# Portrayal of women

WITH THE RECENT INCREASE IN THE velocity of globalisation, more attention is being focused on issues related to the gender divide. This is particularly true of the so-called Third World countries. Gender-related issues, especially those related to portrayal of women in the media, have always been relegated to a lower position of importance in these countries.

These issues, it is argued, are secondary to the over all issues of health, education, equitable distribution of resources, and other such molar problems. One throwback of this relegation of issues has been the emergence of consciousness on the part of homogeneous communities to rise against this stonewall and bring the collective focus to bear upon, and deal with them.

While there are many definitions of community, a review of the sociological literature reveals at least three core components or markers of community, as well as the critical notion of the "imagined community". The first and most important element of community is what Gusfield (1978) refers to as consciousness of kind. It is the intrinsic connection that members feel towards one another, and the collective sense of difference from those not in the community. Consciousness of kind is the shared attitude or perceived similarity. It is a shared knowing of belonging. The second indicator is the presence of shared rituals and traditions. These perpetuate the community's shared history, culture, and consciousness. Rituals "serve to contain the drift of meanings; ... [they] are conventions that set up visible public definitions and social solidarity" (Durkheim,19.5). Traditions are sets of "social practices which seek to celebrate and inculcate certain behavioural norms and values". The third marker of community is a sense of moral responsibility, which is a felt sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole, as well as to its individual members. This sense of moral responsibility, it is argued, is what produces collective action in times of threat to the community.

It is critical to note that communities are no longer restricted by physical proximity or geography. Of course, community was thought of initially s existing in a place. However, the notion has erflowed those restrictions and spilled out into a

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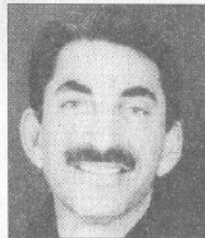
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Research in 2002 showed that 69.16 per cent of the selected viewers felt that PTV was presenting women in a positive manner; 67.5 per cent of viewers felt that PTV's programmes showed both genders to be equally capable and intelligent. The statistics are a far cry from the days when females were depicted as incapable, dependent and weak

much broader field of meaning. Just as modernity is more than the rate of mechanical and scientific advancement, community has become more than a place. It has become a common understanding of a shared identity. Railroads, telegraphs, magazines, telephones, and national commerce have broken down the narrow notions of community and social consciousness. Throughout the twentieth century, it is felt, the notion of community has continued to widen, owing largely to the ability of new communication technologies to unite geographically dispersed individuals with a commonality of purpose

and identity.

The fact of the parallel rise of the modern marketing and the mass media is important in this context. The rise of modern communications has made modern marketing possible. Newspapers, magazines, and then radio and television have enabled people to project issues into national consciousness. To a large degree, issues transcend geography because the media transcends it. In fact, most of the rethinking of community has had to do with the rise of mass media. Mass media has demonstrated that virtually all of the hallmarks of geographic community could be simulated, in a mass mediated world. The changes in computer-mediated communication currently under way, some experts argue, are no different in this regard.

In reality, many contemporary communities are only imagined. It is suggested by some, that all communities larger than small villages are to some extent, sustained by notions of imagined existence. Even in a pre-modern context, distant peoples were united through the communal nature of shared religions. But with the rise of mass media, community is spread and reproduced very efficiently. This allows community members to possess a well-developed sense of belonging. So, for most social theorists, community is no longer restricted to physical proximity of members. Bender defined community as: "a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds". This conceptualisation is consistent with a modern perspective of community, which stresses the functioning of primary ties over notions of local solidarity. Such an approach has also been referred to as a "community-liberated perspective", with community being liberated from geography, due largely to the presence of inexpensive and accessible communication.

One of the major mediums of communication is television. In the late eighties the National Institute of Psychology (NIP), in Islamabad undertook research to analyse the portrayal of women on Pakistani television. The researchers concluded that women were being portrayed in a most negative manner. Under military dictatorship confinement of women to the four walls of the home and behind the veil had been the offi-

cial norm and the general social expectation. A relatively liberal official policy towards female portrayal from the official medium was adopted after the change of government.

In order to see if a liberal view was indeed adopted in the portrayal of women, the students and teachers of a local public sector women's university undertook a research in the year 2002 that unveiled some interesting facts. The researchers first saw what viewers thought were positive and negative attributes of a female character depicted in a television programme. They then went on to measure the presence or absence of those attributes in the characters actually portrayed in some of the major television programmes. The positive attributes of a female identified by their research were: self-confidence, intelligence, moral strength, financial independence, and a bond with the family. Some of the negative traits identified were: talkativeness, quarrelsomeness, boldness, financial dependence, and liberal mindedness.

The researchers then went on to measure the degree to which those traits were seen in the characters portrayed in some of the major television programmes. They again came up with some interesting figures. For instance their research showed that 69.16 per cent of the selected viewers felt that PTV was presenting women in a positive manner; 67.5 per cent of viewers felt that PTV's programmes showed both genders to be equally capable and intelligent. The statistics provided by research in 2002 are a far cry from the days when females were depicted as incapable, dependent and weak. The shift in portrayal of women can of course be attributed to the work of the sensitised sections of the society and the result of pressure brought about by the growing feeling of "community" in the women of the country and the region as a whole.

Can one deny the role of socially, politically, and artistically responsible and active women of this region in bringing about this change in the portrayal of the female in the media?

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