parts.

In a slightly different painting, in the painting *Venus Blindfolding Cupid*, Titian brings in an even greater variation. In this painting Venus is fully clothed and no longer lying down. Her hair is neatly tied - a symptom of her new role in the artistic schema. She is no longer an intimidating beauty; her function is that of a maternal figure, chastising and managing Cupid. An art critic, Erwin Panofsky says that this picture achieves the ultimate resolution of the conflict of terrestrial and celestial love between Eros and Anteros (Panofsky, 2004, P. 255-257). These paintings that depict Venus occupied in the rituals of motherhood and domesticity work to humanise a female figure that has traditionally been abstracted and dehumanised through idealisation.

Furthermore, the Renaissance sought to unify what had been a split between the body and the soul during the Classical age. Plato in the *Symposium* tells us that there were two Venuses - Venus *Coelistis* (celestial) and Venus *Naturalis* (vulgar/natural). The love associated with the former was one that inspired men to better themselves. Venus *Naturalis*, on the other hand is affiliated with wealth, status and heterosexual, sensual love. Her love is earthly and physical rather than spiritual and of the soul. As is evident from the paintings of Renaissance artists they did not automatically rever and prefer Venus *Coelistis*. Instead the Renaissance offered an ideal that was an amalgam of the two: the body was no longer denied or decried in favour of the soul.

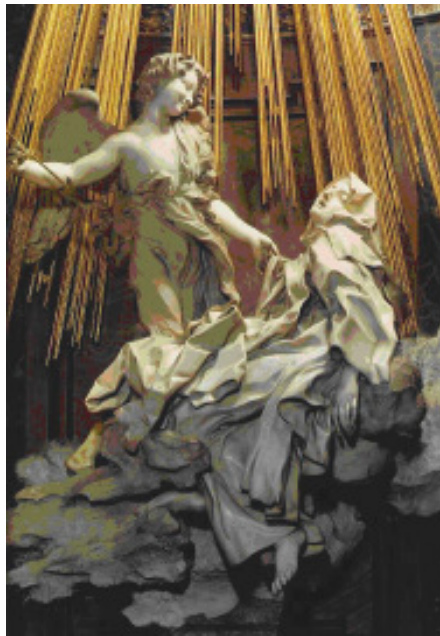


Fig. 3a.5: Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*. Source: @smarthistory.khanacademy.org

Bernini's magnificent and complex sculpture, *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, illustrates this combination of the sacred and profane poignantly. St. Teresa's parted lips, closed eyes and limp limbs are very sexually suggestive. It seems that the female saint is waiting to be ravished by the angel suspended over her, holding the arrow that will pierce her heart. The violent movement of her robe is indicative of her state of mind. Her whole body is in a state of tension and seems simultaneously to be lifeless. This combination of the mystical with the sensual is clearly visible in the literature of the period as well. Donne's poetry for instance clearly establishes the necessity and equal importance of both the body and the soul for a fulfilling life and ultimate salvation.

There is another 'mother' figure, besides Venus (Cupid's mother), that looms large upon the artistic corpus of the Renaissance. Christ's mother, Mary, captures the imaginative appeal of the painters almost as much as Christ himself. Michelangelo's famous sculpture, *Pieta*, captures Christ in all his humanness and mortality. Yet, his mother, whose arms he lies in, captivates our attention just as much as the son does. Subtly her body expresses both the strain and trauma of supporting her dead son and a sense of dire futility, waste and helplessness, conveyed through the gesture of the empty right hand that seems to be questioning the purpose of this sacrifice. Interestingly, Madonna's face is marked by a haunting passivity and expressionlessness. This is a moment that requires no depiction of overt emotion - the grief is beyond the demonstrable.

Even more fascinatingly, Mary looks even younger than Christ in the sculpture. A subversive reading of the work might lie in arguing that Mary and Christ seem to share a relationship. While this may seem like a blasphemous suggestion several art critics have observed that "Most Italian Madonnas are emotionally alike, alike *under the skin*. They seem to be either joyous or

pensive, their expression of emotional is muted...But this loving mother is also her Son's daughter and his consort" (Goffen, 1999, P. 35-69). Similarly, Julia Kristeva suggests that Mary embodies a "gathering of the three feminine functions (daughter-wife-mother) within a totality where they vanish as specific corporealities while retaining their psychological function" (Kristeva, 2010). What seems plausible to propose is that these representations of the Madonna rescue her from a strictly scriptural rendition and recover her humanity.

3.4A RENAISSANCE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE: WOMEN IN ART

The Renaissance not only started the trend of secularising religious, divine feminine figures but also popularised the convention of choosing secular, non-religious female subjects as worthy of artistic depiction. The most famous woman in the history of art is the *Mona Lisa*. Maria Constantino says that "The key to the painting's success is the very ambiguity of her expression, and the question of whether or not Mona Lisa is smiling. Whatever our interpretation, we remain transfixed by her gaze." (Constantino, 2005, 14-16) Like the *Venus of Urbino*, *Mona Lisa*'s eyes draw the viewer into her world. Nevertheless, Leonardo da Vinci manages to create a sense of distance between the sitter (the woman) and the observer. This separation, ironically enough, is also created by the expression on Mona Lisa's face. It's important to consider that this portrait is not of the most beautiful woman. There are far more 'perfect', feminine, gorgeous women that can be found in art history. The enigmatic quality of *Mona Lisa* does not lie, therefore, in an obvious, in-your-face, over-the-top beauty. What contributes to its mystified reputation is its quiet ambiguity.

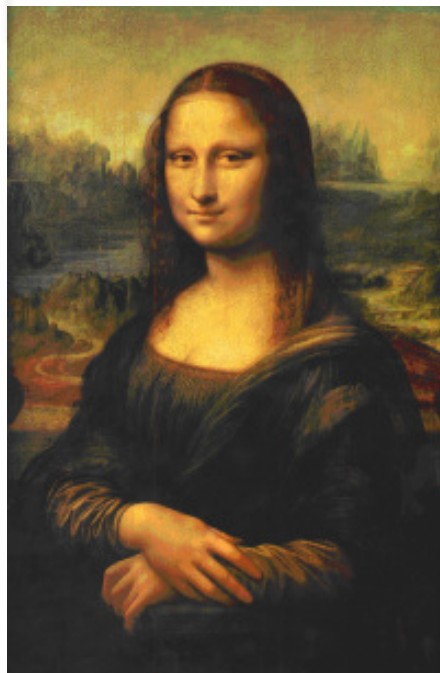


Fig. 3a.6: Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Source: @upload.wikimedia.org

Mona Lisa is a not-so-young married woman. Interestingly, however, the wedding ring is absent from her hands in the painting. Even more, despite her marital status, there seems to be a sense of loneliness and isolation about her - reflected in the unsettling look of sadness in her eyes. All we have to do is to recall Browning's "My Last Duchess" (written a couple of centuries later) about Dukes' wives in Renaissance Italy, to know the precarious lives that women led. At the very least, their lives weren't very exciting or fulfilling. It is precisely this sense of deprivation that haunts the *Mona Lisa*. There is a social formality in her posture - folded hands that convey a public pose. Yet, her face concedes to a hidden reality.

Most puzzling is the half-smile that evocatively escapes her lips - a devilish, lopsided smile. What is its meaning? Is there a touch of seduction in her face, an invitation to the viewer or is it a look that declares closure, a refusal at accessibility, a disallowance of communication? We might suggest that she does both - there is an invitation to the viewer in that her face forces us to ask questions about her, to her, tempts us to unravel her puzzle, delve into the recesses of her subjectivity. Simultaneously, however she also sets a limitation on her viewer; ultimately she will not allow absolute access and will choose to remain silent.

Mona Lisa's complex subjectivity becomes even more enthralling when we consider the fact that in most art women are either deified and sanitised (through the attribution of divinity) such that we get squeaky-clean depictions of women, or women are objectified by associating their bodies with luxuriant tapestries and jewels. In the *Mona Lisa* however the 'object' becomes a subject with a narrative. True, that the narrative isn't quite audible or decipherable. Yet, this portrait forces us to ask why she cannot speak, why the story of Mona Lisa is ineffable. The portrait pushes against the boundaries of the conventional: the woman in it is not containable within traditional tropes. Here, the woman is bursting with a story, a narrative, a feminine human tale but the confines of the convention won't allow the telling of her secrets; hence her silence and indecipherability. Such a reading makes it impossible for us to disparage women like Mona Lisa as deliberately seductive and mysterious. Their mystery is an imposition we - who do not allow women to speak or care to listen - subscribe to them. There's no religious secret or power that underlies her depiction. Mona Lisa is entirely secular. This then becomes an absolutely human portrait of a woman pulsating with life, yet confided by the world she inhabits to remain nothing more than an enigma.

A similar partial-representation of female subjectivity can be found in the works of Rembrandt and Vermeer - two Dutch 17th Century painters. With the Dutch painters art begins to move inwards and choose interior spaces and domestic sites for representation. Simultaneously there is a corresponding movement into the mind of human subjects as well. Since women are the

ones who predominantly inhabit interior spaces, it is no surprise that these paintings begin to enter the interior landscape of feminine consciousness. In Rembrandt's *A Girl Leaning on a Window Sill* we have the image of a very young girl looking out onto the world that is most likely not available to her. She can only reach it from within the confined interior space of domesticity. Her eyes convey a longing for what lies outside and also knowledge that her heart's desire cannot be fulfilled. In another painting, *A Woman Trying on Earrings*, Rembrandt gives us a very realistic depiction of a woman occupied in an everyday, ordinary activity. Usually, images of women adorning themselves came loaded with moral connotations which were meant to convey a maxim against vanity and seduction. Here, however, the woman is an ordinary woman, taking pleasure in a small trinket. She is no great seductress looking to lure the viewer. She's self-sufficient and self-engrossed: for the first time, it seems, women needn't reach out to something beyond the self for a validation of their existence.

With these painters there is also a sudden proliferation of images in which women are engaged in literary, intellectual activity - still 'simple' mental activity of course, like reading a letter or writing one. Nevertheless it is, in a sense, the first time that women's intellectual life begins to get acknowledged in cultural production. (See paintings like Vermeer's *A Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window*, *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*, *A Lady Writing a Letter*, and Dirck Hals's *Woman Tearing up a Letter* in the [hyperlinks](#) given in the References section at the end of the unit.) In *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* the pregnant woman's mouth is slightly open making it seem like she is gasping in shock. The way in which she is clutching onto the letter - both her hands are tightly clasping the letter as though she is afraid it might slip out of her hand - combined with the blue clothing and background create a melancholic, slightly gloomy atmosphere. Here, too, the audience is intrigued into asking several questions that would entail a desire to enter feminine subjectivity.

Jane Gallop in a fascinating article discusses a special issue of the journal *Critical Inquiry* titled *Writing and Sexual Difference: The Difference Within*. The cover of the issue has the picture of a seated woman, licking an envelope and in front of her on the desk lies a letter (Mary Cassatt: *The Letter*) the back cover is a drawing of Erasmus writing a book. Here is what Gallop says about the illustrations: the man in the picture is in fact Erasmus, who is the father of our humanist tradition and the woman is without a name. In the man's background of books, the woman sits against floral wallpaper, and this is echoed in reverse by her patterned dress (Gallop, 1982, P. 797-804). The most significant difference between the two illustrations is that the man holds a pen to paper. His pen is like the scissors hanging on the back shelf behind him - incisive, penetrating and violent. Both the pen and scissors are symbolic of masculine sexuality.

Tragically though, even the privilege of writing letters is not allowed to all women. Vermeer's paintings reveal how the right to write letters is available only to women of a certain class. There is a class of women who write letters and a class of women who serve those who write. Writing is not just an action or work of the spirit, it involves material requisites, for instance the paintings like *Mistress and Maid*, *The Love Letter*, *Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid*. Traditionally, the maid carries letters between the lady and her beloved. Not only does the maid make possible the act of writing (presumably she is the one who has got the quill with which the mistress is writing, has provided the paper etc.), but also labours to make love possible by acting as the go-between between the lovers. Because the maid provides the prerequisites for the writing of the letters we might even claim that she becomes the source and inspiration for the love letters. If we are to make a deconstructive reading of these paintings it is possible to show how even though the maid is not the recipient of love, by virtue of the fact that the letter is handed over to her and received by her, she becomes a quasi-lover. These paintings, therefore, open up the possibility of reading a subversive homosexual bond that exists between women of different classes who share a domestic space.

For the first time, art accommodated the lives of working class women. Vermeer's *The Milkmaid* and Rembrandt's *A Girl with a Broom* are excellent cases in point. The latter painting is able to immediately draw our attention to the doubly subaltern position that domestic workers suffer from. Because she is a girl she is condemned to live out her life completing domestic chores - something she must start learning very early in life. Additionally, by virtue of being a poor, working-class person, she has to make immaculately clean someone else's household - her labour is not even directed at improving the condition of her own home. This painting is rife with gender and class politics. The upturned bucket, dark background and the little girl leaning on the broom create a sense of tragic melancholy, an overwhelming recognition of the lack of options in the life of this girl.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) *Find out the major differences between the male artists and women artists of the Renaissance religious arts, and describe these.*
- 2) *Name the major artists you have read about in the Renaissance period.*

3.5A PAINTING AND SCULPTURE: LATER CENTURIES

With the Renaissance we witnessed the deployment of the male body to articulate contemporary politics of the time. In a similar fashion, women's bodies have been incessantly appropriated for masculine political agendas. The art produced during the French Revolution in the late 18th century marvellously elucidates male recruitment of women's bodies to express all kinds of political positions.

In France, the political animosity felt towards the King and Queen, Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette, took the form of innumerable semi-pornographic caricatures against the royal body. The sexual escapades, or rather their absence in the king's life and, in reverse, the abundance of rumours surrounding Queen Marie Antoinette's heterosexual as well as lesbian dalliances became the subject of proliferating sketches and engravings. Initially, the King's inability to sexually consummate his marriage evoked much medical interest. Soon, however, the matter came to be seen as a symptom of the corruption and flaccidity in the political state of France. Sexual incapacity was thus re-presented as political impotency and ineptness. If the king did not have the "force to deflower his wife" (Baecque, 1993, P. 43), neither did he have the force or moral authority to head a nation. Secondly, the queen's cuckolding of the king, one might suggest, offered alluring lessons to the masses: if the queen, sexually dissatisfied with the king, could choose alternative lovers why couldn't the people, displeased with his politics, do the same - that is, choose better rulers for themselves for instance.

The queen's successful deception and subversion of the king's authority was not, however, a subject of celebration in popular culture. On the contrary Marie Antoinette's power made her the object of immense misogynistic satire and ridicule. Pierre Saint-Amand in a fascinating essay illustrates the long history of what he calls the "Marie Antoinette syndrome" - the fear of powerful women. A woman who could dominate the king himself needed to be restrained in every possible way - through humiliation, **decapitation**, or, if need be, through both. The queen's body, so far the source of her power over and against the king, now appears as the very site upon which the revolutionaries will "tame" her (Saint-Amand, 1994, 379-400).

This desacralisation of the royal body culminates in the ultimate ritual of dis-memberment: decapitation. However, as Saint-Amand points out, the guillotining of the king and the queen, respectively, denoted very different parables. If the king's beheading ushered in a new political regime, the queen's assassination was more a necessary "moral" act, than a political one. She was punished more for her excesses as a woman of easy virtue, than for her political status as queen. Herbert, a journalist who reported

on the queen's execution, recounted the "orgasmic bliss" (Saint-Amand, 1994, P. 387) that enveloped the masses on seeing the "feathered tart" receive just punishment. It was precisely for her sexual crimes rather than her political tyranny that she needed to be beheaded. Jacques Louis David's sketch of Marie Antoinette on her way to the guillotine captures this gendered dimension in her execution. The trappings and markings of the queen - the crown, gown and general opulence and regalia - are entirely absent from her person. If David hadn't particularised her as the queen there would be little means of recognising her as one. The implication is clear - she need not have been the queen at all. Like Charlotte Corday (murderer of Marat) or Olympe de Gouges (author of the 'Declaration of Rights of Woman') - both of whom were also sent to the guillotine - she represents *any* transgressive woman.



Fig. 3a.7: David's *Oath at the Tennis Court*. Source: @chrishorner.net

The politics of body that David's *Oath at the Tennis Court* portrays stands in sharp emblematic contrast to the feminised Hydra (*Body Politic*). If in the previous plate we saw Hydra being captured in the moment of its destruction - the spears of the people are piercing its breast/heart - David's *Oath* delineates the moment of birth of a new entity: the People's Republic. Similarly, if the multiple heads of the Hydra are the corrupt and degenerate aristocrats responsible for destroying France, then the heads taking the oath in David's painting belong to the righteous democrats. And finally if the Hydra-monster is a feminine creature, the new body politic in the *Oath*, is exclusively and unambiguously male - women are entirely excluded from this grand political spectacle and ritual. The canvas is covered with masculine figures, all embracing one another, and dedicating themselves to *their* fatherland. However, the feminine shall find no place in the defining and

elevated moments, or when new, liberal politics are being formulated, as the painting reveals. The liberals (as demonstrated in the discussion of David's painting) visually conceptualised themselves in direct opposition to their enemies. And yet, like so many purportedly 'democratic' and 'progressive' movements, the French Revolution too dipped into the ever-fertile pool of misogynistic images and narratives to propagate their 'radical' agenda. Emancipatory gender politics would have to wait another century (at least) before it could be considered at par with the discourse of class and nation. Interestingly, a paradox lies here – a revolution which organised the new body politic around its male members (once again refer to David's *Oath*), and which strove strenuously to employ "virile" images to do so, ended up choosing the feminine emblem of Liberty as its most defining symbol of self-representation.



Fig. 3a.8: Eugene Delacroix *Marianne*.

Source: @payingattentiontothesky.files.wordpress.com

A few examples of the use of the figure of Liberty before one undertakes an analysis of the reasons for this choice: Eugene Delacroix's painting *Marianne on La Liberte* (1793) depicts a young woman in forward motion, connoting the onward movement of the Revolution. The club she carries (like Hercules) suggests that the work of the revolution is not over. In fact this drawing arrests Liberty in the very moment of her work - the destruction of the hydra of despotism trampled beneath her feet. Nonetheless, the harmony and joy that she brings to the people is emblematised in the serene expression of her face, the beauty of her flowing robes and the laurel leaves she carries to honour the revolutionaries. In another anonymous

engraving (1790), Liberty's posture is even more typically feminised than in the previous drawing. She stands passively with the symbols of the revolution - the liberty cap and the tablets of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Her body is petite and "devoid of muscularity and tension" (Juneja, 1996, 19). Liberty, here, is as feminine as feminine gets.

Why then did the masculinist politics of the revolution choose this figure? One argument offered is that even though the queen epitomised the moral degeneration of France, it was really the king who represented political tyranny. Therefore a feminine figuration of liberty would stand as a perfect antithetical corollary to the patriarchal monarch. Maurice Agulhon adds that familiarity with Catholicism made a Marian figure more accessible to the French. Furthermore, this stable, nurturing, feminine figure stood as a direct counter-point to not just the king but the often unstable and disappointing male revolutionaries (like Lafayette and Mirabeau) themselves. The feminine ideal was seen as uncontaminated by the grimy world of politics (Hunt, 1983, 98-99).

Monica Juneja forwards another interesting reading - the male form, she suggests, escapes universality and anonymity and always functions as a contextualised particular. Women, on the other hand, are seen as embodying a transcendental, abstract quality, as residing "beyond public structures and therefore [able to] lend themselves more easily to the representation of abstract notions" (Juneja, 1996). Moreover, by personifying Liberty in female form, the revolutionaries converted this political value into an object of male acquisition, a reward that all revolutionaries could desire, strive for and possess. The feminisation of Liberty, therefore, is also a transformation of this political notion into a sexualised lure for men to conquer.

In the midst of this frenzied euphoria about youthful brothers-in-arms, where and how did women figure? The 1789 etching by Johann Peters, *The New Bastille Square*, offers a telling account - even though the mother looms large and is placed in the foreground as compared to the dwarfed king, her role in the Republic is contained within the parameters of the "nurturer" of future soldiers and republicans for the nation. As a matter of fact, one of her sons is already dressed as a soldier. The fetishisation of women as mothers lead to several depictions of women with their breasts exposed. An anonymous engraving *Republican Mother Nursing Her Infant* (1793) lays down an even more precise role for women - motherhood as such is not enough. They must be a particular kind of mother - one who nurses her own children. This engraving seems to feed into the Rousseauvian paranoia, which Republican France shared, regarding wet-nursing. All good women of the republic, these engraving commands, must nurse their own children.

After the fall of Robespierre, - he had come to be too closely related to “The Terror” - it was this symbol of the nursing mother that the Thermidorians chose as most representative of their ideals - peace, patience and nurture (as opposed to the blood-thirst of the Terror). This, and the even more pacified feminine allegory of Liberty (now depicted as seated rather than standing or marching) helped France emerge out of the shadows of regicide and the months of the guillotine. It is exceedingly ironical that the revolutionaries eventually found it necessary to coalesce around the bodies of women - both at the start and at the end of the revolution. If the body of a woman (the queen) initiated the revolution, as ‘provocation’ so to speak, then the body of another woman (the mother) helped the revolutionaries recover from the horror of the Frankensteinian monster they had unleashed in the form of the Terror. The feminine thus re-enters revolutionary representation - as a pacifying presence.

Among the recent painters, the works of **Frieda Kahlo**, a Mexican painter, is symptomatic of a female art that is dynamic, original, and an unapologetic celebration of female experience and form. Her self portrait confesses to an unabashed self-confidence - in being a woman painter - and a dramatic revamping of the female nude in male art. There is nothing celestial about the women in Kahlo work. They are real, full bodied, vibrant women, consumed in practices of everyday living or captured in moments of surreal self-introspection. Even when the women in their paintings face the audience outside the painting, the impression created is one of self-reliance and autonomy. These women are not eager to please their (male) audiences. It is their own emotional and mental journey that occupies their attention (Kahlo’s *Frieda and the Cesarean Operation*, 1932, and *Me and My Parrots*, 1941). Kahlo’s paintings are also remarkable for their exploration of a non-European aesthetics and their ability to recover and retain an Indian/Mexican aesthetics.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) *Discuss any two similarities and dissimilarities in the portrayals of femininity in the Western arts.*
- 2) *Point out and analyse the major differences between masculine and feminine figurines of the paintings and sculptures of the West.*
- 3) *Name and describe the major artists and paintings you have read about in the previous sections.*

3.6A LET US SUM UP

In all this talk of the way in which gender politics manifest in art we have not addressed the key issue of the gender of the artist. For centuries women were believed to be incapable of imaginative, intellectual “creation” - this was the sphere of men while women’s sphere was of “preservation and nourishment” (Arthur Bye cited in Nemser, 1973, P. 74). Since women’s identities were considered subservient to their “womb-centred nature” (Nemser, 1973, P. 76) critics argued that this influenced women’s choice of subject matter in art. The underlying basis for all these assumptions is that women’s art is a slave to their biology, and is inherently ‘feminine’ - an attribute that is best avoided in art. Unfortunately, ‘feminine’ will retain its pejorative connotations until society as a whole does not rethink and revamp its gender politics.

3.7A GLOSSARY

Post-lapsarian : It refers to the Fall of Man. In Christian religion, the fall of man, or simply the fall, refers to the transition of the first humans from a state of innocent obedience to God to a state of guilty disobedience to God. In Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve live at first with God in a paradise, but the serpent tempts them into eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which God had forbidden them from. After doing so they become ashamed of their nakedness and God as a result they were banished from paradise. The Fall is not so-named in the Bible, but the story of disobedience and expulsion is recounted in both Testaments of the Holy Bible in different ways. The fall can refer to the wider theological or religious inferences for all humankind as a consequence of Eve and Adam’s original sin.

Decapitation : It refers to the deployment of the fear of decapitation as a weapon used by men to keep subversive women in control. Women, she argues, can escape being completely subsumed by the symbolic because they “lack”, from the feminist theorist, Hélène Cixous’ *‘Castration and Decapitation’*. What for men is a signifier of women’s inferiority, the lack of the penis, becomes for Cixous an empowering absence. However men cannot allow women to have an upper hand in anything, and if they must suffer from castration anxiety, then it becomes necessary to fill women with terror about loss of a body

part too - hence the deployment of the fear of decapitation. All women who ask questions and dare to laugh, or more precisely “laugh at” (and hasn’t Bakhtin already proved the subversive potential of laughter?), thus refusing to listen (respectfully) to the commands of the law of the father - the 180 wives of the Chinese king, the Sphinx and Medusa - must all be dealt with in the same way: off with their heads.

3.8A UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Describe the relationship of post-lapsarian and male nudity in Renaissance religious arts.
- 2) Discuss the paradigmatic shift of outdoor to indoor in relation to representations of women in paintings during Renaissance period.
- 3) Compare and contrast the works of Rembrandt and Vermeer from a gender perspective.
- 4) Explain the ‘Marie Antionette syndrome’ in paintings and sculptures of later centuries in the West.
- 5) Describe the expressions of liberty in paintings and sculptures, especially in those of Europe.

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UNIT 4 GENDER, SPACE AND ARCHITECTURE

Madhvi Desai

Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives
- 4.3 Feminist Perspectives and Architecture
- 4.4 Definitions
- 4.5 Women's Movement in India
- 4.6 Historical Development
- 4.7 Gender and Space
- 4.8 Public Spaces: Power and Access
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- 4.10 Future Scenario
- 4.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.12 Unit end Questions
- 4.13 References
- 4.14 Suggested Readings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Built environment is a broad-based and interdisciplinary term that refers to constructed surroundings, which provide the setting for human activities, ranging in scale from houses and public buildings to neighbourhoods and cities. Architecture is a predominant part of the built environment. It is the art and science of designing and constructing buildings. In fact, architecture is called the mother of all arts. Throughout history, architecture has been used as one of the most favored forms of expression of culture and political power. Great historical monuments (The Taj Mahal) or contemporary buildings (Le Corbusier's Chandigarh edifices) are generally associated with men as either designers or patrons. In a sense, buildings are a record of works done by those who have the power to build. Women have a rare visibility in this context, either in the past or, less so, in the contemporary times.

The broad aim of the unit is to open up new ways of thinking about gender and architecture and to investigate the significance of gender in the production and representation of spatial experiences.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Develop a clear understanding of how gender identities are constructed and performed and how spaces are engendered;
- Evaluate about women and the public as well as private realms in terms of space use; and
- Critically analyse contemporary issues of spatiality in their everyday life from the feminist perspective.

4.3 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES AND ARCHITECTURE

Architecture (and the built environment) is largely perceived to be gender neutral. “Until now, disciplines interested in spatial questions such as architecture and city planning, have not been particularly interested in gender issues. One could almost maintain that gender, especially the female one, if related to space and its design is seen as something ‘impure’ which spoils the abstract and neutral purity of the whole discipline” (Lada, 2009, p.122). However, a major change in thinking about this relationship has occurred in the past two or three decades with the growing feminist knowledge cutting across all academic disciplines that challenge the conventional views. Gender has been included as an analytical category in social and other theories. The feminist perspective in architecture examines how the existing power and social relations in class, patriarchy and culture affect women’s access to private and public spaces as well as to the city at large, and how these factors in turn influence the shaping of the built environment.

Feminism has been one of the significant social movements of the twentieth century. It has had a vast and far-reaching impact on society at large, changing its very fabric and creating new identities for women. The women’s movement has affected both activism and scholarship in several fields in India such as health, literature, law, art, theatre and human development. Feminist theory has helped render the concept of gender visible from the 1970s and 1980s onwards. Though new courses, research and publications with this conceptual shift dealing with gender and the built environment has been undertaken in the West since the early 1980s, the related disciplines in the India lag far behind other fields in developing a body of knowledge. It is, nonetheless, crucial to create feminist awareness in theory and practice of architecture among the general public as well as the professionals. In reality, an inaudible dialogue occurs between the user and the built form and spatial practices produce social relationships. It is a mutually dependent phenomenon. These issues deal with our experiences and negotiations in day to day life which most of us have taken for granted.

Extreme forms of violence such, as dowry deaths, domestic abuses and foeticide are visible forms of discrimination towards women. However, the space-gender relationship is a subtle form of unequal conditioning in society. “In order to control women’s sexuality, production and reproduction, men need to control women’s mobility. The imposition of *parda*, restrictions on leaving the domestic space, a strict separation of private and public, limits on interaction between the sexes, and so on. Patriarchal values are reflected in built spaces constructed in the society. These range from the historic and clear division of *zenana/mardana* spaces in domestic architecture to the ambiguous denial of public space to women at tea and *paan* shops in modern cities” (Bhasin, 1993, p.9). It should be recognized; however, that gender forms just one of the categories along with age, occupation, social class, etc. of other marginalized citizens. The feminist issues concerning architecture can be listed in two broad categories: Women as creators and as consumers of space. We will be looking into the latter, though both are somewhat connected. This discourse is limited generally to urban middle class women; but there is an intense need to extend the inquiry to the rural scenario. Rural women rarely go to shops or the panchayat house as a rule. These sorts of impositions control women’s mobility and freedom in ways that are unique to them - that is, they are gender-specific, because men are not subjected to the same constraints.

4.4 DEFINITIONS

Architecture is the most visible cultural and/or political symbol of any civilization. It is also the physical expression of culture where space is not innate but is the setting of life and its various rituals/activities.

Gender differences are shaped by several determinants such as history, culture, religion and environment other than the biological differences between men and women. They play a role in theory as well as in everyday behavior settings of life.

The definition of space varies in different disciplines such as psychology, music, geography and anthropology. Leslie Weisman identifies three kinds of spaces: the physical, social and metaphysical. She explains, “In patriarchal societies where men are by definition the dominant group, social, physical and metaphysical space are the products of male experience, male consciousness and male control” (Weisman, 1994, p.10). On the other hand, Persis Ginwala, in her chapter on the Dalit women in Gujarat, defines women’s space as a voluntarily created ‘enclosure’ for support, relaxation, freedom and self-expression. Giving the example of wells and lakes, she says, “The creation of spaces, does not necessarily, or even usually, refer to actual creation. Rather, it is the use to which location and structures provided by patriarchy are put that constitutes the creation of a space”

(Franco, 2000, p.98). In the context of the built environment, however, the meaning is physical (but it is socially constructed) and literal or, at times, it is emotional space that is mentally inhabited.

4.5 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

It is important to look at the women's movement in India, at this juncture. It has had a considerable impact, however, indirect and unconscious, on the women within the disciplines connected with the built environment. You have already read about the women's movement in India in Block I, Unit 1, 2, and 3 of MWG 001.

The first half of the twentieth century, during the colonial rule, was a crucial turning point for women in India. It was a time of an intense nationalist struggle for political freedom. The mass movement led by Mahatma Gandhi inspired a large-scale participation of women. They came out of their homes (read kitchens) and into the public realm in large numbers during this period. Gandhi categorically stated that "...the women of India tore down the *purdah* and came forward to work for the nation. They saw that their country demanded something more than looking after their homes..." (Kumar, 1997, p. 83). The women dressed simply in hand-spun Khadi, participated in underground movements and courted arrest to go to jail. Others bravely looked after their families single-handedly if their men were in jails for a long period of time. Though feminist critics have pointed out that this was primarily directed against the British rule and the questions about women's own domination within the domestic sphere were ignored in a patriarchal society, the positive result cannot be historically negated. The 1940s was also a time when a few elite women chose to become architects in the country.

As the second half of the century progressed, it became a period of major transition for women as Indian society underwent tremendous economic, technological, socio-cultural, and political changes after gaining independence in 1947 from the British rule. The Indian Constitution proudly promised equality between genders to all citizens. New work ethics, technology and lifestyles were introduced. Higher education for girls became more wide spread, at least in the urban areas. Selected women had political appointments and many women's organizations came up. A significant number became employed in typical feminine occupations such as teaching, nursing and secretarial work. Gradually, the old ways of life that defined women and men's roles in the society began to get altered. Family structure, household organizations, and lifestyles were gradually modified. The forces of influence included a reduction in the number of children, encouragement for advanced and/or professional education, acceptance of women's employment outside of home, predominance of nuclear families and less significant role of kinship and caste. Women increasingly experienced an

inner urge for freedom, self-expression, and self-development. Nevertheless, then and even now, women are primarily considered caretakers of children and managers of household activities/resources. Working women have to take care of house, employment and children simultaneously.

Further, education fuelled a desire in women for being in the mainstream public space and gaining recognition. Thus, the identity of Indian women underwent a dramatic remake in the past century. On the other hand, some critics believe that, “The critical consciousness gained during the freedom struggle-as well as women’s access to a political arena provided by it-was lost to a great extent” (Khullar, 2005, p.10). This had to be gradually regained in the ensuing decades, the turning point coming in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the positive impact of the social and other changes was seen in the context of architecture as the rather young profession began to branch away from engineering. In the 1960s and 1970s, an increasing number of girls opted for the profession of architecture, setting a trend for future generations to follow.

4.6 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

With their roots in draftsman’s courses, the discipline of architecture developed a separate identity from engineering through the twentieth century. The profession remained the prerogative of men after Independence in 1947. Even at the turn of the twenty-first century, one can perceive an invisible hold of patriarchal culture on the profession, which is rooted deep in the design and construction industries. As in other parts of the world, there is a substantial and worrisome discrepancy between the number of female students (about 50 % and more) and women practicing in the field (about 11 to 12%). (RIBA, 2003) This is in contrast to other areas of the design fields such as fashion, graphics, textiles and perhaps even interior design where women have gathered the critical mass. Spousal practices in architecture where the architect wife’s responsibilities are often limited to the office and husband predominantly meets with clients/contractors and conducts site visits are more of a rule and not an exception. It is a difficult profession for women. At the same time, there are women who have worked hard and have been able to carve out an identity for them. They negotiated the various forces of resistance while venturing into the public realm, sometimes with non-conventional approaches and attitudes, to reach a level of success. Unfortunately, they are generally unaware of the impact of the women’s movement on their personal and professional lives and tend to ignore gender issues. For a sensitive and aware designer the challenge is to delve into the lifestyle and other needs of the women and to translate them into the structuring of space.

The built environments in India had been designed and built by master carpenters and guilds of craftsmen till the advent of the colonial and post colonial eras. Thus, the discipline of architecture is relatively young in India. In addition, even today men take most of the decisions regarding what gets built and how, in government, corporate sector and as developers. Most of the consultants are also male throughout the building industry. Even women workers are relegated to the unskilled, low paying sector for decades. Within this scenario, the tradition of research and scholarship has been difficult to establish in architecture in the post-Independence period. The profession in India being design-oriented, there is least importance given to creation of theoretical knowledge, nor are there any efforts made to synthesize design and research. All these factors hinder a deeper understanding and discourses relating to the feminist perspective in production and consumption of built space.

4.7 GENDER AND SPACE

Social, political, and economic forces and values shape the built environment and its form. Spatial arrangements of buildings reflect and reinforce existing gender, race and class relations because space is socially constructed and the appropriation of space is a political act. “Spatial segregation is one of the mechanisms by which a group with greater power can maintain its advantage over a group with less power. By controlling access to knowledge and resources through the control of space, the dominant group’s ability to retain and reinforce its position is enhanced” (Spain, 1992, p.16).

At various levels, from the city to the neighborhood and from institutions to the dwelling, the ideals and reality about the relationship between men and women is expressed in the built form. The patterns of behavior within private and public spaces are culturally learned and accepted as a way of life. Cultural rules that are often internalised govern the use of space and codes regulate behavior between genders. Most males and females are unaware of this spatial discrimination and take their behavior for granted. The use of the *purdah* or the *ghunghat* is a means of controlling women’s bodies and their spatial interaction. The system of *purdah*, to keep women secluded in the home in a space safe from unregulated sexual contact, unfortunately also served to restrict women’s educational and economic opportunities. Though caste, community, class, region, ethnicity and other variables affect spatial interactions, women form the primary focus of this unit’s discourse.

The socialization process in early years in life shapes the self-image of the girl child, affecting all aspects of her character as she grows up, especially her identity and contribution in the public domain. In Indian society, girls internalize space use and behavior including posture, dressing and speech

as they grow up and are taught the norms of feminine modesty. Space for a girl child is fluid till puberty after which there is a turning point that brings about a change in the attitude towards her. This is not only in terms of the social perceptions of her body but also her physical movements. The fact that women are inferior beings is taught to them from childhood. Their desire for social approval does not allow them to question these norms. As a result, their perceptions differ due to the social construction and their own spatial experiences in private and public realms.

In the early research on gender and space in the 1970s and the 1980s it was standard to explain the broad male/female spatial divide by the public/private binary. It still generally holds true but there are further theoretical developments. For example, Seemanthini Niranjana has pointed out the grey areas in it. She says, “There are continuous shifts and transformations in how these spaces are characterized, since they acquire and shed meaning according to context...Rather, the boundaries of these spaces are constantly being specified and re-specified, contextually and in practice” (Niranjana, 2001, p.110). In another excellent article, Janaki Abraham concludes that every day practices constitute both space and gender. Through her study of the veiling practices of women in the small town of Bikaner, she further shows that in traditional cultures women’s spatial needs are produced and created in a shifting manner rather than being fixed or given. A woman’s relationship to people in a given space is crucial to her experience of that space (Abraham, 2010, p. 214-215). However, for our purpose, we will look at the spatiality of the public as well as private spaces and their negotiations by women.

Check Your Progress 1

Visit a nearby public park. Describe what you see there in terms of gender and space?

4.8 PUBLIC SPACES: POWER AND ACCESS

Are public spaces in cities really designed for use by all ‘publics’ alike? Or do men and women actually perceive and experience them differently? How does the everyday production of gendered public space occur through the physical activities and social life of men and women? Do both the genders have equal access and right to the public space? These are some of the questions we need to ask. For a city, public spaces are important as they reflect the culture of the citizens. Ramya Haran says that the concept of a public space in India is very different; traditionally there were no civic

or public nodes that were planned and there was no culture of public spaces. Most of them occurred near institutions or markets. In fact, many of them were bazaars (Haran, 2010, p.37). This has changed in contemporary times. Therefore, here we are using a rather broad definition of public space to include streets, parks, shopping malls, railway and bus stations as well as public toilets among others.

A space that does not support gender equality is a gendered space. By that definition many of our public spaces are gendered, though the general perception is otherwise. How is that so? Women often feel unwelcome, directly or indirectly and have to confront (or have fear of) some form of verbal, visual or physical/sexual harassment in many of these places. In fact, “the fear and insecurity that women face in accessing public spaces prevents them from availing the benefits of being an urban citizen” (Vishwanath & Mehrotra, 2007, p.1542). Women feel most uncomfortable in male dominated, hang out spaces such as *paan* shops, tea stalls and other urban corners. Therefore, they are often confined to the periphery and those who do not follow the accepted social codes of behavior become potential victims of violence. In addition, women are specifically excluded, for example, from places of worship, such as in the mosque where women are not allowed to pray in most Islamic communities or the Hindu temple that is generally out of bounds for ‘impure’ women. Ranade points out that the control of women’s movement has been central to the maintenance of a gender regime informed by patriarchy. She further states that “When comparing men and women of the same class and community, men have better access to public space at all times of the day. Women have to manufacture an appearance of purpose to legitimately access public space” (Ranade, 2007, p. 1525).

In an elaborate article Phadke states that shopping malls, multiplexes and coffee shops are privatised spaces that masquerade as public while manufacturing an illusion of a public modernity (Phadke, 2007, 1514). It is obvious that because of the nature of the architecture of these places, its use is limited to a certain class of women (and men). In fact, these edifices project a glamorous contemporary and rich lifestyle that in it could be a deterrent to the ‘others’.

The near total absence of public toilets for women in all Indian cities (and villages) is a blot on our vision of the civilized democratic society. The common sight of men urinating in streets and open spaces is a blatant example of them appropriating space without any second thoughts! Ranade argues that the lack of or inadequacy of public toilets is more than a mere inconvenience for women; it is a denial of their public policy rights.

In traditional societies, women are generally not encouraged to ride vehicles and often do not own one which curtails their freedom to enter spaces

compared to the men. “Mobility, or access to physical space, is an indicator of power because it brings with it access to people, resources, information and opportunities... [it] is a strong signal of individual autonomy investing the individual with a sense of responsible adulthood” (Franco, 2004, p.98). Public space robs women of anonymity and their rights as citizens to participate fully.

In India, physical planning is largely in the hands of the government that binds it to bureaucratic procedures. In the planning process, the neutrality of the user is taken-for-granted and the element of people’s participation is minimal. There are no finer guidelines in terms of the implementation of the rules. Disadvantaged groups like old people, children or women do not find any special reference nor are their perceptions sought. In addition, creative interpretations of the byelaws are not encouraged. Most cities have a few large parks located far apart that become unavailable to women and children if they cannot afford the transport expenses. Gender sensitive planning would allocate smaller gardens for each neighborhood. The lack of good infrastructure, such as mass transport network, put women at a disadvantage, as they often do not have access to an individual vehicle. In general, the planners’ own perceptions are determined by their class and gender background, therefore there is a wide gap between their assumptions and the social reality.

4.8 DOMESTIC SPACES: SOCIAL ROLES AND PRIVACY RULES

Patriarchy is seen in its most intense form in the institution of family and the concept of the household. By and large, women’s relationship to the house is mediated through the man: father, husband, and/or son, reinforcing the patriarchal relationships. Patriarchy also demands that they be confined to the domestic space as far as possible. There are also other considerations to women being limited to the domestic realm. For example, “Inadequacies in dwellings, community amenities and infrastructure play a major role in intensifying this domestic work...Lack of essential services such as domestic water supply and solid waste disposal systems have a great impact on women’s lives” (Shreshtha, 2000, p. 449-457).

Nevertheless, the house remains the prime space for the woman, creating an intimate and predictable world for her. At times, this could become a constricting environment but mostly it is not perceived as such. Because a woman has close ties with the males in a patriarchal society, her resistance in the domestic sphere remains muted, if at all. Through it she seeks her social position in the community. She strongly identifies with it and it almost becomes a symbol of self for her since she is responsible for the image of the ‘ideal home’. This works both ways. “Women’s groups

investigating 'dowry deaths' demonstrated how the designation of the family as private domain restricted women's access to protection against domestic violence" (Tharu & Niranjana, 1997, p. 232-260). It is also clearly manifested in case of a divorce where, in a majority of cases, the woman has to move out of the marital home, making the experience extremely traumatic for her psychologically and physically due to the loss of a shelter.

On the other hand, the street is predominantly a men's identified territory where they belong, not as individuals but as groups, making their presence and domination visible and stronger. They occupy an amorphous physical space outside the home. As mentioned above, the spatial divisions are not static and the boundary between male and female cannot be clearly drawn: it is the result of complex settlements and negotiations; it may vary during day/night as well as during different seasons. The same is also true in the private spaces that men and women use whether it is in villages or in the city.

In traditional cultures, a woman's position within a society plays a role in the architecture of a house. The Bohras, an Islamic community in Gujarat, for example, have adapted the house form of the majority Hindus and have modified it to suit their lifestyle, gender requirements being one of them. The dwellings has a linear and hierarchical spatial configuration, going from public to private, where it is invisibly divided into two parts: the front portion being semi-public in nature for men and the back part, more private with controlled access to outsiders (non-family members) for women. The spaces are multifunctional compared to the specifically labeled ones in contemporary houses/apartments. The central courtyard, important from the gender viewpoint, forms the imaginary divide between the two zones. The courtyard allows women maximum freedom of movement within the house, with little need for external windows while eliminating the possibility of their being viewed by outsiders. It also provides good ventilation to the interiors where women spend most of their time. For formal occasions, male guests are entertained in the main hall located on the upper or top floor, directly accessible through the stairs placed in the front portion of the house so that the privacy of the women is protected (Desai, 2007, p. 94). In the Hindu settlements in the same towns, one finds more use of the semi open *otlas* at the front which are occupied by men in the mornings (to read the paper) and the evenings (to socialise) while the women use the same space in the afternoons to either do household work or to chitchat.

On the other hand, the bungalow is a house form initially developed by the British for the military cantonments and other settlements. During the twentieth century, it was taken up by the Indians and developed in a variety of ways in different regions of the country. In its evolution in Gujarat, it was found that the private domain of women got gradually more defined as the decades went by and the position of women improved in the

society. The kitchen which was separately located behind the house gradually got attached, representing the increasing importance and value of the woman of the house within the family. In the post-Independence period, as the living-dining spaces got combined, the kitchen was well-connected to them. The same configuration can be found in the apartments, thus reducing the spatial segregation of the genders considerably (Desai, 2007, 164-165).

Thus, within the home, there are sub-spaces which are relatively public and private, such as living/dining in contrast to the bedrooms. Investment in any space in order to improve its quality depends upon the importance ascribed to that space. For example, in most interiors of a home, when the head of the household decides to redecorate the living/dining areas, the kitchen, the woman's domain, is often marginalised. From the rural households to the middle class contemporary apartments, the kitchens are relatively small in size and are placed away from the outer world. The professional not being gender sensitive, these issues hardly ever get addressed. Given this situation, what can be done in contemporary times?

Check Your Progress 2

Do you know of any house which has some space dedicated exclusively to women? Is it common in your area? Point out the gendered differences of spaces in such houses.

4.9 FUTURE SCENARIO

In the twenty first century when the gender system is gradually being challenged and restructured, there is a crisis in feminine as well as masculine identities. The society needs to respond to both. There is no reason why we cannot imagine a better scenario for the spatial integration of gender as societies change and get more and more globalized. Public transport, public toilets and design issues like good lighting (especially for public toilets and bus stops), footpaths and location of neighborhood parks have to be integrated in architectural and planning programs of cities. Conducting safety audits from a gender viewpoint should be a regular feature. As real estate prices boom and mass housing dominates the market, there is a great danger of gender considerations getting lost in the economics of urban land. The contemporary, globalizing landscape is full of new spaces of consumption such as shopping malls and multiplexes which should to be analyzed from the gender angle. We also need to study other building types such as offices and public institutions as more and more women join the workforce. It is not sufficient to respond to the existing social set up but we need to integrate services such as crèches, childcare centers, convenient

shopping and community kitchens to provide facilities for workingwomen. Jos Boys believes that we need to be radical in working towards new building types such as women's centers offering the re-allocation of resources (land, facilities and spaces) to those who had not previously had access. She also recommends that we re-view the attitudes and assumptions through which much built space is designed (Boys, 2009, p. 20 & 30). We must move towards a more inclusive city.

4.10 LET US SUM UP

From the above, we can see a pattern emerging of the underlying social structure and its mutual relationship with space, in other words, the spatiality of social life. Architecture in terms of use and production is not gender neutral and women are subjected to discrimination which is often invisible. There are broad divisions of public and private spaces in the city/neighborhood and dwelling, however, the boundaries are not fixed or final but are flexible as well as shifting and women negotiate them as within the social/religious/economic frameworks at all levels. Taking this reality, the contemporary society and professionals need to not only respond to the existing scenario but also work at multiple dimensions in the fields of design, planning and policy.

4.11 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Which are the important landmarks/public spaces in your city? Observe the men and women using them at different times of the day in view of the above discussion and map the gendered geography of one selected space.
- 2) Where do the women from your neighborhood go for recreation/pleasure activities? Discuss this in the context of space and gender.
- 3) Do you see any differences in the home of a joint family and that of a nuclear one in terms of how gender and space relations are played out everyday in life? Discuss.
- 4) How does an apartment building differ from a bungalow or a traditional house from the gender viewpoint?
- 5) Observe the men and women using a multiplex and a coffee shop and write down your conclusions.

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UNIT 5 ENGENDERING NEW MEDIA - CYBERSPACE

Vinaya Nayak

Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives
- 5.3 New Media Technologies
- 5.4 Understanding New Media and Gender
- 5.5 Gender and New Media Technology
- 5.6 Paradigms of Development
- 5.7 Gender and Cyber World
 - 5.7.1 Cyber Relationships
 - 5.7.2 Cyborg
- 5.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.9 Unit End questions
- 5.10 References
- 5.11 Suggested Readings

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As Internet and new media grows, concerns about a possible gender gap in use of these new media technologies have also emerged. In the Indian context, where mobility largely determines access to new media technologies - be it through accessing cyber parlors/internet cafes or through affording new technologies - young women may very well find it twice more difficult to use computer-based new media than young men, either teenagers or adolescents. The India Broadband Forum reports that 85% of Internet users are men. New media technologies are here to stay, these low numbers do give us cause for alarm. Some scholars, particularly a branch of eco-feminists, are of the view that women shun new media technologies because these media might not serve the purposes they value. Such writing, in turn, has been attacked by other feminists as furthering an idea of essential gender difference and hindering equality. It is important to note that in certain parts of the world, women's use of a range of new media is at par with or has even surpassed that of men and, of late, has also been accompanied by significant shifts in attitudes. These are some of the issues which we will discuss in this unit.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

On completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe and differentiate new media from what is now termed as traditional media;
- Describe the early history of cultural responses to technology;
- Discuss the different responses to women's relationship with technology; and
- Critically analyse the cyber world and its relationship with the gender.

5.3 UNDERSTANDING NEW MEDIA AND GENDER

While the question of inclusion is an important part of understanding new media and gender, there is another important frame within which the question of gender in relation to new media technologies has been asked. This is the question of how new media technologies necessarily break the very idea of binary gender difference i.e. the idea that there are necessarily only two sexes from which the two respective genders emerge naturally and universally. For instance, how does our immersion into these new technologies change our very understanding of how we experience the body as gendered? Does the idea of technology as extensions of the body (like our cell phones or Orkut and Facebook) break our simplistic ideas of women as nature and technology as male? Or as Donna Haraway claims in her work on Gender and Technology, have we, in our immersion into technology, been transformed into *Cyborgs*, with no fixed male and female gender identities but with multiple and fluid gender positions.

But, before we begin to understand the relationship between gender and new media we will first have to unpack the term New Media, a broad and often confusing term that refers to many historical and technological processes. Then we will proceed to offer a broad overview of how scholars have theorized the gender-technology relationship, with particular reference to new media technologies.

5.4 NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

Before the emergence of New Media in the latter part of the 20th century, communication used to take place through an analogue form of broadcasting, either on television or on print. About these, you have already read in the first two units of this block. But with the invention of digital computers, communication became so much easier. Crossing all geographical barriers, huge volumes of messages could be transferred at a much higher speed. Communication also became much more interactive than the analog media. Thus, with the birth of New Media, and its primarily interactive digital

media technology, a digital shift in human relationships also took place. For instance, Wikipedia and Facebook are good examples of new media phenomena that combine digital text, images and video with web-links, creative participation of contributors, and interactive feedback of users and formation of various networked communities. Other examples include CD-ROMS and DVDs, Internet, websites, blogs, computer multimedia, computer games and interactive mobile technologies. Unlike popular misconception, what differentiates new media from traditional media is not digitizing of media content. The difference has more to do with the shifts in ideas of production, distribution and importantly, interactivity that began with digital media.

For example, a high definition digital T.V receiving digital broadcast signals is still traditional media but graffiti that advertises a website like Orkut, where users are actively creating and shaping content, is digital media. What distinguishes the two is the dynamic nature of the content and flow of media. With new media the consumers have the opportunity to transform themselves into producers and distributors of content through digital technologies, whereas with traditional media the consumer is merely a receiver and the ability to create content is minimal. The following would all fall into traditional media: films screened in theatres, books, newspapers and magazines printed solely on paper and television programs.

Box 5.1 below gives you the key characteristics of traditional and new media. The dynamic features of New Media allow for active participation and feedback thus making it truly democratic.

Characteristics of Traditional Media vs. New Media

Box: 5.1

<i>Traditional Media</i>	<i>New Media</i>
Broadcasting: Mass Audience	Narrowcasting: Segmented Audience
Single or Few Channels of Flow	Multiple Channels of Flow
Zero or Little Feedback	More Feedback
Mostly Analog and Not Compressible	Mostly Digital
Not Networked	Networked
Separate	Integrated
Active Gate Keeping	Less Gate Keeping
Passive Receiver	Active Receiver
Less Interactive	More Interactive

In many of the third-world post-colonial nations like India, technology has been simultaneously represented as both positive and negative. This relationship to technology is also something that one sees in the way *gender work* in India has progressed. Early responses to science and technology from nationalist thinkers like Gandhi and Tagore still inform cultural attitudes to technology, of which new media technologies are the latest.

Asha Achutan (Achutan, 2010) in her work on women and technology notes “four responses to technology - **presence**, **access**, **inclusion**, **resistance**. Reflected from the vantage point of women as one of the disadvantaged constituencies with respect to technology, these are voiced as the demand for **presence** of women as agents of technological change - either through presence in production or through incorporation of their ‘native’ wisdoms into the system; sometimes as the demand for improved **access** for women to the fruits of technology; at other times the demand for **inclusion** of women as a special constituency that must be specially provided for by technological amendments. And then again, the demand for a need to recognize technology’s ills particularly for women, and the consequent need for **resistance** to technology on the same count” (Achutan, 2010, p. 5-6).

This inclusion model can be seen today, for instance, in the aims of the Dynamic Coalition on Gender Equality, which is a part of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) which states on its website that it “aims to ensure gender perspective is included in the key debates around internet governance issues, such as content regulation, privacy, access, freedom of expression among others. Among others, the coalition wants to promote women’s visibility at the IGF and related fora; to conduct research and input on the main topics of IGF debates; to support capacity building of gender advocates and to promote more effective linkages between local, regional and global initiatives on gender and information society” (IGF, 2010, 22-23 November).

The plethora of news reports that caution women against invasions of privacy, objectionable and malicious content, cyber harassment and other forms of ‘cyber crimes’ point us to the simultaneous attitudinal resistance that exists in Indian society. Similarly, cyberspace also provides a platform for people belonging to alternate sexualities to interact openly on certain websites which cater exclusively to them. About their life, you have already read in Block 4 and Block 6 or MWG 001.

Check Your Progress 1

Do any of your friends have a cyber account? Discuss with your friends the benefits and disadvantages of such accounts.

5.6 PARADIGMS OF DEVELOPMENT

The Women in Development Paradigm: The presence, access and inclusion responses to new media world come under the Women in Development (WID) approach to building gender just models of development. WID emerged in the early 1970s to increase women's presence in development related work, particularly through increasing access to the latest development technologies and inclusion of women in the process of achieving economic growth. The goal of WID was economic growth through investment in women. Even though these efficiency-based arguments proved to be effective as a political strategy for having women's issues taken up by development work in the third world, it also entailed a number of debatable results. Because of the WID model, emphasis was placed on how women could contribute to economic development, while their own demands from development (including gender equity) became secondary and conditional upon showing positive economic growth. The WID paradigm gave way in the early 1980s for the Gender and Development (GAD) paradigm.

Gender and Development Paradigm (GAD): A major flaw noted in the WID analysis was that women were assumed to have common, homogeneous interests simply because of their sex. This ignores that women have varied and often conflicting interests depending on their class, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation and the GAD approach with its focus on gender and not women, sought to correct this imbalance and recognized that a woman's interests will vary depending on a complex interplay of her social, political and cultural contexts.

We can see that there is still a connection between these two approaches, which is that both of them see technology as separate from the human who is either in control of such technology or its victim. The gender and technology relationship therefore is caught in an endless argument between the benefits and damages that accrue to women from the use of new technology. One way out of this debate can be seen in the cyborg theories of Donna Haraway and other feminist scholars.

5.7 GENDER AND CYBER WORLD

The relationship between the gender and cyber world has undergone drastic changes, which are easily noticeable. For instance, the access to home based internet is more accessible to boys and men than girls or women. The reason may be the division of household labour. According to Ellen Seiter, it is quite often noticed that while male family members gravitate towards the cyber world as favourite past times and leisure habits, the "loads of chores relegated to female family members will only increase, and make it more difficult for female members to get time on the home computers"

(Seiter, 2003, p. 691). Very interestingly the involvement in the cyber world has given rise to a culture of anxiety. Surfing the net and lengthy downloading may often lead to ennui, boredom and depression.

But quite often, as Roger Silverstone explains, the ability to use the cyber world intelligently as a kind of extension of the personality in time and space, is also a matter of resources. “The number of rooms in a household relative to the number of people, the amount of money that an individual can claim for his or her own personal use, the amount of control of his or her own time if the often intense atmosphere of family life, all these things are obviously of great relevance” (Silverstone, 1991, p.12). Take for example, if you have your desk top computer with internet connection in your house, your usage may depend upon how much internet time is shared between you and other family members. However, if you have your own lap top, the usage of the internet increases significantly.

These sort of subtle differences that emerge because of the cyber world among the family members are giving rise to drastic psychological changes in human behaviour. In today’s world, we often spend more time in our individualised cyber world than with our family members. In fact, cyberspace research also observes that even physical friendships are sometimes explicitly shared and contained within this domain of the cyber world. Human beings become more expressive in communicating through this virtual world than in the physical world.

5.7.1 Cyber Relationships

The information-intelligent generation depends increasingly on the cyber world for social relationships. Chat rooms have emerged rapidly as a popular ‘space’ for this purpose, and offer almost complete privacy, leading to cultural shifts in friendship and sexual behaviour. Modell comments that this has resulted as a rebellion from establishment and traditional values. People have “moved from ‘thrill’-based innovation half a century before to a somewhat fading bastion of essentially ‘traditional’ values” (Modell, 1989, p.303). Very interestingly, cyber relationships have revolutionised the expression of emotions by making this space available to everyone, whether girls or boys, or women or men. Today no more, males no longer need to hide their emotions, but can enthusiastically express or display them in a public, cyber domain. People, who are technology savvy, are “able to express and experiment with aspects of their personality that social inhibition would generally encourage them to suppress” (Baym, 1995, p.143). This has led to a shift in the manner in which heterosexual and homosexual relations get played but in the cyber world. Chat rooms have provided a personal space for alternate sexuality, with social networking sites catering to this group of people and offering an alternate and private space for communication. Therefore, one can begin to see some of the positive, emancipatory effects of the cyberworld on gender relations and sexuality.

5.7.2 Cyborg

Cyborg originated as cybernetic organisms in the 1960s. The science fiction writer, Simon Wright uses this term in his story *After a Judgment Day*, to describe the ‘mechanical analogs’ of one of the protagonists. Cybernetic organism is usually used to describe larger networks of communication and control, for instance, cities, networks of roads, networks of markets, and the collection of these things together. This organism may be considered as an artificial intelligence that makes use of replaceable human components to function. People at all ranks can be considered replaceable agents of their functionally intelligent government institutions, whether such a view is desirable or not. For instance, within the parameters of a huge organisation, there are several divisions headed by different people, under whom several more work, and this chain of labour force penetrates downwards from the topmost levels. However, the whole organisation can be brought into one frame by the gridiron on which the foundation lays, like a CEO keeping a tab of how many products are being sold through the sales executives. This happens when the executive reports back to the team leader, who further informs the sales manager (who might be somewhere else), then it passes on to area sales manager (who also would be somewhere else), and then the report reaches the general manager of the sales division and thus filters to the CEO of the organisation. Thus the physical location of the individual doesn’t hold importance here; what matters is the filtering of information through a proper channel. This entire analogue is basically a cyborg.

Donna Haraway, in her 1985 essay, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”, challenged the traditional notions of feminism, using the metaphor of a ‘cyborg’ (a biological being that also has artificial (electronic, mechanical or robotic) parts) to overcome the limitations of thinking in terms of duality and binary oppositions of male and female. Haraway suggested that women are often talked of only in terms of their body; within a patriarchal society as objects of desire and control, while feminist criticism centered on the idea of freeing the same ‘body’. The idea of a cyborg blurs the idea of binary sexual and gendered identities, and the boundaries between feminine and masculine, and can therefore have great political significance. She says, “*we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs*” (Haraway, 1985, p. 150). Marisa Olson, another media theorist, agrees with Haraway’s thoughts and considers that there were no separations between bodies and objects. Human life force flows through every individual and comes out into the objects they make. There may be no distinction between the so-called real or natural organisms that nature produces and the artificial machines that humans make. Thus, there might not be any hierarchies between genders and sexualities in the cyber world, since social sanctity is managed in a global public domain, rather than at the level of individuals.

5.8 LET US SUM UP

New media offers users a certain level of freedom from the realm of 'bodies' and the anonymity of cyberspace offers a forum unhindered by hierarchies of sex and gender. It can therefore be an enabling and politically charged space. In recent times, the internet has been used by women's and feminist groups as forums for both discussion and activism -allowing for a plurality of discourses that may have otherwise not been possible.

5.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Define New Media. Explain its difference from other media you have studied.
- 2) What are the similarities and dissimilarities of WID and GAD in the context of New Media?
- 3) What do you mean by a cyber relationship? In your view, how has this generated a shift from the way we define 'real relationships'?
- 4) Does the idea of the cyborg affect our lifestyle? Explain with relevant examples.

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