Reality or Myth:
Representation of Women in Tamil TV Serials

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Abstract

   Back from the days of media reports on Oriental women being authoritarian and luxurious, media has successfully presented and caricatured woman-ness. In this paper we have primarily focussed on the television soaps and serials of Tamil and attempt to analyse how exactly do they present women and how successful are they in their presentation of reality? Or is this reality an imaginative one? Therein begins my analysis. The nation which claims to be in the process of "globalisation" or "modernisation" still portrays its women in meaningless masses of costume jewellery and sarees. When women of India are progressing to be IPS and IAS Officers, all these contemporary "slice-of-life" soaps are still entangled in household plots and schemes. Even with some attempts to actually portray reality, Tamil serials have not evolved beyond the monochromatic dimensions of a faithful wife and a tricky vamp. The Study has incorporated the Content Analysis method. And we did content analysis of two popular serials from the popular Tamil television channels.

Keywords: Representation, myth, reality, stereotype, marginalized, sexuality, programmes, responsibility, society

Introduction

   Ever since television was first introduced in India, and the beginning of cable and satellite channels exposed the viewers to more information around the world which in-turn has affected the attitudes and behaviour of individuals (Robert Jenson, 2007). In India about 50% of population are under the age of 25 and it stands first in world's youth population. The media in general, is portraying women in stereotyped roles like house maker, dependent, or as a sex object (Jorg Mattens, 2016; Yann Verhellen, 2016; Velandia, 2014; McArthur, 1975; Elizebeth, 2016; Furnham, 2010) which lead to the misconceptions among the public about the way women are, or should be or might hope to become (Gunter, 1982).This is not just happening in India but also in all the other countries. Women are now featuring alongside or even par to men in many fields (Maren Wellenreuther, 2015). To play these role women should be conscious of their potential and it can only be possible when they will not be deliberately marginalized by male domination. Thus the media and television

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Prof. S. Arunraj and Dr. P. Viduthalai, Editors: Portrayal of Social Issues in Literature and Media
K.R. Shiva Shankaran, Dr. V.Ilamparithi
Reality or Myth: Representation of Women in Tamil TV Serials   26

cluster leads the channels to produce the new genre with some entertainment value on it and to attract the more number of viewers towards the channels to support economically. The television serials plays an major role in television channels to grab the audience attention towards its channel, it's also having unique way of selling proposition to sell the advertisement slots and the TRP plays the intentionally gambling role in it. The viewers are framed as a spectator where the content is moral or immoral to the society.

The representation of women has been a major programming theme from the earlier days in Tamil television channels. Many women oriented programs were been made since and loved by lakhs of Tamil audience. Television offers a wide range of budding role-models, both positive and negative. It is not inevitable that viewers accept television gender images without question, but many popular commentators tend to assume that they are more discriminating than ordinary mortals. Not all women, children or even men are reactive victims of patriarchal stereotyping. The fact that these fictional families are on television, rather than some other medium, is significant in trying to assess their impact on society. Some sociologists consider television the "new public sphere" that has unified the population in a common set of images and symbols. Some go even floater and consider television the "new State religion" that cultivates a homogeneous outlook on social reality (Gerbner 1977). In any case, there is consensus that television has a great influence in our collective life. If television is as powerful an influence as it is held to be, then we might assume the fantasy families who enter our collective awareness on a regular, recurring basis act upon "real-life" families.

They can do so by shaping our ideas and attitudes about what kind of family life is desirable, interesting, serious, or funny; they can show us how husbands and wives are supposed to behave and how parents and children are expected to relate; and they can to us which kinds of family members should be taken seriously and which ate only to be seen as fools. Thus the television family far from being. Simply a famous entertainment device is connected to the ways in which family life operates in "the real world." Beyond providing entertainment, television vastly increases both the availability of info about the outside world and coverage to other ways of life. According to David French and Michale Richiards (2000), television is something special.

It has ascribed culture, political, economic characteristics that concerns to government, education, political parties, advertisers and entrepreneurs. Both of them insist that television is having a central role in terms of fundamental socio-political process. Bandura (1969) suggested that television is a source of vicarious learning competing with parents, teachers, and other socializing agents in providing models for children to emulate. At the very least, television provides certain information that the parents would not be able to present.

The implication is that television can increase the repertoire of possible behaviours beyond what the real-life family situation might provide (Comstock, 1983; Larson, 1989). Consistent viewers may also find some general characteristics of program storylines so widespread and so often repeated that

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K.R. Shiva Shankaran, Dr. V.Ilamparithi
Reality or Myth: Representation of Women in Tamil TV Serials   27

they come to believe these behaviors characterize most of the real-life situations (Withey, 1980; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980). Gerbner and Gross (1976), for example, have reported such a phenomenon in viewers of television violence. Heavy viewers of violent programming consistently overestimate the amount of real violence that is taking place.

Heavy viewers tend to be influenced by televised content more than light viewers especially pertaining to subjects about which they have little experience. This study aims to understand the portrayal of family in tamil television serials. The chosen sample of 50 respondents for this study was chosen through snowball sampling. And the respondents are in the age group 30-50 years across different socio-economy profiles in Chennai. Data was collected through questionnaire and open ended interviews. Based on these findings the most popular episodes of television serials were analyzed for the portrayal of family.

Research Methodology

The study has incorporated with Content Analysis method. The content Analysis of two serials from two Tamil TV channels was taken from the year 2015-2016. The selected serials were "Deivamagal", from Sun TV and "Saravanan Meenakshi from Vijay TV. A random coding sheet was prepared and used for this research. 50 episodes from each serials were been used for content Analysis.

Representation in Soap Operas

Though not as strongly as in earlier years, the reprsentation of both men and women on television is largely traditional and stereotypical. This serves to promote a division of gender roles. With femininity are associated traits such as emotionality, caution, co-operation, a communal sense, and compliance. Masculinity tends to be associated with such traits as rationality, efficiency, competition, individualism and brutality. In TV, 'good' women are presented as meek, sensitive and disciplined; 'bad' women are rebellious, independent and selfish. The dream-girl stereotype is been gentle, reserved, sensitive, passive, non-competitive, sweet natured and dependent. The male hero tend to be physically strong, forceful, and assertive, takes the initiative, is independent, competitive and ambitious.

TV and film heroes represent goodness, power, control, confidence, proficiency and success. They are geared to succeed in a aggressive economic system. There is no shortage of aggressive male role-models in Westerns war films and in modern-day Indian soap-operas. Soap - operas have no opening or end, no structural closure. (Pingree and Cantor,1983). They do not build up towards an finish or closure of meaning. Viewers can watch a soap opera at any point. There are built-in devices to recap on aspect of the plot. There is no single narrative line. Narrative lines are interweave over time. The structure of soaps is complex and involves several perspectives and no consent. Ambivalence and opposition is characteristic of the genre. This leaves soaps particularly open to individual interpretation.

Television and soap operas

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Reality or Myth: Representation of Women in Tamil TV Serials   28

Television, in recent times, has emerged as the most dominant and all pervading force throughout the world. It can publicize information with lightning speed and impact, as well as infuse viewers with images and values in subtle and invisible manner. Because of its very inherent nature, television not only reflects the values of our society but also influence them. Indications from research suggests that TV has had a considerable impact on the personal reality structure of its viewers.(Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner and Warth, 1989).

Television programmes lead to awareness, provide information which creates interest in the minds of its viewers. Communication is not only an essential element to the determination of social order but to look at it more positively, communication can be an efficient means to developmental change. There is no denying the fact that television is a major force to be dealt with in our society. Television in India today has acquired newer scope, greater popularity and a much wider reach. The satellite invasion of India in 1993 has contributed the most to the mutual, multilingual, and multi-channel television system, operating on an involved schedule. The moving images of television demand attention and eventually influence the thoughts and behavior of the viewers Television has entered our life and become an always together part of our daily lives.

The exceptional expansion of Indian television in recent years has influenced people in two ways. First, those living in remote corners have been pulled and merged into the national mainstream. Secondly television has contributed to an exceptional explosion of information in our times. (Gopal Saxsena, 1996) An awareness of the socio-economic developmental plans can be ascribed to the wide-reach of television.

Waves of vibrant changes have flashed across the canvas of Indian television during the last decade. Earlier Indian television was limited to Government-controlled Doordarshan only. But currently there are more than 400 channels available on the Indian television Diaspora offering round the clock services and mixed programming to a huge, various television audience. STAR TV, ZEE TV, Sony, have been offering variegated programmes of various scope and perspectives. Invariably, Doordarshan projected some interesting programmes. They not only included programmes like "Patrika" or "Spectrum" but also many number of serials were telecast. These included well known works of literature like "Raag Darbari","Nirmala" (Premchand), "Pratham Pratishruti" Charitraheen" and "Shrikant"(Sharat Chandra). Epics like "Mahabharata" "Ramayana" and "The Bible" have been among the very admired telecasts. Equally noteworthy has been: Gul Gulshan Gulfam: manner on the life in a Shikara in Kashmir and other aspects of its social life. (Gopal Saxsena,1996)

Theoretical Background
Symbolic Annihilation Theory
Symbolic annihilation is a term used by George Gerbner in 1976 to describe the absence of illustration, or underrepresentation, of some group of people in the media (often based on their race, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status

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K.R. Shiva Shankaran, Dr. V.Ilamparithi
Reality or Myth: Representation of Women in Tamil TV Serials   29

The tv today is at times feminist and at times anti-feminist. Both ideas seem to be surviving concurrently. A problem with analyzing gender representations in film from a feminist point of view is that feminist ideas are constantly being revamped and expanded to include more ideas. There are different types of feminism today. Liberal feminism believes that women are being deprived of opportunities and restricted in their roles while being affected by gender stereotypes. Legislation and initiatives are proposed as ways by which women can move into roles that have been dominated by men.

Radical feminism takes up the perspective that men and women are fundamentally different. According to this form of feminism, women are being dominated by patriarchal institutions in all aspects of their life. Social feminism traced women's subordination to the class-based forms of capitalist society. Black feminism arose in response to criticisms from black women that their needs were not being covered by the feminist movement.

The aim of feminist analysis of the media is to understand how the gender construction and images of the media are connected to the domination, oppression and inequality that women face today. This analysis ranges from how ownership patterns, audience engagement with content, how content is created and how the political economy of media industries influence the final product. Feminist media activism has taken up many forms; they have called for positive representations of women, demonstrated against offensive content, aired their objections to beauty pageants, called for more involvement of women in the production of content and approached regulatory bodies challenging existing portrayals of women.

Results and Analysis
Emotional status
The representation of the women in emotional status was analyzed on the basis of crisis management on the particular character whether they are strong or weak. And the while analysing the content it is found that 85% of the female characters of "SaravananMeenakshi" and 90% of "Deivamahal" were shown the strong characters. Therefore it is concluded that both the TV serials have represented women as strong on how they tackle the crisis situation.

Social status
The representation of the women in Social status was analyzed on the basis of decision making process of the family. And the while analysing the content it is found that 30% of the female characters of "SaravananMeenakshi" and 20% of "Deivamahal" were shown given the rights of decision making process of the family. Therefore it is concluded that both the TV serials have shown Women were not as inferior to men but were treated on par with men as far as decision making rights in the family.

Economic Status
The representation of the women in Economic status was analyzed on the basis of share in property and the sophisticated houses they have in the family. And the while analysing the content it is found that 85% of the female characters of "SaravananMeenakshi" and 64% of "Deivamahal" were shown

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K.R. Shiva Shankaran, Dr. V.Ilamparithi
Reality or Myth: Representation of Women in Tamil TV Serials   30

given the rights of decision making process of the family. Therefore it is concluded that both the TV serials have shown leading rich lifestyles.

Conclusion

Television has totally changed our social and cultural environment. The present study reveals women in Tamil TV serials were shown in a positive manner in all the three aspects of the representation of women. The first analysis of the emotional status of women that Tamil TV serials represented strong women instead of always showing weak women as done earlier. The second analysis on the representation of the women in Social status Tamil TV serials were shown as having rights in decision making process and solve problems in the family. The third analysis on the representation of the women in Economic status Tamil TV serials, as shown in various other Indian TV serials, were shown leading rich lifestyles and therefore fell into the own wealth category. This has been taken as a sign of the setting free of the economic status of women in Tamil TV serials.

Television has become the most believable and insidious means of information diffusion in society. The medium of television plays a very important role in bringing about change among people. The need of the hour is to control its potential in the right direction or rather than let it be a trite reflection of society's lowest common denominator.   Indian soap opera emphasize the process of decision making showing the plethora of details and nuances in the articulation of problems that advance the plot lines. If one is reading from a main perspective, one could say that women are only interested in the trivial details of everyday life, and soap operas, therefore, reinforce already problematic aspects of women"s lives. Women in contemporary soap operas are given powerful positions in different contexts. This genre of television programming can be an effective tool for creating awareness about the changing dynamics of society.

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K.R. Shiva Shankaran, Dr. V.Ilamparithi
Reality or Myth: Representation of Women in Tamil TV Serials   31

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K.R. Shiva Shankaran, Dr. V.Ilamparithi
Reality or Myth: Representation of Women in Tamil TV Serials   32