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Women And Television : ISRO Experience

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WOMEN AND TELEVISION : ISRO EXPERIENCES

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INTRODUCTION

Kheda Communications Project (KCP) of Development and Educational Communication Unit (DECU), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was started in 1975 along with Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE). At that time a one Kilowatt transmitter was located in the Pij village of Kheda district, Gujarat State. From 1975 to 1985 Kheda TV covered about 400 villages of the district. There was a daily transmission of television programmes for one hour out of which half an hour programmes were made by India's Television Authority - Doordarshan and the remaining half hour consisting of agriculture, animal husbandry, health programmes and programmes related to social and economic issues were produced by ISRO. In July 1985 a 10 Kilowatt transmitter was established at Ahmedabad. The transmitter now covers eight districts of Gujarat State. There are estimated to be 50,000 TV sets in the coverage area consisting of 8334 villages.

There has been considerable interest, especially in recent years, about the issues of women and media. This, of course, flows from the increasing interest and action into gender equality in various of human activity. While accepting the definite and almost equal relationship between the broader issue of equality of large participation of women in various spheres of activity and women - media issue, the authors in this paper are primarily examining participation of women in TV.

The paper is intended towards sharing our experiences and approaches as far as women and television is concerned. It is hoped that it will lead to, not only pooling of experiences but also starting a debate and raising issues.

FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH

Participation of women in television can be studied from various view points. The authors have defined three broad areas for study. These are (i) Participation of women as television viewers, (ii) Projection of women's issues and their images on television and (iii) Women as television practitioners.

This paper is based on the data from studies conducted during SITE and after SITE, at ISRO and some other studies. Some of the major sources are studies by Agrawal (1977 & 1981), Bhaskaran (1977), Joshi (1977 & 1983), Patel (1978) and Srivastava (1984).

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AS AUDIENCE

Mere introduction of television or any other technology, does not ensure its access to the intended audience. Television access is dependent upon a variety of factors like social, cultural, economic and political. This is especially true for the disadvantaged group. Women are definitely one such group in the Indian context. Cultural barriers, domestic duties and other taboos come in the way of women being able to view television or have access to television viewing.

Results clearly bring out that both during and after SITE, comparatively, a larger number of women of backward rural areas were unexposed to any mass media. SITE study shows 36 percent of males and 66.5 percent of females reported that they never listened to radio broadcast. In spite of the fact that radio was available in villages, it had not 'reached' a vast majority. Similarly, SITE survey shows that 64 percent of rural men and 88.4 percent of the women had never been to a cinema show. 92.8 percent men and 95.2 percent women had never read newspapers. 30.6 percent men and 62.8 percent women had never participated in any mass media before SITE (Agrawal et al 1977).

Those who got their first media exposure through SITE television were termed 'first generation mass media participants'. Among men, 20.9 percent were first generation mass media participants, and among women this figure was 27.8 percent. This shows that television was able to attract a higher proportion among the women than men though the number of women was smaller than that of men. (Agrawal et al 1977). In another study of SITE, Bhaskaran (1977) indicated that rural women's participation in television viewing remained quite low in spite of the fact that higher portion of women were brought in the television fold during SITE. Table 1 brings out this fact clearly.

TABLE -1

Average Community Television Audiences Size per SITE Village according to Sex (Over Nine Months by States)

Sr. No.	Name of the State	Men	Women	Children	Total
1.	Andhra Pradesh	62	30	53	145
2.	Karnataka	63	20	41	124
3.	Bihar	141	57	55	253
4.	Rajasthan	54	25	46	125
5.	Orissa	76	51	39	166
6.	Madhya Pradesh	74	50	93	217
Average		78	39	55	172

Source: Bhaskaran (1977)

It may be observed from Table-1 that the average ratio of men to women participation was 2:1. It is not enough just to know the proportion of male-female viewing. It is equally important to know the reasons for not viewing television. The reasons as found in SITE studies are presented in Table-2.

TABLE -1

Reasons for not viewing Television by Sex

Reasons for not viewing	During SITE		After SITE	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1. Technical limitation (of TV operation, presenta- tion technique etc.)	12.6	9.6	10.5	11.3
2. Social restrictions (family did not allow)	1.2	12.5	2.2	13.1
3. Due to work (Domes- tic and agricultural)	63.5	54.2	59.2	50.2
4. Physical disability (illness etc.)	22.7	23.7	28.0	25.5

Source: Jesudasan (1977)

Table 2 indicates that it is the workload which was the most important inhibition for both men and women from viewing television but more so for men than women. However, 'social taboo' is a much stronger restricting factor in case of females than males. Physical disability is quite an important reason in both males and females during both phase of the study. This is all the more striking when one takes into account the fact that while drawing the sample for these studies, old and infirm people were not included in the sampling frame.

Post - SITE phase results of Kheda Communications Project also indicates that the average of women's participation in television viewing continued to be low. Joshi (1977) indicated that in Kheda, the average audience size was 135 (42 men, 26 women and 67 children). In other words, among of the adults viewers, 62 percent were men and 38 percent women. Patel (1978) indicated that in 1978

in Kheda the average size was 78 of which 40 percent were children and of the adults 66 percent were men and 34 percent women. According to Indian Institute of Mass Communication Study of 1982 the average audiences size in Kheda was 142 of which 48 percent were children, 33 percent were men and 15 percent were women. Parmar (1983) indicated that the audience size in Kheda was 88 of which 42 percent were children and of the adults 75 percent were men and 25 percent women.

TABLE -3

Percentage Audience Composition in Kheda Communication Project between 1977-1983

	Joshi (1977)	Patel (1978)	IIMC (1982)	Parmar (1983)
Men	31	40	33	43
Women	19	20	19	15
Children	50	40	48	42
Total	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
Size in number	(135)	(78)	(142)	(88)

However, in Kheda it was observed that when women's programmes were transmitted on a regular basis at a definite time and when these programmes took into account the needs, issues, problems, and aspirations of women, the proportion of women viewers increased to about 40 percent of the adults for those programmes. It may also be noted that while participation of women increased, there was no decrease in the number of men viewers even for those programmes. This is an important point to be noted since it is important that for 'women's programmes', the men also need to be the target audience.

On the national scale a viewership study conducted by Doordarshan (1982) indicated that the total audience was 83 Million, out of which 23 Million were women, which is about 28 percent of the total audience. But out of 83 Million total audience, 33 Million or 40 percent were children. Thus, while the number of women viewers is still smaller, it is not as disproportionate as found during SITE and post-SITE periods. The main reason for this seems to be that SITE, post-SITE picture pertains almost entirely to rural, community-television viewers, the Doordarshan study is mainly based on urban, individually owned television viewers - located in urban/semi-urban areas with greater accessibility. Some of the factors which hamper viewing in rural community set up do not hamper in domestic situation. For example, social restrictions like women being not allowed to go out during evening hours, social customs may prevent women going to community situation etc.

PROJECTION OF WOMEN'S ISSUES AND IMAGES ON TV

'Women's programmes' is somewhat of a misnomer. This gives the impression that the programmes are meant for women alone, and that the target audience is women alone. This kind of situation may have value in certain contexts but the authors believe that for many of the women's programmes, men should be the target audience. Women's programmes, therefore, should have a broader definition to include all programmes dealing with the issues, problems and aspirations of women. This definition of women's programmes has the advantage of making them much more broad based and can bring in women's dimension in all aspects of programming and not confining it to stereotype of cookery and child care.

One of the things to look at is how much time is given to 'special programmes' or women's programmes. In April, 1983, there were about 1.6 percent of women's programmes, if taken into account all

the production centres of Doordarshan (Srivastava, 1984). Considering the fact that 48 percent are the adult female viewers the figure of 1.6 percent is indeed very low.

Classification of SITE programmes did not have a category called "Women's programmes" and no data are available about women's programmes. After SITE, Kheda programmes of ISRO have had a category of women's programmes. Table 4 indicates the percentage of time for women's programmes produced by ISRO.

TABLE -4

Yearwise percentages of Women's Programmes

Year	Percentage of Women's Programmes
1978	6
1979	5
1980	3
1981	7
1982	3
1984	5
1985	11

Source: Yearly Transmission Analysis, ISRO

As stated earlier the percentage of women's programmes is only one criterion to look at. What one should also examine is the issues and problems taken up in women's programmes. Do they present stereotypes of women as housewife, mother etc. or her newer roles are brought out? Are the subjects still stereotyped like embroidery, cookery, child care etc. or do they embark upon larger issues pertaining to women? Even more important is whether attention is paid

from this angle, to only 'women's programmes' or are all other programmes looked at having women dimension whether it is agriculture or sports or socio-economic issues or even entertainment programmes.

The authors would like to examine women's programmes from this perspective. It is also in this context that formative research will have a crucial role to play. The researchers should be able to provide inputs from this perspective so that the real issues and problems are brought out, the programmes become need based, they do not reinforce traditional beliefs and images or stereotypes. The women's dimension is brought out in its totality and not confined to women's programmes alone.

As far as portrayal of women is concerned, there have been large number of articles especially by women's groups. But the authors are not aware of any systematic content analysis study of Doordarshan programmes from this perspective.

RESEARCH IN WOMEN'S PROGRAMME PRODUCTION

In ISRO almost all our women's programmes have been made as a collaborative effort between the producer and the researcher. Detailed field studies have been conducted to find out the conditions, the problems and needs of women as well as the situations affecting women. Both quantitative as well as qualitative methodologies have been adopted depending upon the need of situation.

A field study in Kheda villages indicated that not only is the women's status low but also that the women lacked in self-confidence and very often had a very low self-image of themselves. There was good deal of internalisation of inferiority feeling amongst the women and discrimination was accepted as the given thing. A major reason

for this was that the women were economically dependant upon others. If the status of the women was to be improved and she was to be made more self-confident, it was necessary to start a series aimed at increasing her economic independence. It was from this view point that a series called 'Nari Tu Narayani' (Women You are Strength) was started to promote cooperative, economic activities.

Due to lack of research on the problems of rural women, background research had to be done. Needs assessment studies had to be conducted to find out the basic needs to which a programme or a series of programmes should be addressed. Determination of entry skills, needs assessment studies and background research became prerequisite to mounting of a series which had well defined objective and which could become an effective communication tool. When we took up a series on women and law called 'Nyay-Anyay' (Justice-Injustice) we found that merely knowing the technical information about the law was not enough. We also had to determine the level of knowledge of both men and women, the difficulties they experience while making use of the law and the social or economic factors which prevent its effective use. We also found that this information had to be presented in such a manner which can be easily comprehended by a common villager.

PROGRAMME PRETESTING

Pretesting was aimed at determining the attention holding ability of the programme, its comprehension, effectiveness of the format, personal relevance, identification, believability and acceptability. When we pretested 'Nyay-Anyay (Justice-Injustice) programme, we found that the play format part was able to hold greater attention and understood more but discussion with lawyer received less attention and comprehension. It was therefore decided that the discussion with

the lawyers had to be made in a very simple and common person's language and that it should not be too long. Repetition of the major points was also considered to be necessary for better comprehension. When this was done it was found that the programmes became more effective.

BRIEF WRITING

Detailed brief writing has been found to be effective. The brief includes information on the target audience, the objective, the content and the major question which needs to be tested. It is found that when the programme is based on such brief it is much better goal directed.

FEEDBACK EVALUATION

We conducted feedback studies very often. The feedback provided information on attention holding ability, likes and dislikes, comprehension, identification, personal relevance and whether there was anything offending in the programme.

IMPACT EVALUATION

We have conducted some small summative evaluative studies on the women's programmes and it was found that the programmes had taken up issues which were relevant to women. They had helped them in doing or starting something new or had indicated different ways of thinking and analysing an issue. Some of the findings of these research studies are summarised here.

RESULTS OF FEEDBACK AND SUMMATIVE EVALUATIONS

- * All viewers, especially the women, like to see play formats most. A continuous story line is more attractive than a programme of single episode. However, if a programme is based on true incident, the audience prefers to see the concerned real people narrating their own experiences, stories etc. and this is considered to have greater impact on them, for example, the programme 'Bhadke Bale Chhe Jindagi' (Life is in Flames).
- * Most women want that programmes should take up 'real' incidents/situations or issues relevant to them, but want to see a positive end, even if it is 'unreal'. It is felt that while being conscious of reality is important it is equally important that the end should be such that new directions or solutions are suggested.
- * The most suitable time for women is found to be between 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. because it is only after 8 p.m. that women finish the household chores and get time to watch television.
- * Women's programmes should not be addressed to women alone but both women and men should be the target audience.

WOMEN AS MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

These days considerable attention is paid to the question of portrayal of women on television and the question of access to television. It is true that even in this area not many systematic studies are available. But there is an increased awareness and a large number of articles, small studies are focus of many debates and discussions at various fora.

However, the problem of women media practitioners - the source - has been studied to a very small extent. We have recently conducted the first study about women practitioners in Indian television (Doordarshan) at creative and decision making levels. The main findings of this study are presented here. In this study primary and secondary data were utilized.

There were three main sources of information:

1. Statistical data were gathered from the existing information of employment in Doordarshan.
2. The second source of information was personal interviews at different levels.
3. The third source of information was a mailed questionnaire.

The major findings of the study were:

- * Percentage of women producers is about 26 percent in Doordarshan. It may be noted that in European Economic Community countries this figures is also about the same.
- * Apart from producers there are very few women employees at higher decision making levels e.g. Station Directors, Engineers, Administrative Officers.
- * Available statistics do not support the widely held belief among men that the proportion of women in Doordarshan is rapidly increasing.
- * Discrimination in Doordarshan organisation was not considered to be an important reason for lesser proportion of women.

- * Social and domestic responsibilities of women were considered to be most important barriers e.g. child care, cooking etc.
- * There was no difference in the work satisfaction of women and men.
- * Larger number of men considered women to be incapable of independent, quick decision making.
- * Larger number of women considered women officers to be less considerate than men officers.
- * A much greater number of men thought that they are exploited by women and that women took advantage of men's chivalry.
- * A much larger number of women thought that by increasing the proportion of women the programme quality will improve and they would bring a more balanced perspective.
- * More men considered that their work increased while working with colleagues belonging to the opposite sex.
- * Lack of availability of trained women was considered to be a very important reason for lower proportion of women.
- * A much larger number of women felt that there is less proportion of women because the selection committees consisted mostly of men.
- * There were strong job stereotypes and women were considered unsuitable for many jobs. Women employees thought that they were typecast by the organisation.

IN CONCLUSION

We have examined our work and some other studies pertaining to women and television in India. It is hoped that some of these findings will be of interest to other researchers. Even more important would be if more research studies are taken up in this area. We have put together only a small area of research and many more detailed research studies need to be conducted. Some of the important questions that come to mind on which research needs to be conducted are: How women can have greater access to television? How to make them participate in programmes of their concern? How many programmes should there be for women? What type of programmes are needed for women? Is women dimension properly taken up in general programmes? Does the overall juxtaposition of programmes wipe out the effects of some good programmes? How to increase participation of women media practitioners? and, How to share experience between researchers?

We are sure that there will be many more questions into which research needs to be conducted.

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