



# Reinventing Women

Representation of Women in the Media During the Zia Years

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## CONTENTS

Meaning Makers Neelam Hussain	1
Women in the Pakistani Context: An Overview Neelam Hussain	11
Television Drama Neelam Hussain	22
Film Ferida Sher	43
Advertisements Lala Rukh	66
School Texts Nasrene Shah	79
Findings and Alternatives	85

## MEANING MAKERS

It is generally accepted that the media plays a vital role in disseminating information and in forming public opinion. However, given that 'information' exists within the ambit of ideas, this service is never benign – it is closely bound up with the ways in which those who finance or produce the mediatic message see or would like consumers to see the world. Thus, the imperatives and agendas of governments, multinationals or other interested groups play themselves out through a range of mediatic sites such as advertisements, entertainment, education, and news. And though largely unstated, it is through this political dimension of the media that parameters for organising, experiencing and interpreting our lives are 'normalised' and made prescriptive.

This study focuses on the representation of women in the media. Its basis is derived from the above premise. That is, i) the media is a powerful tool for the production and dissemination of ideas and as such plays a critical role in telling the public how to think, behave etc. and ii) it serves the interests of the dominant group/class which, by virtue of its position, exercises economic, political and ideological control over the media. As ours is a traditional patriarchal society that subscribes to the capitalist ethic, Pakistani media operates within a male-supremacist, commercially oriented frame of reference.

Through the deconstruction/decoding of mediatic images, language-use, social and cultural metaphors, dress codes and arrangement of social space, this analysis will critique the ways in which women's representations fit in with the dominant cultural, religious and socio-economic discourses in present-day Pakistan. That is, it will interrogate the system of commonly held beliefs where women are only perceived in their reproductive capacity, and their roles and function in society are seen as being located exclusively within the domestic enclosure of the family unit. The public sphere, which is seen as the domain of men, becomes the arena of all productive activity, and concurrently, the female is designated as the negative category in contrast to the male who is perceived as the norm for positive and 'natural' human behaviour.

The selected time frame, 1985 to 1986, represents the most repressive period of Pakistan's history, especially with regard to women. This was the time when Zia-ul-Haq's military regime, using religion as a tool to legitimise itself, instituted a series of retrogressive and gender-biased laws in the country and used the media unremittingly to propagate a harsh misogynist ethic. Although Zia-ul-Haq's 'accidental' death in 1988 paved the way for a specious democracy and led to certain cosmetic changes in the media, this study mentions them only tangentially. It is essentially a record of the Zia era and its focus is on the

relationship between a particular state ideology, the media and its impact on the lives of Pakistani women.

As for charting new directions, it is hoped that the study will be useful in triggering off discussions on the role and status of women in the different social discourses - as it is only by questioning and challenging dominant cultural and discursive parameters that change can come about within a given social consciousness.

### **Making Meaning - Theory, Technique, Implications**

The mediatic message consists of a complex interplay between the following components: the person or persons who have something to say, the substance of their message, the reason(s) why they want to express a particular point of view, and the person or persons to whom they speak. In turn, the latter receive, interpret and accept or reject the message on the basis of their own particular biases, needs, interests, economic background and other related factors.

In order to satisfy specific requirements, different media techniques have been developed over time. The difference between techniques used for selling a tube of toothpaste or a car and the ways in which information is given in a school text are obvious. What is less obvious is that the advertising agency trying to sell toothpaste and the school text ostensibly providing us with 'objective data' or facts, are both engaged in telling us to look at the world and our lives in a particular way or ways. Similarly, other mediatic forms such as newspapers, films, educational programmes, magazines and television plays are all engaged, in their own way, in the business of interpreting reality for us. They are telling us what to think, what to buy, what to appreciate, what to hate, and so on.

Theoretically the framework of varying techniques can fall into either of two broad categories. These are the Commercial or Market Model and the Mass Manipulative Model.<sup>i</sup> The Commercial Model operates on the principle of 'giving the public what it wants'.<sup>ii</sup> This position is based on the point of view that the public, as consumers, actively selects and is capable of selectively perceiving those aspects or messages of the media that "already fit (the individual or group's) existing positions or preconceptions."<sup>iii</sup> The basic premise of this approach is that people's ideas may be reinforced by the media but are rarely changed by it. The assumption is that attitudes are formed by direct experience and not mediatic messages alone, and that the public responds to and accepts or rejects positions or ideas in accordance with what people themselves have experienced, or believe, or want to believe.

The Mass Manipulative Model relies largely on direct propaganda. It is based on the assumption that the public are 'passive receptacles' for messages that emanate from a monolithic power source, most often the state, which is represented by the ruling class. According to this argument, the media is perceived as a tool to maintain status quo, or to project a viewpoint that falls in with the demands of a given ideological framework and group interests. Subsequently, censorship regimes are critical to the strategy's effectiveness. Given the totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian nature of different regimes in Pakistan since 1957 to the time period this study deals with, the Mass Manipulative strategy has been an integral part of policy-making, not only with regard to television and radio, but also in the field of school and college texts, advertising and films.

Although the relationship between medium, message and the public is not reducible to the mechanical models presented here, these models do provide an entry-point into the mediatic strategies operative in Pakistan.

*Mediatic Tools:* Language, visual images, gestures, tonal inflections, colours and sounds are among the communication tools that are used to impart a given message/ information. None of these are ever value-free. In terms of language for instance, when newspapers report cases of rape, they normally fail to distinguish between 'zina' (adultery) and 'zina bil jabr' which is the term assigned to descriptions of rape. By a single omission, the press falls in with the established myths that 'the woman who gets raped is the woman who asks for it' or, that 'all women enjoy rape', thus transforming the rape victim into a legal offender.<sup>iv</sup>

Further, the effectiveness of a message is also dependent on the kind of weight or emphasis given to grammatical arrangement, syntax, and various differentiated discourses. For example, a television programme whose aim is to encourage women to focus their energies on their domestic role only may draw authority from cultural history by recalling stories of self-abnegating heroines. Or, by valorising the role of the devoted housewife, over and above that of a woman who works outside the home, it may link her family's material success to the mother's sacrificial role. The same message could be given weight by aligning the so-called 'working woman' with negative qualities and the subsequent ruin of the family unit.

That all communication devices operate within given cultures also bears emphasis. They only make sense when they are deployed within a common cultural idiom and socio-historical context, that is, within the grid of a known and recognisable system of signs. Concurrently, as meaning is produced through the specific arrangement of mediatic techniques, received ideas and established truths are, of necessity, more open to manipulation for the production of specifically ideological messages.

For example, in a culture which subscribes to notions of female inferiority and male superiority, a message based on the received definition of women as either victims or as fools, has both emotional resonance as well as serious political repercussions. Thus, in an otherwise supportive article on a woman's protest march against discriminatory laws in February 1986, in Lahore, a 'liberal' and 'sympathetic' journalist for the national daily *The Pakistan Times*, concluded his report with the observation that the women kept on marching despite rain and damage to their makeup. So caught up was the writer in the conventional association of women and 'makeup' that he had failed to notice that the majority of women in the demonstration wore none, or that even if they did, it had nothing to do with the issue at hand. Nor did he seem to be aware that journalists seldom, if ever, comment on how men dress and/ or behave in similar situations.

By ridiculing women through stereotypes, the media reinforces existing prejudices and succeeds in trivialising both women and women's issues. The image of a woman with streaks of makeup running down her face belongs to the realm of the joke and not to the serious world of politics and human rights. Projected as an aberrant figure, her behaviour is deemed to be at odds with and marginal to the important 'working day' world of men. The impact of this kind of projection is grave, as women too shy away from questions and action that might make them a laughing stock amongst family and friends.

At a broader level, latent discourses may be manipulated in order to manufacture the 'sacred', be it religion, or the legitimacy of 'cultural tradition'. Thus political, social and religious narratives were tapped in order to encourage passivity and political inaction since the advent of the first military government in 1957, and during Zia-ul-Haq's tenure there was an unremitting focus on what was depicted as conventional or traditionally acceptable morality. Any shift from the ideological position sanctioned by the state was shown to be subversive, deviationist and/ or irrelevant. Earlier governments had curbed dissent through allegations of treachery and anti-state behaviour; the Zia government focused on religious exclusivity and silenced difference of opinion through state-sponsored bigotry and violence.

As 'Islamisation' became part of official political discourse, the attitudes towards women among both men and women were affected. The incessant reiteration of the slogan 'the woman's place is in the home', and the insistence that this view is integral to our culture and religion, saw an increase in both the verbal and physical molestation of women. The focus on the woman as a symbol of male honour increasingly transformed her body into the space where male vendettas are carried out. This can be illustrated by the Nawabpur incident in 1984, when women were made to strip and walk naked down the streets of the town as a form of revenge taken by one male group against another. Apart from women's groups who demanded strong measures against the criminals, the result of the

sensationalist manner in which the press reported this crime was i) an affirmation of the belief that women are weak and are therefore in constant need of male protection and ii) a spate of similar incidents all over the country.

The motivating impulse behind these two sets of examples reflects the segregationist and gender-biased policy of Zia-ul-Haq and belongs therefore, to the Mass Manipulative ethic. However, in so far as technique is concerned, both the thrust of humour and the elliptical reporting of incidents like the one that took place at Nawabpur (inclusive of underlying funding arrangements for such news), bring them within the purview of the Commercial or Market approach. That is, give the public what it wants as long as it sells - subsequently reinforcing the hierarchies within the 'public' itself. The convergence of intentionality and articulation between two apparently disparate mediatic positions is significant here, as it highlights the complex relationship between the media, language-use, mainstream cultural parameters, state ideology, and consumers.

Socio-political discourses that are said to reflect the desires of a given society, do not do so because they mirror the precise conditions or material needs of that society, but rather because they correspond to the "essentially utopian desires of that majority."<sup>v</sup> For instance, the appeal of a television play that depicts a mother's hard work and self-sacrifice being rewarded by success, does not lie in the fact that in real life hard work and self sacrifice by women or for that matter men always leads to success or even happiness. Nor for that matter is it true that a woman who works outside the home is a negative force. Its appeal lies precisely in the fact that the emotions generated by these themes capture the imagination of the viewers because they are located within and legitimised by traditional discriminatory notions of womanhood and family ties. It presents to the viewing public a world as they *think it should be*, while at the same time enabling them to vicariously participate in a story which is part of the imagined rather than the real world.

It is important to bear in mind though, that consumers' responses are not uniform. The same message can be accepted or rejected in a variety of manners and degrees, depending upon the particular interests and biases of the individual consumer, as well as economic, gendered, ideological and other considerations. For example, the impact of the above message is enhanced in societies, or in communities in Pakistan, where women are stepping out of their traditional roles to give competition to men in the job market. Conversely, it is ignored when the woman's income makes a substantial contribution towards raising the family's standard of living, or when she takes on jobs such as driving the children to school or doing weekly shopping – tasks that reduce the man's work. However, at the working-class level, the idea of the woman remaining in the home does not even arise, as women of this class have always worked. For them the mediatic message might at best operate as a desired state, where the woman does not step out of

the house for work because there is no financial need for her to do so. Thus, although a prescriptive message may be singular in intent, it will be received in accordance with individual and collective terms of references and preferences.

### **Research Framework and Methodology**

Initially part of a wider cross-cultural survey that covered eleven countries in the South Asian and Pacific region, this study focuses on the representation of women in four areas of the media, viz. television drama, films, advertisements and school texts. These fora are taken as being representative of the fundamental bias within the Pakistani symbolic order as far as the images and status of women are concerned.

Newspapers, popular magazines, novels and other literary texts do not feature directly in this study, although reference is made to them to substantiate arguments in the main text. The reason for this exclusion is based, not on an unawareness of the importance of the newspaper etc. as mediatic tools, but on the unavailability, at the time this study was undertaken, of people willing to take on these areas of research.

The underlying premise of this analysis is that though biological difference is important, gender roles are determined mainly by cultural imperatives. That is, virtually all behaviour, including sexual mores, parental care etc. is learned behaviour. Consequently, gender divisions are not part of an immutable 'natural' order, but belong to the mutability of the social process. As such, they are open to change.

The argument that human behaviour is not simply biologically determined can be substantiated with reference to the behavioural patterns of people in different cultures. Among the third tribe of the Tchambali in New Guinea, for instance, women are the "managing partners" within the socio-familial unit. As such, their behaviour is expected to be, and in fact is, dominating and impersonal. The men, being less responsible, are emotionally dependent. While among the Arapesh of the same region, both men and women display "maternal" personality traits as both have been trained to be "co-operative, unaggressive, responsive to the needs of others."<sup>vi</sup>

In Pakistan's context, the knowledge of this fundamental link between gender and culture is critical. It necessitates an inquiry that will simultaneously interrogate and subvert those role models that inhibit the development of the human potential of women and men.

Given the interactive relationship between the media and the consumer, a feminist analysis of the media must operate at many levels. It must take into account the constitutive factors which together control and organise meaning in the media. It must

also develop alternative ways of reading conventional mediatic messages along with alternative methods of producing meaning from the point of view of women. It must, in order to conscientise women, demonstrate to them that i) meaning is socially constructed and that it can change with changes within the social formation and ii) that their oppression is closely bound up with the ways in which they are perceived and perceive themselves within the social order.

One of the ways by which this can be done is by highlighting women in roles that do not conform to existing stereotypes of womanhood. Another way would be to articulate women's latent needs and desires which the patriarchal order either represses or denies. This could in turn give rise to questions and expectations that challenge mainstream perceptions of the feminine.

The analysis undertaken is a step in this direction. However, no definitive answers are offered for the simple reason that there are none. We ourselves are part of a process in which women are trying to work out strategies of action to complex, multi-levelled problems in this field. For example, one may believe in the concept of freedom of speech as a fundamental human right, and one may be against state censorship. Nevertheless, we realise that censorship alone is not the cause of biased mediatic representations of women. It is more than likely that if advertising agencies etc. were to be freed of the prohibitions that today prevent them from giving greater coverage to women, the result would certainly not be non-sexist representations of women. On the contrary, freedom in this area, impelled by commercial considerations of the advertising world, would lead to a proliferation of sexualised images of the woman. These, in ways different from the ones in practice today, would objectify her and reduce her to the level of a sex object. Such considerations point to the need for conceptualisation and interventions along a long-term perspective - that is, not just consciousness raising, but a questioning of the very concepts across which our cultural consciousness is structured.

### **Division of Texts**

Meaning does not deal with transcendental realities but is produced at the juncture where socio-cultural discourses and the specificity of a society's material conditions intersect with history. Subsequently chapter one will provide a brief overview of the myths which have grown around the image of the Muslim woman in the Subcontinent, and the ways in which they have been brought into play in Pakistan during the late 70s and 80s. In the interest of brevity, and in order to avoid repetition, there is little cross-referencing between the different chapters. These sections may instead be read against the cultural and socio-historical backdrop of chapter one.

As the following four sections deal with different, though in the case of television dramas, films and advertisements, interrelated fields, different methods of assessment have been employed :

### *Television Drama*

A survey was conducted of TV plays aired between June 1985 and March 1986. Plays of earlier periods were viewed on video so as to enable a comparison between approaches to women during different periods of Pakistan's political history since the establishment of television here in 1964. Reviews of TV plays and interviews with playwrights and TV producers were also studied. The main source of reference at this level of research was provided by articles by Ahmed Salim in *Herald* magazine and by the reviews and features in the magazine section of daily news papers.

An attempt was made to involve students of a local women's college in this study. Questionnaires regarding dominant and subsidiary themes, characterisation of women, their roles and functions in the plays and so on, were circulated among them. Unfortunately, not enough questionnaires were returned to enable a definitive or in-depth study of student responses to the issue of women's portrayal in TV drama. Nevertheless, the questionnaires did help initiate discussions with small groups of students and as such served as feedback.

### *Films*

For this section, the data was collected through viewing films in different cinemas in different parts of the city of Lahore. This method was used in order to gauge audience reaction on the basis of class and gender difference.

The films viewed fell into two categories. Those which were over a decade old and those which were the latest box office hits. Some of the older films were viewed on video. Current literature on films, the film industry along with interviews of actors, both female and male, were also collected and used for analysis and as reference material.

Some reviewers for both the Urdu and the English press were interviewed informally. Except in the case of two film reviewers, attempts to sound them out on their attitudes regarding the portrayal of women in films was made indirectly. It is interesting to note that at the time this study was undertaken all film reviewers were male.

Before, during and after film shows eighteen women viewers were informally interviewed. Questions included their reasons for seeing that particular film; other films; their preferences for particular films; favourite actors and actresses and their reasons for these preferences. Film plots, costumes, dance and music were also discussed. Questions on the role, oppression and portrayal of women in connection with film themes were asked.

Women's responses varied from brief to long discussions. Only six men from among different audiences were interviewed. With the exception of one man who happened to be a film distributor seated nearby, all were accompanying the women interviewed.

Similar discussions were also held with grassroots workers from government and non-government organisations. The majority of these were women comprising adult education teachers, sewing/embroidery instructors, lady health visitors, project supervisors and leaders of small women's groups in rural and peri-urban areas. These discussions were held at two workshops with an average of thirty five participants each.<sup>vii</sup>

Discussions on this topic also took place with youth groups in disadvantaged urban areas, students, mid and senior level development workers, educationists, journalists, television personnel, government servants and older housewives. A questionnaire was also circulated to grassroots and mid-level women development workers in 1985. However, the poor response in returning the questionnaires cancelled this attempt at data collection.

Discussions on the subject were undertaken at Simorgh as well. Interpretations in this section are, therefore, not necessarily mainstream and can be considered the viewpoint of the Collective, based on the data collected as stated.

### *Advertisements and Cinema Hoardings*

This section entails an intensive viewing of advertisements on television for a period of one month in May, 1985, along with a detailed study of advertisements in newspapers and magazines. As for cinema hoardings, a survey was conducted in the city of Lahore and in smaller provincial towns.

Discussions were held with advertising companies and with cinema hoarding painters to gain information regarding the logic behind their business or craft.

### *School Texts*

The material on which this section is based comprises (i) Urdu language texts and social studies texts in English, (ii) texts of various Education Reports.

Further, teachers and students of Lahore Grammar School, a private institution, have contributed their views with regard to the quality and substance of the school texts. Discussions also took place with members of the Simorgh Collective and other educationists regarding government policy on education, Textbook Board dynamics and teaching methodology. Although teaching methodology etc. have not been discussed in this analysis, useful insights regarding the gender bias in our text books were provided by these discussions.

## WOMEN IN THE PAKISTANI CONTEXT - AN OVERVIEW

In order to analyse representations of women in the media, a feminist study must address a) the particular patriarchal order which has given rise to specific ways of looking at women and b) the specificity of the given socio-historical moment which grants meaning and validity to these images.

Regarding the first aspect, a brief overview of the concept of femininity within the Islamic episteme will be provided. Further, an attempt will be made to relate the various myths of womanhood to the links between power, knowledge and gender relations in patriarchy. Second, as a postcolonial society, Pakistan is caught within the varied demands of a capitalist economic system, cultural revivalism and the emergence of fundamentalist Islam as power strategies. Contradictions engendered between these and traditional modes of thought regarding women's role in society will be addressed here. A survey of shifts in official policies with reference to women will also be presented in this section.

Insights derived from this assessment will provide the base for ensuing analyses of the ways in which women are represented in the media.

### **The Image of Woman in Islam**

Similar to the Judaeo-Christian discourses of Western civilisation, the Islamic discourse of the Near and Far East designates the woman as the locus of male desire. It sees her as a threat to male rationality and subsequently, to the greater good of the community. Thus, within its symbolic order, the woman as signifier of desire must be vigilantly and constantly repressed so as to ensure the survival of the social order. However, a necessary paradox emerges from the fact that women exist as physical entities without whose reproductive capacity the human race would die out. Therefore, in patriarchal societies the feminine must be excluded from the discourses of power, and at the same time, it must be contained within the legitimate boundaries of the social order.

Patriarchal societies have dealt with this problem through the system of patrilineal descent. This, in one blow, minimises the woman's role in the system and ensures the transmission of the father's name in time. By depicting the woman as the passive recipient of the male seed, which is posited as the active principle, she is granted little choice of

action, both in the reproductive process and within the social system, and her distance from the discourses of power is built into the terminology and myths these systems then generate.

Thus, Imam Ghazali could define sexual desire as being created "solely as a means to entice men to deliver the seed and to put the woman in a situation where she can cultivate it..."<sup>viii</sup> He described the ideal woman as one "who remain(s) in her private quarter(s) and never neglect(s) her spindle..."<sup>ix</sup> While St Paul, with an equal lack of ambiguity said, "let the woman learn in silence with all subjection...I suffer not a woman to usurp authority over men, but to be in silence..."<sup>x</sup>

Allied with the body and with the illicit demands of the flesh, the feminine is contained within these two religious discourses through specific regulative categories of the 'good' and 'bad' woman. The Christian discourses have constructed this dichotomy around the conflicting images of the 'Virgin', who sublimates/ represses her sexuality in order to preserve the Law of the Father and thus assimilates into the legitimate areas of sociality; and Eve, or the 'fallen woman', who threatens this order by holding out the promise of forbidden 'knowledge', thus permitting a direct link between women and the concept of Original Sin.

The Islamic discourse also divides the symbol of woman into two categories and then locates it within the patriarchal hierarchy. However, lacking the Christian concepts of Original Sin and parthenogenesis, the symbolic categories of Mary and Eve, as well as belief in the inherently evil nature of sexuality, the Muslim woman is simultaneously designated as 'pakeeza'<sup>xi</sup> and 'fitna'.<sup>xii</sup> In accordance with this perception, Islam necessitates the imposition of explicit and rigidly defined external checks to maintain this moral division.

The 'good woman' in this case is not one who has no sexual desire, but one who consciously limits her sexuality to serve the interests of the community (which is male). She then functions as the invisible, nurturing, supportive mother/ sister/ daughter. In turn, the 'bad woman' is synonymous with the sexually voracious and demonic woman, and she is characterised as being devoid of the maternal dimension - the only female characteristic that, within the patriarchal worldview, justifies the existence of women!

As Mernissi points out, this coexistence of two contradictory qualities within one woman makes every woman a potential threat to the man who is both "*representative and guarantor of the Muslim order.*"<sup>xiii</sup> What complicates matters more is the fact that this subversive conflict is located within the family and is intimately bound with the central role of wife and mother. In relation, the concept of purdah (the veil), and the criterion of "silence, immobility, and obedience" as fundamental to female beauty can also be seen as

part of the same system of regulative mechanisms. That is, these mechanisms mark the 'safe woman' as one who has overcome --- or has been made to overcome --- her own desires, sexuality and identity in order to maintain the patriarchal hierarchy.

### **Myths of the Feminine in the Subcontinent**

The Islamic encounter with the socio-cultural discourses of the subcontinent, in about the twelfth century onwards through to British colonialism, did little to improve the image and status of women. The concept and practice of *sati*<sup>xiv</sup>, the absence of divorce, the custom of dowry and the valorisation of the *sohaagan* or married woman above the single woman and the widow reinforced women's subordinate position in Islamic discourse. Subsequently, new myths developed and became part of the cultural psyche of the Muslim communities in the subcontinent. And these were further endorsed with the advent of British colonialism and its appended Christian ethics.

British rule brought about changes within the economic structures that were in keeping with its imperial interests. Unlike Islamic laws of inheritance, which give women a share in the father's property, the imposition of colonial inheritance laws excluded them from inheriting agricultural property. These interventions, as well as new policies regarding local industry, increased women's economic dependence and reinforced the 'good' woman's image of being biologically unsuited for participation in the public sphere. Only prostitutes and courtesans were permitted a place within the economic life of the community, though here too, their role was one of providing services to the male.

At another level, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a period during which the establishment of an alien system of education under the British, the rise in female literacy, and the challenges to established forms of knowledge were bringing about definitive changes within the socio-cultural parameters of Indian society. In turn, it was a time when a spate of literature regarding the 'nature', role and function of women in society was being produced. In order to cope with their own exclusion from the wider field of economic and political power, the orthodoxy focused on the domestic enclosure and women's service within it as the "ultimate and inviolable repository of Muslim identity."<sup>xv</sup> Further, as this 'new' education did not challenge the conceptual and economic division between the home and the public world, the ensuing texts were further sanctified by the largely tacit acknowledgement granted to them by liberal, 'west-educated' men who continued to subscribe to traditional notions of the woman's role and place in society.

Circulated as a guide for feminine norms of conduct, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's book "Bahishti Zaiwar" (Heavenly Adornments) is representative of the prevalent mainstream

discourse on women. Giving advice to a married woman at one point in the text, he states:

Understand this! The relationship between a husband and a wife is for life. No joy can be greater than that which lies in conjugal harmony, and no misery can be greater than that which is found in marital discord. *Therefore it is your moral imperative that you should hold the man's heart in your hands by obeying his slightest behest* (our italics). If he asks you to stand all night with folded hands, you must do so, as in that alone lies your salvation...if he says it is night when it is day, you too should call the night day...on no account must you lose his trust or let his heart turn away from you...as his confidence once lost, can never fully be yours again...<sup>xvi</sup>

At first glance, the message of this excerpt seems straightforward. A man speaks to a woman from a position of authority conferred on him by sexual difference and religious attestation implicit in the title 'Maulana'. He exhorts her to give single-minded attention, devotion and service to the man, who is her husband, as in that alone lies her salvation. However, a deconstructionist reading of the text teases out the warring elements in the monologue and enables us to uncover the hidden fears that underpin it.

Structurally, the passage consists of the following units:

1. The main argument is based on the premise that the conjugal unit is the only legitimate space where harmony between a man and woman is possible and permissible.
2. The authorial voice, which is male, addresses itself directly to the reading subject or addressee, who is a woman. The fact that the speaker and the husband, who is the object of desire in the text, are both male, creates a significant blurring of identities between the speaker and the hypothetical male who must be appeased by the woman.
3. The message, which is *not* addressed to the man, places the entire burden of the relationship on the woman, while at the same time denying her the right to exercise her judgement as an independent, thinking human being.
4. The woman can best serve her interests by keeping the man in a state of blissful stupor.
5. This can be done if she gains his full trust and confidence.

6. This trust can be gained through self-abnegation and lies.

This passage tells us that the foundation of trust between women and men is based on falsehood. Moreover, it exposes the cliché regarding the deviousness of women. That is, this deviousness is necessitated by male requirements which preclude honest dealings in everyday interactions between women and men!

Thus, it is at this point that the logic of the text begins to falter and the stability of the authorial voice is shattered. By separating the different components of the textual monologue and making them confront each other, it becomes clear that when the text speaks of harmony and trust, what it actually refers to are the underlying dissension and fears in male/ female relationships within the existing power-structure.

Given that women perceive themselves through the prism of this man-made language, the difficulty for them to question images that transfix their roles within patriarchal orders becomes apparent. They suffer from guilt when they are unable to conform to these images, and the thought of discovery and the subsequent loss of their 'good name' fills them with fear. As the issue is literally one of survival, they have the choice of circumventing this problem by totally identifying with the dictates of patriarchy, even to the extent of suffering all forms of degradation and violence in silence, or by operating through subterfuge and obliquity, as recommended in the *Bahishti Zaiwar*.

From the male perspective, these relationships are fraught with uncertainty and tension. As a son who has been nurtured and protected by the woman, the man knows, in his secret heart, that she is neither weak nor irrational. But where her role as the apparently asexual mother has not threatened his safety, the situation changes radically when he confronts her either as wife or potential sexual partner. For where as a son, it is possible for him to repress the knowledge of his mother's sexuality under a barrage of clichés which focus on her 'purity' and valorise her self-abnegatory qualities, as husband and/or lover he sees her both as the object of his lust and the *fitna* who possesses a mysterious sexuality over which he has no control. It is not farfetched then to suggest that the male fear of the woman has its roots in this perception, and it is this fear that has given rise to the myth of the woman as inherently treacherous. Ironically, it is this man-made knowledge, growing from and reinforcing man-made spatial, social and economic divisions, which compels him to make her lie to him.

Here, it is important to point out that neither the woman's dependency nor the dissension and fear are immutable givens of the male/female relationship. Both have their source in

the exploitative and hierarchical organisation of patriarchal institutions and symbols. Therefore, the nature of these relationships can change with the passing of patriarchy.

Given the above analysis, *Bahishti Zaiwar* is important on the following counts:

1. Maulana Ashraf Ali's definition of the woman's role as wife provides us with a blue print of the culturally accepted role/ image of the woman as the locus of fear and desire within the Pakistani psyche.
2. It points to and affirms what Mernissi calls the "built-in ideological blindness"<sup>xvii</sup> within Muslim cultures regarding the woman's economic dimension. By setting up a false dichotomy between women and men on the basis of biological difference, a unilateral relationship between women and men is 'naturalised' and perpetuated through the myths and images particular to the given culture. Thus, it becomes possible not only to deny women their subjectivity but also to keep them in a state of constant dependency on men (though this erasure of the woman as a socially productive entity is common to all patriarchal orders).
3. The fact that (a) the text legitimises itself by constant references to the Divine Will and (b) that its current publishers, Taj Company are also the publishers of the Quran and other religious texts, reveals the mutually supportive relationship between commerce and established morality. This relationship is especially significant as it not only illustrates the ways in which socio-economic and religious discourses make each other intelligible, it also shows us how the entire process, by creating an illusion of totality, helps to naturalise an ideologically constructed meaning.
4. Finally, it bears emphasis that Thanvi's textual politics fed the rhetorical base of future power regimes. To cite one example, Maulana Maududi's writings on *pardah* and the moral dimension of polygamy are the site of a post-Independence class struggle. Though in this case, the 'liberated' woman was to become a symbol of the 'brown sahibs' who replaced the British rulers, as opposed to the veiled woman who was represented as the incarnation of 'pure' Islam. In the late '70s, with the advent of Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship, these received ideas, in themselves and as an amalgam of the Muslim and Hindu cultures of the sub-continent, became part of state policy as the military regime put Islam to strategic political use. That these myths are still relevant today is evident, not only in the idioms and clichés that together make up the sum total of everyday speech, but as fodder for continuing systems of women's exclusion and control.

## Representations of the Woman in Pakistani Political Discourse

Broadly speaking, the traditionalist and the so-called progressive or secular cultural discourses constitute the base of power politics in Pakistan.<sup>xviii</sup> Historically, the traditionalist approach has been the preserve of those sections of society that expressed their antagonism to colonial rule by clinging to traditional patterns of thought and behaviour. As a result though, they found themselves increasingly alienated from the colonial frame of reference and marginalised within the power structure. The modernist or secular approach, on the other hand, came to be associated with those elements in the Muslim community who found it advantageous to accept western modes of thought and the subsequent system of education established by the colonials. Their exposure to new forms of knowledge coupled with their role as functionaries within the system of administration led to the formation of a new indigenous elite. Thus, what had initially begun as a difference in response to the colonial situation became, with time, the basis of new class affiliations and groupings within the Muslim community in the sub-continent. Subsequently, challenges and compromises amongst them determined the course of politics in the emergent nation.

For instance, in his inaugural address to the Constituent Assembly in 1948, Jinnah stated that Pakistan was a secular state based on:

the fundamental principle that (all Pakistanis) are equal citizens of one state (where) in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense...but in the political sense as citizens of the state.

However, as early as 1949, the Jamaat-i-Islami was able to pressurise the same institution to pass the Objectives Resolution which, by including the concept of the Sovereignty of God in its first clause, repudiated the concept of secularism and of sovereignty as being vested in the people. By introducing the concept of Divine Sovereignty into official political discourse, the religious faction paved the way for future fundamentalist interpretations of the political, legal and cultural discourse in the country.

To return to the women's question, as mentioned earlier, the dominant myths regarding women and the shifts in attitudes regarding these myths are intertwined with changes in the socio-political scene in Pakistan. Consequently, from 1947 up until the late 70s, attitudes towards women, socially and in terms of work and education followed a particular pattern. At the time, the ruling class was made up of the western educated feudal and professional elite. It drew its notions of economic and social progress from the conceptual matrix of European culture and it sought to establish a nation-state based on

the pattern of a 20th century western bourgeois state. Within this schema, the entry of women into the public field was not discouraged and certain professions were accessible to them due to economic pressure and the government's overall pursuit of 'modernity' (though not due to any special concern for them as a social group). That this process was slow and little was done to open up the more controversial fields to them was due to a general acceptance of conventional attitudes towards women. There were two main factors that played their part here. The first was traditional notions regarding occupations that were considered suitable for women, or that were predominantly seen as male preserves. And the second pertained to the perception that marriage and motherhood are the woman's 'natural' goal in life. As a result, parents' primary concern was, and still is, with bringing this eventuality into existence. Only then would their responsibility to their daughters, to God and to society be fulfilled.

The point to be remembered here is that women's entry into the public sphere was shaped by an unquestioning acceptance of conventional attitudes towards women and not to an active policy of repression and control by the state. In fact, in the state's own interests, it was even customary to give some recognition, albeit verbal, to women's role in the freedom movement and in nation building, and to exhort them to participate actively in national life.

The Family Laws Ordinance, which was promulgated by the Ayub Khan government in 1961, mainly through pressure from the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA), may be seen as part of this 'modernising' ethos. It would not, therefore, be unrealistic to assume that the issues dealt with in the Ordinance might have been ignored if they had not fallen into the pattern of interpretations of Islam being followed by other post-colonial Muslim states for similar reasons.

A change in government in 1969 brought an elected and allegedly progressive government into power in 1971. The result of a mass public protest, this move from dictatorship to democracy engendered a mood of optimism and a sense of 'new beginnings' in the country. This was also the time when internationally, an articulate and self-defining women's movement was beginning to draw attention to women's issues with greater insistence. The first UN Women's Conference was held in Mexico City in 1975, a World Plan of Action for Women was adopted, and 1970-1985 was proclaimed by the UN as the Decade of Women.

The elected government, which to a large degree continued to draw its policy makers and legislators from the liberal and/ or allegedly progressive section of society, responded to this new ambience in a predictable manner. The first lady of the country, Nusrat Bhutto, attended the Women's Conference in Mexico City and, in 1976, the Commission on the

Status of Women<sup>xix</sup> was formed. Its task was to study the problems faced by Pakistani women and to draw up a plan for improving their status. Subsequently, women's issues received much state publicity, and even though the changes suggested by the Commission were still on paper, new horizons seemed to be opening up for Pakistani women at this stage. But Bhutto's tenure in office was short-lived, and six years later, in 1977, the country saw a return to martial law and with it, a new dispensation.

Subsequently, the alliance between the army and an ascendant fundamentalist group represented a new consumer oriented, tradition-based and upwardly mobile bourgeoisie. Coupled with martial law, this shift brought about significant and far-reaching changes within the socio-symbolic frame of reference.

The new ruling class forged alliances with the established dominant class on the basis of shared economic interests, while rejecting what it read as the profligacy and westernised values of its post-colonial predecessors. In this they were met more than half way by the opportunism of the erstwhile 'westernised elite', comprising feudals, industrialists and bureaucrats. The reason for such a switch is apparent. Apart from the class-based characteristic of keeping a vigilant eye on the main chance, many of them had been rendered insecure by Bhutto's autocratic methods and egalitarian slogans, and nobody wanted to challenge the unpredictable might of the military government.

As seizure of state power alone does not ensure the cultural hegemony of an ascendant class or a ruling junta, the battle for dominance also had to be waged at the level of the great social discourses: in the realms of religion, philosophy, morality, art, language and the manners of the day. It must be added here that sexual control extends beyond the realm of the visible and known areas of 'morality'. As such it provides entry points for state agencies into the different spheres of private and public life, which on the surface may not come within the purview of state control or intervention. Thus, by attempting to rewrite them, the emergent ruling class set out to capture the existing socio-symbolic discourses. In 'real' terms, this translated into the government's apparently single-minded concern with the purification of society through so-called Islamisation and cultural revivalism.

The forms of sexual control ranged from government directives to women government servants and students to dress 'modestly' and to wear the chaadar, to the promulgation of the pernicious Haddood Ordinances in 1979 which enjoin public flogging and/ or death for crimes like adultery, theft, rape and the consumption of alcohol.

These laws impinge on the rights of all citizens. Not only are the terms and conditions through which they operate brutal and anachronistic, they also transform what have

normally been seen as misdemeanours or offences against the individual into crimes against the state. Their special significance, however, lies in the fact that women are the ones who are hardest hit by them. For instance, by denying the woman the right to testify on her own behalf, and by requiring the testimony of four, adult, male, Muslim witnesses to prove rape and adultery, these laws set up impossible conditions by which either act can be proved. Further, they conflate two qualitatively different acts. As it is highly unlikely that a couple intent on adultery and a man or men intent on rape will commit the act in a public place, the victim of rape can end up being punished for adultery. That this is not a hypothetical argument is proved, amongst many other cases where rape victims are languishing in jail for alleged adultery, by the case of Safia Bibi - a blind woman, who was raped and then sentenced to flogging for adultery. Thus rape is made easy and all women are viewed as its potential victims.

As if this was not enough, the position of women was further jeopardised by the proposed law of 'Qisas and Diyat'. This law refers to the Islamic injunction regarding the right of the family of a murder victim to demand either retribution in the form of execution of the murderer, or compensation through the payment of 'blood money'. The law harks back to pre-Islamic tribal societies and its revival today is in itself an outrage.<sup>xx</sup> In effect, if the Hadood Ordinances make state violence and rape easy, the law of Qisas and Diyat facilitates murder. Not surprisingly, women again are its foremost victims as the Diyat (compensation) for a woman is half that of a man. This is especially dangerous in a society where the perils of patriarchy are aggravated by lack of education and a scarcity of resources, and where the media focus is consistent in projecting the image of women as property and as signifiers of male honour.

The implementation of these laws was and continues to be uneven and selective (during Zia's time there were three courts of appeal in the country viz. the civil courts, the martial law courts and the shariat courts). Nevertheless, their effect was the systematic devaluation of women in society. By harping on the connection between sex and sin, by focusing on the image of the woman as the source of sin and temptation, these laws and attendant media policies did much to shift attention from 'real' issues like poverty, unemployment, nepotism, corruption in high places, and the questions of the government's own legitimacy, on to the body of the woman.

Today, Pakistan is a country of sharp contrasts and glaring contradictions. Poverty and unemployment exist side by side with conspicuous wealth and blatant consumerism. Further, the gulf between professed belief and practise has widened. While bureaucrats, mullahs and paid ideologues mouthed pious slogans about 'simple living and high thinking' from the pulpit and the electronic and print media, the 80's were also a time when new appetites were being created on the one hand by the advent of 'gulf money' and

the life style of returning immigrants and on the other by fortunes made through drug smuggling and gun running because of the war in Afghanistan. Although there was and continues to be a greater class mobility in the country than in earlier times, the material beneficiaries of this socio-economic shift have been limited in number. Frustration, anger and violence are endemic to this situation, and the government's policy of a repressive form of Islam has not only blocked channels of often legitimate and innocent entertainment and relaxation, it has transformed norms of sexual behaviour into the sole locus of morality. This combination of factors has been instrumental in diverting a major proportion of what was class based resentment, towards women, both within the home and in the public sphere.

The role of the media in relation to women is important for the following reasons:

1. The media is state controlled. Newspapers belong either to the National Press Trust<sup>xxi</sup>, which puts them under direct state control, or they are subject to stringent censorship laws. Any serious breach of these laws can lead either to the banning of these newspapers or to indirect forms of pressure viz. difficulty in obtaining newsprint, advertisements etc.
2. School books used in the majority of schools in the country are controlled by and usually published by Government Text Book Boards in different parts of the country. Thus once again, information is monitored by the government.
3. Pakistan Television and Broadcasting Corporations are under direct government control, while in the field of advertising explicit rules govern how women may or may not be represented on the screen or in the press.
4. As for the cinema, although it belongs to the private sector, it is again subject to censorship laws and a strict control is exercised as far as the portrayal of political issues or 'immoral' scenes is concerned.
5. Aside from state control, these different forms of media are themselves part of the culture they portray. In general, they operate unquestioningly within its norms. Verbal ambivalence, recourse to existing male/ female roles within society, omissions, stereotypes and innuendoes are all employed to project and consolidate a point of view which sustains the status quo and is resistant to change.

In the following chapters, representations of women in school texts, film, advertisements and television drama will be discussed in terms of the discursive and socio-historical background examined above.

## TELEVISION DRAMA

In order to understand the impact of government policy and television with regard to women, it is necessary to take into account the multiple and often contradictory axes on which television as a phenomenon has developed.

### The First Years

The first transmission station for television in Pakistan was set up in 1964. The introduction of this mediatic channel was part of the prevailing government's programme for affecting ideological control within the home while bringing about, at the same time, a specious form of modernisation in the visible spheres of national life. This programme was to culminate in the debacle of the "Decade of Progress" celebrations initiated by the Ayub Khan government in 1968-69. Ironically, these celebrations coincided with, and to some extent were to trigger off the mass movement that led to the regime's overthrow.

During this period, television became an integral part of the socio-cultural scene, especially where women were concerned. At one level, it provided them a point of entry into the public field. That is, it was instrumental in their economic and social liberation from traditional roles built on their economic dependency and social immobility. Women started work as designers, programme producers, actors and newscasters. Programmes/scholarships were set up to train personnel both in Pakistan and in the technically advanced countries, and there was no bar on the participation of women in these programmes. Many of the current producers etc. in PTV (Pakistan Television) are women who joined the work force in the 60s and early 70s.<sup>xxii</sup>

Further, the state agenda for providing education-cum-entertainment through television initiated a break with the conventional view of the acting profession and generated a demand for a new kind of male and female actor. Unlike the film industry, which had traditionally drawn its artists from the peripheries of so called 'respectable' society, and which still carries connotations of a lax morality and distorted representations of 'reality', TV drama drew upon a resource pool from the 'educated' and so called 'respectable' sector of society. In its early days, actors and producers for plays were students and academics who were involved either in a Eurocentric amateur theatre or in serious Urdu theatre.<sup>xxiii</sup> The importance of TV drama lay, therefore, both in the difference of tone and expectation as compared to the cinema and in the fact that it opened up new career possibilities for women.

At a second level however, the inclusion of women in the public field did not automatically lead to plays that were either radical or even progressive in their content as far as female roles were concerned. Popular formula plays in Urdu operated within the tradition set up by Imtiaz Ali Taj in 1921.<sup>xxiv</sup> His dramatisation of the Anarkali legend<sup>xxv</sup> as romantic spectacle marked the parameters of prospective theatre - that is, its purpose was to entertain, and not to disturb. Thus, the majority of Urdu plays centred around the theme of match-making, romance and marriage. This 'formula' has consistently reinforced a male-oriented view of the feminine. Generally, women were presented as physically well-endowed bodies and pretty faces with the behaviour and mental capacities of naive, well-meaning and playful children - women of the 'shy eastern variety'!

The reason for this apparent disjunction between structure and representation in the same field is important. That is, apart from highlighting the fact that cultural value systems and material realities are seldom if ever coterminous, it also points to the inherent contradictions within the contemporary socio-political field of vision. The term 'modernisation', in the ambience of the '50s and the '60s, was reflexive of dominant class attitudes towards 'culture' and 'civilisation'. As mentioned earlier, the ruling elite at the time drew their notions of social progress from the conceptual matrix of European civilisation. This was further reinforced by the Ayub regime's political alignment with the Western bloc. As a result, as long as power relations within the conventional political scene were maintained, the entry of women into the public field was not discouraged.

Internationally, the idea of feminism as an alternative to patriarchy was yet to become a part of mainstream discourse, while nationally there were not enough women in the formal work force for their presence to be perceived as a threat either to men's jobs or their egos. In the rare instances where they did so, the media could take recourse in the traditionally limiting view of women. And that is exactly what happened when in 1965 Fatima Jinnah<sup>xxvi</sup> went to the polls against Ayub Khan. Political interest joined hands with patriarchal perceptions of womanhood and Enver Sajjad's play *Ras Malai*, screened at the time, was a sophisticated and derogatory jibe at women.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **From Dictatorship to Democracy**

With the change of government in 1969 and the coming into power of an elected and allegedly progressive government in 1971, a slight shift took place in television programmes. During the 60s, left wing students' groups had played a significant role in the politicisation of university women. Now their voices converged with those of an internationally articulate and self-defining feminism. In keeping with the mood of the time, and ascribing to notions of democracy, Bhutto's government initiated a definitive policy with regard to women's 'uplift'. In relation, a directive was sent to PTV for a more

positive projection of women on the mini-screen. By this time, TV personnel had also gained in experience and technical expertise. A combination of these factors led to new developments in the approach to TV drama.

As mentioned, earlier TV plays had focused on 'safe' and overly simplistic representations of mainstream social problems, or on melodramatic delineation of bourgeois fantasy. Now there was a shift in perspective, though still, it was neither wide ranging nor particularly consistent.

A series called *Hawwa Key Naam* (In The Name of Eve or Dedicated to Eve) was telecast in the early months of 1975. The series differed from earlier, and even existing mainstream productions, as its explicit concern was with the depiction of problems faced by middle class women. Not only was the departure significant in terms of the role/ image of women concerned, but unlike most plays where the angle of vision is controlled by the ubiquitous male gaze, here the narrative perspective was supplied by the woman herself. And even if no solutions were offered to solve the problems of the divorced, single or married women around whom these plays developed, the series did compel viewers to acknowledge problems to which little or no thought had been given so far.

In an interview with *Herald* magazine in 1985, the play's producer, Sahira Kazmi, stated that

at that time women's issues greatly occupied (her) mind. The injustice being perpetrated on women, the social sanctions curtailing their liberty, the physical and psychological violence on them.....severely distressed (her). (She) had college girls in mind, and so...thought, why not produce plays on these people's plight.

It must be remembered though, that Ms Kazmi was also the producer of Ashfaq Ahmed's aggressively misogynistic series *Tota Kahani* (The Parrot's Tale), telecast in 1983. The contradiction between her interview, and the former and latter-mentioned plays not only demonstrates the control exercised by government policy makers on the media, it also points to the susceptibility of individual consciousness within mainstream discourse. Further, Ms Kazmi's single and short-lived attempt to explore women's issues from the woman's point of view was more than counter-balanced by mainstream plays, which still constituted the bulk of TV entertainment.

## The Zia Years

The return to Martial Law in 1977, in concert with a fundamentalist and consumer-oriented bourgeoisie, brought about significant changes within the socio-symbolic frame of reference. The new ruling class combated its post-colonial predecessors by promoting aggressive consumerism, while sheltering behind the mask of traditional values. This led to a consciously retrogressive policy as far as the depiction of the female image in the media was concerned; at the same time it endorsed the socio-economic parameters of a class based social formation.

It is significant that at about this time, marriage, with all its social and domestic ramifications, became the central subject of TV drama. Earlier plays had also operated within the domain of family and marriage, but where they had used these sites as take off points to explore different aspects of the human condition, now the authoritarian family as a unit of representation became an end in itself.

There is general agreement among most psychoanalytic and sociological schools of thought that the family represents the arena where all models of conscious and unconscious thought are first formed. Given this perspective, it is not surprising that the dominant group or state should mediate its social and political transactions through and across the patterns of belief and behavioural response that are formed in the family.

Thus, the symbolic use of the family and marriage by the media is highly significant. By reinforcing hierarchical patterns of dominance and control through these symbols, it legitimises and endorses patterns of authoritarianism, especially in the context of a dictatorial state. Here it is necessary to remember that as a signifier and locus of desire, the woman constitutes the space across which the licit and the illicit may be defined. If this concept of the woman in patriarchy is linked to her role and function as mother/ wife in society, then it becomes possible to see the rationale behind TV policy, especially during the Zia years, as far as defining the feminine is concerned.

The woman's domain is shown as being limited to the home and to her role as wife/ mother/sister/daughter. The figure of the wife is especially critical to the production of meaning in plays. Posited as the faithful mate, responsible mother and, by implication believing Muslim (PTV does not acknowledge religious difference), this schema not only fortifies the integration of these different identities, it also grants her the burden of guilt and responsibility for the children – younger brothers and sisters – and other members of the family to which she belongs. Further, the entire focus is on her reproductive or potentially reproductive and nurturing capacities, and no space is allowed where her

economic dimension might be acknowledged. Thus she is denied a separate identity as well as the power to control her own life.

This pattern was to be played out endlessly in TV dramas from 1977 onwards. In *Saraab* (Mirage), by Bano Qudsia for instance, the initial concern of the play was with what constitutes normality in the medical or psychological sense of the word. The cultural signifier through which this question is explored and then apparently abandoned is an explicit sado-masochistic relationship within marriage. In the final analysis however, violence is what emerges as normative.

In broad outline, the main protagonists in the play are an autocratic feudal with a strong sadistic bent, and a young girl, who is beautiful, an orphan and alone in the world except for one college friend and her husband. The landlord meets the heroine at a bank where she is employed and is drawn by her beauty and her air of vulnerable femininity. He pursues her and she accepts his offer of marriage, not because she loves him, but because he represents an escape from the drudgery of work, the loneliness of being a single woman and from her friend's husband, who loves her and towards whom she herself is attracted.

After their marriage, the scene shifts to the husband's estate, and the marriage begins and ends in the realm of gothic fantasy. The estate is isolated from the rest of the world and the house is full of strange noises made, as the audience and then the wife discover, by the first two wives of the husband. The only other visible human inhabitant of the house is a man-servant – huge, impassive, silent and devoted to the interests of the master.

In this mysterious and dimly lit mansion, the husband alternately beats the wife and then begs her forgiveness, until the day he discovers that she is pregnant. Then two changes occur: (i) the husband becomes concerned for her physical well-being and avoids her in order to do her no harm and (ii) the man-servant breaks his self-imposed silence. He reveals the secret of the disembodied voices that haunt the mansion by taking her to see the two prior wives, now driven mad with fear, and then begs her to escape before harm can come to the unborn child.

Concerned for the safety of her child – the stereotypes are at work again – the woman relinquishes her passivity and contacts her old college friend. However, by the time the letter reaches its destination, the friend has died of childlessness and grief. Her husband is now free to come to the heroine's aid. He arrives at the mansion, wins the confidence of the feudal lord, enters the house as a servant and manages to help the heroine to escape.

But the story does not end here. The woman dies giving birth to her child in one of the outhouses on the estate, but, before dying she makes the man promise that he will bring up her son to avenge her death.

The man keeps his word and there are scenes of the child being taught to be hard and vengeful by being encouraged to be cruel to his little play mate. The fact that the play mate happens to be female and utterly devoted to the boy despite being viciously mauled by him tells its own tale. However, to return to the story, twenty years later the son returns to avenge his mother's death. He gains entry into the house to be confronted with an ailing father tortured by the thought that he will die unforgiven for the death of his last wife. The two whom he has driven mad apparently do not matter! The boy's determination falters, Father-Right supersedes the dying agony of the mother, the dagger falls from the son's hand and the two are united in an interchange of remorse and forgiveness while in the background the voice of the muezzin announces the beginning of a new day.

*Saraab* was a slick production which, through a series of audio-visual messages, transformed the play into an affirmation of all that it seemingly set out to critique. A brief analysis of the images and metaphors across which the play is constructed will show how this is achieved.

The play opens with two short scenes, showing a sick man and a sick woman. In the first scene, the man, in this instance the main male protagonist, is introduced through his voice. His speech is rational and clear and although he is the patient, discussing his illness with the doctor, he is completely in control of the situation.

Throughout this scene the audience is not given a direct view of the man's face. The camera is placed obliquely and the viewer's gaze is drawn to and then arrested by the image of the speaker whose face is turned away from the audience, but is identified by the starched tura (plume) of his deep red pagri (turban). This makes a splash of colour in the top right hand corner of the screen, while the highly polished sheen of his black riding boots in the bottom left hand corner, contrast vividly with the immaculate white of his jodhpurs and provide a frame for the doctor who sits passively facing the camera. The figure of the man dominates the scene and thus reverses the normal doctor-patient relationship, where the doctor speaks and the patient listens.

In the second scene the focus of attention is a sick woman. As in the first scene, the only other character on the screen is the doctor. The patient is the heroine's college friend, and the introduction to the scene is again through audio. Though this time the audience does not hear the well-modulated tones of human speech, but listens instead to the sound of painful, stertorous breathing that is animal-like in its intensity. The camera follows the

sound of this agonised panting to reveal a woman in bed. Her hair is dishevelled, the face grey with pain and the eyes, wide open and helpless. It is an accurate depiction of an asthmatic attack, but within the context of the play, this suppliant helplessness takes on definitive ideological implications.

Whereas in the first scene the figure of the man frames the scene, here the figure of the woman is placed horizontally on one side of a conventional bedroom. Unlike the man, who is shown to be in control of the situation even though ill, the woman is flat on her back, immobilised, and dependent on the doctor who places an oxygen mask on her face to ease her discomfort. Instead of dominating the scene, the woman is shown as being in her expected place as a patient in a bedroom where she shares the space with bedroom furniture and the clutter of middle-class domesticity.

Similarly, when the hero sees the heroine for the first time, he appropriates her with his gaze. This is visually achieved through the body language of the two protagonists, and through a symbolic hierarchy that is played out in the spatial arrangement on the screen – the man is in his carriage and the woman is on foot.. The camera focuses sharply on the man's eyes which seek to pin the woman down; she on the other hand is characterised by the helplessness of her stance, as conveyed through soft focus lenses that accentuate the demure folds of her sari, the downward sweep of her eyelashes and the curve of her cheek.

Based on the conceptual dichotomy that posits the male as active and female as passive, this and similar plays simultaneously cancel out all possibility of change within the given social order, just as they provide wish-fulfilment within sado-masochistic male/ female relations. Structuring male/female relations within the active passive schema of patriarchal socio-symbolic arrangements, and then locating them within the legitimate and sacrosanct space of the conjugal unit, the audio-visual messages simultaneously draw upon and reinforce the familiar myths and metaphors of Pakistani culture that are so graphically defined in the *Bahishti Zaiwar*. As a result, the viewer is offered a position/positions that are not only obviously intelligible to her/him, but are also presented as the most valid ones under the circumstances set out in the narrative.

This play has been chosen for discussion as its gothic terminology permits an exaggerated depiction of what stand for 'normal' male /female relations in patriarchy. However, these dynamics are also borne out by another play by the same writer, the wholly realistic *Sawal Mor Mohaaraan* (Beloved Come Back). In this play, despite assertions to the contrary, the heroine in the final instance is dependent on the whim of the husband for her happiness. Similarly, in Nurul Huda Shah's *Jungle*, the heroine succumbs to the family's wishes, not because the writer, unlike Bano Qudsia, agrees with the notion of the

woman's inherently subordinate position, but because in her own words the heroine's revolt in this instance "would not have been true to life"!

### **Themes and Stereotypes**

A survey of recurrent male/female images in TV drama were carried out during the period May '85 - January 86. Small group discussions on this subject were also held with the students of Kinnaird, an all women's college in Lahore. A brief resume of the findings of this survey are given below. These findings will also provide guidelines for further discussions on TV plays in this chapter.

#### *Impact*

Most of the students who watched TV plays rejected the role models being propagated in them. They were, however, somewhat confused by the ideological conflation between images of helplessness and feminine charm. Nevertheless, the moot point of these discussions was not their responses, but those of their parents or older members of their families, who unquestioningly accepted these images as integral to eastern culture and values.

#### *Main Theme*

The general consensus was that most plays centred around relations within the family circle and although social problem issues like drugs, unemployment and the like were taken up, the development of respective narratives occurred at the expense of women protagonists. For instance, the comedy series *Andhera Ujjala* (Darkness and Light), dealt mainly with the issue of police incompetence and the problem of nepotism. However, the difficulties faced by the police were depicted through the victimisation of a female college student who was harassed daily by the local lotharios on her way to and from college.

Although the police ultimately managed to bring the culprits to book, the main focus of the play was on the helplessness of the girl, her feelings of guilt on having excited the attention of the young hooligans, and on her fear of the possibility that she would have to give up her studies in order to save her reputation as a virtuous girl. And although the young men were depicted unsympathetically, the text did not question their ability to control the girl's life. The script made no attempt to question the sexual politics that had been brought into play through the girl's dilemma, nor did it reflect upon the double standards that allow sexual latitude to a man and demand an impossible chastity of a woman.

### *The Moral Message*

In most dramas, the underlying message was built around the ethic of 'discipline and hard work equals success for men'. Success being measured largely in terms of power and financial gain. Denied an economic dimension and excluded from the structures of power, the issues faced by women were more problematic. In their case discipline and hard work could not stand alone. They had to come judiciously tempered with a spirit of self sacrifice and obedience. Success too was not always clearly defined, except when the play ended with either happiness in marriage or through children. Success was also seen in terms of a grateful acceptance of pain. In *Khul Ja Sim Sim* (Open Sesame), for instance, which was yet another play by Bano Qudsia, the message was that a woman should be grateful even though thwarted at every step.

### *Implicit Messages*

It was concluded that the stress was on sado-masochistic relations between the sexes. The helplessness of the woman was seen to be most often closely bound up with notions of femininity. The danger of such representations was seen to lie in the often unspoken warning that by becoming independent and articulate the woman would automatically forfeit both her femininity and her man.

### *The Portrayal of Women*

It was seen that by and large the good woman had no separate identity. She came in any one of the following roles:

#### *Mother*

Self sacrificing, e.g. the case of the woman in Bano Qudsia's *Saawal Mor Mohaaraan*. The betrayed wife accepts her husband's infidelities and gives up all possibility of salvaging her own life in order to look after her children.

#### *Sister*

Characterised again by her devotion to her brother, whom she looks after in the home by mending his clothes, serving his food and so on even though she may be equally tired and hungry. Or who gives up her boy friend/ suitor if the brother does not approve of him. In some cases the blow is softened by the fact that the brother's decision is shown to be in the best interests of his sister.

### *Wife*

Submissive, good housekeeper, careful with money, obedient, devoted to the interests of the family and often a supplicant for the husband's love/attention.

### *Daughter*

Obedient, loving, shy, modest, occasionally rebellious in that she might want to go to college or work, but the test of her goodness lies in her ability to capitulate.

### *Widow*

Often she is the mother of dependent children or is herself financially dependent on some male relative viz. father, brother or in-laws. If she belongs to the first category, then her capacity for self sacrifice and air of perpetual sorrow counterbalances her economic self-sufficiency. The main point that emerged from the discussions was that regardless of her class background and income level, the widow does not enjoy her role as bread winner. If she is dependent on a male relative she emerges as a figure of pity who, if beyond the marriageable age, can weep her life gratefully away in the service of others; or if she is still pretty and young, she must find a husband for herself and thus be provided for.

Like her counterparts in the other roles, she is virtuous, modest, religious and honest in poverty; and if she has children, then she has a strong maternal instinct. She differs from the wife and mother only in that she is sad and carries the marks of suffering on her face.

### *Deserted Wife*

She too possesses the virtues found in other categories of good women. However her main characteristic is a masochistic acceptance of suffering. In most instances, the deserted wife suffers all possible forms of degradation and deprivation while continuing to hope for the return of the errant husband in some distant and unforeseeable future. Even in cases where she does rebel, as in Bano Qudsiya's *Saawal Mor Mohaaraan*, her bid for freedom is cancelled out by her role as mother, and the end result is not different from that of the wife who waits endlessly for the man to return to her.

### *Daughter-in-Law, Mother-in-Law, Sister-in-Law*

These are three roles which enable the woman to give play to the woman's supportive and subordinate role in society. In all three cases, the emphasis is on service and devotion to the cause of the family which is synonymous with the interests of the father/husband

and/or son. Identifying with patriarchal norms, these women are the jealous and acclaimed guardians of the status quo and their role is to chalk out roles for other women in their milieu.

### *Grandmother*

She fulfils the functions already being performed by the other good women in the family. However, her senior position in the family hierarchy enables her to endorse the authoritarian structure of the family. As such she is often the mouthpiece of established opinions and received ideas.

### *Spinster Aunt and Older Sister*

These are necessary though some what aberrant figures in TV drama. The roles are necessary because spinster aunts and unmarried sisters do exist in society. Operating again within the bounds of chastity and self-abnegation, their function, like that of the others is to support and endorse the existing value system. They differ from the others in that they represent the woman's failure to secure a man. As such they enable the writers to introduce elements of sexist humour in the play. The important point about these women is that although we sometimes laugh with them, they themselves are more often than not the targets of humour. Their eccentricity and irrationality serve as reminders of the sexual frustration implicit in their status as single women. On the other hand, if sometimes they are allowed a certain amount of wit (their age no longer posing a threat to the male ego), the purpose of their caustic speech is to expose deviations from the norm and to show that these are harmful or counterproductive.

### *Characteristics of 'good' and 'bad' women*

In summation, the survey demonstrated that these main female roles could be divided into two broad categories viz. the 'good' and the 'bad' woman.

The good woman had the following characteristics:

Self-sacrificing: e.g. the case of the mother/wife in *Saawal Mor Mohaaraan*.

Self-abnegating: Lives through those around her, e.g. in *Hum Log (Ourselves)* the young widow never projects herself. Her conversation and all her concerns centre around her child.

**Virtuous:** Again with reference to the heroine of *Hum Log*, the virtuous woman remains within the space prescribed for her. She is pious and faithful. This is signified by her refusal to talk to a strange man.

**Domesticated:** There are countless roles that show the woman looking after the home, teaching the children, mending, washing, sewing, saving money. Again in *Saawal Mor Mohaaraan*, sympathy for the heroine is elicited through recurrent shots which show her involved in domestic chores and therefore lacking the time to 'smarten up' for the man.

**Religious:** She either prays regularly, or refers constantly to God for guidance, or tells children/friends/husband or any other unwitting soul who comes her way to rely on God.

**Traditional:** Not active within the public field. Has no economic dimension, or at best, reluctantly and tangentially. If she is a working woman it is only because circumstances viz. lack of appropriate male support, compel her to earn her own living.

**Dependent:** On the male for livelihood, transport, advice etc. Does not voice her own opinion, or if she does, is willing to give into the 'naturally' wiser male counsels.

**Conservative in Dress:** Dresses quietly, is not absorbed by the latest fashions. Makes an excessive and visible use of the veil or *dupatta*, as the heroine in *Hum Log*, who keeps her head covered even when talking to her future husband. The *dupatta*, apart from being an article of every dress for women is loaded with symbolism, and a covered head denotes both sexual purity and respect for elders when worn thus in their presence.

**Emotional:** As opposed to rational, which is predominantly a male characteristic in a world dichotomised on the basis of sexual difference. Thus in *Hum Log*, the woman is shown as being unable to deal with her male colleagues. She weeps instead of taking practical measures to sort out her problems. In another play *Bandish* (Bonds/Bondage) the woman makes impulsive decisions and acts without much thought. She leaves home in anger and without any consideration of the consequences of her behaviour.

**Irrational:** A quality closely related to excess of emotions. In *Bandish*, again the otherwise good heroine refuses to listen to advice either from a male friend or an aunt regarding her engagement, and thus suffers because of her rash decision.

**Brave for Others:** viz. family: images of the mother at the sewing machine oblivious of her own exhaustion; the wife trying desperately to earn a living because the husband is sick/unemployed /degenerate.

Honest in Poverty: It is the woman who guides the man in this sphere, often at great cost to herself and others. She works her fingers to the bones, makes no material demands and thus saves the man/members of the family from moral destruction.

### *The Bad Woman*

#### *Working Mothers and Society Belles*

TV's "bad" woman comes in all the roles mentioned earlier, but she differs from her 'good' sister in that she lacks the qualities of submissiveness and self-sacrifice. Once again the media operates through clichés, especially around the role of the mother and the society belle. The working mother will be hard and uncaring and her children neglected and starved of love. The home will be mismanaged and the husband either long suffering and silent in the house or forced to seek comfort elsewhere, usually in the arms of another bad woman! The society belle shares the characteristics of the working mother. The only difference will be that where the working mother indulges her ego in an office, the society belle concentrates on dominating the party scene.

This conflation of the image of the working mother, who affirms the productive potential of the woman, with that of the society belle who apparently has none, is important both as symbol and as patriarchal strategy. By placing the economically viable working woman in the same grid as the non-productive and parasitic society belle, the media erases the woman's economic dimension. Or if it does not quite succeed in doing that, it grants it the furtive quality of an illicit act.

The woman's role, as defined by the portrayal of the good woman, is to suffer in silence. By violating this scheme of things, the bad woman sets herself outside the pale of the moral order and asks for the trouble that inevitably comes her way. Unless of course she recognises the error of her ways and allows the man to reclaim her and bring her back into the domesticity of the family and the four walls of the home. This last simultaneously establishes the inherent weakness and fallibility of the woman, and allows free play to the man's generosity and strength, which are then seen as specifically male attributes.

### *Ego Women*

The bad wife and the bad mother often overlap. Both are selfish and egotistical, and the ego, we are told by the mother of the rebellious wife in *Saawal Mor Mohaaraan*, is a male preserve as it provides the man with the motor energy so necessary for him to succeed in the working day world of men. The woman's place is in the home; her self-fulfilment and salvation lie in the service of others, and as such the 'ego' has no place in

her life. The woman who fails to suppress its prompting can only store up grief and sorrow for herself and those who depend on her.

Overall, Ashfaque Ahmed's plays demonstrate such misogyny and they usually end in the defeat and humiliation of the woman. His portrayal of the domineering and ambitious wife in *Doosri Kahani* (The Second Tale) of the *Tota Kahani* series, exemplifies the pitfalls attendant upon the unbridled female ego. In this play the wife/mother alienates both husband and son in her bid to realise her worldly ambitions through them. This portrayal also illustrates another cliché regarding women as the cause of the moral corruption and /or unhappiness of the man. How many of us after all, have not heard the remark that X or Y was a good man brought to ruin by the unreasonable demands of his wife for jewels or a car or a better standard of living ?

Apart from thematic treatment in *Doosri Kahani*, the woman's humiliation is worked out through images that align her with all that is base and material in life. This effect is achieved both through the difference in tone and manner between the husband and wife, and through the quality of light and the angle of the camera from which they are shown. The wife is arrogant in her manner; whereas the husband's voice is low and his speech is measured, giving the impression of considered judgement even in the most trivial matters, such as asking for a cup of tea.

The quality of light too is different for both of them. It is bright and direct when it falls on the wife, thus emphasising the angles and sharp contrasts in the colours of her dress and the objects that surround her. It is more diffused for the man, falling obliquely on him to give a more harmonious effect. Such photographic techniques work upon and reinforce the stereotype of the greedy and rapacious woman.

By drawing upon this cliché of the domineering wife and the mild mannered beleaguered husband, the writer and producer succeed in placing the entire blame for the ensuing disaster on the woman. Second, the proliferation of stereotypical images and language-use enables them to slide over the implicit knowledge that the saintly and long-suffering husband is a successful industrialist and that he could not have become one without sacrificing atleast some of his much vaunted humanitarian principles. Similarly, specific narrative techniques allow erasure of the fact that the wife with all her arrogance and insensitivity is after all only upholding the hierarchies of class and money that represent his world. In a clever role reversal, the text elides the *man's* economic dimension, not as a critique of the ruthless world of big business, but in order to focus on and consolidate the woman's traditional role – by stepping out of her prescribed role as supportive and subordinate wife and mother, she simultaneously forfeits her femininity and her humanity.

### *Single and Working..*

Apart from the transgressive wife/ mother figure, the greatest source of danger to society, as depicted in the TV plays of the Zia era, is the working woman and especially the *single* working woman. She is the bad woman par excellence of popular fiction and TV drama. Her significance in the Pakistani context lies in that she represents an area of confusion and uncertainty. Traditionally, the only woman who was unmarried and operative within the public sphere was the prostitute or 'fallen' woman who enticed the man away from the legitimate though often dull pleasures of domesticity. Good women got married, stayed at home and did not participate in the financial transactions of the male world. The entry of the working woman in to the public domain of visible economic productivity, apart from offering competition for jobs, does not fit in to the familiar scheme of things. She is therefore depicted as the woman whose desires are at variance with the conventional idea of chaste femininity and who, especially during the period under discussion, deserves appropriate indictment.

Subsequently, she is depicted either as the misguided or heartless mother/wife who neglects her home and children and often risks family harmony for action in the public field. Or she is the single working woman who, because she is willing to compete with men in traditionally male areas of activity, is portrayed as the temptress. She is the home-wrecker because she is the cause of male defection or because she is a bad influence on the good wife.

Thus by virtue of shifts in socio-economic contexts, the traditional vamp of the cinema screen has been replaced by the single working woman, and this is no accident. Nor is this transference completely at odds with the unbridled sexuality associated with the vamp. Though in earlier times, the demarcation line between the good, invisible woman and the bad, economically visible woman could be drawn with less ambiguity.

### *Subvariety of Working Women*

This, however, is not to say that there are no good working women in TV drama. These do exist, but with a difference. They work out of economic necessity alone and their aim, explicitly, is to save the home from disintegration or to share the economic burden with the husband. The significant difference of course is one of attitudes. The bad working woman works for herself, and her good sister does so for others and is ready to scuttle back into the home at the first opportunity. The fact that even the most committed 'career' women, and this includes vamps and prostitutes, work out of economic necessity is elided in most plays.

In *Dareecha* (Threshold) which was telecast in September '85 for instance, the working woman, a teacher, acts as the means to a young man's growth to socialisation and maturity within the ideological grid of 'hard work and self-reliance'. The young man, a social drop out, is rescued by the woman after he has left home in a temper. She urges him to return to his parents and encourages him to work hard for a degree which will enable him to get a job. Gradually the man moves away from the negations that had initiated the story and the woman is made to relinquish her active role through a timely marriage with an old class fellow.

In itself the story is inoffensive enough, but a feminist reading reveals it to be a thinly masked exercise in sexual cultural polemics. The woman, who steps forward providentially to intervene in the young man's life is a teacher. This profession places her within the purview of 'respectability' as teaching is not only one of the jobs which is socially acceptable for women, it also fits in with the woman's cultural role as a nurturing entity. In this sense it is an extension of her reproductive role which justifies her care and protective authority over the child. In the case of the male child, this role extends up until the time when he reaches the stage where he can assume responsibility for himself. Once this stage has been achieved, her authority comes to an end and a reversal of roles occurs where the child who owed her obedience, is now placed in a position where he can dictate to her.

Second, the teacher is also a widow with a small child. Underpinning her independent image, this discreetly hinted at sorrow makes her sexually 'safe' as far as the act of stepping forward and accosting the man is concerned. For a single woman such an act would have carried connotations of sexual aggression and it would have been construed as 'fast' behaviour. In this case, the combined role of widow and mother deprives this act of any threat to male sexuality and locates it firmly within the parameters of nurturance and self-sacrifice.

Finally, the arrival of the fiancé, which coincides with the young man's gravitation into the legitimate areas of sociality, serves two purposes. It cancels out any surreptitious doubts in the viewers' minds as to her intentions and it puts a timely end to her independence. Thus, the implicit moral of the story appears to be that a woman may step out of the bounds of passivity in service of others, provided that during this process she does not forget her assigned role within patriarchy – she must be willing to relinquish her rights to domesticity and to the man who heads the family unit.

This seems to be a recurrent theme in most TV plays that deal with the contentious subject of the working or economically independent woman. Haseena Moin's very popular serial *Tenhaiyan* (Solitude), deals with the problem of the good, single working

woman in yet another way. Having allowed the heroine to achieve public success (she enters the public field and makes good her family's lost fortune), the script virtually erases her from the narrative.

Succumbing to a childhood fear of being alone, the heroine rushes out of the house and is hit by a speeding car. The subsequent coma, the threat of possible brain damage and/or paralysis are offset by the conversations and guilt of friends and family members who rail at themselves for not having looked after her better, and by the presence of a younger sister of the 'kittenish' variety who weeps copiously for her sister. The play ends with the recovery of the heroine, her marriage with the hero and the end of her life as a career woman. While it would be unfair to reduce the entire play to only one of its dimensions, this drastic retreat from the public to the private sphere does emerge as an almost desperate bid to diffuse the phenomenon of the working woman. This bears significance given that at the time, despite state policy and mainstream thinking, more and more women were entering what are traditionally seen to be male fields of action.

## Humour

As mentioned earlier, humour forms yet another means of denigrating and controlling women. Although men and women may be equally the source of humour as well as its targets in TV drama, the quality of humouring has a definite gender bias. The women who serve as targets of male humour are almost always working women, spinsters and domineering wives of the virago variety. Jokes focus on their role-bound and socially-negated characteristics. By contrast, the man is usually depicted as the hapless victim of these women, or as the patient husband/son/servant/colleague who accepts their vagaries out of a good humoured resignation to circumstances. The single woman too serves as the fairly consistent butt of sexist humour. The jokes aimed at her recall the stereotype of the spinster who, having failed to get a man, is the repository of ill temper, irrationality and inconsistency.

This pattern does not change in jokes made by women. Despite the semblance of control, they are betrayed by their own humour as it usually rebounds on them. For instance, the kind of humour indulged in by innocent young girls is characterised by an all pervasive element of childishness and naiveté – the 'kittenish' sister in *Tenhainyan* operates at the level of sticking her tongue out at undesirable men. Other similar gestures or comments elicit the man's indulgence but never his fear of her sexual potential. Incidentally good women of the passive kind seldom make jokes. It would seem that the subversiveness of laughter, no matter how limited, is forbidden to them.

## Cosmetic democracy - 1985.

At this stage, there was little reason to believe that there would be any change in the projection of women in TV drama. However, the shift from martial law to a cosmetic democracy in 1985 brought with it a welcome moment of reprieve in the more visible spheres of life. In the street it manifested itself through processions and public meetings, and on television, through a more sympathetic though conservative approach to women and their problems.

In January 1986, a Government directive based on recommendations by the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women, was sent to PTV, Radio and women's ngos. This directive yet again asked for a 'positive' approach to women's issues. The result was a slight though uneven change in the quality and focus of plays being telecast by PTV.

One example is Amjad Islam Amjad's *Doosra Kadam* (The Second Step). This play is significant as it reflects both PTV's dependency on government directives, as well as the cultural ambivalence towards women who do not fit into traditional female roles. The play dealt with problems of the working woman – in this case, a young and attractive divorcee faced with sexual harassment at office and in the locality where she lives. The play differed from earlier presentations in that the woman was neither a vamp nor a home-wrecker. Ostensibly a sympathetic examination of the problem of sexual harassment was intended. Nevertheless, the narrative was shot through with contradictory meaning, and it ultimately followed conventional patterns in that the female protagonist was depicted as a victim and the only solution to her problem was the 'safe alternative' of marriage. Further, the play's visual structure assisted the subtext. That is, from its inception, the working woman's body became victim to the male gaze wherever she stepped into male domains – the street, the office as well as the camera.

Thus, ineffective policies and a reliance on stereotypical gender roles coupled with thematic repetitiveness confirms the initial premise of this study. That is, the main thrust of television drama in Pakistan has been towards entertainment and/or ideological manipulation through the deployment of popular myths and nationalist platitudes. This situation is compounded by the fact that Pakistani Television, because of the nature of its outreach, is subject to stricter censorship laws than any other form of media. This is exemplified by the comments of M. Nisar Ahmed, Managing Director of PTV after the take-over by Zia-ul-Haq's military regime in 1977. In an interview with *Herald* magazine, he defined his role as MD as being analogous with that of a *munshi* (agent and keeper of accounts) vis a vis the *maalkan* or owners of the property, in this case the government. He further stated that not only does the Pakistan government draw up the general policy for PTV, but that what the government defines as "positive" values are "taken as positive

values for the moment." The MD's statement, its cynicism notwithstanding, says it all. If women want to bring about changes in the way their image is distorted by the media, they will have to find alternative channels for doing so. Official media will hear only the voice of its masters.

Today, although women's lives continue to be bleak and the patriarchal dichotomies that divide the world along gender lines persist, certain important changes have taken place. To begin with, after the restoration of democracy under a woman head of government in 1988, there were changes in official policy regarding the projection of women on television. Although rules regarding the use of the *dupatta* by TV newscasters and announcers were not relaxed, women were granted greater visibility. As far as TV drama was concerned, although the majority of the plays continued to mete out stereotypes, some plays explored complex issues concerning women.

Among these was a series called *Neelay Haath* (Blue Hands). Written by Shahid Nadeem and produced by Madiha Gauhar of *Ajoka* theatre, these plays dealt with the issue of violence and women. Most of the episodes were based on real life incidents, and they centred around the different kinds of violence that women are subjected to in Pakistan. The series was immensely popular and drew its viewers from all sections of society, both rural and urban. Significantly, there was a tendency among upper class women to accuse Madiha of thematic and situational over-exaggeration in the plays. On the other hand, rural and lower middle class women would eagerly wait for each episode as they identified with both the class of women represented in the series and with the nature of problems depicted on screen. *Neelay Haath* was followed by *Tapish* (Heat) produced by Sahira Kazmi, and *Piyaas* written by Asghar Nadim Syed. Both plays dealt with issues of violence at the gender and class levels. Not only did these plays set a new trend in TV drama, they also lifted the taboo around the issue of rape and violence, which earlier had been implicitly treated, in order to intimidate the female characters rather than to represent and critique the violence and related social problems faced by women.

### **Prospective Directions**

Alternative theatre can serve as a rich source for actors and playwrights for television drama. Groups like *Ajoka*, *Lok Rehas*, *Saanjh*, *Dastak*, to name only a few, began in response to Zia-ul-Haq's repressive policies; since then they have established their credibility using both street theatre and more traditional theatre formats to provide alternative perspectives, especially to women's issues.

College drama groups are also beginning to get involved with women's and other human rights issues. Both Kinnaird College and Government College Lahore have had active

drama societies, and in the '60s and early '70s amateur groups provided some excellent theatre in Lahore. However, with the advent of Islamisation, much of this activity stopped. Ironically Kinnaird, by virtue of being a women's college which works with an all female cast, continued to produce its annual play and still holds an annual inter-class One Act Play Competition. This forum provides students with the space to write and produce their own plays without interference from the faculty. Notable among them have been *Divaaney Kon?* (Who's Crazy?), *Yeh Ghao Kaisay Bharna Hai* (How Will This Wound Be Healed?), *Lapar* (Slap) etc. Of the plays mentioned here, the first two were written by students and *Lapar* by Shahid Nadim of *Ajoka*. These plays dealt with issues of rape, women in prisons, trafficking, son preference, domestic violence and other similar concerns. While their impact is limited to the middle class student community, it does indicate a definite change within the perceptual field of a generation of young women. Further, as a number of students who take part in college drama societies are being drawn into theatre groups like *Ajoka* and *Lok Rehas* in Lahore alone, some optimism regarding positive changes in the representation of women in the media may be justified.

Women's ngos have also made an entry into the field of documentaries on women. Among these films are Sabiha Sumar's *Who Shall Cast the First Stone*, which deals with problems created by the Haddood Ordinance. This film was made for BBC. ASR (Applied Socio-Economic Research) has to its credit *When This Day Is Named*, a film on Pakistan's women's movement, with a focus on Sindhiani Tehrik and Women's Action Forum. This film was also made for BBC. Simorgh has made three short films entitled *Jaloos*, *Mai Jannat* and *Neither Coal Nor Ashes*. The first is about women and street power and is based on protest marches taken out by Women's Action Forum against issues such as violence against women and discriminatory and anti-democratic laws. The second one is based on an interview with a seventy year old mid-wife from Dajal, a small village in southern Punjab. *Mai Jannat*'s narrative and her critique of patriarchy dispel the notion that the women's movement is confined to a few misguided, urban upper class women - a recurrent cliché used by fundamentalists and the establishment to trivialise the movement. The third film, *Neither Coal Nor Ashes*, deals with the issue of stove burning deaths in Pakistan.

Apart from these short documentaries, which are shown at women's conscientisation work shops, video films of street theatre plays are also used as take off points for discussion at such meetings. Among those used in this context, *Ajoka's Bury*, with its theme of women in prisons, has been extremely thought provoking.

The *jalsa* as a forum for the dissemination of ideas or for highlighting issues has continued to play its part as far as conscientisation and protest are concerned. Songs and plays by different theatre groups are performed at these gatherings and at street corners.

Although this activity is restricted to Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, attempts have been made to take these plays to the smaller provincial towns, notably by *Lok Rehas*.

This list of interventions can feed the forms that television dramas assume. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the task that must be undertaken before women are able to shake off the stranglehold of stereotypical images cannot be underestimated. It is up to us to continue with this work and to increase its outreach and impact.

## FILM

As a popular means of entertainment, films serve as one of the most effective channels for the production and dissemination of ideology. They recreate reality in the darkened cinema hall through the triangular relationship between the audience or spectator, the image on the screen and the narrative perspective set up by the 'eye' or angle of vision of the camera.

In addition to enabling this "willing suspension of disbelief," the cinema also provides an experience which is both personal and private, yet public and impersonal. Insulated from the known and external world by the particular space and structure of the cinema, the spectator is allowed entry into a world of fantasy where s/he can, through a voyeuristic identification with the main protagonists in the story, experience her /his own repressed desires. It is public and impersonal because the act of viewing a film in the cinema is a collective act and one in which the audience participates as a group. This creates a distance between the spectator and the screen image and releases her/him from the guilt that might result from a confrontation with these repressed desires, as it deflects them onto the impersonality of a shared experience based on common cultural assumptions and fantasies.

The ways in which the camera projects the image on the screen is not only instrumental in showing the spectator an image but in telling her/him how to look at it and what meaning to read in it. According to the feminist critic, E. Ann Kaplan,<sup>xxviii</sup> this 'gaze' is built upon culturally defined notions of sexual difference. Therefore the act of gazing or looking, which is played upon in the dominant cinema, creates pleasure that is ultimately erotic in its origins. And because patriarchal cultures designate the woman as 'object of desire', the eroticism of such cinema projects the woman as the legitimate object of male desire and fantasy. Thus, films are never benign – a prescriptive 'reality' gets created and recreated in the darkened hall, through the interplay of various cinematic components and their ideological underpinnings.

### Films in Pakistan

Pakistani cinema caters to a predominantly illiterate and economically disadvantaged class. Subsequently, film producers operate within the belief that the simplest form of entertainment, for an audience who in 'real' life finds little or no reprieve from the pressures of daily living, is to grant people a brief entry into a world where the fulfilment of desire is possible. Thus, films are made to provide 'entertainment' in the form of escape

for viewers (whose sense of alienation may be intensified by rapid urbanisation and internal migration). Whether or not the medium is perceived as a creative means for provoking critical thinking by film makers, it certainly is not used as such.

Further, not only are the viewers and producers predominantly male, but almost all scriptwriters, and camera crew are also male. They are, with the exception of a negligible few, uneducated (in the wider sense), and reflect a middle-class morality in their work. This confluence of context and interests positions women's bodies as the major means to commercial success. All the possible ways in which a woman can be exploited visually are deployed. The choice of roles, the costumes, dance, songs, dialogues and camera treatment emphasise the fact that the film industry has a steady eye on the box office. Thus even those themes or subplots that could be considered 'social' (a local term for creating consciousness of social problems) are treated in a manner that yet again exploits the woman and her body (e.g. rape scenes, violence, honourable vendettas etc.).

The commercial aspect is also reflected in films made by women film producers who conform to male oriented stereotypes. The failure of even the few films that are seen as 'alternate' (but were basically in the same mould from a feminist point of view, despite their social and political messages) is a validation of the above observation.

Given this context, we can begin to understand why (1) Pakistani films are sexist and based on an affirmation of patriarchal norms and (2) why they rely so heavily on voyeurism (an active perversion, practised primarily by men with the female body as the object of their 'gaze'), exhibitionism, (the passive counterpart of voyeurism, and therefore, presumably practised more by women) and fetishism in their representation of the female image on the screen.<sup>xxix</sup>

### **The Impact of Films**

The impact of films on attitudes and behaviour of women and men has not been systematically studied. However if one were to observe the more superficial aspects of the cinema world, the conclusion would certainly be that films *do* have a strong impact. For example, film songs and the concepts of romance, romantic behaviour and motherhood, to name a few, appear to have permeated the attitudes of all classes of Pakistanis. It is interesting to note here that film songs are very popular and retain a nostalgic quality for even the so called 'intellectual', upper-class women and men. The attitudes of masochistic, self-sacrificing unrequited love, the scenarios of *barsat* romances (monsoon), the subjugation of a women's entire life to the whims of her father, brother, husband, lover, son, the *zalim zamana* (cruel world) that obstructs and destroys romance, are all part and parcel of the Pakistani film 'love life'. It can of course be argued that

society has influenced these depiction's of the film world. But through the idealisation that takes place in films, negative, and ultimately, anti-woman attitudes and values are projected and reinforced.

It has been noted with amusement, that among the conscious feminists, while singing romantic film songs in a group, suddenly a woman will stop and laughingly protest at a line that romanticises women's suffering and martyrdom in and through loving men! But 99.9-1/2% women do not question any of these projections because in a strongly patriarchal society these values and attitudes have been internalised so well that they are not challenged.

A breakdown of the different constituent parts of the film will be made in the following sections. This will both substantiate the arguments presented in the introductory section and will show how male fantasy is narrativised in ways that reinforce sexual hierarchies in society.

### **Roles Women Portray**

Of course the plot determines the roles in which women are portrayed, but certain attitudinal and behavioural categories do emerge. Simplistically put – and their portrayal in Pakistani films is simplistic in the extreme – there are the virtuous women and there are the whores. In the final analysis, as in television drama, women fall into either one or the other category. However, they do cross over, though normally from the whore to virtuous category, thus establishing the triumph of the moral order. That a whole genre of films about prostitutes in Urdu and Punjabi exists on this theme is significant, and such preoccupation in a segregationist society that sets a high premium on female chastity requires an in-depth study in itself.

But to generalise, there are major roles in each category – the mother, the sister, mothers and sisters-in-law, friends, rivals, daughters, maid servants. These are stereotyped roles which, depending on the urban or rural setting, have predictable characteristics. Most, if not all, are 'good' women who of course betray negative characteristics associated with women in our culture – they are jealous, petty, scheming, harsh, stupid, silly, passive, helpless and conformists to the bitter end. The second category consists of the 'bad' women – these are the prostitutes, gangsters molls and more recently, the independent working woman who is shown as being 'westernised', a term which is more or less synonymous with moral depravity, and the absence of emotions associated with motherhood, such as nurturance and self-sacrifice.

Here again the similarity between women in films and women in TV drama, as discussed in an earlier chapter, is clear. The greater latitude allowed to the cinema enables an inclusion of prostitutes who, in the Zia era were debarred from the miniscreen which is more geared to 'family' entertainment. The post-Zia era, however, has seen a slight shift in TV drama in this regard.

### **Heroines**

The stereotype emphasises docility, domesticity, self-sacrifice, a readiness to accept all the patriarchal values with great endurance, and of course femininity, as desired and desirable characteristics for women to project. The last quality is often characterised by frivolity and a focus on dressing up. The plots generally revolve around the naive, coquettish and spoilt young woman (rural or urban) who falls in love and then weeps and wails and sings and dances her way to marriage.

Urdu films often have 'social' themes such as the abandoned woman with a child (married of course, but misunderstandings abound). Generally, class and money play villains, and the errant husband, the sacrificing mother among others provide the back-drop for these films. If the film is a 'tragedy', the heroine either dies or marries the man she does not love for reasons of family honour. If not, then she finally marries the hero and lives happily ever after. Some of the most popular Urdu films in earlier decades portrayed the 'heroic' sacrifice of one woman for another. For example, *Baaji*, (Older Sister) and *Saheli* (Friend) to name two, depicted the sacrifice of elder sisters for younger sisters as both loved the same man, while a recent Punjabi box office hit *Mehndi* (Henna), involved two close women friends, with the poor woman opting out through suicide.

Rarely are women portrayed as real heroines. That is, they are not allowed 'real' deeds of heroism. Even in films based on folk stories, where the heroines were in fact powerful characters like Umrao Jan Ada and Anarkali, the stories and their outcome are structured so as to lessen the impact of their real deeds of heroism. In other words, the heroine is 'appropriated'. 'Patriarchy cannot tolerate violations of its representations and constructs and she must be 'sacrificed' to patriarchal ends'. Thus what reaches the audiences is a distortion of facts, based on a particular point of view.

Another significant factor that emerges from the analysis of 'heroines' is that even when they are on strong ground in conflictual situations, they do not seem to have the language to express themselves. An example of this is the betrayed wife in *Shadi Meray Shohar Ki* (My Husband's Wedding). She objects to her husband's love-affairs and in particular to a serious involvement with a young girl. She argues with him, but on the emotional basis of being his wife. She does not talk about the situation in legal terms, or even moralistically

as the man certainly would have in a reverse situation. When she finally gathers enough courage to leave home in protest, even giving up her eight year old son, she does so in an emotional manner, rather than by settling matters rationally and/or legally. Towards the end of the film when she barges in on her husband's second marriage ceremony, she resorts to using rhetoric and a gun, and does not refer even once to the laws of the land, which do not allow a second marriage without the permission of the first wife. The fact that this law has been in force for almost three decades over-rides ignorance about this matter on part of the producer and script writer. This argument is corroborated by the fact that in the third or fourth frame of the film, the script establishes that the son is eight years old and that if the wife leaves, she forfeits custody of her child. The knowledge of law thus being clearly demonstrated in favour of the man right from the start.

This treatment is not only a reflection of the script writer's selective use of knowledge but is also a reflection of the society we live in – it does not allow women to voice their legitimate protests or fight for their rights because of an apparent lack of knowledge and power.

### **The Bad Woman**

She is the 'loose' woman who is either a victim or villain, as the plot eventually determines. But by definition she is a woman who has broken (or has been made to break by force of circumstances) the rules of the social order. Yet paradoxically her being 'loose' is in the service of men. That is, she is economically dependent on them and either sells herself or serves their ends. Prostitutes, dancing women, gangsters molls, 'madams' fall into this category as does the 'liberated' woman. The latter is considered 'bad' as she defies the norms and values of 'tradition'. Whatever the case might be though, a virulent moralism is played out in the issue of her fate. That is, she either repents and reforms, or else is killed off, commits suicide or goes mad. Or less dramatically, her retribution is worked out through the loss of social 'respectability' as well as love and intimacy within the family (husband, children, home).

### **Subsidiary Roles**

The women who are cast in supporting roles usually function as foils for the heroine and are rarely projected as positive characters. They are echoes of the male world in that in one way or another they uphold existing hierarchies. For example in *Shadi Meray Shohar Ki*, the sisters-in-law exhort the wife to go back to her husband and home despite his unfaithfulness. The wife's arguments are belittled by the minimal support and approval that one sister-in-law, unmarried and young, gives to her act of independence. Very soon both sisters-in-law are on the same platform – that good wives do not leave home.

In other subsidiary roles women are coquettish and stupid, or serve as maidservants, victims of poverty and age, as rivals or as gyrating chorus members. They generally provide more female forms for the male gaze.

### **Motherhood**

Motherhood is glorified in Pakistani culture. It is supported by religious scriptures according to which 'heaven lies at the feet of the mother' and that on the Day of Judgement men and women will be known by the names of their mothers. These edicts are used to indicate the high status given to women as mothers.

However, instead of giving women a high position within the system of power-relations, this valorisation of the mother is used to limit women. The ultimate goal and source of fulfilment in a woman's life is perceived to be 'motherhood'. From the time a girl is born she is considered a temporary family member or 'guest' who has to go to her 'own home', which is in fact a euphemistic term for her husband's home. She is also told that she must only leave this home on her funeral bier.

But marriage alone is not enough. Bearing children (specifically male) is perceived as integral to this social and economic contract. Infertility is a curse and infertile women are considered 'bad luck'. They are debarred from many ceremonies related to marriage and child birth. The fact that a man is permitted to divorce his wife on grounds of infertility is further substantiation of this cultural precept. And according to popular interpretations of Islam, the funeral of an unmarried woman is *najaiz* (unlawful). In other words marriage is 'necessary', and the infertile or single woman is considered and treated as abnormal.

Films dramatise and idealise, and subsequently reinforce the values underlying this conception of motherhood in our society. The conflicts and doubts, the special burdens of motherhood are systematically ignored. Perhaps this is just as well as these would be portrayed from a male perspective, and we see the results, especially in television plays, where real problems (e.g. balancing energy and emotions between home and work) are denigrated by the women being shown as opting for one or the other. In either case the stereotype is reinforced – in one case she is a 'bad' mother, in the other a 'good' one. Complex realities are seen in black and white terms, and the multiplicity of experience is ironed out by the unilinear structure of the narrative.

The portrayal of women as good mothers is usually based on the image of the self sacrificing, hardworking woman who suffers intensely for her children. She is allowed to be aggressive and even violent in order to protect her children or their interests, thus reflecting the cultural reality of a woman gaining status and voice in decision-making through motherhood and age. In the role of the mother-in-law, the woman is often shown

as tough and uncompromising, though again it is in the context of patriarchal values of honour, class, property and social norms.

The special relationship between mothers and sons is a recurrent factor in our films. The fact that in reality women find companionship, affection and respect through their sons is portrayed in highly emotional terms. And if these very same indulged sons are shown as behaving crudely and sometimes cruelly towards their mothers, it is also shown that the 'cause' is another woman. She is often the sweetheart, wife or another scheming woman who influences the man. Thus the blame for the poor treatment of the martyred mother and good woman is laid at the doorstep of another woman, and not on the male.

This raises the question of bonding between women. In a segregated society where the joint and extended family is common and desirable, where tribal/ethnic bonding, close relationships with neighbours in villages and urban areas are part of the way of life for the majority (the only exception and those too, only in degree - are the urban, upper-class, professional elite), the relationships between women are close. There is sharing at all levels and affection and caring is expressed spontaneously. Even in the delicately balanced relationship of the mother and daughter-in-law, areas of sharing and dependency do develop. Further, the cultural factor of respect and affection for older women has some bearing on this relationship.

However, while depicting friendships between women, Pakistani films tend to play down the solidarity between them. The scenes where women are shown as friends are often shot in a fashion that serves more as a means to titillate the audience rather than to show emotional bonding among women. Scenes with women dancing together often involve gestures having definite sexual connotations. This kind of body contact both fetishizes and objectifies the women's bodies and gets past the censors who would object to similar contact between a man and a woman.

A recent Punjabi release *Mehndi* (still running to a packed house while this report was being written four months later), is apparently an unusual film given this context. It shows intense emotional bonding (rather similar to that of lovers) between two friends, one rich and the other poor. However, they both fall for the same man and there is a conflict in each regarding loyalty to the friend and desire for the man. Both, separately decide to commit suicide but the poor woman succeeds, thus simultaneously resolving the dilemma regarding the lover and maintaining the sanctity of class relations.

It is interesting to note that the women viewers interviewed before, during, and after this film all stated that the film was about a "beautiful friendship." On the other hand, the two

men viewers interviewed said it was a film with "excellent dances and about the sacrifice of one friend for another."

Mothers and daughters are not often shown as being close to one another. Rather, the daughter is portrayed as being spoiled by her father. This is a fact that grass-roots workers of a development agency put across very well - that mothers in our society are compelled to be harsh in dealing with their daughters as they understand the problems that lie in store for them. Therefore, they have to train their daughters to be pliable like "wet clay pots," for if they become like "fired clay pots they would shatter at the first impact instead of adjusting to the potters wheel".<sup>xxx</sup>

Thus, overall bonding between women is construed in marginal and undesirable ways so that both women and their relationships remain "manageable", and the power differences in the existing social order are neither questioned nor threatened.

### **Women and Violence**

Violence, whether it is glorified in war, *jehad* (holy war), 'honourable' vendettas and feuds or simply as a symbol of male strength and virility, is very much a part of Pakistani vocabulary. Successive repressive regimes in the country have used violence, overtly and covertly, to subdue people into accepting the status quo. That women are one of the main targets of this violence is seen by the almost daily newspaper reports of abductions, rapes and murders, often in vendettas or property disputes.

Making it more acceptable, Pakistani films reflect this worldview of violence. This is regardless of whether the narrative is based on a folk story (almost all have a vendetta aspect), a nationalist theme (*Aag Ka Darya*, *Nishan-e-Haider* etc.), a populist point of view (*Zulm da Badla*, *Maula Jat*, *Wehshi Jat* etc.) or just plain romantic themes. Even the few, so called 'alternative' films (*Blood of Hussain*, *Mela*, *Neend*, *They are killing the Horse* etc.) have their fair share of violence. The influence of Westerns, Italian, Japanese, and Indian 'action' films has also had a visible effect on the amount and kinds of violence in Pakistani films.

However with regard to women in films, violence assumes two distinct forms. First, there is the more obvious kind - that is violence because of or on behalf of women. Within a patriarchal frame of reference, women are projected as property in need of protection, and in turn, males are projected as their protectors. Subsequently, upholding 'morality' necessitates/legitimises revenge for crimes of honour - rape, abduction, insult of and/or injury to women. (The fact that in the course of such honourable vendettas the women of the rival party are subjected to maltreatment or insult appears to excite no comment)<sup>xxxi</sup>.

From fist fights to floggings to dagger and gun fights, audiences are treated to audio-visual orgies of violence. It should be noted that the sound-effects and volume-level during such sequences is increased manifold! And with the predominance of colour films for over two decades, the impact is even more gory.

The woman in such situations is generally portrayed as a victim. She is either shown losing her sanity (the rape victim in *Maula Jat* who gives the feud a start, becomes insane and dies after dancing her feet to a bloody mess, significantly without her *dupatta*, a symbol of modesty and honour); or, ostracised by society, she retreats to her home to weep out the rest of her days as a victim of circumstances. In recent films (1980s) the victim is often present in the frame of action. But generally, as in the earlier films (both Urdu and regional), she is a passive onlooker or a helpful aide doing the cheer leading.

Even though the thriller genre tends to depict women as more active in the business of avenging their interests, this is only an interim measure and they collapse in the arms of the beloved as soon as the narrative permits. In instances where the victim actually takes up arms to avenge her honour herself, most often she is either killed off or sent to jail. It appears as though a woman cannot take on men to avenge her honour without the support of other men. These men come in the roles of fathers, brothers, husbands, sons and lovers. 'Adopted', 'instant' brothers – a common feature where a stranger will be moved by a situation to call the woman his 'sister' – are also given the protective role prescribed by society.

An interesting observation is that while the 'very good' women rarely take on the business of avenging their honour with violence, the 'bad' ones do. Here, the rape victim also qualifies. A related observation is that cinema hoardings and other publicity channels use images of women in aggressive poses and decor as marketing ploys. For example, the hoardings and advertisements of *Zameen Aasman* (The Sky and the Earth), an Urdu film released in December 1985, depicted blow-ups of the heroine wearing trousers and wielding a whip!

This film itself differs from others in that the footage given to the woman in a violent role is longer than in most films. The heroine is an arrogant, 'modern' daughter of a feudal lord who rules the area while her brother is away. She is portrayed ordering and enjoying the crucifixion of rebellious peasants and whipping men, including the hero, who is a peasant leader. But as the romance between the hero and the heroine develops, she becomes docile and passive – that is, 'true feminine' aspects begin to dominate her behaviour. It is significant that the romance is only established after the hero abducts the heroine, takes her to a peasant hovel on a mountain and forces her to do 'menial' tasks that she has never

previously done, such as chopping wood, collecting cowdung, milking the cow, cooking, fetching water, sweeping etc.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Despite her 'reformation' however, or perhaps because of her new-found sympathies for the oppressed, she now becomes the target of her brothers' violence. And so even though the earlier part of the film establishes the heroine as a 'tough' woman, capable of using and enjoying violence, she soon becomes its victim. Thus, when women are portrayed as 'courageous', it is still in the loser's fashion.

In another instance in *Zameen Aasman*, the poor but upright peasant's son grows up to become a peasant leader mainly because of his mother's encouragement and strength of conviction. Yet this aspect of her personality remains confined to speech alone and does not include action, except in two episodes where her 'courage' is demonstrated by her braving a stampede of cavalry who kill off an entire village; or while she is desperately looking for her son who is hidden in a field of haystacks that the soldiers set on fire. This point deserves emphasis. That is, the self-sacrificing woman can take risks, especially for her son or husband, but she is rarely an active and equal partner in uprisings or revolts against an oppressive class system.

In relation, when women are portrayed as 'aggressive' characters (e.g. Maula Jat's rival's sister) they take on the mannerisms and 'language' of men. For example, this woman competently rode a horse and walked with a distinct swagger (like the male hero), with a rifle resting on her shoulder. She used taunting, 'male' idioms, when talking to her jailers and police officers while goading her brother and tribe to fight to the bloody end. She also shot her own brother after an emotional speech in which she berated him for his cowardice in returning home without killing off their rivals and himself getting beaten up in the process. Thus, in certain roles women are permitted to take on male attributes along with the appended attributes of violence, competitiveness and heartlessness. This 'latitude' serves to reinforce patriarchal values of property and honour.

In the final scene of '*Maula Jat*', this very same 'bold' woman allows herself to be meekly 'handed over' to the rival's family in marriage, so that 'brave sons' of these brave rivals can be born to unite the tribes and fight oppression. (It is interesting to note here that the audience responded very warmly to the heroine and this finale was considered appropriate!)

In some films, especially older ones like *Zerqa* and *Aag Ka Darya* or (The River of Fire), women are shown as being tortured for a noble cause. But the ways in which these scenes are portrayed diverts attention from their sacrifice by focusing the viewer's gaze on costumes (torn in appropriate places), and on the instruments and methods of torture.

The camera treatment of all this and the use of the heroine's body are too much in the realm of sado-masochism for comfort. This mode of portraying the female body is similar to the countless rape scenes in Indian films; they are given footage on the apparent justification that people need to be made aware of antisocial behaviour, even though in fact they operate as a mechanism for introducing titillating frames in the film. Due to the presence of strict censorship codes for Pakistani cinema, rape is depicted in symbolic but extremely provocative ways. Ultimately both explicit and implicit treatments reinforce the norms of sexual violence and focus on women as potential victims.

The second distinct form of violence against women is depicted through occurrences in 'ordinary life'. This form is more subtle and therefore more dangerous. Actions range from abusive and harsh language, to unabashed beatings, to confinement to a room or house by fathers (real or step), brothers or villainous uncles/guardians. Often this violence is shown as being in the interest of the woman. Further, daily violations are not only portrayed as justifiable but are often also construed and viewed as 'fun' in romantic episodes. For example, ear and hair pulling, or the depiction of women fighting women physically is often considered humorous. This perception is important, as regardless of context, it is still a violation of the female body and person.

### Women and Humour

Women are often the targets of 'humour' in Pakistani films. This is usually done through the use of glib and chosen stereotypes such as the naive village woman, the stupid wife or more often through conflicts between women – mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law – usually as rivals for a man's attention.

In 'action' scenes where the woman is an admiring spectator, her 'contribution' in the fights (even on behalf of her honour as is often the case) is ineffectual and serves as an occasion for laughter. An example that comes to mind is in *Choo Mantar* (Abracadabra) a Punjabi film of the '50s where the heroine (otherwise a strong fisherwoman) takes off her sandal and hits the villain ineffectively during a fight between the hero and the villain. The audience found this highly amusing.

In the current films, between the late 70s and 80s, apart from humorous posturing, even the dialogue has become more barbed. Emotional scenes, where women are shown expressing their pain or are briefly in command, are almost always immediately followed by 'witty', 'light hearted' comments that serve to 'distance' or trivialise the charge of the situation/ dialogue. It is almost as if a woman cannot 'say her piece' unless it fits into the pattern of the 'patriarchal plot', with regard to the honour (*izzat*) of the man, the family or the tribe or kin-group. In *Shadi Mery Shohar Ki* (rated as a comedy) when the wife

strongly objects to her husband's extra marital affairs, the power of her emotional dialogue fizzles out (as judged by the audience's laughter), when the husband trivialises her grievance with the quip, "The wise were right! After marriage a woman should be dumb and a man deaf."

From a feminist point of view it is also striking how films are billed as 'comedies'. A prestigious English magazine, the 'Herald' (April 1986), reviewed *Shadi Mery Shohar Ki* as follows:

This...is a rare example of a film that refuses to run out of steam midway but continues to spring surprises on the audience all the way to its hilarious finale...The movie is a delight, with more laughs per minute than any recent film-local or imported.

The film was viewed for this study on the third day of its release, in a packed cinema in the city. To begin with, the audience reaction did not tally with the review as it did not produce 'more laughs per minute...'. Perhaps it was the reviewer's idea of what the film was supposed to be in a stereotyped situation where the poor, errant husband was 'tormented' by his wife who made his extramarital escapades more 'difficult'.

Transgressions of gender roles is another site for the production of humour, for example, when men take on feminine/womanly roles by ineptly attempting to take care of a child – holding a crying baby, trying to amuse or console a child, or by trying to cook. It is as if the male role is yet again being emphasised as *outside* of all the caring, nurturing, giving realms of living, where by implication, female roles are denigrated.

On a different tangent, regardless of the type of film genre, language or period, the appearance of hermaphrodites (*khusras*) on the screen is a call to laughter. The fact that they almost always have very witty and biting dialogue enhances the humour. This is a reflection of reality where hermaphrodites as a group or class traditionally earn their living as entertainers at weddings, births and other festive occasions. It would seem that their 'neutral' situation in a world so sharply defined in female/male roles, is one that allows them to observe and comment on aspects of both roles and situations. The other obvious aspect regarding hermaphroditic roles is that the dialogue is invariably overtly sexual or full of sexual innuendo. Again it seems that the sexual ambiguity of hermaphrodites releases them from verbal taboos and inhibitions associated with clearly demarcated gender roles.

Western theorists suggest that the representation of transvestites and cross dressing in films marks a search for an androgynous ideal through the blurring of sexual differences. This is an aspect that needs more research and analysis in our context, considering that there is no apparent ambivalence in female/male roles and identities here.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Finally, women's 'own' humour is restricted to short and flirtatious dialogues. Significantly few jokes are made at the expense of men. And in situations where there is humorous repartee between women and men, the man seems to always get the last word, thus once again establishing male superiority within male/female relationships.

### Women in Romantic and Courtship Episodes

Irrespective of genre, language or period, romantic/ seductive overtures are almost always initiated by the woman. Though the 'type' of woman determines the specific posture and language of seduction. In the case of the 'good woman', this is done in a childish, 'innocent' or coy manner, with much camera focus on eye and body language. A measured amount of explicit resistance to the male is also displayed. This is especially true of films in the recent decade where the 'liberated' woman is scornful and even rejects the hero's advances. However, she 'succumbs' soon enough and that too, in a gesture of total submission. She gives up her identity and her desires and even her style of dress changes. The colours change dramatically as well, from the flamboyant to the more subtle and subdued shades! In contrast, the 'bad woman' is shown as actively pursuing or ensnaring her desired man.

Invariably, the 'chasing' involves dancing in an overtly seductive, if not obscene manner. Heavy doses of sexual symbolism are deployed in these instances, while gestures and lyrics are openly and often crudely provocative. For example, in a scene from *Chan Varyam* (Beloved Hero), the hero is on a huge black stallion - the camera angle making him dominate the scene - while the heroine writhes suggestively on the ground, singing a song with the following lyrics: '*Mein ik dharti sard di bal di tu ik badal bay parwa, dil di nagri minta kar di meray des we wasda ja*'. Roughly translated, it means, 'I am the thirsty earth burning and parched, you are a careless cloud, I beg you to come and rain in my land too'. The heroine is in yellow - a colour associated, among other things, with revolt and the renewal of spring<sup>xxxiv</sup> especially in the Punjab.

The pursuit and 'appropriation' of the heroine by the hero takes place in an equally basic, though violative manner. Courtship allows the male protagonist to touch, fondle and even manhandle her; gestures which are otherwise considered taboo in the Pakistani context. Significantly, there is a marked contrast between the earlier and latter part of every film in this regard. Once the woman submits, either through acknowledging the man's power

over her or through an engagement/ marriage, these aggressive gestures are barely seen. Perhaps this is indicative of the fact that once a woman becomes part of the family unit, she needs to conserve her time and energy for the service of the man and the family and cannot waste her time in 'love' scenes. The only exception to the relinquishment of her identity occurs in relation to patriarchal norms of *khandan* (family), *khoon* (blood ties) and *izzat* (honour).

In such instances, commonly recurring obstacles to romance are conflicts between family honour and class, inter-tribal feuds and the inherent injustice of a *zalim zamana* (cruel world). Pakistani films tend to resolve this complex interplay and antagonism that arise from a conflict of interests with simplistic panache. The poor hero/ heroine marries his/ her rich counterpart, and this generous and unrealistic wedlock apparently signifies the victory of humanistic values.

Many if not all films tend to resolve the crisis of honour and class through action that entails some sacrifice of the woman's dreams and desires. Where 'bad' women happen to be involved with the hero, audience emotionalism is heightened by dramatic gestures such as the hero's father placing his turban, which is a symbol of his honour, at the woman's feet as he pleads with her to release his son from the snare of her undesirable love. In turn, the woman submits, through self-sacrifice. The cliché of the bad, socially undesirable woman with a good heart is repeated ad nauseam.

Returning to the question of the impact of films on behaviour, this kind of portrayal of romance, hardship and ultimate happiness exercises a definite influence on male behaviour. In reality, codes of behaviour are so rigorous that women do not normally dare to take initiative in most matters, especially in the romantic and sexual encounters. The break with the norm in films is perhaps an expression of male fantasy, especially in a society where there is segregation between the sexes. And the fact that films are either made by males, for males or from a male perspective allows full expression of these fantasies. Further, the way young men in particular pursue women, the gestures, the style, even language is almost identical with that found in films. It is assumed that they also expect the same results! For instance, that the woman will stop being coy and give up the pretence of being irritated or angry and will submit sooner than later to their demands. The way men pester women, especially in holiday resorts (where most of the romantic episodes are shot – the use of foreign locations is a new phenomenon) strongly supports this observation.

## Fantasy and Pornography in Films

What is especially interesting about fantasy in film is that women are permitted to say and do more in dream sequences than in the main film text. *Shadi Meray Shohar Ki*, discussed earlier, demonstrates this kind of unactualised expression. Over half the film is in dream sequence - the unfaithful husband dreams that his wife dies in an accident (after he has very easily brought her back to his home which she left in protest in the main text of the film), so he decides to marry the woman he was having an affair with. However, the ghost of his wife proves to be a disruptive presence. The wife, who in 'real life' is a fairly stereotyped 'good' wife, takes on a very aggressive and vengeful persona in the dream, asserting her identity and her desires with dialogues full of sarcasm. The final shot in the dream sequence has the hero repenting and swearing fidelity to his dead wife. Needless to say, he wakes up, relieved to find his wife has merely left home again and promptly proceeds with arrangements for his second marriage!

Do images (invariably stronger than dialogue) of women as assertive and strong have more impact on the audience, or are the scenes of her final submission or 'taming' more provocative? This kind of question is crucial to feminists - not just in terms of analysis and interpretation of mainstream symbolism but also with regard to possible means and implications of expression in repressive situations.

On a different tack, dream sequences allow male fantasies to play themselves out, because after all, dreams need not pander to daylight moralism. Representations of women in these scenes are fraught with sexual connotations - way-out costumes as they lie around in gardens or fabulous bedrooms awaiting lovers on horses; floating from clouds on moonlit nights, the hero playing a flute while over twenty women float onto the screen around him, singing and dancing with abandon (*Choo Mantar*) - such images speak volumes about the nature of repressed and not-so-repressed male desire.

Like other forms of representation, pornography is a social construct and as such is subject to cultural, political and historical variations. Westerners, especially women viewing Pakistani films for the first time have defined them as 'soft porn'! Such reactions, even years before one consciously looked at films from a feminist point of view, helped bring symbols, and through them the ways in which women's bodies are objectified, into a more critical focus. Though at this point in time, there is no doubt regarding the on-screen objectification of women. The length and life of fantasy sequences, including costumes, props, romantic music, erotic dances and so on, 'reveal' much more about the male world than the realist aspect of the film does.

## **Dance and Songs**

Despite the current ban on women dancing publicly, a film has to have at least half a dozen dances if it is to be a 'hit'. The style of these dances is vulgar and has little connection with the rich traditions of classical and folk dance in Pakistan. The dances, usually to good music, but with very suggestive lyrics, are, to put it bluntly, a form of symbolic sexual intercourse.

Structurally, the plot is often developed through songs, and even dances. The music, lyrics, flashbacks, dream sequences all develop the theme and give it continuity. They provide information on emotional states and on the development of the relationship between the hero and the heroine. Apart from this facilitative service, film soundtracks also draw audiences to the cinema halls.<sup>xxxv</sup> Thus music is an integral part of Pakistani films.

## **Film Dialogue – Its Usage and Impact**

It is not uncommon for people to memorise whole dialogues and remember them for years (in a society with a strong oral tradition this is not a surprising ability). For example, a young man interviewed on his views on the portrayal of women in Punjabi films was able to repeat complete chunks of dialogues from films seen over ten years! Apart from the films themselves, booklets on films and hit songs sometimes include and make available popular film dialogues.

Further, humorous dialogue more so than other types, is absorbed into everyday speech. From a feminist point of view, the damaging point here is that no matter how transient they are, such dialogues provide slick clichés that are thoughtlessly or even deliberately used, thus making negative attitudes and behaviour towards women current and acceptable.

## **Dress**

Aesthetics are never neutral. In a society driven by materialistic ideals, dress is more than mere utility or decoration. Amongst other things, it represents the confluence of both class and gender-based 'morality'. And this morality prescribes and regulates normative (as well as digressive) self-construction, behaviour and relationships.

The life styles projected through films tend to glamorise and subsequently reinforce ostentatious living and its underlying value system. Images of palatial houses, gardens, servants, rich food, clothes, and jewellery belie the reality of a majority that cannot even

aspire to these 'essentials'; and they contradict the official posture regarding Islamic values of simplicity. Thus, films perpetuate double standards and in doing so, serve to maintain existing social stratifications.

As for gender roles, despite strict censorship codes regarding dress, women in cinema are made to wear vulgar clothes in materials that are either gauzy or satiny and that emphasise the curves of their bodies. The use of strategic surface decoration such as sequins and embroidery is an important part of this emphasis as it caters to the general obsession with big breasts and buttocks; it helps focus eyes, male and female, on these parts of the female anatomy. Further, the elaborate tassels of the *lacha* (a kind of sarong) emphasise the waist and buttocks and so on. The *dupatta*, a long scarf/veil meant to cover the head and upper half of the body, is also often used to 'tantalise' the male. The only exception to this usage is when the 'bad' woman reforms or the 'good' woman is reduced to poverty, is chastised or is sorrowing - then her *dupatta* is worn 'modestly'.

Women in western dress - clad in trousers or long dresses, and wearing hats - are immediately labelled as 'liberated', a word that is synonymous with the 'bad woman' who has shed all social and familial restraints. In more recent films though, the heroine in western dress may be associated with affluence or exposure to travel abroad. In this sense, she occupies an ambivalent moral area until she submits to the hero, and subsequently demonstrates her reclamation by the social order through a demure shift in dress. Thus by the end of the film, the same woman who was earlier seen in vulgarised versions of western dress now wears traditional clothing and has her head modestly covered!

Cross dressing - women masquerading as men - is also fairly common in films. It sanctions further fetishization of the female body through extra-ordinary costumes. And it apparently provides titillation to the audience in scenes of women relating to women dressed as men, in 'illicit' yet provocative ways.

By highlighting aspects of sartorial style, films influence dress codes for the majority of people, especially young women and men. The only exception is the small urban elite who tend to be influenced by western fashions (perhaps through western films). The 'delicate' beauty (*nazook haseena*) is idealised while the earth-bound, ordinary woman, if ever projected, is not worth emulating. In fact she serves as a foil for the idealised images. The Punjabi heroine is of course anything but delicate, because of her physical stature, but her clothes and mannerisms are meant to enhance her charms. In relation, Urdu films exercise greater influence as they are considered more sophisticated (emphasis on 'rich and respectable') than those made in provincial languages. Regional films tend to vulgarise ethnic dressing to the level of the absurd, so that they are not really imitable.

Nevertheless, ostentation and flamboyance are shown as being integral elements of the heroines' role. These 'feminine' images are especially imbibed by lower middle class women – during interviews, women from this income group specifically commented on film costumes. A glance at female film audiences also validates the weight of this influence. Imitations are manifested through clothes, hair styles, and accessories (bangles, jhoomar, earrings, kajal etc.) that are very often sold with brand names of popular films and/or heroines.

What is more insidious is that the coy mannerisms of heroines tend to be adopted by women viewers. The particular *adas* (mannerisms of a coquettish nature) and speech with specific lip and eye movements are evident among lower middle class urban girls. Since their mothers do not behave in this way, it can be safely assumed that this is due to the influence of the films they view.

The danger of this apparently harmless (and perhaps universal) pattern of imitating popular film stars is that in a segregated and repressed society like ours, young women are often unaware of the sexual implications of their gestures and mannerisms. Thus they unwittingly invite unpleasant male attention and are then seen as responsible for both deliberately 'seductive' behaviour and its repercussions.

### **Cinema Audiences**

Since the advent of video films, the bulk of the cinema-going public is drawn predominantly from among working class and blue collar males. They are usually single labourers and domestic servants for whom this is the only available entertainment. Small towns and rural areas draw in even greater numbers of men. Though in some rural areas complete villages often turn out to see a film or reels of songs and dance clips from popular films. In such audiences, both men and women may arrive together but then they sit separately. At matinee film shows that are specifically held for women, men may be present, though in smaller numbers and on the sidelines. Their presence may be to ensure that the women are not watching 'obscene' films. In market (*mandi*) towns/villages, the audience is entirely male – share croppers, small farmers, middlemen, truck and tractor drivers. The tickets here are cheaper and films serve as a relaxing way to wait for markets to open. There are all-night shows, sometimes with a number of old films shown consecutively.

Overall, women audiences are smaller in size than they were a decade ago. Eighteen interviews with women at various cinemas in Lahore revealed that the main reason why women did not come as often as they previously did was because they could see films (mostly Indian) on video at home, which was cheaper, more 'entertaining' and saved them

the hassle of getting out of the house. This substitution of the VCR (in terms of Indian and Western films), for shared public entertainment is further substantiated by the general absence of the upper middle and upper classes at the cinema - they express a lack of interest and even contempt for Pakistani films.

On the other hand, lower middle-class families take special pride in stating that their women folk do not watch films. It is an implicit acknowledgement of film being a male preserve and that its illicit pleasures are forbidden to women for fear of their being 'corrupted'. Even video films are often viewed separately by women. This is stated to be a personal choice, as women feel uncomfortable while viewing films with even close male relatives. They also report that men, sometimes even sons, ask them to leave the room when there are romantic scenes. This is especially true when Indian films are viewed, as they are more explicit than Pakistani films.

For those who do watch films in the cinema, the main reasons, as gauged from interviews, were advertisements of new films on television and radio, recommendations by neighbours and friends, and reviews in women's magazines and newspapers. A trip to the cinema meant an outing, especially affording privacy to newly-married couples, those meeting surreptitiously (very few), and groups of relatives and friends from a neighbourhood, school/college. The latter group has become less common in the last decade.

Family melodramas, common to all Pakistani films, but the special preserve of Urdu films (called '*gharaeloo*' - literal translation 'domestic'), appear to draw women viewers most. For viewing this genre of films family males give permission to their women folk more readily than for other genres. According to Laura Mulvey, the melodramatic form deals with processes of repression as well as the status of repressed content. Thus, in her view 'family melodrama' is geared to probing pent-up emotion, bitterness and disillusionment well known to women'.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Given this theoretical context, the popularity of melodramas can be understood - in that they serve a useful function for women who lack any conscious and coherent culture of oppression. This may be so despite the fact that the plots never provide solutions to women's problems outside prescribed patriarchal norms.

Interviews with two women who had just viewed *Shadi Meray Shohar Ki*, exemplifies this situation. They were asked to respond to the heroine's pain and dilemma in view of her husband's infidelities and her subsequent protest in terms of leaving home. While the two viewers thought that the husband's behaviour was unfair, they also felt there was no other solution for the heroine but to return home to him, as he was a man and had his pride to contend with. Given these responses, it is apparent that a simplistic

understanding of catharsis and women viewers' identification with projections of others in similar situations, does not adequately explain the popularity of melodramas. Psychoanalysts and feminists need to further explore this area.

### **The Film Industry and Censorship**

The socio-political situation has had a distinct impact on the film industry in the last decade. The industry has had to absorb fallouts from heavy taxation and the video boom. Further, strict censorship codes have not only been concerned with 'obscenity', but have also laid emphasis on nationalist themes and on the brand of Islamisation that is propagated by the present regime. The Scripts Scrutiny Committee, or the next tier, the Censor Board is empowered to reject segments or entire narratives if they do not conform to the injunctions prompted by state-sponsored morality. That this has placed a definite limitation on the industry was highlighted by the Chairman of Pakistan Film Producers Association in an interview, when he stated that "you can't make a hundred films on nationalism or religion."<sup>xxxvii</sup> It is interesting to note that due to this one dimensional policy, in the recent past only three films won tax rebates and all these were on explicitly propagandist themes.

Despite official 'restraint orders' regarding obscenity, the last decade of films have not portrayed women more positively. There may be less exposure of a woman's body but the objectification is even more noticeable in the obvious attempts to 'cover up'. It could be argued that more subtle ways of titillating the audiences have been opened up. For example, an unidentified Lahore film producer was overheard talking to his colleagues about a problem with the censors regarding a scene in an ongoing production. He suggested that if the well-built heroine was shown riding a horse in slow motion, they would beat the censors and have the whole cinema hall masturbating in no time!

Films thus provide expression for the insidious coupling between official and market 'interests'. And due to this, hypocrisy abounds. Dancing by women is banned in Pakistan; alcohol, gambling, drug peddling and prostitution are forbidden; rape and abduction are punishable by death (although such judicial decisions are rare); adultery is punishable with floggings, imprisonment and stoning to death. Yet as a reflection of our society, current films are brimming with such censured narrative images and their violent accoutrements. Though of course, given the double standards, digestion of these images necessitates a suitable moral glaze. Talat Aslam<sup>xxxviii</sup> has suggested that in Pakistani films the emphasis on the 'call for respectability' has resulted in:

.....this balancing act, forcing film makers to produce images of pleasure and desire only to show their defeat at the hands of the forces of decency. Both the images of pleasure and the moral condemnation have become accentuated. If the

degeneracy of certain characters is allowed to plumb new depths, the moral tone of condemnation was made loftier than ever before. This explains why films these days are such a beguiling mix of prurience and puritanism. But this does not imply a moral victory for decency. Messages go out visually as well as through dialogue.....images of pleasure hold the attention more than any number of pious speeches. What remains embedded in the audiences' consciousness when the lights come on are those very same condemned images, offering as they do a glimpse into a world they dare not ask for.

### **Alternative Films and Documentaries**

From a feminist point of view, the present retrogressive socio-legal trends have resulted in insecurity, contradictions (especially at the official level), and an obsession with the subject of women. Recent Pakistani films reflect this mood. Challenges to it may be posed using the same mediatic channel. But for such interventions to be effective, the reach and limitations of existing alternatives must be examined.

Since the '50s, about a dozen films have been made that can be loosely defined as 'alternative'. They were produced by some of the best known intellectuals in the country, comprising leading poets, film-makers and politically aware producer-directors. However, not a single one of these films was a 'success' in conventional box office terms. This is one of the reasons why it has been impossible to access copies for review for this study.

All these films attempted to project aspects of specific social and political problems in the country. However, only a few of them made any attempt to address problems faced by women, or to explore progressive representations of women in their narratives. These were '*Ghar Pyara Ghar*' (Home Sweet Home) by Shamim Ashraf Malik, where a women struggles to make independent decisions; and '*Neela Parbat*' (Blue Mountain) in which sexual problems were discussed. '*Mela*' (Carnival) by Salman Pirzada, briefly featured women as prostitutes and performers in a circus. As their function in the film was to serve as metaphors for a corrupt and dehumanised society, they hinted at the problem of women's status in society only in a peripheral way. The film was banned in Pakistan because of its anti-army, anti-establishment stance.

The only film to have come out in the last decade or so, that specifically focuses on one of the issues that confront women was *They Are Killing The Horse*, by Mushtaq Gazdar. This film is about the repression, both sexual and otherwise, of an educated middle-class girl. She is not allowed to work because a 'working' daughter is seen as an indication of the family's inability to provide for her, and therefore is not in keeping with their sense of pride and honour.

Incarcerated in the home, she views the outside world either through the latticework of a window or through the netted grill of her *burka* (veil). Gradually, she begins to relinquish her hold on reality and takes recourse in dreams where a hero on a horse will come and take her away from her claustrophobic world.

The breaking point comes when the young woman watches a *moharram*<sup>xxxix</sup> procession from her window. The combined presence of the ceremonial horse with its trappings of martyrdom, and the customary self-flagellation and violent emotions associated with *moharram* are too much for her. She can no longer take the blood and violence and loses her hold on sanity. Although the theme in itself is important, in the final analysis the film is disappointing. Apart from her treatment by a psychiatrist as well as *pirs* and *fakirs* (holy men said to be endowed with healing powers), the only solution that the film has to offer is marriage with the 'right' man.

So far no 'alternative' films have been made by women and certainly there are none that deal with feminist issues.

As for documentaries, government departments such as health, population, the ministries of tourism and information and so on, have made some contributions. Television has also produced documentaries of a fairly high standard. However, the few concerning women's problems have been predominantly propaganda films, where women are shown working at home, at arts and crafts, engaged in agricultural activities. It was amusing to note that in a recent series of videos made by an ngo, for the promotion of breast feeding, male puppets are used to advise the female puppet, who listens from the roof-top. In more general propaganda films, women are maintained in the background, or else are made to fit in with familiar notions of femininity.

Incidentally '*Shana ba Shana*' (Shoulder to Shoulder), the only positive documentary as far as women are concerned, was made in the early '70s, by two of the best TV producers who also happen to be women. The programme was based on a compilation of interviews with professional women.

## Conclusion

This review of Pakistani films and the portrayal of women in them is depressing. As discussed before, however, we need to study and analyse our situation and the role of the media, especially film, before we can even begin to find viable answers to this problem. In other words, we have to formulate the right questions before we can hope for useful answers. But this cannot be an isolated endeavour.

Recognising the enormous financial and state constraints on film making, as well as an absence of non-governmental agencies' support, it is perhaps unrealistic to suggest that women should begin to make their own films. But a beginning has to be made. Even if video films are made on more 'acceptable' issues such as health, sanitation, income generation or education, this can be done from a feminist perspective. Funding for such ventures should be relatively accessible through international and national agencies.

Encouraging and influencing men and women within the film industry or in its periphery to critically contribute is another way of trying to correct the slanted vision of the camera. This can be done by viewing and reviewing existing films – mainstream, documentary and alternative – from a feminist point of view. The exchange of alternative films from other countries, especially in the region, would be another way to help raise the consciousness level regarding the image and role of women in and through films. Feedback on this activity is essential.

The formation of film societies and clubs in all possible forums could prove useful as well. And the dissemination of the results of ensuing discussions could generate new ideas and serve as a baseline for further activity.

Finally, the video boom should be taken seriously as an alternate and cheaper means of getting across our perspective to the general public. There are some theatre groups that are run by women. As they have women members as well as talented writers, they can be encouraged to work with this medium. Women television producers and directors can also be tapped.

It is clear though, that even if all these activities were to be implemented, they would only represent a small attempt and a relatively small group of people would be influenced. Significant and far-reaching changes in the media can only come with a change in the conceptual framework in which we live. As long as established myths about women retain their credibility, the cinema, as a popular means of entertainment will continue to propagate them. Thus as part of our immediate plan of action, something might be achieved if the 'target' group for these activities were to include those who wield influence in the film industry, the press and the state machinery.

## ADVERTISEMENTS

The obvious purpose of advertisements is to sell a product. But as with films, TV drama and the overtly propagandist programmes initiated by the Zia regime in Pakistan, strategies of salesmanship in a consumer society are most effective within a frame of reference created by the interchange between familiar reality and the desired ideal.

This is done most often by 'packaging' the saleable item in the trappings or wrappings of what is depicted as a better lifestyle, in terms of both status and comfort. Thus as stated earlier, although the immediate purpose of an advertisement may be to sell a product, it also sells ideas and a way of life. This is done insidiously, and the viewer receives these messages at an unconscious level.

### Television Commercials

The strength of television commercials lies in the fact that television has invaded the home and has created the largest captive audience compared to any other form of mass communication after radio. Further, it doubly reinforces its message, both visually and through audio. Thus it captures the total attention of its viewers and appeals, at one level or another, to different age groups and to both sexes.

In addition, television viewing is not confined to homes that possess television sets. Community viewing of television is prevalent in areas where most households do not possess television sets. Neighbourhood *chai*-shops (teashops) have television sets to attract customers and they become crowded for popular television programmes.

The most popular programmes are relayed at the prime time, between 8.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. during which time the largest number of commercials are run, sometimes exceeding 15 minutes at a stretch. The rest of the time commercials for consumer products are less frequent.

Television commercials employ all forms of popular entertainment i.e. music, 'jingles', drama, the story, visually eye-catching colours and designs and the verbal message. Every word, every action, every posture and arrangement, in fact, the minutest of details has meaning in a social or public situation. Through the screen which has its own material and technical fascination, the world depicted in it has an added glamour and excitement, which makes the average viewer susceptible to the obvious and not so obvious message.

The glamour and fascination create the captive audience and ensure that the messages in their hidden dimensions are received without question.

The close relationship of a fashioned image to what can be defined as so-called natural behaviour creates an ambiguity in that the fashioned image cannot be dismissed as unnatural. Therefore it becomes more believable. The message of the believable image can then be held up as a model to which one can aspire e.g. the image of a 'beautiful home'. The constructed image of a beautiful home then proceeds to define and determine (a) the concept of what a home should be (b) the concept of beauty, and (c) the artificial image as reality.

Such is the power of the visual image that the process creates, moulds, defines and reinforces our concerns, desires and ideas. This is not only with regard to acquisitions in terms of the fitness of things but, at a more dangerous level, commercials reflect and reinforce social attitudes, norms and behaviour and the way relationships are ordered in a given system. And since the essential strategy of consumer advertising is to repeat the message so often that it becomes the truth, the underlying message in fact announces ultimate doctrine.

### **Male and Female Target Groups**

The major target group of television commercials are women as buyers of household products, beauty and medical aids. 75% of television commercials are aimed at women, and only 25% of advertised products are conceived as purely for male consumption i.e. cigarettes, shaving blades, agricultural and technical products and related advice. 48% of the commercials depict women only and 30% depict men only. Men and women together are depicted in 48% of the commercials, of which 15% show women in the background. And this is despite directives from the present government which, as part of its policy of Islamisation based on the exclusion of women from the public field, limit the exposure of women beyond 25% of the total time of any commercial.

### **Constraints of Censorship**

Government directives regarding the depiction of women in television commercials are stringent and conform to their ideas of the Islamic spirit. Violence, obscenity, scantily clad women, touching between sexes, close-ups of women's lips are strictly prohibited. All females above the age of 12 have to be shown with dupattas. This rule applies to both Pakistani and foreign models. No woman can be depicted in advertisements selling purely 'male' products.

Strict censorship ensures all of the above and more. Since obscenity has not been defined, scissors are used at the discretion of the censorboard which may find thin dress material, or the breeze slightly lifting a part of the dress on a woman as too provocative or suggestive. In one advertisement, a little boy winking at the camera was censored as too obscene. A soap advertisement with the slogan "Reward makes you so nice to be near" showing a man and woman could not be released until it was clearly established that the couple was married. This was done by introducing shots of wedding albums. And this is where the contradiction between explicit ideology and practice becomes obvious. For although women may not be used as sex symbols to sell products, in order to guarantee the sale of a product 'a pretty face' is a time-tested formula which is understood between the advertisement man and his clients and is not offensive to the censor board. Thus women in one way or another, continue to function as the 'bait' which focuses the gaze/attention of the consumer.

### **The Myth of the Homemaker**

Since violence, sex and obscenity cannot be employed, television commercials are free to depict another aspect of women which has the blessings of the powers that be – women in the role of good mother, wife and home-maker.

The major target group of television commercials are women who are obviously viewed as dumb consumers who need advice. They imply that the secret of success for a woman lies in her choice of products, the magical powers of which can transform her home, her appearance, her relationship to her children, her husband, her social circle and family. She will be rewarded with gratitude, affection, approval and immense satisfaction from her family for serving them so well, and with envy and admiration from society at large.

If society has defined the role of women, commercials go a step further in reinforcing this and perpetuating the myth that housework is no work. Women are shown doing all the housework, cooking, cleaning, washing and serving. Not only is housework shown as the task of women alone but also that it is their pride and happiness. Television women are always smiling happily as they proudly produce fabulous meals, shining dishes and bathrooms and spotlessly clean clothes. In diminishing the laborious nature of these tasks, the underlying message is that a good woman equals the good housewife or *salika mand khandar* wife/mother who not only takes pride in these mindless tasks but also never complains and in fact enjoys the drudgery of endlessly cleaning up after others. The very fashionable, beautiful women used in commercials 'proves' that housework consumes little time and entails no effort.

The fact that women are never shown in any other role defines the proper place of the women in the home. To prove this to be a universal truth, women from all over the world are shown by one tea commercial proudly serving tea in native costumes. Several commercials use foreign (white) models for local products in similar roles. The role model is a smartly dressed, young and pretty woman doing domestic chores.

### **Norms of the Feminine**

These are reinforced by the images of women used in luxury products. Beautiful women, wearing the latest style in clothes, luxuriate on soft cushions and deep plush carpets in beautifully decorated, air-conditioned rooms, consistently implying that women are idle, spend-thrift, vain and mainly concerned with the condition of their skin, their hair and their looks.

Ideals of beauty are also created by the images in commercials – how to keep your skin 'soft and lovely', your hair silken, a perfume that is a mantrap. More offensively, skin bleach cream campaigns rely on creating the image that a beautiful woman is one with a fair skin, which is shown as being a guarantee of marriage. Distorting colour bias to an outrageous extent, commercials use 'white' foreign women, and if no foreigner is available then a Pakistani woman is given a blonde wig thus reinforcing prevalent social attitudes and biases towards skin and hair colour. This kind of projection reinforces notions of the woman as a sexual object who has been placed in this world for the pleasure of the male (to put it euphemistically) 'gaze'!

The roles played by women in film and television drama are reproduced in advertisements. Thus women are servile and play only a secondary and supportive role in society. This is a notion that television commercials never tire of reproducing over and over again. For example, the woman serves tea in a family unit where her role is to serve; the woman stands in the background smiling while male members of the family exhibit strong teeth in an advertisement for toothpaste; the woman stays at home while men and boys go off on a trip of fun and adventure; the woman serves guests and family, mostly males; the woman serves the male executive, then takes dictation.

Again, the woman is shown as the healer, the soother – the nurse to the sick, the young and old family members. She makes them well and happy, so that they can get back to being useful members of society. She sends them off happily, while she stays at home. Men in contrast are depicted as responsible, useful members of society. They do hard labour, produce crops, work at machinery – whether heavy industrial machinery, tractors or hand-tools. They also do work that requires specialised skills and knowledge, such as work in laboratories testing products etc. and as professionals, decision-makers,

executives. They are depicted as wielding power and influence and money, as well as being successful achievers in nation building activities. They are also high achievers in sports, and take part in dangerous and exciting adventures.

While the machismo male image is perpetuated, the women stand behind the male models, not even in active supportive roles but simply applauding male successes. Masculine strength, power and expertise is glamorised and idealised in contrast to the passive, backstage role given to women.

### **The Production of Ideology in Advertisements**

The most dangerous aspects of these commercials is the manner in which the process of self definition of women is externally determined. The yardstick to which a woman should measure is defined by the television commercials not only regarding her role in society but in terms of her appearance, behaviour and her very being. Beauty products especially use recognisable personalities like film and television stars who reveal the secrets of their beauty by their choice of soaps, make-up etc. and also by creating an environment which is invariably an idealised, romantic world in which the woman is an unreal, ethereal being. She moves across the screen in slow motion while soft focus techniques render her in pastel colours and filtered light gives her an ethereal quality as she floats through flowers or decorates an interior of a home or office. When she speaks, her expression is vacant and passive, her voice is husky and caressing, barely formulating words; every step, every move and touch is slow, hesitant and unsure as though she does not exist as a material being. In the Johnson's Baby Oil campaign, she coyly suggests that she too is a Johnson's 'baby'. A creature like her is not alive, not of flesh and blood, is totally incapable of doing anything, is not an individual human being, does not exist. Identifying with that creature must surely create the impression of a weak, helpless creature that can have no confidence in herself and her abilities to do anything but to be a manufactured dream.

### **Newspapers and Magazines**

The message of newspaper and magazine advertising does not deviate from the pattern of television commercials. Since campaigns of products are planned at the same time for all communication media, the message and thrust is the same, including its sexist bias.

Censorship rules are uniform, though they are less stringent for magazine advertisements and therefore these advertisements employ a language which is more suggestive. "Bata by choice" is "Smooth and Provocative" although it is unclear in the campaign whether Bata shoes or the women models who display the commodity possess that quality – can a shoe

be provocative? Or in the case of a Sharp airconditioner campaign, the slogan "A Taste of Paradise" may well confuse, with its use of the image of the lovely woman in juxtaposition with the advertised product, as to who or what gives one that taste of paradise? The ambiguity is deliberate in such cases as the slippage between the woman and the commodity being advertised designate both as objects.

Needless to say that 95% of all advertising employing visuals use women to sell their products even where the female image may have no connection to the product being sold. Advertisements for television sets will insert a picture of a woman on the television screen or, even more irrationally, somewhere in the layout, to ensure the attention of the reader. The Phillips tube lights advertisement goes a step further. In its campaign to save electricity, it employs an image of a woman setting fire to a pile of money, with the caption "Stop Burning Your Money!" along with advice on how to save electricity costs. Indirectly, the underlying suggestion of course is that women are the ones responsible for the waste.

One difference that does emerge between print and electronic media is the extensive use in newspapers and magazines of advertisements lifted from western campaigns. The majority of these are advertisements of foreign products, mainly perfumes and cosmetics. Or else, locally produced beauty products employ images of foreign, white models. Invariably these are highly suggestive in posture and dress. Close-ups of open-mouthed women with hair flying and dreamy eyes are superimposed on bottles of perfumes. These women are transformed into sex symbols. The message here is seduction by the woman through the advertised product. Again the two are interchangeable and the woman, by implication, is as much an object for possession as the purchasable commodity on sale in shops. Clothes that reveal the body are utilised to the extent that the scissors of the censor-board will permit. Often bare legs and off-shoulder dresses are covered by lines and designs to suggest dress material. Where only men are depicted, as in 'TJ's Fashion Garments' for men, the campaign is unabashedly macho, with slogans like "The Combat Club" or "Tough gives a macho soft leather look."

Women and men are rarely shown together, but where they are, the socially structured supremacy of the male is evident in posture and attitude. The man is placed above and literally looks down at the woman, or the man is leading with the woman following him. There is a disdain and detachment in the male for the female, or simply, the woman is a background spectator to the central drama in which the man plays the key role in a social or a family situation. In the rare interaction between men and women, again the man is shown in a protective or custodial role. This once again establishes the gender hierarchy within patriarchy.

## **Cinema Hoardings**

The most obnoxious, vulgar and obscene display and treatment of women in the media is undoubtedly on cinema hoardings. These are found in all the cities and towns wherever there are cinema houses. Even the smallest town will have at least one cinema house.

### **The Male Gaze**

Over the years cinema hoardings have developed a unique style in which women are depicted blatantly and unabashedly as sex objects. Because this is a craft that has remained in the hands of a few individuals who have trained their own artisans, the genre of cinema hoardings has been developed and perpetuated by the craftsmen themselves. Subsequently their imagery, which links up with the imagery and perception of women in films, is of a particular kind of male view, in which women are represented solely for the purpose of male pleasure and titillation. These hoardings are an incontrovertible indictment of the male perception and male fantasy which objectifies and de-humanises women to an extraordinary degree, by stripping them of all aspects of their personhood/existence and by presenting them as 'flesh' per se. Of these, hoardings of Punjabi films are the most extreme, reflecting the Punjabi male's attitudes towards women and life in general.

### **Sensationalism**

Over the past twenty years there has been a steady increase in the departure from reality in images on cinema hoardings. This is in direct correlation with the increasing distortion of reality in the films themselves. Both films and their advertisements have been following a formula for years, which with hundreds of productions and reproductions, need increasing sensationalism to continue to attract customers. This demand is met by the juggling of constituent elements of the hoarding by an intensification of emotionalism, violence and sex. If the horror of blood has lost its impact with the first film, the next one will have to have more blood, which is redder and flows more freely, for it to continue to hold the fascination of the audience, until finally the flowing blood becomes a gushing fountain. The grand finale in *Maula Jat* is such an example of violence and blood, culminating with the actual amputation of a leg.

Concurrently, the images in cinema hoardings have become increasingly melodramatic. The depiction and description of the female body too has become more exaggerated and explicit. The fact that the audience, instead of being repulsed, is attracted to this increased distortion of reality is precisely because of its fantastic nature. The hoardings provide an outlet to all male fantasies of power, aggression, violence and sex, which are played out on the streets while people go about their daily business.

To walk down Abbott Road, in Lahore, which has the largest number of cinemas in the city, is to walk into an assault of the senses. Hoardings in hundreds are displayed on cinema houses, on trees, walls, lamp-posts, houses and buildings, at the crossings and in sidelanes. Wherever you turn, amongst the buntings and the banners, large figures loom in garish colours and glitzy dresses. Strong outlines and an increasing use of artificial coloured lights vie for attention. A sensational effect is created by the use of greens and reds on faces, and the high contrast of light and shadow, outlandish costumes and the detailed use of jewellery and glitter. The extreme ugliness and distortion of form and expression seems to attract rather than repel the largely male audience.

The main characters and action of films occupy most of the space on the hoarding, while secondary characters are included on the same hoarding, normally in triangular or circular frames. And for greater effect, the main figure is rendered in gigantic proportions, normally in full or half cut-outs, bursting out of the hoarding. Images of women are rendered in pre-codified formulae and are easily comprehensible to the viewer. Only certain types of women are depicted here and each category of women is portrayed within a particular mode of posture, dress and colour.

### **The Good Woman**

The 'pure', helpless, martyred woman is shown in supplicant poses, dying, kneeling, begging or being rescued. Normally, this category of woman is secondary on hoardings, unless the film focuses on sentimentalism, in which case she is the primary character. She is shown in sober clothes, usually wearing black or white, her head covered with a dupatta, and with relatively little make-up or jewellery. In contrast, the male character is shown in heroic postures, with strength and courage, determination and resolve on his face; he is shown rescuing, protecting or carrying the woman.

This helplessness of the 'good' woman is one aspect of presenting woman as easy prey and as the victim of male violence, which is the manner in which it is invariably presented in the films themselves. Hence the image of a helpless woman is in a codified language which is geared to arouse male sexual aggression and boost the male self-image as the one, who by right, has power and control over the woman and her body. Supplicant postures of women place them well and truly in the category of victim, and the male viewer is in a position of power over her, through which he derives vicarious sexual pleasure.

A deviant in this type is the 'pure' woman who protests. She is mainly depicted as enslaved and oppressed and may be shown as ostensibly appealing for help. But her posture of abandonment, arms raised, wrapped in chains and running towards the viewer,

suggests more her sexual vulnerability than her need for rescue. This representation of the woman as defined by the male view and for male viewing is a signifier of overt lust and sadism. It is interesting to note that both men and women are often shown in chains, but the difference in the representation is crucial. Men are shown with broken chains, but their wrists or legs; the act of breaking the chains is an act of strength and courage and is a universal symbol of fighting oppression and injustice, very often, the state and authority.

Images of women in chains carry an altogether different symbolic charge. Ostensibly a symbol of protest or a call for rescue, in fact, the image is redolent with sexual subjugation. This again is part of the codified language of sexual control and torture, of rape and atrocities on a woman's body which is specific to films. The chains are wrapped around her body and not her wrists and ankles. They focus the viewer's attention on the breasts and hips and become symbols of male trespass on her body. So even though the act of the woman in protest is not passive, her helplessness and lack of ability to take a positive stand is reinforced. The crime against the woman is transformed into a game of power between two male opponents, since only another man can rescue the woman in distress. This is a deliberate victimisation of women and a conscious effort on the part of the film makers and advertisers to present the helpless woman as a victim of sexual assault and harassment. How much does a woman viewer identify with this type of representation is difficult to ascertain, but it is clearly evident that the influence of these images is far-reaching, in that women assume the passive role of the helpless female in need of rescuing, with the knowledge that their helplessness makes them desirable to the male and his ego. All this is determined and defined by the visual construction of the images of women in the media.

### **Bad Women**

Type-casting and role defining is simplistic in hoardings and therefore doubly dangerous. The distinction between good and evil is the distinction between the kinds of women represented. If the good woman is a weak and helpless creature, the evil woman has several though similar faces – these are of the harlot, the dancing girl, the seductress and the westernised woman. She is the seducer, the destroyer of men's morals and of society, the one that man must overcome and subdue, and by his subjugation of her, magically convert into the good woman. The solution too is simplistic – love, power and control, which are synonymous in the cinema hoarding, will do the trick.

## Seductive Images

Images of women as seducers may be depicted in any number of ways: as the wife, the beloved, the village damsel dancing in the fields, the college girl, the rich woman, or even the friend to the leading female role. In each case, there is little variation. She is passive, languorous, submissive, falling in men's arms, or enticing them. The emphasis is on heavily mascaraed eyes and red lips, jewellery, and often a wet curl on the forehead, each of which is a highly erotic sign within the given system of signification. Facial expressions and postures too are sexually provocative in nature.

The simple domestic scene of a man eating his food is converted into a sexually charged image, with the hero in the act of putting food in his mouth and the heroine lovingly hanging around his neck. A walking woman is distorted into a grotesque figure with tight clothes revealing abnormal breasts and buttocks, as in *Hong Kong Ke Tufaan* (The Hong Kong Desperadoes). In *Mehndi*, a woman seated on a rock cuts a highly suggestive posture, with her dress pulled up and partially revealing her legs. Her arms are raised to fix her hair, thus revealing an ample bosom as she coyly looks out at the world. The motivating intention behind this posture is clearly to depict an image which produces an impression of open complicity and sexual invitation to the male viewer.

In *Charhda Suraj* (The Rising Sun), a village woman strikes a heroic pose, almost manly in it's challenge. She holds a staff and stands with legs firmly on the ground. But the image of the man standing behind her, grasping the staff with one hand and clasping her bangled wrist with the other puts her clearly in his control and protection. Her arm is pulled out and towards the back which is a gesture of restraint (control) as well as a symbol of possession. Her costume too pronounces her breasts, while heavy jewellery acts as the erotic symbol. Even in an active role, the woman is firmly depicted as being in possession of the male and in need of his protection.

## Bridal Imagery

A large number of images show women in bridal costume and jewellery, and as in *Mehndi*, swooning in men's arms. Bridal costume and jewellery are more than erotic symbols, for they reflect the social custom of giving away a virgin in marriage as a sexual offering to a man. The importance of virginity at the time of marriage is an indication of the proprietary nature of the marriage contract, where the right of ownership is vested in the male who assumes proprietorship over the woman and demands that she be untouched by any other man. In *Haq Meher* (Bride Price)<sup>x1</sup> the solitary figure of a woman in bridal costume stands passively, elevated above the heads of two men. It is apparent from the imagery that her fate lies not in her own hands but in the control of the males who will

decide her future. Clearly, she is the property of the men, as she is passed from one to the other in marriage. She is projected as being 'pure' and therefore barterable. This bias further reinforces customs that are oppressive to women as, by implication, it leaves men free to exercise their sexual/patriarchal prerogative.

### **Images of Western Women**

Another category of the types of women defined by film makers and advertisers is the western-oriented woman. She may be a part of a gang of criminals, sometimes even their leader, she is usually the 'other' woman who seduces the man to evil ways. She is often a night club performer, dressed in revealing clothes. She holds the inevitable cigarette in her mouth, wears western dress and even a hat, and sometimes carries a pistol. To make sure that there is no mistake in identifying her character, her facial expression ranges from being cruel to one that is conniving. The effect is heightened by the use of blue, green and red lights, as in *Ashiana* (Nest) or *Kismet* (Fate). Her tight-fitting slacks, sleeveless blouses and bare midriff also suggest that she is a loose, immoral woman and a danger to men's morals and to society.

### **Images of Dancing Girls**

The dancing girl or the prostitute is depicted in provocative visual terms. She is heavily made up, strikes outrageous dance postures, wears outlandish costumes and is laden with jewellery – all erotic in nature, and recognised as such. On the hoarding for *Jeeney Nahin Doon Gi* (I Won't Let You Live), the dancing figure seems to be doing a strange trick, walking sideways with her legs bent at the knee, apparently as a dance posture. She wears a strange crown on her head, but the most eye-catching part of the body are her legs, which are attired in tight pants with wide stripes painted sideways - an obscene device to focus attention on the woman's legs. In *Nag aur Nagan* (The Serpent and His Mate) a clinging body suit on the dancing figure is more obscene than a straight forward nude image. The figure is presumably dressed to represent a snake, while she dances in front of the image of a cobra. Snakes in South Asian culture and paintings are replete with sexual symbolism, and the intention in both the title of the film and in the hoarding is unambiguous.

These and other, similar images of women are blatantly sexist and stereotypical, and there is no attempt to camouflage or hide the intention behind them. Quite unabashedly, the objective of these images is to define the relationship of the male spectator with the female body, encouraging voyeurism, fetishism and exhibitionism through the display of the female body as a sex object. There is no ambiguity in the message, and the bias that

determines the viewing is strictly male. It is a rare hoarding that does not exhibit such an objectification of women.

### **Male Sexual Fantasies**

While it may not be easy to determine the complexities that underlie male fantasy, one thing is clear. The sexually determining male gaze reduces all women and women's bodies into objects through which male fantasies of lust, sexual power and control, exploitation and sexual aggression come into play. Further, judging by the display of women on hoardings, the fantasy must be of gigantic proportions, since not only the size of hoardings but also the proportions of the female body are gigantic. Another aspect of this fantasy is the representation of a kind of a woman who is so totally available to the male sexually, that not only is she an object but a willing participant and contributor to his fantasy; and not only is she on display but she also expresses a knowledge and recognition of herself and her impact as a sexual object on display. She looks directly at the viewer with a frank, sexually inviting look. Her posture is equally deliberate. The contortions and distortions of her body, quite apart from being grotesque and unnatural, are hideously exaggerated to represent dancing postures which display the widest possible angle of hips and buttocks or the greatest exposure to breast and buttocks, while the use of clinging clothes and long side slits in shirts draw attention to a grossly exaggerated and disproportionately large female anatomy.

### **Responses**

For women, the images of seduction have far-reaching effects. As discussed in the section dealing with films, mannerisms projected in films, costumes and jewellery become fashions to be imitated by members of the middle and lower-middle classes especially in urban areas. By recognising the source of these fashions and adopting them, women are consciously employing an anti-woman language as codified by the film-media --- that of women as objects of display and enticement.

As for men, film-media influences them to view women in terms of two broad categories - the 'domestic', wife, mother, daughter and sister who is secluded and confined to her house, and the 'other', who steps outside her home. This is especially true amongst the middle and lower middle classes where men and women are socially segregated. Men's view of this 'other' woman, therefore, is that all women, other than their own whom they possess anyway, are sexually promiscuous and available to them. Since the viewing of women is determined by such images, all women who allow themselves to be viewed in public by coming out of their homes can only belong to that category of women who

allow themselves to be exposed on the screen - that is, as a body or sex object for them to possess.

This possession is not always physical, it is also a visual possession which strips and bares women. Physical possession comes in where men in crowded areas feel it their right to pinch female flesh surreptitiously. These instances, along with the verbal aggression to which women are often exposed in public places, provide an instance of a direct link between the media and its impact on the bias against women.

Censorship rules, although less stringent for films and hoardings, still prevent a total exhibition of women's bodies, hence there is no nudity. However, within the censorship confines there is enough display in the manner of representation to arouse male sexual desire.

It is extraordinary that no one has really raised an objection to these images of women, not even the fundamentalists who are constantly objecting to obscenity on TV and in newspapers. That these images, which so clearly define women only as sex objects or sex symbols, have never been raised as an issue even by women's organisations is strange, especially since such portrayals are perhaps most damaging to the dignity and humanity of women.

### **Alternatives**

There are no alternatives to this kind of projection of women's images on cinema hoardings. There have to be concerted public campaigns through articles, letters of protest in newspapers, pickets in front of hoardings, and lobbying with both the government and the public, against the sexual connotations and psychic damage to women through films and their advertisements.

## SCHOOL TEXTS

### Background

Pakistan allocates 1.99% of its GNP to education, which clearly illustrates the low priority given to this sector by the government. In relation, the literacy rate of Pakistan is 26% - one of the lowest in the world. For women it is an overall 16%, and in the rural areas it is an abysmal 6%. Given below are enrolment figures at various levels of education.

<u>Total</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Female</u>
6645000	2195000	1738000	451000	568000	145000

<u>Secondary Vocational</u>	
<u>Total</u>	<u>Female</u>
55000	10000

<u>Arts and Science Colleges</u>	
<u>Total</u>	<u>Female</u>
452000	141000

<u>Professional Colleges</u>	
<u>Total</u>	<u>Female</u>
92185	19000

<u>Universities</u>	
<u>Total</u>	<u>Female</u>
56160	8500

These figures indicate that approximately one third of the total number of children in all primary schools are girls; in middle schools the figures decrease to one fourth; and by the time students reach the last two years of schooling, the fraction falls to one sixth of the total. The proportion is even lower at the tertiary level. The significant drop between primary and secondary level enrolment largely occurs in the rural areas. Reasons for this shift are that from the earliest years of schooling, parents, being for the most part themselves uneducated, are less motivated to educate their daughters than their sons. Further, having to help their mothers with domestic chores and looking after younger siblings compel girls to discontinue their schooling as they grow older. In addition, because secondary schools are often at a greater distance from their homes than primary schools, the daily journey is considered somewhat unsafe for girls to undertake.

### Textbooks

Textbook policies are formulated by the curriculum wing of the Federal Ministry of Education, and they are implemented by the Textbook Boards of the four provinces. If deemed 'suitable' by the Federal ministry, manuscripts are then incorporated into the

relevant texts. However, since so much of the material is chosen due to factors other than the qualifications of the writers or quality of the work, the standard of textbooks is very poor. Nevertheless, the State has a virtual monopoly over them because most children attend government schools, and even private schools are required to use government texts. This situation is compounded by the fact that very few schools use additional materials and fewer still have libraries. Thus for the most part, schools use government text books to the exclusion of all other books.

Although there have been other reports since, the Sharif Committee Report on National Education, published in 1959, is still considered a landmark in the history of education policy in Pakistan. It includes a special chapter on women's education (though the recommendations in other sections are said to apply to both sexes). The ambiguities inherent in this chapter can be exemplified by the suggestion that increases in provisions for primary education for boys and girls should be equal. This is followed by the advice that "from the middle stage of education (about 11 years plus) 'girl's needs' begin to find expression .... (education should) fit them more particularly for their future role. At this stage a compulsory core curriculum of special subjects such as elementary house craft which includes needlework, tailoring, weaving, cookery, home and child care, be introduced."

What the report does not clarify is whether or not girls are expected to cope with all the other areas of studies along with these. It also presumes that all girls would want to opt for these subjects. Though highly regarded, few of the Sharif Committee Report recommendations have been actualised – the education system still functions on the basis of whims and the ad hoc decisions of those in power.

### **Social Science and Language Texts**

The selection of material for both social science and language textbooks follows a set pattern. The process is informed by policy directives emphasising the need to develop in students, a sense of patriotism and an awareness of being Muslim and part of the Ummah.<sup>xli</sup> In the social science curriculum, there is a heavy bias towards the inclusion of national heroes, and equally highlighted are the heroes and occasional heroines of Islamic history. One or two lessons in each book are about a Muslim country or its leader, such as Shah Faisal of Saudi Arabia or Kamal Attaturk of Turkey. It is significant though that measures taken by the latter to improve the status of women are not mentioned. Alongside the above mentioned areas, a similar number of lessons are science-oriented (e.g. penicillin, radar etc.).

## **Stereotypes and Role Models**

From the very first language books for five year olds, traditional stereotypes with regard to female/male role models are established, and they are reinforced and elaborated in subsequent readers. One of the first illustrations is that of a girl helping her mother with household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, sewing. She serves the meals to the male members of the family, clears the dishes and washes up. Never is a male shown helping in the house, whether it is in the urban or rural setting. The message, as in other mediatic channels discussed in earlier chapters, that these are 'women's tasks', is driven home repeatedly. Yet it is interesting to note that in the description of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, it is stated that there was no task, howsoever humble, (sweeping, mending washing up) that he regarded as being beneath his dignity. The policy makers apparently do not wish to make the connection between the example set by him and the need for men to share the mundane tasks that are the woman's lot. Similarly, the introductory social studies text tells us that the respect accorded to the mother is due to the fact that she cooks, cleans and cares for the family. Clearly, her role and place are delineated within the context of the family unit. That she contributes to the economy and nation building activities is not recognised.

Except for the early readers, girls are never shown playing outdoor games. Sport, it seems, is outside the domain of young women. Even in her hobbies she is circumscribed to physically inactive pastimes. In these texts, as a girl grows towards adolescence, she becomes increasingly unobtrusive and, except within clearly demarcated parameters, is neither seen nor heard – she is given to activities within the home. Boys on the other hand are active, curious, ready to take the initiative in moments of crisis. Only a boy is allowed to dream of what the future holds for him – will he be a pilot, an engineer or even perhaps a nuclear scientist? The message is insidious and powerful – a woman's fulfilment and ultimate destiny, even if she is educated, must lie within the family – her future is not in her own hands.

## **Contributions of Women**

The contribution of women, whether it be in the economic, political, social or religious spheres is marginalised. Every occupation, 'the potter', 'the tailor', 'the farmer', is given in the male gender where the craftsman or worker is lauded for his skills and contribution to society. Women's contribution in the rural sector (where a research study has revealed that the rural woman in the Punjab works an average of 16 hours in the day) is mentioned almost inadvertently.

Not a single woman is included in the social studies series on popular personalities. In the Urdu books, space has been conceded to two women only. The claim to eminence of these two women, Miss Fatima Jinnah and Begum Mohammad Ali, is their relationship to men. In one instance it is as the sister of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Her role is depicted as that of nurse, helpmate and support. The fact that she was a candidate in a Presidential election is considered a matter not important enough to mention. What the writer felt was more pertinent was that Miss Jinnah always dressed 'modestly'.

In the second case, Begum Mohammed Ali is portrayed as the mother of the famous Ali brothers who hoped to revitalise Muslim society. She is depicted as a woman deeply rooted in the religious and social traditions of Islam. Nothing is ever mentioned about her work in the Freedom Movement, nor do we hear of the fact that she discarded the 'veil' at a public meeting. And although she stressed the need for women's education, textbooks warn the 'weaker sex' to beware the pernicious influences abroad. It is imperative, the writer says, that the woman preserve eastern traditions (these are not spelt out) and not lose her balance. It is significant that no similar caution is issued to men. Tradition, for women, is seen as a fixed pattern of behaviour rather than as a set of values whose expression may change with time.

There is not one woman among the tales told of Sufi saints. Among the eminent figures of Islamic history only three or four mentioned are not male. It is curious how certain accepted historical facts are omitted so that the picture that emerges is one that conforms to the cultural and social norms of present day Pakistan. That Hazrat Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him), was a successful business woman, a widow and fifteen to twenty years his senior goes unmentioned. The fact that it was she who proposed marriage to him is not even hinted at. It is pertinent that all the qualities that indicate that she was a strong and independent personality are ignored altogether and the image of the self sacrificing wife who gives her all to her husband's cause is highlighted. Once again, another heroine of early Islam, Hazrat Zainab, is depicted as weeping at her brother's helplessness in a battle where his little band of followers was vastly out-numbered. Her courage in the face of great adversity, her resourcefulness and her historic address in the court at Damascus are not considered worthy of inclusion.

The impression is that each one of these great women's major claim to fame is their connection with men of distinction. The crucial role played by these women and others is by and large glossed over. After the Quran, the most important source for Muslims are the 'Hadith' and Sunnah, or traditions of the Prophet, more than fifty percent of which are credited to Hazrat Ayesha. But today we are told by the ideologues of the present

government that a lone woman's evidence in matters financial and those concerning future obligations is inadmissible in a court of law. The active participation of women in the independence movement is also mentioned only in passing.

The lone instance of a woman lauded for acting in a manner that may be regarded as 'unfeminine' is of Umme Umara going into battle in the early years of Islam. Thus it appears that in times of crisis it is acceptable for women to step out of the four walls of their homes and enter the mainstream of human endeavour, but they must immediately return to the domestic enclosure when no longer required in the public field.

### **Government Policy and Social Reality**

No government policy on text books has at any time in our history recognised its blatant anti-woman bias or tried to promote and encourage a more positive image of women. Traditional concepts of the differing roles of the sexes are nurtured and reinforced at every level. If this bias is due simply to a lack of awareness among the writers themselves, it does also illustrate the unenlightened attitude of policy makers. Despite public platitudes and pronouncements made by people in power, on the importance of education for both men and women, these do not seem to lead to their making a contribution to the development of the nation (as the text books indicate). The root of the problem seems to lie in the inability of our society to come to terms with the nature and role of women within the context of a contemporary Muslim society.

In so far as alternative text books are concerned, some non-governmental publishing houses such as Ferozsons and Oxford University Press do print alternative materials which are used as texts by some urban private schools. These books, particularly those on history, do have a relatively more realistic and balanced approach and present women in a somewhat positive light. However as it has been stated earlier, the number of these books is very small and their circulation is limited to a few private schools.

A few private educational institutions are trying to present alternatives by providing a better quality of education for girls, with a more flexible and student oriented approach to learning. It is the same few schools that offer sports, music and drama as an integral part of the curriculum. They have seen the need to build an awareness among students of contemporary issues. But as mentioned earlier, only a small proportion of students have access to these institutions.<sup>xlii</sup>

In certain subject areas, such as language, it is mandatory to use text book board publications. In order to overcome the bias in the material, these few schools try to build an awareness amongst the staff of the need to raise questions and encourage discussion of

the given text, thereby promoting in the child the need to read critically and establishing the precept that all books should be read in that fashion.

During the last nine years, obscurantist elements have been permitted and indeed encouraged to make women the focus of the so called Islamization process. Major national issues such as poverty, illiteracy, corruption etc. are side-tracked by the urgent need for women to don the chadar and be forbidden from participating in cultural and sporting events. These measures, we are told, will strengthen the moral fibre of the nation. A series of amendments to the law i.e. the Hudood Ordinances, the Law of Evidence, the Law of Qisas and Dyat etc. which have further reduced the status of women before the law, forced women to raise issues which they had assumed were no longer relevant. This atmosphere, which has been nothing less than claustrophobic for women, is hardly the ideal environment for progressive reforms in education or other forms of the media.

However, despite the efforts of these retrogressive elements, the enrolment of girls at university in cities like Lahore and Karachi is near 50% and their performance in BA and B.Sc. examinations is generally superior to that of their male counterparts. Economic forces are making it almost a necessity for the middle class urban woman to go out to work. The majority of working class and rural women have always contributed heavily to labour intensive tasks even though statistics do not show it.

This assessment of the portrayal of the female sex in school books along with the stultifying school system in Pakistan, points to a need for radical change within the educational structure in the country. It is equally clear, however, that change is not going to come through authorised channels.

The only means whereby any change may be wrought is for women's groups to put consistent pressure on the government to portray women in a more positive light in text books. These are the formative years where lasting impressions are made and it is imperative that girls do not receive a negative self-image as a result of 'education'. Till the day that the government deems fit to change its policy on this issue, it is imperative that a beginning be made in building awareness among administrators and teachers, many of whom are women, in the private sector. It would be necessary to hold a series of workshops for an exchange of ideas on how to use the existing material without accepting the built in bias.

There is also a growing awareness among women, of the need to combat the debilitating image of the female in the media – whether in the areas of text books, children's fiction, TV, cinema and advertising – and this in itself is a sign of hope for positive change.

## FINDINGS AND FUTURE ALTERNATIVES

The findings of this analysis confirmed that mainstream media is part of a given system of signs, which includes linguistic, audio-visual, sartorial and spatial arrangements, through which a society reinforces its social institutions viz. the family, the legal system, traditions and behavioural norms, and talks and thinks about itself and its experience. By reproducing and manipulating the myths and beliefs of a given culture within the specificity of a socio-historical moment, the media creates the illusion that i) these sign-systems are part of an immutable world order and ii) they colour the individual's perceptions of his/her relation to that order.

In so far as the image of the woman as represented in the media is concerned, it was seen that it has its source in the desirable woman of male fantasy and has little to do with the complex heterogeneity of the individual subject. As such, she is structured across a series of stereotypical though contradictory attributes. She is simultaneously strong and weak, visible and invisible, foolish and wise, hard working and helpless, and, most important, as it underpins and informs all roles, she is the asexual, pakeeza (pure, chaste) mother/ wife or daughter/ sister and the sexually irresistible and terrifying fitna.

This wide ranging duality informs different areas of the mediatic expression and is significant as it points to the problematic nature of male/female relations within patriarchy which, within the ultimate analysis are based on the man's desire to establish and maintain control over women's sexuality. This feature has been addressed in the main body of the text. However, a detailed analysis on mainstream perceptions of the feminine and their relation to the ways in which female and male subjectivity are constituted, falls outside the parameters of this study.

Nevertheless, the overall findings of the study point to the imperative of bringing about radical changes in the images and metaphors that bind women to roles which set limits both to their choices and to their potentials.

Action for change must be simultaneously carried out at more than one level:

- i) To influence or change government policy towards women.
- ii) To engage in consciousness raising programmes aimed at the creation of alternative perspectives on gender and class relations.

### Government Policy

The most obvious course of action might be taken at the level of policy makers and bureaucrats. This is with a view to the creation of non-sexist government policies, leading to directives that demand unbiased representation and increased visibility of women in

the media. However, given the thrust towards retrogressive Islamisation, the apathy of a bureaucracy bogged down in its own red tape, and the established view of women's inferiority to men, such attempts would most likely be abortive.

### **Television Drama and Films**

In both these fields, mediatic messages serve as a narcotic and as a tool for the propagation of received ideas and official policy. However, despite the proliferation of films and television plays that reinforce existing ideas of male and female roles and functions in society, the possibility of change lies with the individuals who are already in this field. That is, to some extent both television and the cinema draw upon actors/producers who belong to alternative theatre, and thus the vision and expectations of these professionals are at variance with mainstream stereotypes and biased government policies. Direct and indirect participation and support in alternative theatre activities could prove useful in this regard.

### **Advertising**

The task of change is equally difficult in advertising. Most agencies are concerned with satisfying their clients by facilitating the increase of sales and profit margins, thereby falling in with the requirements of the market. However, persuasion at the individual level might effect some shift in advertising tactics, so that the fetishisation of the female body or the perpetuation of gender stereotypes may be substituted with non-discriminatory means of ensuring a product's sale.

It should be noted here that despite the presence of a number of women who own advertising agencies or who are in managerial positions, the politics of women's representation in media has not significantly changed. Even allegedly 'aware' individuals among this group are constantly in search of the 'pretty model' and seem unable to see the contradiction between such demands and their own public stance as liberated women.

### **School Texts**

As for school texts, attempts must be made to break establishment monopoly on the production and dissemination of meaning through alternative texts such as teaching manuals, social studies texts and story books. Such texts would have to necessarily be produced by feminist organisations.

These however would not gain immediate currency in all schools, as the majority of schools rely on texts published by different Boards of Education in the country, and

because the overall examination system is geared to the information provided in these texts. Some headway could be made through private schools, where teachers have asserted their dissatisfaction with prevailing education material.

However, this plan has its own drawbacks and feminists need to carefully examine related issues before any steps can be taken. By exclusively working within the private sector, we stand in danger of further widening the existing gap between a socially privileged class that can afford to send its children to private schools and the under-privileged majority who must of necessity rely on state schools.

At present, the most useful initiative might be teacher training, wherein teachers from both the private and public sectors are involved and enabled to reread existing texts from a feminist perspective. These workshops could potentially provide the space and incentive for the publication of alternative texts - thus granting visibility to women and also providing positive images and role models of women as opposed to what is on offer today.

### **Feminist Organisations**

As far as feminist organisations are concerned, the responsibility of consciousness raising of those who are engaged in the production and dissemination of meaning and those who are the recipients of the finished product, lies with them.

Up until this point in time, women's organisations have either focused on social work, or they have concentrated their energies against specific sexist laws and directives e.g. APWA's fight for the Family Laws Ordinance 1961 and Women's Action Forum's agitation against the Haddood and other such laws initiated by the Zia government. In order to increase their efficacy, these groups must widen and strengthen their socio-political base without relinquishing their autonomy as women's organisations. For it is only by going beyond our class boundaries, in these cases primarily the middle and upper middle classes, and by forging more effective alliances with working class and rural women, can we hope to bring about real changes in society.

One of the ways through which this can be done is the jalsa, or gatherings for women. In itself the idea is not new, and some headway has already been made in this field through the WAF annual jalsa, along with similar meetings held by women's organisations, where a sense of shared commitment to common concerns, regardless of class difference, has been reinforced by songs, brief skits or plays that parody patriarchal structures and reveal the absurdity that informs retrogressive laws and institutions.

Workshops, focusing on women's issues or for purposes of income generation, have been initiated by women's ngos in the country. These too have made some contribution towards consciousness raising of women. They have also helped build bridges, no matter how tenuous initially, between rural and urban women.

As mentioned earlier, the task ahead of consciousness raising and creating an alternative world view to the one established by patriarchy is both complex and long term. Given that the media plays an important role in disseminating established ideology, it should be the main target for feminists engaged in the work of reformulating the conceptual and structural parameters of our world. For it is only when women cease to see themselves as passive objects will they be able to experience life at first hand, and discover their own potentials.

## Notes

- i These definitions have been taken from Cohen and Young's introduction to *The Manufacture of News*, eds. Cohen and Young. (Constable, London. Sage Publications Beverly Hills, California, 1982) p.13.
- ii Ibid.
- iii Ibid.
- iv Over time and largely as a result of the work done by women's groups, this practice of transposing zina for zina-bil-jabr has been questioned. However, mainstream attitudes and usage have yet to undergo change. In the '90s, after the restitution of democracy and an alleged move away from earlier policies, when a delegation from Women Action Forum went to see Chaudhry Sardar Ahmed, the Inspector General of the Punjab Police, with regard to a case of gang rape that had taken place in village Bhitwai, Multan, he attempted to dismiss the issue with the comment: "Lets face it; I am a man and you are women, and we all know that in 90% of the rape cases that take place the women are party to the act." Although he retracted this statement when he realised its implications regarding his own position, and insisted that he had been 'misunderstood', the sad fact is that the IGP's statement represents mainstream attitudes towards women victims of sexual violence.
- v Julia Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," *The Politics of Interpretation*; ed. W.J.T. Mitchell. (The University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 92.
- vi These examples have been taken from Margaret Mead, "The Standardisation of Sex Temperament," *Sex Differences*; eds. Lee and Stewart. (Urizen Books, N.Y. 1976) p. 194.
- vii Women and Development Workshops, 1985, organised by the Family Planning Association of Pakistan.
- viii Imam Ghazali, *Ihya ulum al-din*. Quoted by Fatma A. Sabah in *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious*. (Pergamon Press, 1984) Ch. 1.
- ix Ibid.
- x Quoted in *Sisterhood is Powerful*; ed. Robin Morgan. (Vintage Books, 1970) p.34.
- xi Pure. Pakeeza is the feminine term which has its source in 'pak' or pure. In its feminised sense the term, which refers to both intrinsic and ritual purity and cleanliness, focuses on female chastity in both word and deed.
- xii The word denotes chaos - a source of discord and the subversion of order. Interestingly, it also refers to the moment of primal undifferentiation out of which order arose and which therefore, is also the source of divine and human creativity.
- xiii Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*. (Al Saki Books, 1983). Ch. 2.
- xiv Widow immolation on the husband's funeral pyre.
- xv Deniz Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State*. (Macmillan Press, 1991) p.7.
- xvi Our translation. eds.
- xvii Op cit. Mernissi.
- xviii Safdar Mir, "Religion and Politics in Pakistan," *Islam in Asia*; ed. Asghar Ali Engineer. (Vanguard Books, Lahore, 1986) pp. 147-48.
- xix For further information see text of "The Consolidated Recommendations of the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women, 1985," Government of Pakistan.
- xx It is ironical that this law, which did not get beyond the proposal stage during Zia's government, was pushed through in 1991, after the restitution of democracy, by his political and ideological heirs, the IJI (Islami Jamhoori Itehad) government comprising a multi-party alliance between right wing forces, predominant among whom were the Muslim League and the Jamaat-i-Islami. This was also the time when the notorious Blasphemy Law was strengthened and the death penalty for blasphemy was introduced.

- xxi The creation of the government-backed National Press Trust in 1964, which in time acquired a chain of newspapers, was the culmination of the Ayub Khan Government's agenda for the curtailment of Press freedom and the imposition of state control over the production and dissemination of information. In 1959, one year after Martial Law was imposed in the country, the Security Act was amended in secrecy and was followed by a new Martial Law Regulation to enable the government to successfully seize the Progressive Papers Ltd.
- In 1961, the news agency, Associated Press of Pakistan, was taken away from a trust and brought under direct government control. The Martial Law regime also rewrote the Press laws by consolidating the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867 and the Press (Emergency Powers) Act of 1931 into the West Pakistan Press and Publications Ordinance. This Ordinance, which made both the normal and emergency laws applicable to the Press more stringent, was revised twice by the same regime and it remains in force to this day as the principle law affecting the Press.
- xxii These women made notable contributions in the mediatic field. The name that immediately comes to mind is that of Shirin Pasha who began her professional career in PTV and is today one of the leading documentary film makers in the country.
- xxiii Not only did serious dramatists come forward to write for television, young women and men with an interest in theatre were encouraged to take up acting as a career.
- xxiv Imtiaz Ali Taj, writer and radio broadcaster broke away from the florid and non-realist tradition established by Agha Hashar, to write within the realist genre. His focus however, was on entertainment and had little to do with disturbing social realities.
- xxv According to popular historical lore, Anarkali, the beloved of Prince Salim, later to accede to the throne of the Mughal Empire as Jehangir, was walled up as punishment by the Emperor Akbar, for daring to love a prince. Her tomb is in Lahore in what are now the premises of the Civil Secretariat.
- xxvi Sister of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, 'founding father' of Pakistan.
- xxvii Ahmed Salim. op cit.
- xxviii E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: both sides of the camera*. (Methuen, 1983).
- xxix Ibid. pp. 14-15. These definitions are based on Kaplan's analysis.
- xxx This discussion took place in a Women and Development Workshop organised by the Family Planning Association of Pakistan in august 1985.
- xxxi This glaring contradiction within male discourse is an indicator of the woman's symbolic role in a patriarchal order, where she must be simultaneously absent and present - absent in her individual capacity as a human being and woman and present as male property and symbol of male honour.
- xxxii This 'taming of the shrew' theme seems to be one of the constants of male fantasy and recurs with a fair amount of consistency in films. India's first Technicolor film *Aan* was built around the same motif.
- xxxiii It is possible that in a culture where segregation on the basis of sexual difference is the norm, the allure of cross dressing lies in its transgressive potential. Further, as cross dressing enables entry into the forbidden and secret world of the zenana or women's quarters, it carries with it the excitement of the illicit and the erotic.
- xxxiv Basant, the festival of spring which, despite Zia ul Haq's Islamisation policies, is celebrated on both sides of the border, is marked by the yellow mustard seed flower. Yellow is also the colour of renewal and revolution in the Punjab.
- xxxv It is interesting to note that in the West it is only recently that film critics have begun to feel that "the image has been over-valued at the expense of sound - that rhythm is an essential component of film." Tyndall and Mcall, in E.A. Kaplan's *Women and Film*. (Methuen, 1983).
- xxxvi Kaplan, *Women and Film*. op cit.
- xxxvii The *Herald*. op cit.

- xxviii Ibid. October 1985. Since the focus of this study is on the ways women are represented in films, the state of the film industry is discussed only tangentially.
- xxcix Moharram'. The annual commemoration of the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain, grandson of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him).
- xl Haq Mehar is an essential component of the Muslim marriage contract and refers to a financial settlement made in favour of the woman by the man at the time of marriage.
- xli The Islamic belief that all Muslims share a common identity, as well as interests, which constitutes them as a homogenous community regardless of national, geographical, racial and sexual differences. An essentialist notion that is as enabling, as it is misleading. It is much used as a rhetorical device.
- xlii The Lahore Grammar School is one of the schools referred to here. This is one institution where music and classical and folk dancing are part of the curriculum. It is significant that during the Zia regime, when the government imposed a ban on classical dance on television, and official discourse consistently equated music and dance with western depravity and alien cultures, few parents objected to their daughters learning these subjects.