

Research Article

Media and its Role in Shaping Women's Empowerment: A Study on Soap Opera Serials

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How to cite this article:

Hmar EL, Pathak J. Media and its Role in Shaping Women's Empowerment: A Study on Soap Opera Serials. *J Adv Res Jnl Mass Comm* 2019; 6(3): 20-23.

Date of Submission: 2019-09-20

Date of Acceptance: 2019-12-12

A B S T R A C T

Indian Soap Operas are written, produced and filmed in India with characters Played by Indians and episodes broadcast on Indian television channels. They have also been broadcast not just within the territoriality of India but often many "serials" are also broadcast overseas. For example, the India soaps Operas are popularly seen in countries like Pakistan, the UK, US, South Africa and Australia and some parts of European countries. Without a doubt, Indian Soap Operas are often mass-produced under large production banners, with houses like Balaji Telefilms produced by Ekta Kapoor and Shobha Kapoor.

Women's empowerment with relation to the Impact of Indian Soap Operas through the Indian Cable system has been a debatable issue and this paper seeks to find answers to the dilemma of Social change evinced through this medium.

The focus of the research is the tiny township of Silchar as a representative of the rest of the Indian woman's mind and her choices.

Keywords: Soap Opera, Portray, Womens Empowerment, Impact, Media

Introduction

The portrayal of women that is done in the media now-a-days is in issues which women like to disagree from the media portrays them. The women of today are awakened and aware of their position and their role in the development of the country. In some serials they are shown negatively, but in some they are given the role of a strong lead actress and they became an icon for the viewers and also a ray of hope which creates a strong image in the heart of women.

The Indian ISO serials have undergone a long but definite process by using new technology so that whichever production is more attractive invites a large number of viewers. The story produced under this opera has a moralistic theme that relates the Indian context of livelihood, culture and social change. Generally, the role of women in a family

is widely exposed-some reflect on how they can convince their spouses, train their children besides exposing their fidelities and infidelities.

Social Impact of Soap Opera in Indian Society

The Indian Soap Opera have a direct and indirect impact on Indian society, with regard to national integration, identity, globalization, women and ethics. India has not been left out of the cable, television and satellite revolution. A recent survey says that over 112 million households in India own a television.

It was not long ago that woman in some parts of the country inside the house thought that they were just women and hence need to be at home and work with the household and do nothing else. But due to the impact of the soap opera

serials in the Indian televisions, women are motivated and given full support. According to Robert Jensen in his article "THE POWER OF TV: CABLE TELEVISION AND WOMEN'S STATUS IN INDIA" he said that in the span of just 10-15 years since cable connection became available, cable or satellite penetration has reached 60% in Indian states such as Tamil Nadu mainly to enable the viewers to watch serials, even if the average income of the household is below Rs.100 per person per day. Due to the impact in some of the villages the people have now come to believe that women are not simply to be kept in homes even after they are married. Men have given opportunity to their wives, daughters to pursue education and work outside the house according to their satisfaction and necessity.

Impact of Soap Opera on Urban Women of India

In this world of technology where everyone is busy with the ICT, women are also not lagging behind, due to the influence of soap operas. They have started working with men equally in the public or government sector for the equality and upliftment of the society. Soap Operas have in the recent past shown tremendous influence on both the urban and rural women of India and have successfully shaped up their lifestyles too.

As India is progressing at a fast pace there is a change in the mindsets of the people too, particularly among the urban women where they are not only very educated but also aware of the realities of life and their moral duties. This cause and effect also reached the urban women of Silchar Township. Therefore, now the women of this area are also able to think at par with men, and even the differences with respect to gender inequality are disappearing for women are becoming more assertive of their rights, freedom and dignity.

It will not be wrong to say that these sudden changes among the thinking and understanding of women have come due to the influence of soap operas which have impacted their lives. They are portrayed in a way that women who watch them are motivated. Women folk like to imitate and get inspired by characters like Shanti who is bold, Perna who is the epitome of beauty and how can we forget Parvati and Tulsi who are the pillars of their homes and many more.

Literature Review

A large number of researches have been done in the western developed countries whereas a very few studies have been undertaken with respect to Soap operas in India.

Literature review helps the author to understand in depth about the study and the area of the study. It helps to know what the study is to be and till where the study has been done. It also gives the author in depth knowledge about this area of research.

Neeraj (2010) highlights that with an ever changing world, Television as always been a very old and amiable companion of human beings. It is not only the T.V film industry that is growing with a rapid pace, but even the personalities and the attitudes of men is changing. Initially, the pivotal role of women was considered to be a figure that was defined as, "the house maker".

Ahmed and Khallid (2012) also describe women as the most important gender and acknowledge their contribution as important to the development of a society. They should not be ignored; they should rather be given importance and made to know about their rights and importance. They are an important pivot in the family and experts on running a family too. They are also important in role in progress making for the society, just like man.

Khan and Beenish Zaheen (2011) wisely explain that Soap Operas are a part of the everyday lives of their audience. They have successfully been able to present everyday happenings and also form a part of the cultural exchange, which goes in both the home and the work place. Soap operas have been able to have a good impact upon the viewers mind, thought and attitude, they are really able to influence their target audience, so it is important to keep the soap operas running and transforming the mind of the audience especially the woman's mind.

These days of course, soaps are mainly for TV and are produced all over the world. Some are successfully exported (not only English-language productions but also, for example, many from Brazil and Mexico) while others are never watched outside their country of origin (Blumenthal Dannielle, 2005).

Methodology

The Primary source of data was collected through questionnaire schedules; a purposive sampling method was applied to collect the data from the respondents i.e. the people residing in Silchar town of Cachar district, named 78. Both male and female were chosen as the sample of the study. Keeping in mind the low numbers of respondents, a simple random sampling was used to determine the samples. A total of 156 samples were collected from a total of 400 people residing in the selected towns.

Scope of the Research

The proposed Research tries to unravel the impact of Soap Opera on Indian Women in general, and the direct and indirect impact on women of Silchar Township in particular. It is also to find how the media in direct way or indirectly shaped the role of women empowerment through soap opera serials etc. It also aims to assess the change and continuity brought through these soap operas into the social and moral life of women and how others can be motivated.

The proposed reach is also to study the effect of Soap Operas on the individual behavior of women living in Silchar Township of Assam. Furthermore, it is also to ascertain how women after being influenced by these soap operas have to rise to fight for sociological change not just within their individual parameters but also on social behavior today.

Research Finding and Summary

First question was, what kind of soap opera do they watch? 20% responded that they watch family drama, 15% responded they watch crime drama, 30 % of them responded that they watch women oriented dramas, another 20% of the responded that they watch women centric serials and 15% of them replied that they watch other types of serials.

The next question was, "Do soap opera serials influence in their actual life habits?" 45% of them responded positively, 30% of them responded negatively and 25% of them were not able to choose either.

The next question was, "Do soap operas create an impact in their way of life in changing their lifestyle etc?" 35% of them replied by saying yes, it strongly created an impact in their way of life. 26 % of them replied negatively as they were not influenced in any by watching soap opera serials. 39 % of them replied neutrally.

The next question was, "Do they feel their family members who watch soap operas are imitating their characters?" 40 % of them agreed and said yes, they imitate the character they watch, 24% of them responded by saying no, they don't imitate nor copy any of the characters they watch in the soap opera. 36% of them were neutral and were not able to respond anything upon the basis of the question.

The next question was, "Are they getting knowledge regarding the positive or negative aspects of the characters in the serials?" 56% of them reply positively, they agreed that they get knowledge of the characters which used to be highlighted in the serials according to their role and character. 32% of them replied no as they are not able to attain any knowledge character good or bad, which they view whereas 12% of them are not able to decide anything.

The next question was, "Does the media play an important role in changing the mind of the people while watching the soap opera serials in particular?" More than 70 of them replied with positive responses and they were fully agreed that the media plays an important role in changing the mind of the people and creating an impact upon them. The rest of the 25% of them responded that the media is just a tool to entertain people and create an audience.

And the last question was, "Do the systems like early marriage, dowry system etc, which were highlighted in the serials create a response in their mind to abolish it?"

More than 80 of them agreed that all such systems should be banned and should be abolished from the society. Only 20 of them responded that these are all just mere show and it has nothing to do with real life.

The objective of the research paper is fulfilled by the following research paper as we have seen that the following survey clearly includes all the objectives of the study and we have also seen that the women who watch opera serials are mostly imitating or acting in the very way in which the character they watch, act. The study also shows that the characters impact the lifestyle of the people and also the way they accept their lifestyle. The study also strongly shows that the media is playing the main role in showing and creating images of the good and bad characters of the serials. The media keeps the viewers motivated and also many accept they are encouraged with the positive character of the serials.

They strongly accept that earlier, women were just meant to work inside their homes and be simple mothers. But the influence of soap opera through the media creates a new change in their mind. They believe now that they are not just to be kept at home and do house work. They also know their responsibility now and are determined to work equally with the men for the upliftment of the society.

The research shows that the people have grown in their thinking and their mental ability to understand social hierarchy. They are now quite aware of the many misconceptions and superstitions still pervading our country and society, now they also wanted to take part in any activity to abolish this system.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The media not only give a wide platform of education to the people but it also has influenced people through the medium of the television. It also makes its viewers motivated, educated and helps them to gain an understanding towards the real conditions of the country with the various shows.

Earlier soap opera was just was a mere piece of show, an entertainment to watch and forget and which had no meaning and moral at all. But, according to our study we have seen that many people agree that they have been educated through the serials or the shows where they get much to learn and understand.

Soap operas have become guidance to the people in the rural areas where they are not able to hear or get enlightening lectures on Education. This is the impact of soap operas to the urban women of India, particularly the women of the Silchar Township in today's world; these serials not only give them a channel but it is also changing the scenario of the rural areas. They have been able to know the social problems faced by them either in their neighborhood, society or community.

The media not only creates unity among people but with the help of its medium, it is also encouraging and educating people, which is a very positive effort and healthy sign in the process for the upliftment of the society

The Mass Media of Barak Valley has too long basked in an urban world. From the impact we can also evaluate that the women of today have very high aspirations for themselves, they also want their rightful place in society and they don't want these aspirations and desires to die. They want equality and they agree that we are growing as a nation and they really want to grow and hope to land up in an era where there is no discrimination between man and woman and one doesn't have to sacrifice everything for the other and should have their own individuality.

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 the way the media represents them as well.

Most issues raised by the female respondents was that soap opera serials should mostly impose on the serials where the woman should be given more importance and they should be in lead roles which all the audience follow as role models. This not only motivates the viewers but it also makes the characters played know their responsibility and role in the society.

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