

Portrayal of Women in Television (TV) Serials

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ABSTRACT The present study entitled “portrayal of women in television (TV) serials” was conducted with a view to ascertain the responses of men and women regarding the image of women in TV serial and to study the impact of these serials on them. The sample comprised of 120 respondents which consisted 60 men and 60 women purposively in the age group of 35-50 years. Women portrayal of TV is one of the contentions issues surrounding the media today. The modern images of the more liberated woman are not the image of the contemporary Indian women. It seems that sex-stereotyping is more deeply woven in to the fabric of television soap operas does not depicts the reality of women’s role in society, for a variety of different reasons, including the illusionary characters, the concentration on domestic and personal issues. It has been seen that women are portrayed in stereotypical, often fashionable way and never as an intelligent, confident and emancipated women.

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing communication revolution has opened up possibilities of accelerating development especially for the upliftment of women and children. But if it remains uncontrolled and unguided, this revolution will have adverse effect on the life of women. Every now and then, one comes across reports of one or the other group of women activists protesting against what they describe as wrong “exploitative” projection of women in media particularly in the electronic media. Women are basically seen as performing a deco-rative function and being marginal to national growth and development. Their primary place is seen as being with in the home and this value is reflected in the content and setting of most of the television programmes. The plural nature of Indian culture and diverse role that woman play is neither acknowledge nor communicated. This results in reinforcement of the stereotyped image and role specification of woman in an undimensional projection of their reality. When we speak of the image a society projects of its women, we have in mind its ideal of woman hood or its popular stereo-types or the position of women of the insti-tution, of the role or position of women or the vision of poets, artists and prophets rela-ting to women (Shrivastva 1992)

All serials wrapped in tradition of male chauvinism discourage women to aim for more than a loving husband, happy children and a

modern home. She is portrayed as a glamorous doll whose physical beauty is her only asset. The sacrificing role of women in every serial is highlighted, as it poses no threat to the patriarchal structure. Women are all the time compromising and negotiating. The soap operas affect women more simply because the women are watching more serials than men. Men spend maximum time outside whereas women are confined to the household (Jyotin 2002). Sex stereotyping is also very much evident in television portrayal of men and women in their appointed roles. Invariably, masculine personality attributes are empha-sized and women in the world of television are presented in role of domestic help, a wife, a mother etc. and they are portrayed as submissive and engro-ssed in common family affection and duties .as against this, men are depicted as employed, competitive. Women shown in similar competing roles with men are far less in number and are considered to be oddities and deviations from norm, trait wise though there is a stereotype portrayal of women being congenitally much more than men. Even when women are presented as power holders, the patriarchal context is unmi-stakably present. Infact, the attributes of power and aggressiveness is portrayed as something unnatural to a women and a challenge to the male ego (Karthika 2005).

The images portrayed in TV serials have a definite impact on the thought patterns of society. Women on television entertainment programmes are projected as non-thinking, sacrificing, and

suffering beings while educated and motivated women are seen as the scourge of the patriarchal order of the society (Desai 1990). Media is an important tool for change. Women need to ensure that media reflects images that create positive role models of men and women in society, which will alter damaging stereotypes. Gahulant (2002) in a study on women in advertisements and serials in Kerala found that serials on TV have new women who are selfish, actively aggressive, sexist, insensitive and female chauvinist. Rajagopal (2002) observed that serials images have a stronger impact on shaping gender images in people, female oriented serials influence women to become self-conscious about their appearance as a measure of their worth.

With these assumptions in mind, it was decided to perceive opinion of viewers regarding portrayal of women in TV serials and to know the impact of these serials on society.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Jammu on 60 couples in the age group of 35-50 years. The couples were selected purposively who were the regular viewers of selected TV serials.

Selection of Serials: A pilot study was conducted to know the most popular serials watched by the couples in the age group of 35-50 years. A list of serials watched by this age group was made and from the list five popular serials on different women images were selected. The serials selected were "kyunki saas bhi kabhi bahu thi", "kahani ghar ghar ki", "thodi khushi thoda ghum", "betiyaan" and "thodi zameen thoda aasman". An interview schedule was formulated to elicit the required information. The data was collected in the months of February-March 2007.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The present study was conducted with an aim to know the "Perception on the portrayal of women in TV serials". The findings have been presented under the following headings.

- I. Televiewing pattern of the respondents
- II. Opinions of respondents regarding portrayal of women
- III. Impact of commercial advertisements on respondents

I. Televiewing Pattern of the Respondents

The televiewing pattern of the respondents

provides information about their liking for different types of programmes. It is closely related to "prime time" where the maximum number of programmes is telecasted. This is the time most sought by the advertisers for advertising their products. Thus, the televiewing pattern of the respondents would give information regarding the time slot favoured by them and their exposure to various serials.

Table 1 depicts the time spent by the respondents in watching TV. Majority of women, 71.6% spent 2-3 hours daily in watching TV whereas 61.6% of men spent 1 to 2 hours daily as against these there are others among men, 8.3% and women, 16.6% who watch for 4 or more hours. Difference may be due to the fact that most of the women are housewives and have more time at their disposal than men.

Table 1: Time spent in watching TV (N=120)

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	1-2 hrs	37	61.6	7	11.6
2.	2-3 hrs	18	30.0	43	71.6
3.	4 or more	5	8.3	10	16.6

Table 2 draws information about viewing pattern of channels telecasted from time to time. Among most popular channels watched were Star plus, ZEE TV and Sony. These channels were watched by 100% couples. Though other channels like news channels were watched by cent percent men and 11.6% of women. Other channels like Discovery/sports were watched sparingly by men convenient to their time schedule.

Table 3 depicts that cent percent of men and women both watch soap operas. The specific

Table 2: Channels most watched (N=120)

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Doordarshan	7	11.6	9	15.0
2.	Zee t.v.	60	100.0	60	100.0
3.	Star plus	60	100.0	60	100.0
4.	Sony	60	100.0	60	100.0
5.	Discovery	20	33.3	-	-
6.	Star one	3	5.0	9	16.0
7.	News channel	60	100.0	7	11.6

*Multiple Responses

serials selected for the study were watched by all the respondents. The programme which were next in popularity among 23.3% women were reality shows and 16.6% in case of men. Regarding other shows, 100% of men go for news broadcast as against only 11.6% of women who were also keen for news. Regarding other shows like musical shows and films, a small number of viewers both men and women would occasionally watch, one or the other.

Table 3: Programmes watched by the respondents (N=120)

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Soap operas	60	100.0	60	100.0
2.	Musical shows	12	20.0	8	13.3
3.	Comedy shows	14	23.3	6	10.0
4.	News	60	100.0	7	11.6
5.	Reality shows	10	16.6	14	23.3
6.	Films	8	13.3	6	10.0

*Multiple Responses

It is evident from table 4 that majority, 100% of women preferred to watch women oriented serials because they see a reflection of their own life experience in such serials whereas majority, 100% of men preferred serials based on social issues, since they believed that these depict reality and shows real dimensions of life.

Table 4: Type of serials watched (N=120)

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	On social issues	60	100	60	100.0
2.	Humorous	42	70	19	31.6
3.	Women oriented	54	90	60	100.0

*Multiple Responses

II. Opinions of Respondents Regarding Portrayal of Women

Table 5 reveals that majority of men (66.6%) and (50%) women felt that women are projected mostly as housewives, concerned with domestic problems related to children and other family members, which they thought is partially true but

Table 5: Image of women portrayed in TV serials (N=120)

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Domesticated	40	66.6	30	50.0
2.	Business women	7	11.6	6	10.0
3.	Fashionable & glamorous	40	66.6	32	53.3
4.	Emancipated women	4	6.6	5	8.3

*Multiple Responses

in the present social set-up women besides doing domestic chores, being educated also attend to problems like official assessment, business matters.66.6% men and 53.3% women believed that women are also projected as tools of glamour and fashion in the serials. The reason being that fashion and glamour has taken the place in our lifestyles and is always the talk of the day hence such projections help the director in getting better TRPs. A similar study by Cooper (1994) reported that 44.74% respondents opine that women are portrayed in domestic and decorative roles.

Table 6 reveals that men 55% and women 58% opined that many serials have commercialised the women’s image for invoking more and more of clientete and business matters to confess it rather frankly that such an image depraves women’s image and leads to a scandalous portrayal of women which is hardly desirable. Raksha (2003) revealed that TV serials are portraying negative, limited and derogatory images of women for commercial purpose.

Table 6: Views about obscenity in serials (N=120)

Responses	Respondents			
	Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	33	55.0	35	58.3
No	27	45.0	25	41.6

*Multiple Responses

Table 7 reveals the perception of portrayal of women in TV serials 48.3% of women opine that women are portrayed as a real character and as a household character. The men (63.3%) and women (21.6%) thought that many events projecting women’s role are mostly illusionary. Thirty-three percent women and 13.3% men said that

Table 7: Portrayal of women in serials (N=120)

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
		N	%	N	%
1	Real	20	33.3	29	48.3
2	Illusion	38	63.3	13	21.6
3	For commercial purpose	38	63.3	16	26.6
4	Glamorous	8	13.3	20	33.3

*Multiple Responses

women are portrayed in all these serials as a piece of glamour to invoke and attract people's attention. General feeling of the respondents was that most of the serials are fake and more fictitious in nature, not sketching the real and correct images of women either as a housewife or as a business and corporate women. Both men and women were of the opinion that women are represented in stereotypical roles, i.e. mostly as housewives or glamorous women. Stereotyping in serials is widely prevalent though there has been some increase in the modern, liberated images of women but her role is just confined within four walls of the house. Respondents felt that women are projected according to the stereotypical image existing in the society leading to reinforcement of stereotypical roles.

Kishwar (2007) revealed that popular Indian soaps are dominated by women characters. She stated that TV serials portrays an illusionary world which aspires people to see women in joint family with perfect income in rich lifestyle and all the time in the world to pit against each other. Dewey (2001) found that serials are stereotypes with strong links typically made between attractiveness and women with women increasingly being used and portrayed as commodity in serials.

Table 8 reveals that both men, 61.6% and women, 66.6% believed that women are negative stereotype in most of the serials; they felt that serials are not version of social reality. Most of

Table 8: promotion of negative image of women (N=120)

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
		N	%	N	%
	Yes	37	61.6	40	66.6
	No	23	38.3	20	33.3

these serials draw the character of a women as a helpless negative creature. This is not the view held by 38% men and 33% women. They hold the view that woman of today is not so pitiable. Though she is fully free and emancipated and she is also portrayed as economically independent to a great extent. Shrivastva (1992) revealed that Indian media portrays in negative stereotypes in daily soap operas. The serials show that the most important and valuable assets of a women is physical beauty women are dependent, coy and submissive.

III. Impact of Commercial Advertisements on Respondents

Table 9 reveals that 31.6% men felt that women are gaining confidence whereas thirty-five percent felt they have even develop leadership qualities. The men 33.3% felt that women are managing and organizing home and work place and maintaining a balance. Women revealed that serials definitely affect the mindset of a person. Majority of women, 65% felt that serials help them in organizing successfully, it also helps in gaining confidence. Desai (1990) found that the images portrayed in TV serials have a definite impact on the thought patterns of society and various group within society

Table 9: Impact of serials on mindset of women (N=120)

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
		N	%	N	%
1	Gain confidence	19	31.6	12	18.3
2	Develop leadership qualities	21	35.0	9	15.0
3	To maintain balance at home & work place	20	33.3	39	65.0

Table 10 reveals that 71.6% women and 51.6% men did not agree that serials empower the women in playing their rightful role in the society as real life is quite different from what it is otherwise shown. The men (48.3%) respondents and women (28.4%) respondents felt that women do get empowered by these serials. Men felt that after watching these serials their wives also sometimes claims to be independent in decision-making. Some of the female respondents felt that some of the serials do motivate them to rebel against

Table 10: Serials and empowerment of women (N=120)

Responses	Respondents			
	Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	29	48.3	17	28.4
No	31	51.6	43	71.6

Reasons for Yes
 Widen the mental horizons
 Enable them for an emancipated and individual survival
 Sensitizing on issues related to day to day living

exploitation and to fight for their rights. Women respondents cited the example of Uma’s character in the serial “thodi khushi thoda ghum”. They positively liked the character that handles the difficult situation with courage and confidence.

Table 11 reveals that respondents from both the categories felt that these serials leave an impact on their mind. The men (100%) and women (58.3%) reveal that these serials leaves a curiosity in their mind to watch the next episode.66.6% women stated that they watch serials only to know the latest dresses and jewellery worn by the female characters. Thus, it leaves an impact on the fashion statement of the female respondents.

Table 11: Curiosity to watch serials (N=12)

Curiosity to watch	Respondents			
	Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
	N	%	N	%
Get involved and curious to watch	60	100.0	35	58.3
Fashion statement	-	-	40	66.6

*Multiple responses

Table 12 shows that majority of women, 71.6% of women felt that women should be projected in multiple roles, like that of a mother, as housewife as also a professional character whereas 46.6% of men felt that women should be projected in reality, as the Indian women is simple, intelligent and not as a manipulator. TV is one of the best sources of entertainment and also educative but it is defeating the purpose of a real social fabric of Indian life by resorting to unrealistic performance at times whereas 25% men and 13.3% of women like the portrayal of women as brave, dashing besides as a glamorous personality. Whereas 33.3% of women and 16.6% of men want

Table 12: Expectation of respondents from media regarding image of women (N=120)

S. No.	Expectation of women role	Respondents			
		Men (n1=60)		Women (n2=60)	
		N	%	N	%
1	Emancipated women	10	16.6	20	33.3
2	Women with multiple roles	20	33.3	43	71.6
3	Real image	28	46.6	30	50.0
4	Brave, dashing	15	25.0	8	13.3

*Multiple responses

that women should be shown as an emancipated figure, economically viable and an independent person being capable of working as an equal partner with men in the socio-economic and political field.

CONCLUSION

It is a fact that the Indian society generally considers women as weak and as a liability. As a result, a woman undergoes tremendous traumas from birth to death. This negative attitude towards women in real life is very much reflected in way media represents them as well. Media representations of Indian women reveal that they are less accepted and respected as persons and more looked upon as objects. She has three projected roles-biological, domestic and decorative. Media hardly challenges the gender attitudes promoted and perpetuated by the society. The present study entitled “portrayal of women in TV serials was conducted with a view to ascertain the responses of men and women in TV serials and to study the impact of these serials on them. The sample comprised of 120 respondents which consisted of 60 men and women purposively in the age group of 35-50 years who were the regular viewers of the selected TV serials. An interview schedule was used to elicit the required information.

Regarding the image of women shown in serials, majority of both the respondents felt that as women are mostly projected as housewives and glamorous. They reported that when “women’s issues” or a “women’s story” is presented, two archetypes tend to emerge. The stereotype is either a quite young, professional, beautiful super woman or a relatively passive and traditional woman living mostly according to the rules set

by her man. They further claimed that very little variety of realism is found in projection of women. A key issue raised by many females was that the serials should present the survival stories of women, struggling between the many roles and obligations that today's society imposes on them. Both the respondents agreed that women are projected according to the stereotypical image existing in the society leading to reinforcement of stereotypical role. Popular Indian soaps are traditionally Indian and are very stereotypical only such themes keep the TRPs of serials high.

Majority of both men and women believed that women are negatively stereotyped. Most of the serials are not version of social reality. Most of the men revealed that serials themes are centred around large extended families and also depicts image of infidelity, conspiracies which keep the audiences tied up to their TV sets. Many women respondents agreed that serials so have impact on their mind setup. Women revealed that serials help them in organizing their homes and work place, whereas majority of men revealed that women are gaining confidence and are developing leadership qualities. Both the respondents felt that serials do not empower women in playing their rightful role in the society as real life is quite different from what it is otherwise shown. Majority of men and women revealed that media should portray women in multiple roles and also as a real character and not as manipulator. Today's woman is already imbibed to tools like TV, films etc it is therefore necessary that serials should relate to the realistic part of life which could help the woman in particular to come out of the old shell and appreciate the changes necessary for her future prosperity, essentially economic.

SUGGESTIONS

*Media should foster broad ethical content and moralizing impulse in the society for emergence of civil society and better roles for women.

*Media should sensitize the issues in their perspective. The present position is more on commercial manifestation.

*Serials should present "survival stories" of women struggling between many roles and obligations that today's society imposes on them.

*There should be no obscenity and vulgarity in the serials.

*Serials should show women working in wide variety of career settings. They should be projected in diverse roles such as emancipated and independent decision maker

*There is need to scrutinize all serials carefully to ensure that directors do not portray women in derogatory and stereotype image.

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