



GENDER BASED DISCRIMINATION: PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN INDIAN TELEVISION

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Abstract: In this paper the portrayal of women in Indian media has been discussed with regards to the impact it has on the society and its effect on the viewers. It aims to show how the female gender has been perceived and projected to the audience as weaker section. The patriarchal ideas, which has been a practice of the lost times seems to make a return in the soap operas and its role in impacting the progressive mind-set is perceived. They show women as a dependent being, who has to be always in the shadow of other men or else she has shown as a vamp whose only job is to destroy another women character in the name of entertainment. In a weak attempt to show their empowerment, woman and her position is grossly undermined. The largest audience of this content are women and we should understand how this will take a toll on their ideals and perception of self in the world. The discussion of subjugation of woman in Indian serials and films and its consequences is the need of the hour and this paper has attempted to study it.

Key Words- empowerment, stereo type, patriarchy, entertainment, social cause.

Introduction

Indian serials are the most popular form of entertainment. But behind all that glittery romance, drama and fights lay many negative aspects like the portrayal of women and gender based discrimination. The serials are infamous for normalize old and stereotypical ideas and forming the idea of the ideal characters both in positive and negative aspects. The serials with their overly dramatized plots and overexaggerated emotions tend to popularize the gender norms. This portrayal influences societal perceptions, shaping how women are viewed and treated in real life. This paper aims to examine the ways in which women are portrayed in Indian serials and the effects of such portrayals have on the viewers and society .

Women in Indian serials have two extreme characters: either they are damsels in distress or women with the most villainous instincts known to man. The protagonist, whether an illiterate woman always taunted by the world or a well-educated woman striving to find her place in this world, is shown as an innocent woman not used to the world and always craving to live in the shadow of her protector that is her husband. The husband character is very important in these shows; the woman is either forcefully wed to him or not, but his wife idolises him, worships him, and her life is centred around him, always supporting him even if he abuses her, ignores her, tortures, or leads her to the point of death. She is the woman of dreams, always looking after in-laws, tolerating all the taunts she gets, cooking delicious food, knowing all household chores, and never defending herself before anyone. The villain, on the other hand, is usually a woman carrying a revenge from old times who wants to keep herself above everyone else, or is a woman who wants the protagonist's husband and wants to disturb her life, their chief dialogue in these serials being, "I will not stop till I destroy her life." These are usually how women are shown in the serials, which hundreds of Indians across the globe watch. They are the epitome of unrealistic expectations, and the description of women shows preconceived notions about women. Why should only a woman be shown as a homemaker, sacrificing her life and dreams just to satisfy others and always compromising about her needs, or as someone who destroys homes and enjoys and finds happiness in others sorrows? Why can't the narrative instead be about a strong, independent woman building a life for herself and all the women around her showing support instead of jealousy, supporting a positive attitude in women by this way? The Indian serials, even after so many years, show patriarchy. The man is a very rich person who marries the woman out of his family and society's pressure and looks out for work and business while the woman is confined to her house or her family. The dress in these serials is also an important factor in determining. any women wearing traditional attire, like a saree draped over the whole body, a big sindoor in her forehead if she is married, and her arms full of bangles, this shows an ideal Indian woman. any other woman being modern and wearing modern clothes, who doesn't dress according to her culture, is the bad character. The problem is not the dress here, but the message it conveys. It says how a woman in the society should dress according to the societal expectations to be considered good, and if she doesn't, she is banned. In this modern world we need ideas that challenge the freedom of women and not impose boundaries on her and judge her according to her appearance. Marriage is an important institution in Indian culture. But the idea represented by the serials gives the wrong idea. There is no mutual love and understanding between the couples; the woman is ready to kill herself to save the marriage, but the man walks away freely and can marry any number of times he wants. Though witty and intelligent, female characters are overshadowed by their need to achieve idealism and therefore lack substance. They reflect and influence the viewers to idolise women as physically and intellectually inferior to men. For instance, characters like Komolika in *Kasautii Zindagii Kay* or Rakhi Sawant in many serials are often depicted as the "villainous" women, whose only purpose is to stir trouble in the family, while idealised characters like Tulsi in *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* and Perna in *Kasautii Zindagii Kay* embody passive goodness. In serials like *Kumkum Bhagya* and *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah*, while there is an occasional attempt to address societal issues, there is still a tendency to gloss over important issues such as women's rights, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. The resolution of conflicts in many of these serials still revolves around

traditional family and societal roles rather than advocating for gender equality or empowering women. Patriarchy is highly prominent in these serials. Gender roles are highly defined by them, and women are sex objects who decorate themselves and take care of the women, which gives a wrong message to the society. at a time when women are overtaking men in all the fields, we want to believe that the man is the whole feeder for the family. but sadly this is the truth that the serials want us to believe, which it is not. They have a certain set of rules they have to follow to be ideal, and doing anything else or going against them makes them the bad character. Another problem is the submissive nature of the protagonist. She takes in all the mistakes of the family on her back for no reason, even supporting the wrong person just to maintain this image. But what message is it giving? that an ideal lady never complains and that no one is allowed to tell on someone if they are family ?. Wearing mangalsutra if she is married, pulling the ghunghat and wearing sindoor on her head are some things normalised for a 'good woman,' and short clothes and big bhindis and a load of kajal portray a bad woman.

Now how is it even helping our society other than giving people an idea that to be a good woman, working, having good morals, and earning for family is not important and that your appearance matters?. There are other serials where the woman is well-educated who wants to accomplish many things but is forced into the marriage market. Here, women's empowerment is curbed by showing that women don't have their own aspirations and the right to accomplish. even the parents don't support her dreams and make the sole purpose of her life marriage. The message this gives to society negatively impacts the thought of many people. The woman, after marriage, either loses all her aspirations about that life and busies herself in learning household chores and cooking. Even if she gets a job after convincing her in-laws, she is hardly empowered, having to work regardless of her employment status. Female characters in the serials are portrayed as either stronger than anyone else, enduring any kind of pain, but weak and dependent. They typically are not shown earning money working outside the home, but instead they stay home performing all the household chores. When they do have jobs outside the home, they are still supposed to do all the domestic tasks alone with an even broader smile, and if they don't fulfil their duty, they are further criticized. The female characters in these serials are happy to bear any load of work, but that cannot be true in the real world, giving the society unrealistic expectations about women. In reality, if any woman performs all the domestic tasks alone along with her paid employment, then it will definitely affect her body and soul. This unequal domestic work affects a wife's happiness in her marriage. All these serials are the same person wearing different cloaks. It's the same storyline of an ideal woman and counter woman destroying her life.

The ideal woman has all qualities except to stand up for herself, and the vamp is actually intelligent with courage, but she decides to use it to destroy others lives. Why can't just Indian serials have women embodying all these characters and fighting odds in a realistic way, with women teaching the world more than the family values and breeding the societal stereotypes? There are some serials that start with a message to the society, but after some number of episodes, they lose track and go back to the same track. The whole serial setup is full of unrealistic expectations and things that can never happen in the real world just to gain TRP. Indian daily soaps have been perpetuating the misogynistic structures that we live in. From being immemorially

caught up in the *saas-bahu* drama depicting women as essentially docile and submissive to storylines confining women within households and normalising them taking up the double burden of having a career (only in conventional jobs) as well as running a family, daily serials have been cementing gender roles. Nowadays, the dominant theme of these soaps is anchored in the patriarchally established myth “*aurat hi aurat ki sabse badi dushman*” (a woman’s greatest enemy is another woman herself). The TV shows gaining the highest target rating (TRP), like *Anupama*, *Gum Hai Kisi k Pyaar mei*, *Udaariya*, and *Imile*, to name a few, have all been following the same thematic pattern. Unbelievable scenarios and actions. In many Indian serials, the depiction of women’s lives is highly exaggerated. Women are often shown involved in impossible or highly dramatic scenarios, such as surviving murder attempts, sudden changes in family dynamics, or having multiple dramatic confrontations with other women. This creates an unrealistic view of women’s daily lives and often distorts the real-life challenges that women face. Showing women as sacrificial figures, the dependency of women, the victimised women narrative, the patriarchal family structures, and the normalisation of gender-based violence are some other problems in these serials. But what are the negative effects of these cereals? These are forms of entertainment watched by nearly the entire population of the country, comprised mainly of women who want relaxation after a long day. They watch it with families and small children, and one can only imagine the effect it has on them. It has overly hyped old ideas and unrealistic scenarios, and even adults can be influenced by it. Youth of today need modern ideas to develop the world, and how can these ideas affect their ideology? respecting women, not believing in useless superstitions, respecting others lives and property, and most importantly, respecting others personal space should be shown in these serials, but for the sake of TRPs, the serials show ideas that are just brain rot. But Indian society is the one to be blamed for this. They want to see things that won't happen in one's life and want to be shown unrealistic things they won't experience. These serials show and promote stereotypes, like a bad-looking or modern woman is bad while a beautiful, well-behaved girl is a good person, instead of showcasing the idea that a book should not be judged by its cover, and it even promotes bad gender and economic portrayal. Though the serials show topics like domestic violence, infidelity, social evils, instead of being a campaigner against them they tend to glorify them and make them more exaggerated and emotional instead of showing healthy and proper ways that can be used to stop, they resort to revenge and torture as a method.

Women watch serials, and especially housewives may tend to normalise the bad ideas shown in the serials. manipulation, patriarchal system, stained relationships, and domination of men over women, and economic dependence of women are some such ideas that they will accept as their favourite character in the serial accepts them. The mothers watching these serials will want their daughters, and the mother-in-law watching it will want her daughter-in-law to be the ideal, stereotypical woman. It might also influence them to marry off their children and not want her to carry on her career forward. if aa women has modern ideas, everyone hates her because the heroine of their favourite serial is not so and doesn’t stand up against any evils. Another common idea normalised in the serials is that every couple wants a boy child and tends to reject the girl child. If a girl child is born, it is shown as a disgrace, and when a boy is born into a family, a whole lot of celebrations and festivities are carried out in the serials. The responsibility of the girl child is only working hard, always maintaining the character, never bringing disgrace to the family, accepting a good boy, marrying him, and

never getting involved in love and relationships. She has no say in the family and should learn to do all the household work and cook. But the boy should educate himself, carry on the family business, and enjoy himself, and him learning any household chores is entirely prohibited, and if he does so, it is a very special thing, or he is disgraced. Him helping his wife and respecting her makes him her servant or wife's pet. Why can't they rather normalise the idea of women also doing business and involving themselves in other careers and men doing household chores and helping around in the house? This can break the stereo typic way of depiction. Serials should instead show that women, instead of dolling up with makeup and pretty dresses, should focus on building their own lives and careers. They should represent the fact that the marriage and kids are not the only and whole point of a woman's life, but studying, building a successful life, and bringing laurels are also important responsibilities she should undertake. Men should be schooled by the women, by her standing up against any things that are unacceptable to her. Men also should take equal part in cooking and household chores like cleaning, sweeping, washing, etc. Revenge should not be the essential and only path and the sole purpose of some women; it should rather promote the idea of proper problem resolving and healthy conflict resolutions. Any television shapes the thoughts of the people exposed to it. Therefore, correction and awakening of the makers of the serials of the bad effects of its old ideals is very important. They should understand that women are not merely objects but whole personalities capable of great things and showcase that in serials and help in women's empowerment and upbringing of women in the society.

As daily soaps have become the part of common man's life it has the capacity to guide and bring enormous changes in once life. These serials are not just entertainment they also can help in the social cause which can lead the society in a good way.

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