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CROSS CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

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BLOCK 7 CROSS CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

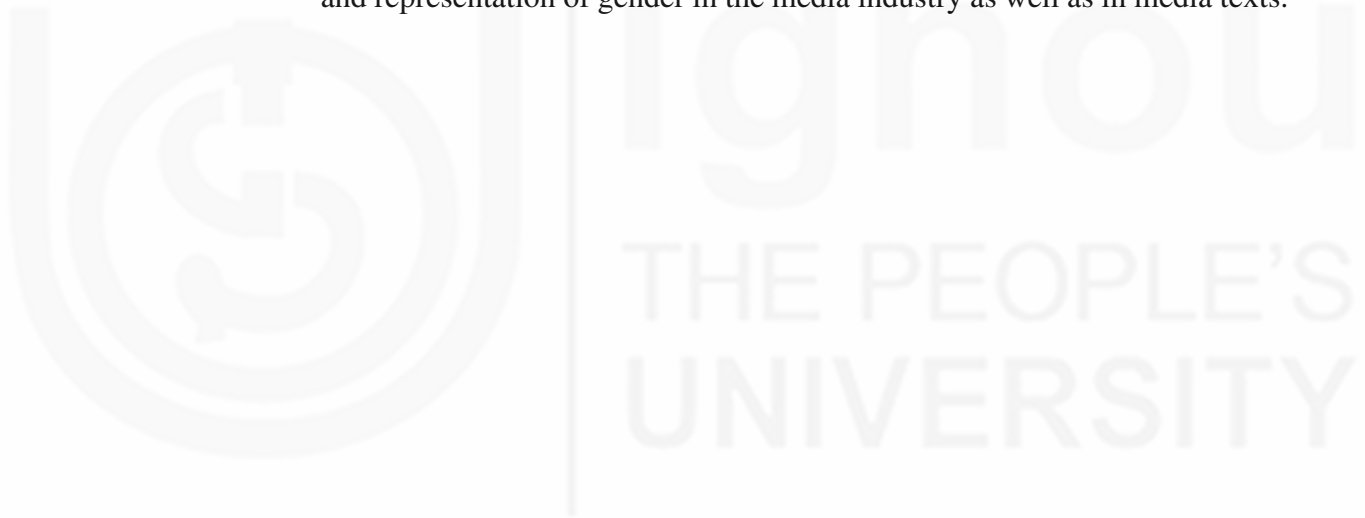
Introduction

The three units in this section on Cross Cultural Perspectives focus on three issues, Sexuality and Gender, Globalisation and Gender and Mass Media and Gender from an anthropological perspective. It is important to understand the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality as they are understood within various frameworks of academic and popular understanding. Categorising ourselves in terms of being a 'man' or 'woman' is a fundamental way in which we understand ourselves and one another. Normatively, these *social* categories of 'gender' map onto the *biological* realities of possessing male or female secondary sexual characteristics – what is called the 'sex' of a person. Biological explanations typically draw on genetic, hormonal or socio-biological (evolutionary theory) accounts of gender and sexuality and are often employed to defend the normative or to veil over the social and political construction of gender and sexuality. Feminism provides some conceptual framework to understand the subjugation of women by men through sexuality and sexual identities. Sexuality is constructed through a negotiation of meanings in symbols and practices. A pan-cultural phenomenon is the control of female sexuality, even as the precise contours of meaning this takes finds different shades in Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Such conceptions of female sexuality ties in with the female body which is seen as the site for the protection and maintenance of family honour. Cultural values also inform what is understood to be kinship across the world. India has a long history of multiple sexualities and non- gender identities that do not fall into the man-woman binary. It was only in the 19th century and with the advent of modernity specifically through British rule in India that these sexualities and gender identities faced systematic erasure in the bid to create the modern nation state with the heteronormative family as a chief institution within it.

The phenomenon of globalisation which has impacted our society in numerous ways, has particularly affected the everyday lives of women, especially from developing countries. On the one hand, globalisation has provided numerous jobs for people in developing countries, led to improved standards of living due to greater access to products and services at lower prices, and enhanced transfer of technology for human benefit. On the other hand benefits of globalisation have not been uniformly distributed, leading to the widening of gap between the rich and the poor. In many cases, the condition of unskilled and asset-poor people has worsened due to the impact of globalisation. Women have also been both positively and negatively impacted. In some societies, existing gender biases in patriarchal societies have been aggravated, whereas in others, women have been able to challenge the traditional social norms due to improved employment opportunities. In many cases, however, female marginalisation as a result of globalisation cannot be denied. Not only has globalisation led to an increased incidence of poverty among women, it has also made them more vulnerable due to declining state support programme and greater informalisation of female employment. The only way to minimise the negative impacts of globalisation is to make the process of development planning and implementation, both at national and international level, more gender sensitive. There is a shift in the current

policy stance towards people-centred and gender-wise policies. Gender mainstreaming is now an important agenda in all development initiatives at international and national levels. Concerted efforts in this direction will lead to equitable and just development.

Media exercise enormous influence and power in unprecedented ways in our everyday lives. People are exposed to the multiple forms and contents of the media as most of them spend a considerable amount of time in watching television, films and videos or reading newspapers, magazines or listening to music and surfing the Net. And by doing so, most people actively take part in constructing a media culture or cultures, since human capacities to speak, think, form relationships with others and the sense of creating one's own identity are now largely shaped by the media. Gender-based social images that are transmitted through media have a powerful impact on the larger cultural domain. The crucial linkages between media and the construction of gender are important. Gender representations are neither simple nor the audience readings of the text are rather complex and multi-dimensional. Even though there is a huge difference and change has occurred in the economic and social status among certain sections of women, women as a social and cultural entity are still in a structurally subordinate position to most men. And this cultural equation gets reflected in the construction and representation of gender in the media industry as well as in media texts.



UNIT 1 SEXUALITY AND GENDER

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Learning Objectives



After going through the module, a student should:

- understand and critique biologically determinist frameworks of understanding sex, gender and sexuality;
- be familiar with social constructionist frameworks for understanding sex, gender and sexuality;
- understand anthropological work in this paradigm demonstrating how different cultures articulate the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality in different ways; and
- be familiar with the Indian context of sexual politics.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Sexuality is a broad area of study related to an individual's sex, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation. Categorising ourselves in terms of being a 'man' or 'woman' is a fundamental way in which we understand ourselves and one another. Normatively, these *social* categories of 'gender' map onto the *biological* realities of possessing male or female secondary sexual characteristics – what is called the 'sex' of a person.

Thus a range of psychological traits and behaviours such as aggression, verbal ability, assertiveness, passivity, etc., as also *who one desires* – an aspect of sexuality- are associated with male and female. Across cultures, the relationship

between sex, gender and sexuality tends to be narrowly defined. Thus, a person with a vagina is a woman with characteristic ways of experiencing herself and the world and with characteristic patterns of desire: “normally”, she would desire a man.

It is important to make a distinction between two types of questions in relation to sex and gender. First is the question of the reality of gender, or in other words, do sex differences link to differences in social life so that there are two types of beings called men and women? ‘Sex differences’ research in psychology at the turn of the 20th century studied an enormous range of behaviours and characteristics across the sexes using a range of scales, inventories and questionnaires. A review and analysis of this massive and uncoordinated body of research by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) concluded that there was small but consistent differences between the sexes in just four areas: verbal ability (girls showed higher), visual-spatial ability (boys are superior), mathematical ability (boys were superior) and aggressiveness (boys are more aggressive). They argued that there is a tendency to report findings of difference and under-report findings of similarities so that men and women may be more similar than different with more differences within the population of men or women.

Second, conceding that there are observed differences between the sexes on some traits and characteristics, to what do we owe these differences? Sometimes the existence of real differences between men and women is taken to mean that these are inevitable and rooted in biology (genes, hormones, physical characteristics). Thus, from within this framework homosexuality can be seen as a genetic *aberration* or men can be thought as *naturally* more sexually aggressive than women. However, these differences might also stem from environmental or social influences or from our tendency to make sense of our experiences in a world which offers us certain ways of understanding them (the role of language). These two explanations are often competing and form the two poles of what is known as the nature-nurture debate.

Today, claims that our psychology is either completely determined by culture or biology is rare and explanations suggest that biology and environment interact in complex ways to produce the social phenomena we experience as gender or sexuality. Thus while biological givens cannot be denied altogether, it is also the case that the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality is reinforced and reproduced by a range of social institutions including religion, the state, education and the family.

Some of the evidence from sex-difference research is sometimes borne out in our social life. Thus, that males are more aggressive seems validated by the fact that domestic violence, rape and other violent crimes are predominantly committed by men. However, explanations or accounts of these differences are not merely academic but also political because biologically determinist explanations can justify social disadvantage deriving from these differences, inevitable as they are. Biological determinist explanations are also often the basis on which non-normative sexualities and gender identities are marginalised (as *aberrant* or abnormal). On the other hand understanding the social construction of these paves the way to the reorganisation of the world that is respectful of *difference*.

This module first introduces the concepts of sex, sexuality and gender and examines closely some problems with biological determinism before presenting frameworks of understanding that tend towards the ‘social’ as deriving from such diverse fields as feminism, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism. Building on these social-constructionist frameworks, the module next specifically reviews research on sexuality as conducted within an anthropological framework. Finally, the module considers some concepts useful for engagement with the praxis of sexuality and gender – policy and politics as they relate to gender and sexuality.

1.2 THE ROLE OF BIOLOGY

Although many accept an interaction between biology and society to produce sexed and gendered individuals, there is a common sense assumption that biological factors provide a powerful, irrefutable push in certain directions while environmental factors merely provide a moderating effect. Also, not only is biology a more powerful force than society, there is also a tendency to value the natural over the cultural – especially in contemporary Western society. Thus for instance, stating that homosexuality is unnatural is also often to say that it is unacceptable. Here biology or nature is recruited in the aid of ideology that advantages some and disadvantages others. Most human activity such as wearing clothes, writing a book or pursuing education cannot be categorised as ‘natural’ activities but still do not come under moral censure.

Biologically-determinist theories of sex and sexuality have drawn heavily on science, from physiology in the 19th century to neurobiology and genetics in the 20th and 21st centuries. These explanations have focused upon hormonal, genetic or evolutionary factors. Thus, aggression is linked to the male reproductive hormone testosterone. However, evidence of this link has primarily come from animal studies with consequent problems of generalising to humans and where human subjects have been used, the evidence is contradictory. A genetic foundation has been attributed to both aggression and homosexuality though in both cases research has failed to identify a gene in men that make them aggressive or a ‘homosexual gene’.

More compelling are explanations that suggest that certain behaviours (aggression and promiscuity in males; heterosexuality) are genetically reinforced through natural selection because they aid in the survival of the species. Thus the reproductive function of females – pregnancy and child-care would recommend that they remain confined to the home to avoid endangering their young. With this division of labour, aggressive men who can defend themselves better when hunting are more likely to pass on their genes to their children while nurturant mothers are more likely to pass on their genes to their children who have higher chances of survival because of the nurturance they receive from the mother. In the context of sexuality, women are less promiscuous than men because the investment in pregnancy and the responsibility for the care of the child would recommend that she chooses a man who is most likely to support her in the upbringing of the child. On the other hand, a man who is free of the burden of pregnancy and child-care would best ensure the passing on of his genes by impregnating as many females as possible.

Evolutionary theory applied to sexuality would understand the biological differences between the sexes and the *inevitable* attraction between them as

genetically programmed to ensure that the human race and society flourishes. Here, a key idea is that men and women have sex in order to reproduce and this plays a functional role in human evolution. A consequence of such reasoning is that homosexuality thereby becomes “unnatural” and an aberration. However a problem with this reasoning is as Jeffrey Weeks (2003) points out, most heterosexual human sexual activity is not undertaken for the purpose of reproduction. For example, masturbation, cross-dressing or sexual fetishes practiced between heterosexual couples do not require intercourse between bodies. Thus heterosexual activity is not only about a propagation of the species or one’s gene pool.

1.3 THE ROLE OF SOCIETY, LANGUAGE, POWER

The problem with biological bases of sexuality is that they tend to be reductionist – complex social and political dynamics are veiled-over to present a simplistic analysis that is based on biology. Biological explanations cannot account for why powerful institutions such as religion, laws, the police and military have to be employed to police, control and limit the expression of a sexuality committed to reproduction.

Various traditions in the social sciences have attempted to develop frameworks of understanding that acknowledge the role of social or cultural forces in shaping our sexual lives as also the role that power plays to advantage certain sections of society while marginalising others. Here we briefly examine feminist, psychoanalytic and poststructuralist understandings of sex, gender and sexuality.

1.3.1 Feminism, Sexuality and Gender

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Feminism: Feminism is committed to theorising bases of inequality (in opportunities, rights, privileges) between men and women and to a programme of social change for addressing it. Different views of why there is gender inequality gives rise to different forms of feminism with different recommendations for change (Burr, 1998).

Psychoanalysis: Theory of the human mind in which the self or the ego wrestles with the sexual drives of the unconscious on the one hand and the demands for restraint and denial arising from the super-ego on the other. Psychoanalysis emphasises the role of early childhood experiences in producing subjectivity (or the self) including gendered and sexed subjectivities.

Poststructuralism: Poststructuralism names a theory, or a group of theories, concerning the relationship between human beings, the world, and the practice of making and reproducing meanings. Poststructuralists affirm that consciousness is not the origin of the language we speak and the images we recognise, so much as the product of the meanings we learn and reproduce. Language here is not understood in terms of the words we speak but in terms of discourse : systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.

Feminists see biological accounts of male sexuality and/or aggression as justifying coercive male sexuality such as rape, sexual harassment. Radical feminists go a step further to propose that sexuality and male aggression is the cornerstone of women's oppression. Their central argument is that, heterosexuality is defined by male domination and female submission; when the most fundamental of human relations are defined in this manner, then it is little wonder that other contexts (such as work and the family) follow suit with men having unequal power and privilege in relation to women (Burr, 1998). Some radical feminists claim that gender is reinscribed each time a heterosexual act takes place such that through the act of male penetration of female bodies, where the person with the penis is the 'giver' (dominant) and the person with the vagina, the 'receiver' (submissive), gender is reproduced. Men and women are (re)produced in each instance of coercive male sexuality such as rape, sexual harassment, the wolf-whistle and pornography- where women are pitted as passive objects of male desire. These are not isolated examples of male dominance but reflect general male privilege and power that men as a class hold over women as a class.

1.3.2 Freud: The Psychoanalytic Conceptions of Gender and Sexuality

According to Sigmund Freud, children's gender identity rests on their recognition that they have (in the case of boys) or don't have (in the case of girls) a penis. For boys, the penis represents their entry ticket into the powerful world of men; both boys and girls are thought to believe that girl's lack of penis is a result of castration for some wrong-doing and boys live in constant fear of this happening to them too. During the Oedipal phase, when he is 3 to 5 years old, boys' increasing sexual awareness become directed to his mother. But the boy fears that his powerful but distant father will castrate him in retaliation and he deals with this anxiety by repressing his feelings for his mother and identifying with the father, taking on all that the father stands for – his voice of authority and the social norms and values he embodies. Little girls on the other hand, who are aware that their castrated status renders them second class citizens, inevitably see their mothers as also castrated and therefore second best. In her identification with the mother, the little girl therefore takes on the board a submissive attitude in relation to a man (heterosexuality). Moreover, since she has not had to resolve the Oedipus complex, as also not having identified with an authority figure, develops not the strength of character and moral rectitude that little boys develop. According to Freud, children start out as "polymorphously perverse" and may feel desire for either parent; in some of his postulations, he predicates the final identification to the same-sex parent to be dependent on the presence of innate dispositions of corresponding masculinity or femininity.

Freud's theory of gender and sexual identity clearly valorises masculinity; later psychoanalytic formulations have built on Freud's ideas while producing less misogynistic accounts. Freud's views have been criticised on many grounds including the assumed superiority of the penis over the vagina, the implication that only father discipline in the home (and represent authority) as also for ignoring gender as a system of power relations in society and taking for granted male power in society.

1.3.3 Foucault: The Discursive Production of Sexuality

Michel Foucault, a poststructuralist theorist, provides a most vivid illustration of the ways in which the modern sexual subject is produced in networks of power operating through knowledge and discourse in the three volume *History of Sexuality* series (1976-84). Foucault's theories of discourse hold that the individual subject is produced in and through specific discourses that circulate in any society at any given moment— in the media, through speech, through practices, through academic, legal papers and documents etc. E.g., subject categories such as 'homosexual' and or 'criminal' do not exist prior to their construction in language and discourse. People termed 'homosexuals' only know themselves as such and are called as such through the discourses of science and medicine that constructs bodies of knowledge about a subject named as 'the homosexual' or 'the criminal'. Power operates through such knowledge as is spread through discourses (the power/knowledge axis) by producing such categories of identification or the subject.

A key idea that Foucault debunks is the idea of sexual repression during the 17th century and the subsequent liberation from repression in the 19th century as proposed by historians of sexuality. Instead, he argues that even in the age of supposed liberation, power operated in more insidious ways to produce specific kinds of sexual subjects. Foucault examines the ways in which sex has been "put into discourse" through medicine, the church, psychoanalysis, education programmes, demography and the criminal-justice system. All of these discourses on sexuality just produce different kinds of sexual objects through different technologies of power.

Foucault is critical of disciplines such as psychology and psychiatry that work on the principle that it is possible to liberate us by helping us to realise the deep truths that we have repressed. According to Foucault, psychiatry itself is the source of these fundamental truths. So for instance, by examining the medical and psychiatric discourses on sexuality during the "repressive" Victorian times and during the current era, Foucault demonstrates how these discourses actively produces particular "truths" about sexuality. Foucault talks about the paradox of freedom—"talking about ourselves as requiring freedom owing to fundamental constraints produces an 'us' that is fundamentally constrained" (Hepburn, 2003). For Foucault, there is no true hidden sexuality: the "repressed" sexual subject and the "liberated" sexual subject are products of discourse and forms of power and knowledge.

1.3.4 Butler: A Foucauldian Interpretation of Freud

In *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), poststructuralist feminist thinker Judith Butler propounds a theory of the relationship between language, the unconscious, sex and gender. A key idea in Butler's theory is the idea of *performativity*. According to Butler, there is no essential woman who is the author of her gendered identity – mannerisms, thoughts, feelings, personality features that constitute what is called 'feminine'. The gendered subject is not the *cause* of gendered acts but is in fact an *effect* of these performative acts. Butler says that if gender is what one *does* rather than *is*, then it should be possible to do gender in ways that that show the constructed nature of heterosexuality in ways that challenge vested interests to present them as natural or essential or non-constructed. In drag, the disjunction between the body of the performer and the

gender enacted is highlighted and this according to Butler draws attention the imitated nature of all gender identities.

Butler also does an interesting reinterpretation of Freud; she challenges the idea of *innate* dispositions of masculinity or femininity that Freud sometimes proposes as required for identification with same-sexed parent. Butler challenges Freud's idea that dispositions lead to masculine or feminine identifications. Instead she says that it is these identifications that cause the dispositions (of femininity or masculinity). So according to her when a little girl desires her mother, it is not the incest taboo that operates but the homosexual taboo. This formulation requires that people identified as heterosexual desire the parent of the same sex. Why would this happen? Butler says that what is forbidden is what is desired- here she becomes Foucauldian. In other words, the law *produces* the desire that it subsequently prohibits. So the taboo against homosexuality produces this very desire for the same sex parent in a child. This being forbidden, the child has to relinquish the desired object and identify with the desired object. So girls identify with their mothers and boys with their fathers (Salih, 2002).

So what is she saying here? Whereas Freud suggested something innate about masculinity or femininity that makes one identify with a man or woman, Butler sees society's prohibitory rule as producing a man or woman. Or in other words, Butler thinks all of gender identity (which includes desire for the opposite sex or heterosexuality) as being based on a prohibitory rule in society. The idea here is that heterosexuality is based on a prohibited homosexuality; heterosexuality requires homosexuality in order to define itself and maintain its stability (Salih, 2002).

1.4 CULTURE AND SEXUALITY

The manner in which we experience ourselves as gendered and sexual beings finds life within symbolic meaning-systems existing in different cultures. Research shows how cultural values systems inform such diverse sex (or sexuality) related things as gender-identities, the control of female sexuality and understandings of kinship and family.

1.4.1 Gender Identities, Sexual Identities and Culture

The Western binary of heterosexual 'men' and 'women' as created by a strict definition of the relationship between sex and gender (including sexuality) is challenged by transgender people such the *Hijra* in India or *Tom* and *Dee* in Thailand and the *Fa'afafine* in the Pacific.

Hijras are the 'third-sex', the 'eunuch' or the intersexed hermaphrodite in India (Reddy and Nanda 2009). Though the most visible alternative sex/gender, they are located within a larger spectrum of sexual and gender configurations in India which includes *the kothi, panthi* and *naran*. *Narans* are characterised by gendered "feminine" practices and the ability to bear children; in other words, all women are narans. *Kothis* are those men who "like to do women's work" and are the receivers or the 'bottoms' in same-sex encounters with other men. *Panthis* are the givers or the 'tops' in sexual intercourse with other men and distance themselves from the "female" practices typically embodied by *kothis* and *narans*; they may partner with both *kothis* and *narans*. *Hijras*- in this configuration- rank

themselves the most authentic of *kothis*, deserving the most respect (*izzat*) in the community. Thus, the gender system here is seen as categorised on the basis of practice rather than anatomy into ‘men’ (*panthis*) and ‘not men’ (*kothis* and *narans*). It may also be noted that gender identities are predicated on desire lines – sexual-relations between masculine and feminine even when these are not tied to biological sex.

Similarly, according to Sinnott (2008), *Toms* are masculine-identified women who present their masculinity through their dressing style and their personality and on the basis of their attraction to feminine-identified women who may have sex with *Toms* or with men. *Toms* do not try to pass as male and consider themselves to be women with masculine souls. Thus here we see that gender cannot be seen as mapping neatly onto sex and as an interaction between male and female sexes.

1.4.2 Male and Female Sexuality and Culture

A phenomenon that is observed cross-culturally is what is commonly referred to as “the double standard” for men and women with regard to sex outside the conjugal unit – here men escape societal censure to a greater extent than women and women’s sexuality is regulated to a greater extent than men’s. Biologically determinist discourses such as “men are driven by uncontrollable sexual drives” are prevalent in contemporary advanced industrial societies of the West such as Britain (Hollway 1998) and justify such unequal practices. According to Hollway, the male sexual-drive discourse and the have-hold discourse –where according to Christian scriptures, sex is correct only when within marriage and toward the formation of a family- presents men with a contradiction which they then visit upon women. This results in the creation of the “good woman” who one marries (the Madonna) and the “bad woman” (the Whore): the Madonna-Whore syndrome. This in turn links to the control of female sexuality because every “good woman” is a potential “fallen woman” at risk of being overwhelmed by uncontrollable sexual urges.

These dynamics can also be observed in Islamic culture (Mernissi, 1987) as also in Hindu societies (Kakar, 1989). Fatima Mernissi, observes how there are two contradictory understandings around female sexuality in Muslim society – the explicit theory of female sexuality casts them as passive and deriving pleasure from submission to male desire, but the implicit theory casts them as seductive active pursuers of their desire and posing a danger to male rationality. Again, these competing constructions result in the notion of women as needing protection from men as also requiring control of their own sexuality for the good of society. Sudhir Kakar (1989) in the Indian context, points to similar notions of the “mother-whore-partner-in-ritual trichotomy” in the Manusmriti (ancient Hindu laws of conduct ascribed to Brahma). Kakar notes the phrase: “Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her son protects her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence”. This, Kakar says refers to a protection not from external danger but from a woman’s inner sexual proclivities. A subsequent verse supports this interpretation; this verse chastises the father who does not give his daughter away in marriage at puberty and the husband who does not satisfy her sexually when she in her season (*ritu*).

Such conceptions of female sexuality ties in with the female body being seen as the site for the protection and maintenance of family honour. Lila Abu-Lughold

(2009) studies the wedding rituals of a Bedouin community in Egypt's Western Desert for discourses of sexuality circulating therein. Rituals at the wedding involves public defloration of the bride by the groom with much significance given to the consequent blood stained sheet on which she rests, which is publicly displayed. Lughold observes how weddings become an occasion where families find themselves in some rivalry, the honour of each at stake in the competition between the bride who fights against the groom who has to penetrate her. In this Muslim community, sexuality is not a private playing out between two individuals but owned publicly by the community or the families of the bride and the groom. Interestingly, while outsiders are scandalised by the "barbaric" nature of this ritual and notes the humiliation of women involved Bedouin women are in turn scandalised by how pleasure and enjoyment are brought to the fore-front when sex becomes a private affair between the bride and the groom in non-Bedouin Egyptian wedding rituals.

Similar debates frame the wearing of the Burqa or the veil by Muslim women in Islamic cultures. From a modern feminist perspective, the veil represents repressive control of female sexuality; however, Lama Abu Odeh (1997) shows how for many Arab women, the veil represents a resistance to objectification of their bodies by the capitalist gaze and represents a certain freedom for women who participate in the public world by shielding them from unwanted attention. Other studies report how sexuality is not repressed in the covering of the body but many men and women in Muslim society see the privacy around the body as heightening pleasure in the knowledge that they are the only people who will view their partners body, thereby heightening intimacy.

1.4.3 Kinship and Sexuality

In many cultures, sexuality and kinship are intricately connected issues. This is because dominant sexual moralities frame heterosexual relations within marriage as the only legitimate means to forming families or kinship bonds. What is valued here is the "blood tie" (order of nature) over the other forms of relationship, such as marriage for instance, which is formed through laws of social origin (order of law). Thus, the sexual relationship between man and woman become an important component of the idea of kinship. However, David Schneider (1968) in his study of kinship amongst the Yap in the Pacific Rim found that in the Yap community, pregnancy is not seen as linked to sexuality or sexual intercourse and fatherhood is defined by a man's ability to care for a child more than his role as a progenitor.

This study shows how what most cultures take to be natural or commonsensical (relations as blood-relationships) is in fact a social or cultural construction specific to particular cultures or points in history. Such an understanding paves the way to understand "alternative" forms of family and kinship as followed by people of marginalised sexualities and gender identities. Judith Butler (1993) analyses the documentary film *Paris is Burning* by Jenny Livingston (1990), which studies the ball culture of New York and the African-American, Latino gay and transgendered people involved in it. Balls are highly competitive events where participants have to "walk" or perform set themes and are judged for their "realness" (adhereing to high-class femininity for example). These participants come from various "houses", each with its own "mother" which serve as surrogate families in place of their real families which often reject them on account of their sexual or gender identities. According to Butler, this can be seen as a

resignification or a process of attaching new meanings to - and thereby destabilising of- heteronormative family configurations.

A parallel to this can be found in the patterns of kinship followed by the *hijra* community in India. An authenticating criterion for the *hijra* identity is their affiliation and social obligation to one of the *hijra* houses or lineages in the community. By engaging in a specific *hijra* kinship ritual, individuals not only acquire a guru or teacher within the community but also signify their membership in the particular house/lineage to which the teacher belongs.

Alternative forms of kinship are also formed at the junctures of culture and technological advancement. In Europe and North America, activism and advocacy by gay and lesbian groups has won these groups in some countries the right to same-sex marriage; Netherlands in 2001 was the first country to institute this. In some countries, civil unions or registered partnerships between same-sex couples allow them rights comparable to marriage rights, though with some restrictions such as the right to adopt. In addition, in the 80s technological advancement has resulted in many assisted reproduction technologies. In in-vivo fertilisation of IVF, the ova is fertilised by the sperm in a petridish and then placed in the woman's uterus. Either the sperm or the ovum could be obtained via donation. This means that sexuality has been delinked from reproduction and family formation. In many countries, such donations are regulated by the law and even prohibited. Surrogacy further complicates the situation in that a couple can approach another woman to carry through the pregnancy. These technologies alter the meaning of motherhood to include three meanings; the mother is the one who a) provides the ovum, b) who gestates the baby. In all of these arrangements, a third party is introduced into the traditional conjugality and to many people this is evocative of adultery or non-monogamy. Therefore, such procedures often become the focus of social, political and religious censure.

1.5 HISTORY OF SEXUALITY IN INDIA: LESBIAN GAY BISEXUAL TRANSGENDER QUEER (LGBT-Q) POLITICS

Research into literature across history in various Indian languages has demonstrated how India has a long history of multiple sexualities and non- gender identities that do not fall into the man-woman binary (Vanita and Kidwai, 2000 cited in Menon, 2007). In this context, Vanita talks of several language terms such as *tritiya prakriti* (the third nature, for men who prefer sex with men) in the fourth century Kamasutra; *swayamvara sakhi* in an 11th century Sanskrit text (for women choosing women as life partner), and *chapti* for female to female sexual activity. The non-binary gender system underlying the *hijra* identity also has a long history in both Hinduism as also Muslim cultural traditions in India. In Hinduism, *hijras* identify with figures such as Arjun of Mahabharata, who lived for a year in the guise of a eunuch during exile while participating as dancer at weddings and births; this gives legitimacy to the ritual contexts in which *hijras* perform (Nanda 2011). Similarly, Shiva as Ardhanarisvara (vertically divided half-man/half-woman) as also certain female avatars of Vishnu are other figures that *hijras* identify with. *Hijras* also enjoyed the historical role of the “eunuch” in the five hundred year history of Muslim court culture in India.

It was only in the 19th century and with the advent of modernity specifically through British rule in India that these sexualities and gender identities faced systematic erasure in the bid to create the modern nation state with the heteronormative family as a chief institution within it. In 19th century, British introduced the anti-sodomy law of 1860 England in India via Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code thereby criminalising same-sex activity – which had been hitherto invisible to the law. Likewise, *hijras* under colonial classification were categorised as one of the “criminal castes” alongside their removal from any royal protection through an erasure of the traditional royal patronage they had previously enjoyed.

A Foucauldian analysis can here show how the modern ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ as *personages* (not sexual acts or unions as evidenced in ancient Indian languages) entered the Indian lexicon as sites of both oppression and resistance to draconian laws as codified under Section 377 IPC. Thus, the law and queer movements that resist the law give a new significance to same-sex activities and unions, creating identities such as ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ and groups of people with experiences that can be understood in terms of ‘gay and ‘lesbian’.

In India, these terms as also the politics surrounding these terms came into the public space/discourse with the AIDS epidemic and international funding for HIV/AIDS prevention in India in the mid to late 1990s (Menon, 2007). While the aims of these NGO housed programmes was AIDS prevention, it had unintended consequences in terms of opening up space for the articulation of non-normative sexualities as is practiced by sex-workers and “gay” and “lesbian” people. Thus discourses of health and medicine aimed at regulating sexuality, paradoxically opened up ways to articulate non-normative sexualities.

Reddy and Nanda (2009) show how the *hijras* of modern India are not just a ‘traditional’ sexual category but has also become a contemporary identity formed at the intersections of religion and politics. Here, ‘tradition’ comes to be employed towards ‘modern’ ends in contemporary India. Thus, *hijra* candidates can capitalise on the religious basis of their identities, their distance from family, gender and caste affiliations as also their sannyasi or ascetic leanings. This can be understood as a re-inscribing of the status-quo and of discourses that are oppressive (such as Hindu nationalism) but may also be read as creative ways in which a community that has been systematically marginalised attempts to stake a place for itself in a world intolerant of multiplicities and difference.

1.6 SUMMARY

This module problematised the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality as they are understood within various frameworks of academic and/or popular understanding. Biological explanations typically draw on genetic, hormonal or sociobiological (evolutionary theory) accounts of gender and sexuality and are often employed to defend the normative or to veil over the social and political construction of gender and sexuality. Feminism provides some conceptual framework to understand the subjugation of women by men through sexuality and sexual identities. Psychoanalysis is another tradition that helps to understand how early childhood dynamics and cultural constructions of right and wrong kinds of sexuality produces sexual and gendered subjects. Foucault introduces the notion of power and discourse as shaping the body and provides another

framework for understanding the interaction of nature and nurture. This framework of understanding is extended in the work of Judith Butler who takes discourse back to early childhood dynamics as examined by Freud.

The module next examines the question of the relation between sex, gender and sexuality through an anthropological framework of understanding that looks at the manner in which sexuality is constructed through a negotiation of meanings in symbols and practices. Different cultural configurations allow for a variety of indexing of gender identities that is different from the gender binary of 'man' and 'woman' that neatly maps onto sexed differences in reproductive abilities. A pan-cultural phenomenon is the control of female sexuality, even as the precise contours of meaning this takes finds different shades in Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Cultural values also inform what is understood to be kinship across the world; the traditional Western notions of sexual relations (and blood ties) at the core of kinship is challenged by cultural configurations elsewhere; this finds a modern parallel in new patterns of kinship that erotic minorities follow, aided as they are by technologies of assisted reproduction and regulated surrogacy. Finally, the module concludes with a consideration of how some of these frameworks as discussed in the module has helped to understand LGBT-Q politics in India.

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Suggested Reading

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Sample Questions

- 1) What are some of the problems with the biological explanations of gender and sexuality differences?
- 2) Explain the Butlerian concept of 'performativity'. Deliberate the potential this term holds for a politics of transformation (towards a world tolerant of difference).
- 3) What has anthropology offered to widen the narrow definition linking sex, gender and sexuality that dominates the 'modern' world today?
- 4) What is the Madonna-Whore syndrome?
- 5) What is the history of Indian sexuality from a Foucaultian perspective?

UNIT 2 GLOBALISATION AND GENDER

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction: Globalisation Processes and their Impacts
- 2.2 Globalisation and Gender Equality
 - 2.2.1 Feminisation of Poverty and Female-Headed Households
 - 2.2.2 Women, Work and Globalisation
- 2.3 Gender Inclusive Globalisation
- 2.4 Summary
 - References
 - Suggested Reading
 - Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After going through this unit, you will be able to understand:

- the processes of globalisation and their differentiated impacts on marginalised populations and women;
- how globalisation contributes to enhanced gender inequality; and
- how the negative effects of globalisation can be minimised by mainstreaming gender in our social and economic policies.

2.1 INTRODUCTION: GLOBALISATION PROCESSES AND THEIR IMPACTS

Within cross cultural perspectives, it is important to discuss the issue of globalisation and gender. The phenomenon of globalisation which has impacted our society in numerous ways, has particularly affected the everyday lives of women, especially from developing countries. In this unit we will study the implications of globalisation on gender, with special focus of women's work and poverty among women. Let us begin by first understanding what we mean by globalisation.

Globalisation refers to a number of events that have been rapidly changing the world, especially since the 1980s. It is primarily driven by the global economy, mainly the policies of privatisation (selling government owned assets and businesses to private multinational companies)¹ and deregulation (lifting trade restrictions, easing of government regulation, allowing foreign businesses to operate within our country, and floating of national currencies in the global market place).²

¹ Prior to the 1980s, in most of the countries, governments were handling all the businesses and governments owned all the assets in a country.

² Bond, Michael. <http://www.eveofthepoc.com.au/Downloads/WhatIsGlobal.html> accessed on 20.1.12

The ultimate goal of globalisation processes is to have a privatised economy, which allows a healthy competition for goods and services within the free market (across national borders). It is believed that this enables people to have access to better services and products at lower prices, eventually leading to a better standard of living, or, human well-being.³ Along with the diffusion of goods, services, and capital, globalisation also involves diffusion of technology, information, culture, and people across national borders (Çağatay and Ertürk 2004), and all this has led to fundamental changes in human institutions in practically all societies across the globe (ibid.).

Since the mid-1980s, many scholars in the social sciences have studied the causes, scope, and impact of globalisation (Meyer 2006:83). Along with economic integration of different countries, globalisation has also brought industrialisation to the developing countries, which has led to economic growth in these regions. Since the 1980s, many Asian countries have emerged as significant manufacturers of products such as textiles, steel, cars, electronics, computer equipment, etc. This has led to the creation of jobs for millions of people in these countries.

As a result, one important trend worldwide has been that there has been an increase in the contribution of the secondary sector (manufactured products or material goods) and tertiary sector (essential services)⁴ to the gross domestic product (GDP) of most countries. This means that there has been an increase in jobs in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Growth in tertiary sector, however, has been greater than the secondary sector. And the relative contribution of the primary sector (agriculture, mining, forestry, and fishing) to the GDP has been declining steadily.

This trend in the global economy is closely related to skill differentiation. The unskilled and semi-skilled jobs (mainly in the primary and secondary sectors) are primarily taken up by the less privileged sections of the society, whereas skilled jobs of the service sector are occupied by upper income groups of the society. Wage differences between the skilled and unskilled jobs have also grown sharply, creating heightened disparities between these groups. On a broader level, disparities between rural and urban areas, developed and developing countries have also increased. Effects of globalisation have also differed across groups of class, race, ethnicity and gender.

Many researchers have said that globalisation is a double-bladed phenomenon (Çağatay and Ertürk 2004) with unequal distribution of benefits and harms. Trade liberalisation is not inherently welfare producing; it can produce and re-produce inequality, social disparities and poverty at the same time as it expands wealth (Sen, 1996:132).

Today the global system is marked with widening income disparities, economic growth disparities, human capital disparities such as, life expectancy, nutrition, infant and child mortality, adult literacy and enrolment ratio. Along with this are disparities in the distribution of global economic resources and opportunities and globalisation adds to this. In such a scenario, it is the interests of the poor and under privileged that are most affected and amongst them of the women.

³ Bond, Michael. <http://www.eveoftheapoc.com.au/Downloads/WhatIsGlobal.html> accessed on 20.1.12

⁴ Such as finance, insurance, real estate, wholesale, retail, motor trade, catering and accommodation, transport and communications.

The dominance of rich nations, multinational corporations and international capital over markets, resources and labour in the developing countries through trade, aid and technology transfer has greatly weakened the capacity of nation states and governments to promote human development and offer protection to the poor people. Since the resources for the social sector come out of an ever-shrinking common pool, the burden on women is much more. The worst hit in this transformation is the unorganised or informal sector, marked with income disparity and dominated by the poor and under privileged. (Pande, 2001, 1)

Apart from changes associated with global trade, the other facets of globalisation are increased migration, spread of global culture, development of the internet and easier communication and transportation around the world, accelerated development and transfer of technologies in all spheres (including reproductive technologies), tourism, etc. All these have both positive and negative dimensions and also differentiated impacts on men and women. However, detailed discussion on these is beyond the scope of this unit. We shall concentrate here on impact of trade liberalisation on gender equality.

2.2 GLOBALISATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

While we stated in the beginning that the major transformation in global economy occurred around 1980s, we need to understand that the processes of globalisation are closely associated with colonialism and capitalism, which have transformed traditional economies over the last couple of centuries. “All scholars agree that colonialism and capitalism restructured traditional economies in a way which had a profound impact on women’s economic activities, on the nature of sexual division of labour, and on the kinds of social and political options which remained open to women. However, there is considerable debate about the exact nature of the effects of these processes on women’s lives. Scholars like Boserup (1970) and Rogers (1980) have suggested that capitalist exploitation combined with eurocentric ideas about the roles and activities proper to women led to the destruction of women’s traditional rights in society, and undermined their economic autonomy. Other writers have pointed out that it may be wrong to imagine that the pre-colonial/ pre-capitalist world was one where women had a significant degree of independence. However, the penetration of capitalism into subsistence economies, through the growth of commercial agriculture and wage labour, is acknowledged as having generally deleterious effect on rural women. A number of authors have stressed that the development of intensive agriculture and the introduction of new forms of technology discriminated against women. An increasing market in land and labour, together with changes in land tenure systems and developing migrant labour, also worked against the interests of women” (Moore 1988:74-5).

The transformation of global economy around the 1980s has accentuated the disadvantaged position of women in developing countries. Feminist researchers and activists have repeatedly pointed to a variety of gender biases of structural adjustment policies⁵ (Ça atay and Ertürk 2004). In the case of Morocco, Skalli

⁵ Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) are economic policies for developing countries that have been promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) since the early 1980s by the provision of loans conditional on the adoption of such policies. SAPs are designed to encourage the structural adjustment of an economy to promote privatisation and deregulation.

(2001) mentions that the social effects and costs of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) have proved to be specifically detrimental to women in low-income households and made their status even more vulnerable. The situation is quite similar in other developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The differentiated impacts of globalisation processes on men and women are because of a number of reasons. Firstly, a discrepancy exists in almost all economies between women and men's access to resources, knowledge, ownership and control over assets. Patriarchal societies like the Indian society, where men have authority and control over property, men traditionally hold a privileged position as compared to women, who are seen as subordinate. Patriarchy also manifests itself in the social, legal, political, and economic organisations, and it is seen that globalisation has heightened already existing biases in patriarchal societies. Discussing the case of Morocco, Skalli (2001:76) states that "the patriarchal structure of the society operates at all levels to position women in lower status than men. Patriarchal ideology and systemic gender biases have denied women not only equal educational and employment opportunities and treatment before the law, but also equal access to and control over resources, adequate health services, housing, social welfare, and support. These are important social indicators that have a direct bearing on the incidence of female poverty and reflect the different levels at which social exclusion is produced, justified and perpetuated."

Discrepancy also exists between men and women in terms of patterns of paid and unpaid work, wages, ability to generate income, educational patterns and political and economic power (Ça atay and Ertürk 2004). Women's low educational opportunities and skill training have a direct bearing on female work pattern. Women get caught in the cycle of exploitation and underpayment as they increasingly occupy the low-paying unskilled jobs. There exists salary gap between working men and women, and many women continue to work below the minimum wage. In rural areas, female labour around the world continues to go unrecognised and unpaid, as it falls under the category of farm work or income-generating activities within home, in areas such as arts and crafts, weaving, and cottage industries. Mies (1982) describes in her study of lace-makers of Andhra Pradesh (India) that growing impoverishment of the peasant agricultural sector has led women in poorer agricultural households to take up lace-making (for private exporters) as a way of generating supplementary income. These women are invisible as workers because of the prevailing and overriding ideology that they are really only 'housewives' who happen to be using their leisure time in a profitable way. Thus, women generate supplementary income for the household without altering the sexual division of labour or the nature of gender relation in the society. Consequently, women's insertion into the global market production system has merely served to reinforce existing gender relations (Moore 1988:83-85).

Let us now take a closer look at how globalisation is said to have contributed to growing poverty among women.

2.2.1 Feminisation of Poverty and Female-headed Households

Research into the social impacts and gender-specific effects of structural adjustment policies and studies on the proliferation of female-headed households have led to increased attention to the notion of *feminisation of poverty*. There is

a growing perception around the globe that poverty is becoming increasingly feminised, that is, an increasing proportion of the world's poor are female. A 1992 UN report found that the number of rural women living in poverty in the developing countries increased by almost 50% between 1970 and 1990 (an awesome 565 million) and majority of them lived in Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa (Moghadam 2005:2).

There are different measures of poverty in economics, however, whether measured by income/consumption or the broader array of entitlements/capabilities indicators, the incidence of poverty among women appears to be on the increase (ibid: 4-5). Concept of feminisation of poverty is not only a consequence of lack of income, but is also the result of the deprivation of capabilities and gender biases present in both societies and governments (Chant 2006). The rise in female poverty is attributed to many factors such as population growth, the emigration of men, increasing family break-up, low productivity, a deteriorating environment, and structural adjustment policies (Moghadam 2005:4-5). As you will be able to understand by now, most of these are closely associated with globalisation processes.

Since impoverishment of women and children is closely associated with the striking increase in single-parent female-headed households, focus on such households is critical to addressing the problem of feminisation of poverty. Such households are at the highest risk of poverty for women due to lack of income and resources (Sara and Pramila 2007). According to a case study in Zimbabwe, households headed by widows have an income of approximately half that of male-headed households, and female-headed households have about three quarters of the income of male headed households (Brenner 1987).

There is a continuing increase in the number of female-headed households in the world. The main factors responsible for this increase in rural area are the rise in male out-migration, occurrences of illnesses and deaths of husbands. It is stated that 30-35 per cent of all rural households in India, for example, are female-headed households compared to 25 percent in Cambodia, 21.4 per cent in Mongolia and 15.7 per cent in Korea (Ng 2000).

It is also important to note that female-headed households are very common among urban poor as well, in both developed and developing countries. Moore (1988:63-4) states that a common feature of urban life is that many women are choosing not to marry and a significant number of married women are choosing to live separately from their husbands. Discussing the case of the US, Peterson (1987:334) mentions that "women are increasingly likely to carry the primary responsibility for supporting themselves because of rising divorce rates and non-marital childbearing. At the same time, many women remain locked into dead-end jobs with wages too low to support themselves and their families. Child-care responsibilities and lack of affordable child-care prohibit many women from participating in the labor market at all."

Skalli (2001:80-4) discusses the case of feminisation of poverty and female-headed households in Morocco in the context of structural adjustment policies. In Morocco, female-headed households are increasing in the urban and rural areas. A major proportion of such households are headed by widows or divorcees, where widows tend to be more vulnerable than divorcees, due to their advanced age. These women are generally employed in the low-paying jobs, mainly in the

manufacturing industry. However, it is specifically the informal sector that employs these women, where they are engaged in little income-generating activities like needlework, sewing and knitting, from home. Work in non-formal sector exposes women to a number of constraints and prejudices, because of the absence of labour laws, social security regulations, as well as social welfare benefits. In Morocco, restructuring of the economy has resulted in the disengagement of the state from and reduction in its investments in the social services sector (health and education services). Cuts in public expenditure, and cancellation of subsidies on essential goods, worsened women's vulnerability and their exploitation. In particular, women's chances of securing employment in the formal sector decreased. This implied, an increased pressure to work in the informal sector at all ages, for longer hours, minimal wages, and a greater urgency to migrate within and outside the country in search of cash-earning activities some of which can be risky for their physical, mental, and psychological health. On the other hand, economic recession and restructuring, as well as socio-economic, demographic and cultural changes have also led to the breakdown of the traditional family support network. For women in low-income households, in both rural and urban settings, this directly translates into the burden of combining unpaid domestic labour with low-income, labour-intensive activities in the informal sector.

Situations very similar to this one exist in other developing countries. Another issue closely related to poverty and female-headed households are the feminisation of subsistence agriculture. As you know, globalisation has triggered industrialisation all over the world and one of the major consequences of this has been the increase in the production of cash crops. Moore (1988) states that commercialisation of agriculture has led to women in rural areas taking up the major responsibility for growing of subsistence crops. In Africa, commercialisation of agriculture forced women into working longer hours in the subsistence sector, in order to provide for the family, while men became involved in cash-cropping. Also, as industrialisation opened up job opportunities in urban areas, there was increased migration of men from rural to urban areas, which further heightened the responsibility of women to manage subsistence farming.

In the case of Ghana (Africa), Bukh (1979, in Moore 1988:76) describes that during the boom in cocoa production men took over the job of producing cocoa, while women took on responsibility for cultivating the basic food for the household. When the price of cocoa fell in the 1970s, many men migrated to look for work, leaving the women and children behind on the farm. Many women found it difficult to cover their household and personal expenses, so they supplemented their incomes by combining farming with petty trading, wage labour, craft work and food processing. As evident, this increased the workload of women enormously.

While, similar situations are found in other communities in Africa, Moore (1988: 77-8) says that we should be cautious about setting up a straightforward equation between women and subsistence agriculture, and men and cash crops. There are plenty of examples of women growing cash crops, working as wage labourers and engaging in a wide variety of other market-oriented activities. And the overall effect of the commercialisation of agriculture has frequently been the impoverishment of the peasant agricultural sector as a whole, rather than a simple gain for men.

2.2.2 Women, Work and Globalisation

So, as we have seen in the last section, closely linked to the feminisation of poverty is the changing nature of women's work. Studies in this field have been dominated by the growing phenomenon of women's participation in non-agricultural employment. In this section we will study the issue of feminisation of work in the context of export-oriented manufacturing in developing countries.

Changes in occupational structure, and in the overall organisation of an individual country's economy are directly determined by the part the country's economy plays in the international arena. The level of industrialisation of a country is one of the major determinants of women's participation in non-agricultural employment. Industrialisation alters patterns of work, it changes the relationship between the workplace and the home, and it reorganises the distribution of employment opportunities within the different sectors of the economy, by creating new forms of employment and destroying others (Moore 1988:97-99).

The rapid increase in the number of women engaged in non-agricultural employment in developing countries has not occurred uniformly in all regions. Also, the increase has not taken place in the same sectors of employment. While some women have gone into the industrial labour force, most have gone into light industrial manufacturing. In some countries, a significant proportion of women have gone into the tertiary sector of employment, where they are employed in personal services and government occupations, as well as in professions.

Let us discuss the case of light industrial manufacturing in detail.

World Market Factories / Export Processing Zones

Global capitalist development has led to the emergence of world-market factories in many parts of the developing world, particularly in Asia and Latin America. These world-market factories produce goods exclusively for export to the rich developed countries of the world. The companies that run these factories may be owned by local capitalists or they may be subsidiaries of large multinationals. In either case, their choice of location is determined by cheap and compliant labour, the advantages of tax concessions and by conveniently inadequate regulations governing health and safety provisions.⁶ World-market factories produce textiles, soft toys, sports equipment and ready-to-wear clothes, electrical goods and components for the electronics industry. In many instances, these factories play a very limited role in the manufacture of the product, which means that they are little more than a stage in a production process controlled by multinationals (Moore 1988:100).

The most interesting aspect of these world-market factories is that the vast majority (over 80 per cent) of the workers who are employed in them are young women between the ages of 13 and 25 years.⁷ These women, of course, are the assembly-

⁶ Many developing countries have demarcated Export Processing Zones (EPZs) for such activity. The idea of EPZ is essentially to provide special incentives to exporters and to allow them to avoid or bypass many of the laws and physical and material constraints, which supposedly inhibit export growth in the rest of the economy. The significance of the Export Processing Zones lies essentially in its physical, social and economic separation from the rest of the country (Ghosh 2002:47).

⁷ Education is thought to have a positive effect on women's participation in the labour force because it improves employment opportunities for women, it encourages greater female mobility in search of employment, it is assumed to increase the aspirations and expectations of women workers, and it is supposed to weaken the barriers of cultural tradition which prevent women from entering the labour market (Moore 1988:103).

line operatives; the administrative and technical posts, which are far fewer in number, are occupied by men. A number of studies report that the preference for employing women by these companies is due to women's apparently innate capacities for the work, their docility, their disinclination to unionise, and the fact that women are cheap because, while men need an income to support a family, women do not (ibid:100-101). This shows that the gender biases inherent in social life are strategically used in employment of women, for the production of cheaper goods.

Impact of Wage Labour on Women's Lives

Many researchers have studied the impacts of such employment on the lives of women. It is interesting to note that these studies do not uniformly talk of the disadvantages and exploitation of women in such forms of employment. Many studies point to the benefits that some women in developing countries have gained from these employment opportunities (for e.g. Swantz 1995; Sen 1996; Joeke 1997). Studies on Caribbean region show that paid work is desirable because it provides women greater independence from men and their families. Among older married women in Puerto Rico, it was found that long-term employment in industrial production leads to a greater sense of self-worth, and greater class consciousness (Safa 1990). In addition, several studies of Latin American countries contend that when women enter the labor force, more equitable patterns of resource sharing and decision-making within the household unit occur (Meyer 2006:88).

Ganguly-Sarcase (2003) also states that globalising processes of market liberalisation and SAPs may not necessarily have a negative impact on women. While new forms of inequality do result from economic reforms, there may be other opportunities for greater independence in certain societies, like the lower middle-class women in West Bengal, India. Other researchers like Omvedt (1997 in Ganguly-Sarcase 2003) have stated that in light of democratisation in gender relations within the Indian family, the effects of structural adjustment on women have not been as much of a burden as its opponents claim. Feldman's study (1992 in ibid.) of women workers in export-processing enclaves in Bangladesh, shows that women from rural middle-strata families were able to increase their employment opportunities, thus challenging the traditional prohibitions on female mobility that were shaped by Bengali culture and a variant of Islamic doctrine.

Salaff (1981) in her study of working women of Hong Kong, shows that in the low-wage economy of Hong Kong, each family depends on the wages of several family members in order to survive, and daughters' wages are increasingly crucial part of family income. While there are several advantages of the working daughter to the family, these women also see their employment as beneficial, as it opens up a number of opportunities for them. Most marriages are no longer arranged and women tend to meet their potential spouses through peer group activities. Women save part of their earnings to buy household goods for their marital homes, and to make contributions to their dowries. Working daughters keep a small and regular amount for themselves from their earnings to use for personal effects and leisure activities. In this sense wage-labour makes leisure time activities with peers financially possible. In recognition of the money they put into the family, working daughters are usually exempt from household tasks such as cooking, child care and laundry. Working daughters are also given more

say in family affairs, particularly in relation to the activities of younger siblings (Moore 1988:100-112).

Apart from improving women's position within home and providing greater independence, there are some other positive outcomes of women's employment. Research indicates that women's access to economic resources in the form of paid employment reduces their dependence on children for social status and economic security, thereby reducing levels of fertility. Relatedly, paid work has been found to positively influence women's own health as well as that of their children (Meyer 2006:88).⁸

However, there are several scholars who adhere to the 'female marginalisation' hypothesis. These researchers contend that the studies discussed above are overly optimistic in regard to women's gains from employment. In today's world while information and communication technology has become a potent force for transforming social, economic, and political life in the globalised world, the gendered division of labor is already emerging. A large number of women tend to be concentrated in the end-user, lower skilled jobs and comprise a very small number among managerial, maintenance, and design personnel (Pande, 2006: 7). According to Papps (1992), development has led to the displacement of women from traditional subsistence activities and restricted employment opportunities. Moreover, in many cultures, deeply held social traditions (such as housework as women's duty) have not changed as a result of women becoming breadwinners in the household. For those women who have found employment in the modern sector, they often face continuing gender exploitation in the form of hazardous working conditions, marginalisation into low paying jobs, barriers to promotion, and unequal pay (Meyer 2006: 89). This is also reflected in the examples that we discussed in the section on female-headed households.

Both these kinds of studies illustrate the multi-faceted process of economic globalisation. While women may experience increased independence and power within the household when they enter the labour force, the conditions under which they gain employment and how they participate in the economy are crucial determinants of whether or not they improve their economic and social status (ibid).

2.3 GENDER INCLUSIVE GLOBALISATION

With an understanding of the gender-differentiated impacts of globalisation, we now come to the issue of gender-inclusive globalisation. Ever since the concerns of negative impacts of globalisation processes have been raised by social scientists and feminist researchers, there have been discussions and efforts in the direction of making globalisation policies and processes gender-inclusive. Let us understand what this means.

As we know, globalisation is deemed beneficial to a country because it is supposed to lead to economic growth, resulting from a better allocation of resources in the world economy, exchange of knowledge, transfer of technologies and a

⁸ Miles and Brewster (1998 in Meyer 2006:88) find that in the Philippines, female wage workers in white-collar jobs and self-employment are significantly more likely than those not employed to have obtained prenatal care and substantially more likely to have adopted a contraceptive method in the year following childbirth.

consequent increase in productivity, as well as the development of human and physical capital. With the expansion of domestic production, income opportunities as a whole generally increase, benefitting a large number of people (UN 2008). However, as we have seen in the last section, within the context of globalisation, women can be the winners or losers. Their multiple responsibilities and gender-related constraints, such as a lack of access to productive inputs and resources, can mean that they are not able to seize the opportunities provided by trade expansion to the same degree as men. Moreover, the opportunities provided to men may have negative consequences for women and they may even lose their livelihoods as a result of import competition. In order to promote a mutually supportive (high growth, low gender inequality) scenario, it is well-understood now that women's multiple roles, responsibilities and limitations need to be taken into account in globalisation policies and programmes (UN 2008).

The growing understanding on this issue has led to the emergence of the concept of *gender mainstreaming*. In July 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defined the concept of gender mainstreaming as “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.”⁹

Thus, gender mainstreaming is not only about adding a woman's component into an existing activity. Gender sensitivity must be integral to all planning and implementation processes.¹⁰ Some of the ways for ensuring gender mainstreaming include the gender mainstreaming plan of sectoral policies; targeted interventions by the state to reduce gender inequalities, equal participation of women (especially at decision-making levels of sectoral policies), and monitoring by women's organisations (UN 2008).

Let us take the case of gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies. In developing countries, every sector needs policies, which would increase employment opportunities for women in the unorganised sector because majority of poor unskilled women can primarily be occupied in this sector. Jhabvala and Sinha (2002) mentions that in India, forestry is a sector where women's employment can be increased manifold. They suggest that reforestation programmes of nursery growing, plantations and tending of plants, as also collection, processing and sale of minor forest produce, can be handed over to women's groups. One calculation has shown that if nursery growing for the forest department in Gujarat (west India) could be done through women's groups, it would increase employment among one lakh women, for six months.

In the health sector, policies which would link informal health providers, especially midwives, with the formal health system, would increase both employment and earnings of the health providers. Increasing micro-finance schemes would increase employment opportunities through livelihood

⁹ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/gender/newsite2002/about/defin.htm> accessed on 25.2.12

¹⁰ Ibid.

development. Direct access to markets would increase employment opportunities as well as earnings. Training and skill development would also enhance productivity, earnings, and opportunities (Jhabvala and Sinha 2002:2042).

Another important way of gender mainstreaming is gender-budgeting. Since the mid-1980s, a variety of gender-budget initiatives have been undertaken with the purpose of rendering public budgets gender-equitable. It has been seen that in public spending and methods of raising revenue, there are inherent gender biases, and many of these biases appear to be commonly exacerbated by market liberalisation policies (Ça atay and Ertürk 2004:16). The budget is an important tool in the hands of state for affirmative action for improvement of gender relations through reduction of gender gap in the development process. It can help to reduce economic inequalities, between men and women as well as between the rich and the poor. As we have discussed previously, reductions in social programmes (such as health and education), due to structural adjustment policies, have been disproportionately harmful for women and girls. Since social programmes have a direct bearing on human capabilities, women have become more vulnerable due to these reductions. Gender-budget initiatives can ensure public provisioning of social programmes, and potentially reduce women's vulnerabilities. A positive example from Indonesia in this direction is that, during the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s, which caused loss of employment among women in both formal and informal sectors, efforts were made in Indonesia to keep poor children, especially girl children, in school through scholarships, half of which were allocated to girls (ibid:18).

Women's participation, at the level of decision-making, planning and implementation of development programmes, is also central to ensuring gender mainstreaming. This involves seeking out grassroots women's organisation and NGOs – from small groups of producers and networks of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, to gender activists and academics concerned with trade and development. Consultation and inclusion of this segment of civil society as key stakeholders is a necessary step towards ensuring the effective participation of women (UN 2008).

2.4 SUMMARY

In this unit on Globalisation and Gender, you have seen the complex relationship between gender inequalities and the economic liberalisation policies that underpin globalisation processes. On the one hand, globalisation has provided numerous jobs for people in developing countries, led to improved standards of living due to greater access to products and services at lower prices, and enhanced transfer of technology for human benefit. On the other hand benefits of globalisation have not been uniformly distributed, leading to the widening of gap between the rich and the poor. In many cases, the condition of unskilled and asset-poor people has worsened due to the impact of globalisation. Women have also been both positively and negatively impacted. In some societies, existing gender biases in patriarchal societies have been aggravated, whereas in others, women have been able to challenge the traditional social norms due to improved employment opportunities. In any cases, however, female marginalisation as a result of globalisation cannot be denied. Not only has globalisation led to an increased incidence of poverty among women, it has also made them more vulnerable due

to declining state support programme and greater informalisation of female employment.

The only way to minimise the negative impacts of globalisation is to make the process of development planning and implementation, both at national and international level, more gender sensitive. Many developing countries and governments may lack the resources and mechanisms to protect those who have lost livelihoods in the context of globalisation. However, gender mainstreaming in the spheres of policy-making can be undertaken meaningfully. There is a shift in the current policy stance towards people-centred and gender-wise policies. Gender mainstreaming is now an important agenda in all development initiatives at international and national levels. Concerted efforts in this direction will lead to equitable and just development.

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Sample Questions

- 1) What do you understand by feminisation of poverty? Explain in relation to female-headed households.
- 2) Briefly discuss the processes of globalisation and some of its positive and negative impacts.
- 3) Discuss the impact of wage labour on women's lives.
- 4) What do you understand by gender mainstreaming? Why is it important?



UNIT 3 MASS MEDIA AND GENDER

Contents

- 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Understanding Mass Media
 - 3.3 Locating the Linkages between Mass Media and Gender
 - 3.4 Gender Stereotypes
 - 3.5 Anthropology of Media
 - 3.6 A Feminist Critique of Mass Media
 - 3.7 Summary
- References
Suggested Reading
Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After reading this unit, you will be able to understand:

- the interfaces between culture and mass media in terms of (re)producing certain notions on gender and shaping gender relations in contemporary societies;
- a basic understanding of mass media with its definitions, characteristics, meaning and scope;
- key issues like; what makes the study of mass media relevant to students and teachers of anthropology;
- the linkages between the concept of gender and mass media;
- the cultural implications of gender stereotyping in the mass media texts of our time;
- how “the audience” is constructed and look into the possible ways in which we can interpret the content and meaning of media representations; and
- finally a feminist critique on the production and representation of gendered images in mass media.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As we live in a world that is “media saturated”, it is apt to say that no one can escape the influence of mass media. Media exercise enormous influence and power in unprecedented ways in our everyday lives. People are exposed to the multiple forms and contents of the media as most of them spend a considerable amount of time in watching television, films and videos or reading newspapers, magazines or listening to music and surfing the Net. And by doing so, most people actively take part in constructing a media culture or cultures, since human capacities to speak, think, form relationships with others and the sense of creating ones own identity are now largely shaped by the media. Marshal McLuhan claims

that the media made the world into a “global village”. Now we are familiar with a range of countries, regions and cultures and the issues and lived experiences of the people of these cultural landscapes (Knightley 1975). The mass media—particularly the visual media and television—has become “the cultural epicenter” of our world (Castells 1996).

The terms “mediation and “media” derive from the Latin “*medius*”e “middle”—assumes two or more poles of engagement. The following discussion will explore the different dimensions of such mediations as part of mass communication, media production and consumption and will underline the crucial linkages with the notions on gender.

3.3 UNDERSTANDING MASS MEDIA

The idea of “the mass” can be understood as a larger public in a very general way. Raymond Williams argued that there were no masses, only ways of seeing people as masses (Williams 1964). In this sense the terms such as “mass society” and ‘mass public” can be artificial constructions that serves the purpose of undifferentiating and homogenising people into a singular category called “the masses”. This notion of homogeneity became more compelling in the early part of the twentieth century with the growth of the mass production and the mass media. This has created a large group of people who consumed almost the same products such as films, music and other common consumer goods. The notion of mass culture became a coiner to these economic and social events of simultaneous consumption of cultural and economic goods.

A medium is a means for communication such as print, radio or television. In this wider sense, mass media are defined as large scale organisations which use one or more of those technologies to communicate with large numbers of people. Historically speaking, the period between 1860 and 1930 was crucial in the formative moment and growth of mass media with the innovations in electronic technology and in chemical industry. The introduction and development of photography, cinema, cable telegraphy, wireless telegraphy, phonograph, radio and television made the mass media industry a powerful cultural entity through which a range of cultural meanings were produced and exchanged.

As mass media rules the modern social life and cultures, there needs to generate an intense academic interest among those who are trying to study culture. Early scholars on media like Paul Lazarsfeld and others seemed to show that media effects are direct and powerful. But most recent research revealed that mass communication is mediated in complex ways and its effects on the audience depend on factors such as class, gender, social context, race, emotional state of individuals and the time of experience among the many more culturally related issues. In short, the relationship between mass media and society is a complex one.

Television, videos, films, radio, newspapers, magazines, comics are all cultural products. Cultural products are different from mundane and material products in the sense they serve as vehicles of meanings, values and ideas and also work as a form of communication. But cultural products like industrial products also need consumers. So there is a constant thirst for novelty in the field of cultural production as mass media need a large number of consumers. Mass media thus

constantly work towards innovation in terms of what is produced, how it is produced and what do these products mean to people.

Mediation refers to the act of bringing together two parties (with the intervention of a third party) by the provision of some form of link in order to convey a message or to provide agreement or reconciliation. A process involved in the channeling of social knowledge and cultural values through an institutional agency to an audience (O’Sullivan et al 1994). In this sense mediation is more than a third party intervention, rather its form and nature of intervention and how does it shape the ways of communication becomes key concerns. In what ways newspapers, radio and television produce common ways of knowing the world? Once the processes and technologies of mediation are subjected to analysis, the ideologies of the media can be exposed.

Studies on mass media, especially on television as the most pervasive medium, has enormously expanded in the second half of the twentieth century (McQuail 1994). There are four major distinct areas that can be observed in studying media and they are:

- 1) Media content studies, concerned with the cultural character of media output. This can include the process of stereotyping, biased contents that can promote violence or anti-social behaviour and such effects especially on children.
- 2) The question of ownership and control; especially on the increasing concentration of media production into a few numbers of large corporations and the commercialisation of programming.
- 3) Ideological impact of mass media in promoting a total pattern of life and culture.
- 4) The media practice of agenda setting, distortion and reduction of information.

While connecting media universe with its social and cultural context, the concerns over the issues of democracy, access, social class and gender representations and the emergence of a new public sphere need to be centered for discussion. In order to understand the social make-up of the media text and the media markets, certain key questions can be raised such as: who owns the media? Whose news gets broadcasted? Who all get access? Who are the people often unable to express their voices in the new means of representation? In what ways particular people and cultures are represented?

3.3 LOCATING THE LINKAGES BETWEEN MASS MEDIA AND GENDER

Why Study Media and Gender? In what ways these two are related?

The media becomes significant in its power to represent ‘socially acceptable’ ways of being or relating to others and its potential to negotiate and produce public recognition, honour and status to groups of people is immense. Cynthia Carter and Linda Steiner note that in the 1860s, feminists in the UK and USA who were arguing for more progressive and egalitarian definitions of womanhood complained bitterly that the newspapers and magazines of the day either ridiculed or ignored women’s lived experiences.

It was during the ‘second wave’ of the women’s movement in the 1960s that systematic research into media images of women flourished. Almost immediately, feminist scholars and activists started examining how women were being portrayed in a wide array of media texts- including cinema, videos, prime-time television dramas, newspapers, pornography, magazines, popular music, advertising and soap operas. The objective was to problematise the media enculturation through anti-women and sexist content that made hierarchical and binary sex-role stereotypes into ‘natural’ and ‘normal’.

Critical forms of feminist scholarship in the 1970s took a critical turn by examining the ways in which media representations supported the interests of the twin systems: patriarchy and capitalism. A critical and productive concept informing some of this research was that of ideology and hegemony. According to Antonio Gramsci (1971), the notion of hegemony presents an explanation of how and why ‘dominant’ classes in society have to constantly renegotiate their powerful positions in relations to the ‘subordinated’ classes. To maintain control and power, these élites have to rule by winning public consent, rather than maintaining their control through coercion or repression. When the hegemonic and ideological ways of being of the powerful are naturalised and made to seem ‘normal’, they are presented to everyone as if no other explanations are possible, thus producing the larger “common sense”.

As Carter and Steiner rightly note “the media are instrumental in the processes of gaining public consent. Media texts never simply mirror or reflect ‘reality’, but instead construct hegemonic definitions of what should be accepted as ‘reality’ (Carter and Steiner 2004). The contents and representations in the media appear to be inevitable, ‘real’ and commonsensical. Thus, media images align with the interests of powerful groups in society. Feminists have redeployed the notion of hegemony in order to argue that most women cannot see how patriarchal values are culturally translated to appear as ‘non-ideological’, ‘objective’, ‘natural’ and ‘non-gendered’.

As we have discussed previously, though sex and gender are not synonymous, they are closely related. Conventionally, the term “sex” has long been used to refer to the biological differences (male and female) while the term “gender” is used to refer to the socially and culturally acquired behaviours and roles (feminine and masculine). Recent debates on sexuality and identity have re-defined sex and gender as existing along a continuum rather than in terms of dichotomous polar opposites as male/female or masculine/feminine (Butler 1990).

As sex and gender get re-defined in different ways according to historical, political and socio-cultural contexts, such productions, reproductions and counter-productions of ideas on those concepts are placed in the media texts for reception. Media act as powerful agents of constructing and representing gender. Both print and visual media, television in particular, are arenas for constructing stable notions of gender through an act of stereotyping. Though the notions of masculinity and femininity vary in different cultural contexts, the media images on these concepts tend to homogenise them in their representative modes and meanings.

Margaret Mead, drawing from her ethnographic studies in Samoa (1928) and New Guinea (1930), has explained that what is understood as masculinity and femininity varies across cultures. In other words, not only do different societies

identify a certain set of characteristics as feminine and another set as masculine, but also, these characteristics are not the same across different cultures. Thus, feminists have empirically demonstrated that there is no essential co-relation between the biology of men and women and the features and behaviours that are thought to be masculine and feminine. In fact the enculturation process has a greater impact on molding children to appropriate such gender-specific forms of behaviour, action, clothing and so on. Socialisation often works as subtle, hidden and at the level of ideology. Enculturation designs bravery, aggression and confidence as “masculine”, and modesty, sensitivity and shyness as “feminine” and the value that society attributes to them, are produced by a range of institutions; and media performs a key role in socialising boys and girls differently along the lines of such norms and values.

Women’s role in the media industry and their level of participation is one of the major areas of concern. Several studies find the inferior positions and low ranked jobs that women are assigned within the domain of media industry worldwide. Ann Ross Muir (1988) argues that if women are confined to the lower-paid and lower-status positions within the media industry, then there are fewer possibilities for them to influence the content and representation and work against the stereotyping of women. She adds that most television content exhibit a masculine point of view since men dominate and control the industry (Muir 1988).

Drawing from the industrial relationships in media, Stott and Steiner observe that although the working conditions for women journalists has considerably improved in the last few decades, historically women have been desperately aware that majority of their male colleagues doubted their capability to perform ‘serious’ journalism merely because they were women. Some even believed that any woman journalist who became successful did so basically through her sexual availability (Carter and Steiner 2004). This biased view still prevails among many reporters and editors and producers in the media industry across the world.

If we look at the participation of women in television industry, we can see most of the the television industries worldwide are dominated by men (UNESCO 1987). It can be a reflection of gender relations in other streams of life in which women are mostly confined to home. This dominant cultural pattern had a significant impact on the gender configuration in the television industry as predominantly men centered. In the early years of television, there were very few women occupying prestigious position of higher authority and power. The recent decades witnessed certain changes in bringing more awareness towards gender equality in the mass media industries. Television now provides a range of opportunities for women. However, the crucial question remains on the production of gender sensitive content of the media texts. Is there any major shift in the gender stereotyping in the content of television? It may be premature to understand gender equality in the domain of mass media parallel with the increase in women’s participation as media professionals. The relationship between patterns of employment within television organisations and televisual representations are differently located in terms of explaining gender equality. We then need to raise a crucial question; if the presence of more number of women does not correspond with any major shift in organising the content of programme, then what goes wrong? Statistics reveal that in most of the mass media industries across the globe, women are not able to occupy major decision making positions in comparison with men.

Van Zoonen's work on feminism and journalism (1989) shows a clear mismatch between institutional norms and individual intentions in the production of media content. Women journalist who espoused feminist ethics found that although such ideas were included in their training, it seems difficult to apply those ideas in an institutional setting. The organisational socialisation puts tremendous pressures to get back to conventional ideas on gender and as a result of such continuous imposition; women tend to perceive these patterns as 'normal' and thus taken for granted.

Women in Media Industry

In Britain, the 1975 enquiry into equal opportunities carried out by the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians within the industry showed that the position of women had not improved but had deteriorated since the 1950s, when women represented 18 percent of the workforce in Television. By 1975, the figure decreased to 15 percent, with women concentrated in areas such as costume, make-up and production secretary, with very few in technical production roles. In 1986, figures by ITCA (Independent Television Companies Association) found out that out of 306 cameramen (*sic*) only 12 were women; of 269 sound technicians, 8 were women and of 1,395 engineers, 19 were women (Muir 1988). Monica Simms' survey of the BBC in 1985, revealed similar findings. Looking at the BBC top grades, she found that 169 were men while only 6 were women. The BBC today has vastly improved its equal opportunities policy, but even so very few women make it to the top.

Source: Casey et al. 2004. *Key Concepts in Television Studies*. London and New York: Routledge.

3.4 GENDER STEREOTYPES

In this section, we will begin with the concept of representation in order to get into the idea of stereotyping. Every human communication contains "signs". A sign can be identified with three basic characteristics. Firstly, a sign has a concrete form. Secondly a sign refers to something other than itself. In other words, anything that tells us about something other than itself is a sign. Thirdly, a sign can be recognised by most people in a society. The physical form (verbal or figural image) of the sign can be called "signifier". The mental association of the sign or what it refers to, can be known as "signified". The process, and products, that give particular meanings to a sign is called representation. The concept of representation is central to the study of media and culture. By understanding the modes and meanings of representation, we can explore the questions of power and ideology. As a term that is frequently used in media studies "representation" or "to represent" can mean the ways of depicting or presenting something for an audience to read or consume. Since an unmediated "real world" cannot be accessible, re-presentation makes mediation possible to reach the audience with different versions of the world. So what we see in television, hear in the radio or read in the newspaper will be a construction, involving decisions about the selection of the content, the placement of the camera, editing the material and so on.

Another way of looking at the concept of representation is the ways in which media images lead us to make sense of cultural symbols. This can further lead to an understanding of how different social groups are often depicted in media

texts and how does stereotyping of certain cultural groups and people take place. Media representations thus can be understood as a reflection of reality or maybe a distortion of something “real” or “true”. This implicates our interest to look at how far media images are true to that reality or how far the media distort the reality in order to reproduce certain ideologies. In the various ways of re-presenting the “real”, media texts often get into a consistent form of construction, which makes certain social groups into a fixation; what we call the process of stereotyping. For instance, women are often depicted or seen mainly in limited range of roles such as housewives, girlfriends or secretaries, and in the case of some ethnic minorities, the representation can be predominantly in the roles of terrorists, criminals or servants (in the case of Muslims and Black people). Some scholars argue that the immediate and sharply contrasted reversal of stereotypes as part of media ethics will not serve the purpose. This is because of the complex nature of relationship between representation and reality. One cannot easily recognise what is real and what is representation. So we need to look at various instances of stereotypical representations in order to uncover the issue “who represent whom?” Richard Dyer talks about the importance of looking at the concept of “pleasure” in this regard (Dyer 1985). Who is getting pleasure out of experiencing a media text? Or what kind of pleasure a media text can offer by particular ways of representation and who are the target audience to those representations? Do audience members all get pleasure from media content in the same way? Given the social differences in terms of race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientations, it is unlikely that all viewers, readers and listeners would be equally at ease with the modes of representation. Representations are produced and circulated in a social context of meanings in relation with power and ideology. This commonsense of meanings is governed by power which projects certain meanings as positive and denigrates some others.

Stuart Hall invites a question that we need to ask beyond the old notion—that representations are reflections or distortions of something real—and to center the issue whether events in the world really do have a single and essential fixed meaning that is “true” against which distortion could be measured (Hall 1997). In other words, reality has no fixed meaning until it has been represented and particular representation and their meaning are subject to change over space and time. In Hall’s understanding, what we call ‘reality’ does not exist outside of the process of representation (Hall 1997).

Similarly, the concept of sign took a significant turn in Baudrillard’s writing. He has argued that while living with postmodernity, people largely experience and live in a mass-media-produced blizzard of signs. People struggle to distinguish and separate reality from representation with the infinity of signs in the visual and new media texts that form a ‘hyper-reality’.

Stereotypes are some sort of a standard fixation of characteristics attributed to persons, groups and cultures. The term derived from the Greek term “stereos” means solid and “typos” means mark. Walter Lippmann, an American journalist of the early twentieth century developed the concept in his book “public opinion” (Lippmann 1922). Lippmann finds two crucial aspects of stereotypes. Firstly, stereotypes tend to be resistant to change; second, they generally carry a pejorative and narrow range of meanings (O’Sullivan et al 1994). Stereotypes are theoretically identified as inaccurate and simplistic generalisations about individuals or groups or particular cultures. However, most mass media texts

continue to make stereotypical representations. Stereotypes and stereotyping are products and processes that are linked with power and ideologies. Tessa Perkins (1979) observes that stereotypes can often represent certain real social relations and they may be partial, but not necessarily false. So the relationship between stereotypes and social reality is a complex one. For instance, the depiction of women in inferior roles need not necessarily read as a text that tends to reproduce women's inferior status in the society. On the contrary many cultural commentators have argued that media texts construct and perpetuate stereotypes, and there is evidence to support this view.

Who produces stereotypes about whom? This leads to a discussion on the question of representing the other. Who is the other? The representative entity that is situated ones own self (outside ones own gender, race, class, religious and ethnic identities) is "the other". In most instances the construction of the other turns out to be the construction of "the inferior other" by the dominant individuals and groups in the society. How othering is produced in media texts in the form of stereotyping? What is the relationship between media and the existence of stereotypes? The role of the media in agenda setting, gate-keeping and ownership continue to be crucial in the persistence or relegation of stereotypes.

In Indian cinema industries, ranging from Bollywood to all south Indian industries, there is a widespread pattern of stereotyping the image of the female protagonist. There is a notion of homogenising the physical appearance and mental attitudes of women who perform the lead role in Indian cinema. Women were seen as readers of 'inferior literature, subjective, emotional and passive, while men emerge as writers of genuine authentic literature - objective, and in control of their aesthetic means'.

Grose observes the *Sun* Newspaper's visible culture of sex that invaded every part of the paper, including the pages it has from time to time made exclusively for women. In the paper's own version of its history: "The *Sun* called its women's pages filled them with sex. They were produced by women for women. But they were subtitled "The pages for women that men can't resist", acknowledging that there are plenty of topics that fascinate both men and women, like sex" (Carter and Steiner 2004).

Grose's observation can be located within the pages of many magazines that are written by women for women. It shows how women themselves inadvertently collude in the construction of stereotypes. What messages are such magazines trying to send to their readers? Women's magazines tend to fall into mainly two categories: firstly those concerned with home making and child care. The second type concerned with providing important tips to marketing themselves to catch a mate. This division itself makes both categories into a problematic dualism in which the first category of women represent the characters which are homely, pure, chaste, maternal and modest. On the other hand the second category of women stands for the features of amoral, sexual, sinful and danger. These dualism can be observed in most of the Indian films in which there is a presence of two female protagonists—one traditional "Indian woman" who represents the first category (who often becomes triumphant in the competition to win the male protagonist's heart) and the modern/western woman who represent the second category, a symbol of danger that threatens the "Indian Culture".

Heather Gilmour, in her study on computer games, argues that most computer software now being developed for girls helps reproduce hierarchical gender difference between boys and girls rather than challenging the power structures. She observes that in most computer games, ‘girls continue to be essentialised as emotional, highly social, modest and soft-spoken while males are defined as competitive and technologically inclined’ (Gilmour, 1994).

Such assumptions about gender distinctions are not based on any essential differences between boys and girls, but instead illustrate the ‘ideologies and assumptions of researchers and developers’. Having surveyed 180 students (90 boys and 90 girls) about their genre preferences, Gilmour found that the differences between boy and girl gamers are primarily matters of ‘cultural gendering of leisure and play’, rather than inherent biological differences. While game software developers address girls as a homogeneous, gendered group, girls maintain certain heterogeneity of game preference and use. Gilmour urges on computing experts to go beyond conventional notions of femininity as a monolithic category that inevitably work to restrict feminine behaviour, pleasure and self-definition (Gilmour, 2004).

Gender and Game Shows

Looking at the male dominance in the participation and ownership in the mass media industry, Chaudhuri explains the relationship between the male supremacy in the industry and the masculine nature of representation. Examining game shows like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* She argues that women are far less likely to apply to be contestants, are less likely to be chosen and are less likely to win large prizes. This observation corresponds with the fact that most programs of this kind are produced, presented and compiled by men. Presumably, most questions asked in such contests have a male orientation. Women contestants may be treated differently from men. So we can argue that even though there is an increase in the employment level and participation of women in the media industry, the larger culture of the industry continued to be masculinist and this eventually make an impact on the mode of representation and shaping the content overwhelmingly masculine in nature.

Source: Chaudhuri, A, 1999. *Who Wants to be a Quiz Show Contestant?* Guardian, 29 November.

3.5 ANTHROPOLOGY OF MEDIA

Anthropology’s role as the self appointed interpreter and representative of the cultural “others” has been dwindled and it was replaced by the global media agencies in the recent decades. The ethnographic accounts that provided knowledge about different non-Western cultures and communities around the world give away a major share of such production to the mass media industry. Anthropologists have been displaced to a certain extend by the big media like CNN, BBC, Hollywood and other global media in the making of ethnography and (re)presenting the “unfamiliar” cultures. In a technology-mediated era, an anthropological subject like marriage has its location more in the internet in terms of arranging negotiations. Countless marriage alliances are channeled through the space of the web. Anthropology in its desire to understand cultures,

thus cannot escape the media as it is one of the significant aspects of contemporary social life.

Against this backdrop, anthropology finds its own analytical space to understand these developments through an emergent subfield known as Anthropology of Media. Among other things, Anthropology of Media engages the readers in an anthropological critique of how mass media are employed to construct and represent cultures (Askew and Wilk 2002). The strength of anthropology lies in its concern with people and their lived experiences. Anthropology of Media is concerned with certain key questions; firstly what meanings do people construct out of mass mediated images and sounds? How do they negotiate embedded ideologies and power politics? What new forms of social interactions have media technologies enabled and how are existing social formations transformed? How are conceptions of space and time altered through the influence of the media? Media anthropology thus comprises ethnographically informed, historically grounded and context sensitive analysis of the ways in which people use and make sense of media (Askew and Wilk, 2002).

As interpretive and symbolic anthropology developed as significant subfields in anthropological inquiry in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the question of the production of meaning became central to anthropological concern. Clifford Geertz was one of the champions of this school of thought. Geertz argued that culture is a system of symbols in which meanings are produced and exchanged in multiple ways. The most influential aspect of Geertz's work has been his emphasis on the importance of the symbolic — of systems of meaning — as it relates to culture, cultural change, and the study of culture. According to Geertz, anthropological analysis of culture has to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. Crucially, Geertz compares the methods of an anthropologist analysing culture to those of a literary critic analysing a text; in fact this methodological turn suggest the way of looking at culture as understanding a mediated text (Geertz 1973). This methodological position in ethnography has brought anthropology and media studies in a common analytical ground.

In the 1970s, the focus on the power of the media texts to shape cultural values, behaviour and attitude was subsequently taken up by British cultural studies scholars like Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, David Morley, John Fiske, Ien Ang and so on. Earlier, scholars like Powdermaker, Adorno and others concentrated on the idea of production of the media text in relation with power and ideology. The turn towards cultural studies opened up a window to explore media reception in more nuanced ways. Cultural studies scholars questioned and challenged the assumption of unambiguous, unilineal and single dimensional transmission of media messages directly from producers to consumers. The question of power and control remained central to their analysis. However, power no longer was understood as monopolised entirely or exclusively by media producers. Informed by the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Michael Foucault, Jaques Derrida and others, cultural studies scholars attributed some measure of power to the acts of viewing and listening, the power of the audience to manipulate the text. They reconceptualised the audience members into active subjects rather than automate regulators. This can be seen as an extension of the reader-centered approach adopted in literary criticism. Media audience members were thus elevated to a level above that of passive receptacle. Rather than mere consumers

of the media texts, audiences were recognised as active participants in the production of meaning. However, Stuart Hall and Laura Mulvey refer to the media producers' arena of strategies in constructing the content when it concerns with identities like ethnicity, gender, race and class. With the application of a wide range of strategies such as stereotyping, naturalising, reductionism, binary opposition, erasure, fantasy, fetishism and so on, that the production predisposes and guides the audience to a reading that favour existing power structures (Hall 1981, Mulvey 1989).

Getting back to the domain of anthropological inquiry, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson championed the use of camera (both still and moving) in their study on the Balinese culture and personality in the 1930s. Cultural documentation in the visual form became a key ethnographic practice. Anthropology in its positivist orientation claimed to be a "value-free science" which remained a theoretical illusion. This is partly because of the unavoidable selection the anthropologist has to make among a variety of cultural events. So in a way, looking back or revisiting the early ethnographic representation, one has to look at the text exactly like a mediated content what Geertz has rightly suggested.

However, understanding mass media from a feminist perspective within the discipline of anthropology has a very recent birth. In fact, gender was not a major concern in classical anthropological writings. The early ethnographies were revisited by feminist scholars and problematised the texts for being highly male oriented. Feminist anthropologists like Lila Abu-Lughod, Henrietta Moore, Sherry Otner and others brought to the center the questions of gender inequality, problems of ethnographic representation, male dominance and the nature-culture dichotomy that made women the cultural inferior, as certain fundamental problems within the discipline (Otner 1974, Abu-Lughod 1986, Moore 1988).

There emerged a wide range of attempts to read the media in an ethnographic sense in the Western contexts. Studies on the Hollywood, Disneyland, Western television, popular music and internet have been flourished in academic circles in those parts of the world. However, the Indian academia is still in an early phase of producing such anthropological insights. Though scholars of journalism, mass communication, cultural studies and film studies have made certain significant contributions to media studies in India, the contribution of anthropologists is still minimal.

To mention a few notable contributions, media's perception and presentation of women's issues were discussed by Ammu Joseph and Kalpana Sharma in their edited volume "Whose News?" In this work, certain crucial issues related to Indian women between 1979 and 1988 have been examined such as dowry-related death; rape; the right to maintenance of Muslim divorcees; the re-emergence of the practice of Sati; and sex determination tests (Joseph and Sharma 1994). Sonai Bathla made a study on the media concerns on women's political participation that figured in the news media in India during the Lok Sabha election reviews in the late 1990s (Bathla 2008). There is tremendous focus on the study of cinema in India in recent years. Sociology, film studies and cultural studies made significant contributions in the areas of television, cassette culture and cinema. Peter Manuel, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Madhava Prasad, Ravi Vasudevan, Christopher Pinney, Arvind Rajgopal, Patricia Uberoi, Jenny Rowena, Ashis Nandy, Poornima Mankekar and others are some of the key figures who have

worked on audio visual cultures, texts and representation in India. Robin Jeffrey's work on the Indian newspapers throws light on the space of print culture and its cultural dynamics (Jeffrey 2010). Since there is a significant move towards interdisciplinary perspective in anthropological research in India, the area of media analysis has been gaining momentum in the last few years.

3.6 A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF MASS MEDIA

Feminist critiques on the question of representation attempt to understand how television, newspapers and other media texts stereotype, under-represent and misrepresent women's experiences. The major concern was to problematise the male dominated domain of media that needs to be subject to equal opportunities for women.

There is little doubt that feminism has been one of the most influential theoretical turn in academics, particularly on the debates on culture, for the past three to four decades. Feminism also overwhelmingly made significant influence in the area of media studies, demanding for social change and continued to resisting against the male dominated participation and representation in the media industry. As a political and academic movement that consistently threatening the status quo, feminism, to some extent (especially in male receptions), has become a "dirty" word and its ideas subject to a backlash. This is partly because of the misrepresentation of feminist ideas in the media. Moreover, in recent times, feminism has become fragmented (as it could not represent the differences within women in terms of caste, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality) and has found itself under new criticisms and some of them perceived as "from within" (Casey et al 2004).

As a political, social and academic movement and a theoretical perspective, feminism foregrounds gender as a significant and important factor of our cultural identity. Gender is regarded as a powerful mechanism that structures our material and social worlds. At particular historical junctures, there were different streams of feminist thought emerged with their own unique stand points such as Marxist, Liberal, Radical, black and dalit feminisms. However, all of them, at different levels, argued that women as a social group have been treated in a range of unfavorable ways by men as a social group in economic, political, educational and social institutions. It is important to note that feminism has seen patriarchy as not just a simple and straightforward question of individual men being oppressive or discriminatory to individual women. Feminism identifies patriarchy as embedded in our culture and social institutions and this might have an impact on individual behaviour and attitudes of men towards women. Media as a powerful institution in constructing and representing gender relations has also come under feminist scrutiny in terms of stereotyping women's lives in the media texts and women's participation in the industry.

Feminist scholars took serious interest in studying the media in the late 1960s and 70s by focusing on sexual politics, gender roles and relations. Significant works like Kate Millet's "Sexual politics" (1970) and Germaine Geer's "The Female Eunuch"(1971) provided a critique to understand issues beyond conventional forms of patriarchy and realised the new modes and structures through which patriarchy is operated (Casey et al 2004).

While the early concerns of feminist thinking tended to focus on women's relative absence in powerful positions within the media industry, in the 1970s feminist concerns were largely on the narrow range of representation of women and the negative stereotyping of their lives. In the mid 1970s, scholars like Laura Mulvey provided with a new way of thinking about the gaze, concerns with positioning of spectators to experience the film or television through male eyes. This is known as the male gaze thesis (Mulvey 1975). The approach is based on the idea that male gaze sexualises women and turns them into mere sexual objects to be looked at. Here looking is understood to involve desire, control or desire to control. The male gaze is tied up with the issues of power. Recently feminist scholarship began to look at the process of stereotyping in a more critical fashion as it is not a simple and straightforward event. The focus also went into the construction and representation of masculinity and masculine sexuality. The relation and the impact of the second aspect on the content and representation becomes a point of critique. Male camera operators, directors and producers have objectified women's bodies and limited their range of roles in which women appear.

Although gender refers to the concerns of both men and women, majority of critical writings and debates, has, until quite recently been, about women's experience and the representation of women. However, recent studies have attempted to widen the scope of gender and media studies by locating the question of representation of men, discourse of masculinity and masculine sexualities. Men, in most media text, inhabit a wider range of roles, that too in the public domains of occupation in the form of professionals, employers, labourers. They appear also in wide range of age, and also in wide range of body shapes and voice qualities. Many surveys on advertisements and programmes in television suggest that women are shown as domestic beings (as housewives or mothers) or as sexual objects or accessories to men (bodies to sell products or assistants to powerful men). The older women representation generally goes along with the notions of cruelty (in the case of mother-in-laws in Indian soaps) or subjects of fun. Women from ethnic minorities, especially dalit and dark skinned women often fail to appear in the characters of "good" or "ideal" woman, but they are mostly depicted as the "other" and as "bad" and "undesirable". Contrast to this, "normal" femininity is depicted as overwhelmingly young, slim, tall, fair skinned and heterosexually domestic. On the other hand, "normal" masculinity has often seen as less restricted and more often associated with action, power, authority and control.

The traditional association between men and sport, news and current affairs has hardly been shifted. Football commentators and their uniform voice quality has reproduced over the years a peculiar taste towards such a uniform and unique male voice that resist to a different voice whether it is of a man or a woman. The construction of an "ideal" female voice in Indian cinema corresponds to this point. Sanjay Srivastava discusses about the singing voice of Lata Mangeshkar and its representation as the "ideal" feminine voice. Lata's voice, a particular female singing voice – with its specific tonality and modulation – became an expression of gender identity in India—the ideal feminine voice, the most desirable voice of the ideal Indian woman. He argues that Lata's singing voice has instituted a very specific identity for Indian womanhood, one which has almost no precedence in traditional forms of Indian music. One music critic has noted that Lata's style has become "the ultimate measure of sweetness in a woman's voice (Srivastava, 2004). This construction and representation of the

“ideal feminine” erase the possibility of representing other heterogeneous women voices in media texts such as in Indian cinema, television and radio.

Advertisements in newspaper and in visual media have a stronger impact on shaping gender images than books on feminism and scholarly experiments on gender equality. Matlin (1987) explains how the media’s misrepresentation of women in advertisements has created plenty of stereotypical representations of women. She observes that women are often shown in a sexual or vulnerable position in order to sell the product, whether it is an advertisement for shaving cream or alcoholic beverage.

Matlin describes how the medium is an important force in shaping reality it is these stereotyped representations that help to shape women’s opinions of what they should look like. Often girls and women forget that, and become sensitised by advertisements (Carter and Steiner, 2004). We must study advertisements and their surrounding texts together; analysing the concurrent and convergent meanings they construct and circulate about the constitution of gender.

The problem with the “hot” content

Many of us, the internet users, are now caught in the web of Youtube in terms of our experience of video watching. Some scholars argue that the internet spaces, like the social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, personal blogs, and video sharing sites like the Youtube are enabling spaces for marginalised groups by offering emancipatory potentials. The basic assumption behind this argument is that everyone gets a possible space to create his or her own content that can resist and challenge the dominant and hegemonic representations. But when we look at these virtual spaces, most of their fields continue to remain with anti-women, anti-dalit and racist content. For instance, if you type any (celebrity) woman’s name in the Youtube (or any such) search box, the top most leading suggestions/options would be “hot”, “hot videos” ,and “sexy” after those particular woman’s names. But this would not happen when you try with a male name.

In a sense ranging from Arab Spring movement to the Anna Hasare campaign, social network sites like Facebook and Twitter have been a revelation in connecting with people. Recently a group of youngsters, in the name of “change.org” a portal for social change has launched an online campaign for the removal of sexually violent content in those very social networking sites like the Facebook. The group has found that there is a large amount of sexually violent content floating in such virtual spaces to demeaning women (Tejaswi, 2012).

Examining the visual spaces with reference to sexual content and pornography, Robert Jenson explores how the sexual charge is connected to the ideology of male dominance and female submission that is central in contemporary commercial pornography (Jensen, 1994). He argues that whether a pornography user feels guilt and shame or is proud of his use, the result is generally the same: the use of pornography continues to sexualise and objectifies women and reduce them into mere sexual bodies for male pleasure. He further explains with a subjective account on the effects that pornography had on him. Based on his experience, Jenson argues that:

- Pornography is an important means of sex education.
- Pornography constructs women as objects, which encourage men to see women in real life in that same way.
- Pornography creates or reinforces desires for specific acts, most of which focuses on male pleasure and can cause female pain.
- Rather than unlocking sexual creativity, pornography shapes and constrains a person’s sexual imagination with its standardised scripts.
- Race is an important aspect of pornography, reinforcing the view of women of colour as the ‘exotic primitive’.

For Jenson, the concept of authentic sexual desire is problematic; there is no pure, natural sexuality that is not mediated by culture. Here he simply contends that pornography is a force that can shape desire and that we should be concerned with how men may be conditioned to desire sexual acts that are humiliating, degrading and sometimes painful for women (Jenson, 2004).

Sources:

- 1) Tejaswi, A. 2012. “Youths Fight it Out Online”. *Decan Chronicle*, April 19, 17-19.
- 2) Jenson, R. 2004. “Knowing Pornography”. in C. Carter and L. Steiner (eds), *Critical Readings:Media and Gender*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

3.7 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have examined how gender-based social images that are transmitted through media have a powerful impact— though not straightforward and simple—on the larger cultural domain. We began with the basic understanding of the development of the mass media and the features of the media industry and the modes of representation that media perform in different contexts. The crucial linkages between media and the construction of gender were explored. The issues related to the construction and representation of masculinity and femininity in media texts were discussed with relevant examples from both Western and Indian contexts.

The nature of media industry and the occupational division between genders and the related inequalities were foregrounded with a view to understand the crucial question; “who produce the media content, and for whom?” It is evident from the above discussions that contemporary media, especially television is not a monolithic entity. Gender representations are neither simple nor the audience readings of the text are rather complex and multi-dimensional.

In this unit, we have discussed why the field of media and gender is an interesting and relevant field within the discipline of anthropology. The discussion on media and gender from an anthropological perspective thus demonstrates; even though there is a huge difference and change found in the economic and social status among certain sections of women, women as a social and cultural entity are still in a structurally subordinate position to most men. And this cultural equation gets reflected in the construction and representation of gender in the media industry as well as in media texts. Feminist theorisation has clearly had a transformative impact on the fields of anthropology and media studies.

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Sample Questions

- 1) What is mass media? What are major areas of concern in media studies?
- 2) What are the factors that lead to the marginal role of women in the media industry worldwide?
- 3) What is stereotyping? Write a feminist critique on the gender stereotyping in media by citing examples from the Indian context.
- 4) Write a brief history of anthropological investigations in the areas of media and gender.