

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN MARATHI SERIALS : A RAISING CONCERN

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INTRODUCTION

Serials have become important part of daily routine of the ladies in India. With the internet and technology advances web series have taken place of serials for the young generation. But impact of both is same on the population. Media especially the television media has a great influence on the general perception of the population.

A study in US of around 1600 participants who watched television in moderate amount concluded that these people who watched television were having lesser grey material in their brains after a scan than their counterparts who didn't at all or rarely watched the television. ¹ The grey material helps individuals into their cognitive activities. Ryan Dougherty, a postdoctoral fellow in the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in his extensive research of 20 years concluded after the MRI scans of his subjects that their brain size reduced significantly. ²

If this screen time is further added with watching programs are accompanied along with the content which is not information oriented but reflection of stereotypes and gender- roles in the society then it may affect the individual in change in their thought processes too.

As Maharishi Mahesh Yogi says, “ what you see you become”, one needs to delve upon what one watches at regular basis. The amount of violence (violence is not always physical in nature but also in mental level too), stereo-type gender roles, superstitions, socially unacceptable topics, divorces etc. which are negatively impacting the mindsets of the audience.

Media affects the lives of individuals as different levels, and today Television has become a media that has penetrated to the rural most place in India and is most favourite media amongst females as well as males equally for the entertainment purpose. Unfortunately, this media which can be used for the very positive purpose has been negatively impacting the lives of the individuals. It is said that while the famous ‘ Ramanand Sagar’s - Ramayan’ was being aired on the Doordarshan hardly would one see anyone on the roads because most of the population would be glued in front of the television sets. But these serials had very different flavour in them. Today, they have been taken over by the serials that are heavily loaded with stereo-type gender roles, superstitions, divorce etc. The heavy makeups, heavily loaded dialogues, hay wire storyline, are dragging along with it the family culture and its learnings into a gyre of darkness. Some serials in Marathi channels raise concern as the storyline and the dialogues are farfetched from reality. In 2020, a serial “Devmanus” was aired on Zee Marathi. While this serial was based on a real case of Santosh Pol who was notoriously known as Doctor Death, in the name of creative independence the storyline was changed a bit. Many individuals who are interested in the crime thriller would enjoy watching the story but the serial took turns to ennoblement of the central character of Dr. Ajitkumar Dev. If this kind of serials is seen by individuals probably people would take heinous crimes like murder very lightly and consider them as a normal thing. At the same time this ‘Devmanus’ is shown continuously cheating women for his lust as well as money and when some female challenges to expose him he then brutally kills her. The amount of violence shown against women is despicable in this serial. Recently, a case in Delhi where the murderer Aftab Poonawala hacked his girlfriend to death said that he was inspired from the murder shown in series ‘Dexter’.

Another, famous serial “Tula Pahte Re”, on Zee Marathi showed a storyline of misplaced fairytale which takes turn when the prince charming finally turns into the murderer of his first wife. A fictional story but difficult to accept shown as a reality had highest TRP(Television Rating Point) during the time it was aired. But when one thinks about this story of this serial it was giving wrong message to young girls that some prince charming would come and sway her into the world of luxury and dream like situation. So rather than achieving life goals on one’s own prowess, inspiring girls to get a short cut to luxury through prince charming.

One more serial on Zee Marathi, “Paaru”, a story revolving around affluent family of Ahilyadevi and Paaru who is a simple village girl. Over the top make-up of the negatively plotting characters as well as some of the other characters seems obnoxious. But at the same time which family has such people who plot against other family members in such a way. The dialogues of this serial is full of malicious words.

Earlier some serials like “Majhya Navryachi Bayko”, “Arundhati”, “Jeevlaga”, are having their main protagonists having extra marital affairs. When such topics are shown in the media it becomes a norm in the society as most of the population is watching these very regularly.

Either women are plotting vamps or they are weak submissive protagonists who are at the mercy of some male character who would save them from a difficult situation. So either the females are ‘Sita’ or ‘Kaikayee’. But what about the females who fall between these extremes and surprisingly most women fall under this category. A serial “Majhya Navryachi Bayko” had its protagonist who could have become an inspiration for many housewives in Maharashtra, but the protagonist’s success shown is unrealistically high and after the success the twists and turns into the serial takes away the inspirational streak from the entire story.

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Short interviews were taken of 32 ladies who were willing to give interview and also watched serials. The age group varied from 34 to 71. Initial data related to their age, years of watching serials etc was collected and later their opinion about today’s Marathi serials and their reason to watch Marathi serials was asked.

Out of the ladies whose interviews were taken 16 were senior citizens retired after service, 4 were senior citizen house wives, 10 ladies are still in service and 2 are house wives.

Most of the ladies were of the opinion that they had no option but to watch serials. There were various reasons for not having an option

Language barrier : Most of the ladies got hooked to serials was due to language barrier. Most of the senior citizen ladies were of the opinion that when they started watching serials the quality was good. Once they got hooked up to the serials they could not switch. When asked why didn’t they watch informative programs they said initially they mostly in English and few were in Hindi.

Time constraint: It was understood that the ladies started watching serials as watching films was to get glued to television for 3 – 3 ½ hours instead ½ hour serial per day or even 2-3 serials was good as past time.

No other interesting content : These ladies mentioned that there was no interesting content available. Many of them mentioned program “Gajara” which was aired on Doordarshan in late 80s till mid 90s. Such programs are missing hence no other option but to watch the serials.

CONCLUSION

When asked the ladies who were still working were of the opinion that they do not get much time and serials are like cathartic expression for them where they watch the serials and they forget about it get on with household jobs to be done. Whereas, ones who were retired most of them felt that there was enough time for them to spare to watch serials but they are not happy with the quality of the stories of the serials.

These ladies expressed remorse that every serials when it starts first 10-15 episodes are different and they get glued to the serials but later realize that the story is going haywire.

Some ladies remembered the serials from Doordarshan like “Damini”, “Chiman rao Gundya Bhau”, “Manasi”, etc were some serials which were real entertainers. “Manasi” was rather a program which had variety with interview of women achiever, some Do it Yourself activity and discussion on topics of interests of women. These respondents lamented that such programs are not aired today though the number of channels have increased.

When asked what kind of image do they want females to be shown on television, almost all were of opinion that the women should be shown realistic. The women in serials are shown wearing big ornaments, heavy make-up and expensive clothes. The homes shown are also unrealistically large and furnished. Moreover, the women characters either are depicted to be too strong or too meek. Either those ladies are shown as very successful and over powering business women or suppressed house wives. Very few Marathi serials show females working in offices, travelling in locals, and making ends meet.

Finally, to end the paper with a quote by Amanda Ray, “Every generation is responsible for creating a better future for next generation”, as the media of television is penetrating into the furthest part of India it is the responsibility of the custodians of media and media houses to provide material that would ensure strong women in future in India.

END NOTES

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- [2] Brennen Jensen, “New study suggests that too much of tv can rot your brain”, John Hopkins Magazine, Exercise Science, Winter 2021

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- [3] Vinayak Singh Khichi & Julia Oinam, “Impact of Daily soaps on Women”, International Journal of Novel Research and Development, Volume 8, May ‘23