

Stereotypical Depiction of Female Characters in Malayalam Serials: A Study of “Sthreedhanam” and “Amala” Serials

Johnson James

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Semester IV, MJMC, Department of Visual Media and Communication,
Amrita School of Arts and Sciences, Kochi, India

Abstract: This study intends to check the stereotypical depiction of female characters in Malayalam serials. From the evolution of television channels serials have a space. Serials could attract and entertain a group of audience all the time. This study mainly focused the changes in the narration of female characters. A content analysis of female characters, both positive and negative, would reveal the various stereotypes associated with positive as well as negative female characters in Malayalam serials.

Keywords: Serials, Stereotype, Characters, Female, Malayalam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Soap operas can be found as highly rated tele vision program. Soap operas main broadcast in the prime time. The prime audience of the soap operas is women. So that the soap operas theme and the way they are executed will be women oriented. Mostly main characters in Malayalam soap operas are played by female artists. From the early stages to present media scenario, these female characters have lots of similar characteristics. The study mainly focuses on this similarity.

Women are mostly neglected behind the camera and this might have added to the presence only in front of the camera. Reducing women to act as performers alone and deny her the rights of creating media products has been a major agenda of the society in Kerala. To contribute and strengthen the status quo the politics of Malayalam soap operas are generally tilted against freedom of women and their opinions. This is in stark confidence with the fact that most of the viewers are women who are housewives and the larger number of characters in these is women. Traits that make a wife desirable in these soap operas include beauty and fairness, conformist behavioral patterns, soft-spoken, disciplined and primarily focused on being a good homemaker.

On the other hand, villainous female characters are usually women who lead a luxurious life and often have dominating tendencies. In short, the very tendency to be outspoken or non-conformist is enough to consider a character to be on the wrong side. These traits and behavioral patterns have been repeating in Malayalam soap operas for very long. They have contributed to the status quo in denying women the ability to grow out of the patriarchal chains and be free. She has to listen to her parents when she is unmarried and to her husband after her marriage. She is denied the right to remain unmarried who is seen as an evil trait to the point where she is discarded by her family.

This study was undertaken to have a clear understanding pertaining to the similarities that are evident in the portrayal of women characters in Malayalam soap operas. Soap operas have been in popular media for long and have always revolved around the lives of two or more characters with a strong focus on emotional relationship between people which is often augmented to a certain level of melodrama. A look into the prominent Malayalam soap operas has revealed a tinge of anti-feminine wave which is relevant in an industry which is mostly under the regime of the male counterparts.

The specific objectives of this study are to assess:

1. The portrayal of female characters in Malayalam television serials.
2. The acceptance of female characters by audience.
3. The over dramatically representation of female characters in Malayalam serials.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There were lots of researches and studies have undergone in the area of female portrayal in media but there were only limited researches have done in the field of stereotypical depiction of female characters in Malayalam soap operas. So that, there are less resources to refer the topic. With the limited resources the research could be done in the proper manner.

A study conducted by Krishnan and Dighe (1990) on the content of Doordarshan (DD) programs over a month in July 1986. The aim was to analyze the content of television programs in relation to women. Two main trends were shortlisted in the treatment of women in DD programs, namely, affirmation and denial. The results of the study highlighted that DD programs affirmed women to be physically and mentally housebound. They were engrossed in homemaking, deriving meaning for their existence and achievements from their husbands and children. Women were portrayed as passive and subordinate. (Krishnan & Dighe, 1990)

Purnima Mankekar (1991) elaborately studied *Mahabharata*, a religious epic, serialized on Doordarshan from September 1988 to July 1990. She particularly laid emphasis on the public disrobing of Draupadi, one of the important female characters of the epic and the wife of the five Pandava brothers. Mankekar investigated the televisual experience of women viewers of *Mahabharata* on the discourses of nation, sexuality and gender. The researcher drew inputs from the *Mahabharata* crew as well as women viewers. According to the production team of Mahabharata, Draupadi indexed the position of women in society and her rage reflected the power of women. However, this power must be contained in the interest of the family and also the nation. (PurnimaMankekar, 1991)

According to Usha V T all the female characters are typical and almost share the same traits. They are as such helping in bringing forth a stereotypical image of women. Malayali women are shown as soft-spoken, submissive, obedient, non-complaining, devoted. (Usha, 2004)

According to the Sashi Kaul and Shradha Sahni, the female characters in the serials are shown as existing incidental being to her husband fulfilling his needs and looking after children in the context of being the main care taker of the modern day home. They are shown in a negative light and stereotyped as beings of mere existence whose very need to exist is satisfied by the fact that she acts as a major link in the growth and maintenance of a patriarchal society. (Kaul & Sahni)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To study the stereotypical depiction of female characters a comparative study is the suitable tool to prove the topic. Content analysis method has selected as a tool to study the topic.

Two serials from two channels has selected for the study. The character's dressing style, make up, dialog delivery, attitude, appearance; background score of the female characters has checked through the content analysis method.

The primary focus of the present study being the stereotypical depiction of female characters in Malayalam serials, the study design demanded the conduct of content analysis to assess the stereotypical depiction of female characters. The frames of reference are a set of viewpoints or presuppositions through which individuals assimilate the cultural facets of the messages.

Two Characters from Four episodes has been selected for the analysis. The stereotypical depiction has been found out from the serial STHREEDHANAM and AMALA from the study.

4. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Female characters portrayed stereotypically in Malayalam soap opera. This study tries to find out the way they are being portrayed. Two serials from two famous Malayalam channels have selected to complete this study. "Sthreedhanam" from Asianet and "Amala" from Mazhavil Manorama. These serials have high viewership and highly rated.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Serials have high viewership in tele vision. Two top rated serials from two leading channels has selected for the study. “Sthreedanam” from Asianet and “Amala” from Mazhavil Manorama. In the soap opera “Sthreedhanam”, two characters have been selected who depict the mother-in law and daughter in law, Sethulekshmi and Divya respectively. And in the soap opera “Amala”, two characters have been selected who depict the Step mother and daughter, Sudharmma and Amala respectively. Four episodes from both serials have selected to study these four female characters.

Analysis of Female characters in “Sthreedanam”: Divya the leading character in the serial is shown with very light make-up and she is shown as one who cannot stand for herself. She never gets angry and this is shown as part of the background score which plays when she comes on screen. Sethulekshmi, the negative character on the other hand comes with heavy make-up. Her dressing style shows her in sarees with bright colours and her hair and make-up are in line with the latest trends. She is often shown as a negative character who tortures her daughter-in-law.

Episode 300, 330, 360, 390 has analyzed for the study and it proven the characteristics of Divya and Sethulakshmi.

Analysis of Female characters in “Amala” : In the soap opera “Amala”, two characters have been selected who depict the Step mother and daughter, Sudharmma and Amala respectively. The characters played by Amala are shown with very light make-up and she is shown as one who cannot stand for herself. She never gets angry and this is shown as part of the background score which plays when she comes on screen. Sudharmma on the other hand comes with heavy make-up. Her dressing style shows her in sarees with bright colors and her hair and make-up are in line with the latest trends. She is often shown as a negative character who tortures Amala.

Episode 250, 260, 270, 280 has analyzed for the study and it proven the characteristics of Amala and Sudharmma.

In the analysis, it is proven that both positive and negative female characters from each serial have so many similarities. It is pointed out that the stereotypical depiction in Malayalam soap operas found to be true.

6. CONCLUSION

The research study intends to find out the stereotypical depiction of female characters in Malayalam serials. Through the study of these two serials it is proven that the female characters in serials are stereotypically depicted. The way the character is being designed can be seen similar in both serials. The positive female character’s dressing style, physical appearance, make up, dialogue delivery, attitude etc. can be seen similar in both serials. The portrayal of negative characters is also depicted in the stereotypical way. They are also narrated in the way that the positive female characters are being narrated.

From the early stages itself soap operas followed certain techniques to catch the attention of the audience. They primarily focused female audiences. Female audiences were attracted to overdramatic narration style of soap operas. The psychology of female audiences was thoroughly studied by the creators of soap operas and they narrated the soap operas according to the human female psychology.

REFERENCES

- [1] Kaul, S., & Sahni, S. (n.d.).
- [2] Krishnan, & Dighe. (1990). Affirmation and Denial: Construction of Femininity on Indian Television.
- [3] P, K., & A, D. (1990). Affirmation and Denial: Construction of Femininity on Indian Television.
- [4] PurnimaMankekar. (1991).
- [5] Usha, V. T. (2004). The impact of television programs on women in Kerala.