

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN ON TV: INCEPTION OF CHANGE

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Abstract

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Media plays a pivotal role in spreading information, bringing social awareness and transforming current cultural aspects of a nation. Women play a crucial role in building and moulding of a nation's destiny. Media has always been accused and criticised for stereotyping, objectifying and discrimination against women. This paper aims to bring to light the positive change in the representation of the women in last 5 years with emphasis on TV as a media. There is a subtle yet noticeable shift in how women are portrayed on TV. With examples, it has been shown how recent TV shows, news channels, advertisements and government campaigns on TV contribute to inspire confidence and self-respect in a woman as well as reflect the progressive changes happening in the real society.

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1. Introduction

Television is considered a powerful media in our contemporary society. It has a tremendous impact in bringing change in the society and building the nation. As cited by Centre for Advocacy and Research in an article in *Urban Women in Contemporary India: A Reader*, “for a long time, both feminist scholars/activists as well as social scientists studying gender perspectives related to the media have been preoccupied with issues related to women and media representation. Their central concern has been the extreme marginalisation or deliberate trivialisation of women in the media”.

With modern education and a plethora of activists working for women upliftment, the traditional notion of patriarchy is being questioned. Media, being the mirror of the society, reflects this transition. There is an initiation of progressive change in the way women are portrayed on television.

2. Different forms of presentation on television

Portrayal of women on television as media in last five years has been looked after as a most influencing genre of media for presenting the positive change and acceptance in society. For this, different forms of representation of women on television like fiction shows, non-fiction shows, advertisements, news channels and government campaigns are taken into consideration.

2.1. Fiction Shows

The most successful fiction shows on television are the ones that depict women breaking shackles of age old traditions. It reveals the need they fulfil for their target audience – to evolve and progress with the changing times.

To name a few, *Diya Aur Baati Hum* talked of a small town married woman’s journey to become an IPS officer with her encouraging husband and a supportive mother-in-law. *Balika Vadhu* threw light on the plight of a girl forced to marry at the age of eight as well as social issues like remarriage of widow and adult education. *Pratigya* told about a woman fighting for her rights. While *Everest* revealed difficulties of a daughter who wants to become a mountaineer to make her father proud, *Punarvivah* had the mother-in-law encouraging her divorced daughter-in-law to remarry. *Naamkarann* came up with a story of an unmarried mother fighting for acceptance of

her daughter in society on one channel while another channel aired a show *Ek Shringaar: Swabhiman* presenting a story of a widow school teacher focusing on giving the best life to her two daughters. Where *Udaan* portrayed an issue of child labour, human trafficking and struggle to be free from it, *Kuch Rang Pyar K Aise Bhi* narrates a story of a female physiotherapist managing her personal and professional life post marriage. On one side *Dil se Dil Tak* concentrates on the theme of surrogacy while on the other side *Aap Ke Aa Jane Se* portrays Vedica, 42 year old widow and a mother of 15 year old daughter, pursued by 24 year old Sahil. Show named *Doli Armanon Ki* showed that marriage is not an entire world and end of the world of a woman's life. The writer-producer of the show Pearl Grey says, "If she is not happy in the marriage, she does not have to accept it as her destiny." She adds that serials are more real, closer to life and relatable now. "Not only can we take up issues, women can take a stand now," asserts Pearl. In the line of same theme taking a stand for what you like and what you feel, comes another show *Krishna Chali London*. It is a story of Krishna, bright student, planning to become a doctor by pursuing studies in London, but forced to marry a person who doesn't care about responsibilities and gives no importance to studies. Story focuses on journey of Krishna fighting with all odds and becoming a doctor post-marriage. Story of a small village Madhubani as a microcosm of Bihar is narrated in *Nimki Mukhiya* where Nimki, living life with casual and carefree attitude, becomes a Mukhiya – sarpanch – a chief of village. It portrays a struggle between Nimki's married life where she is not accepted by in-laws as daughter in-law and her role as Mukhiya where all villagers not only accept but praise her work. Thus TV has become a platform to show transition of woman in society from suppressed to surpassed, from domestic woman to professional lady closing painful stories of past and ready to start and write a new chapter in life.

Parallel to this new air of re-narrating mythological themes also got focus on prime time TV shows like *Mahabharat* from the point of view of Draupadi, *Siya ke Ram* retelling Ramayan from the perspective of Sita, *Karn Sangini*, based on Kavita Kane's novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, narrating focused angle of *Mahabharat* from the spectrum of Karn's wife Uruvi and *RadhaKrishn* essaying Radha's love for Lord Krishna that stands the taste of time. These all shows made a mark on society by presenting the age old stories from the point of view of female protagonists.

2.2. Non-Fiction Shows

Be it channel Bindass, coming up with a progressive campaign, 'B for change' or *Satyamev Jayate* discussing with sensitivity the issues of female foeticide, fighting rape, dowry and domestic violence with suggested probable solutions it has become a prime theme in Non-fiction shows as well.. *Halla Bol*, *Code Red*, *Savdhaan India* and *Crime Patrol* are few other shows that highlight social injustice and crimes against women along with ways to prevent and combat them.

2.3. Advertisements

TV advertisements have always stereotyped women as sari-clad moms or objectified them in a seductive role. But of late, there is a rise in number of commercials created based on the theme of 'woman empowerment'. Hamsini Shivakumar has termed it 'progressive advertising' and defined it as, "ads that show that daughters are no less than sons and women are equal to men in the world of work, are to be found in financial services ads, in jewellery ads, in telecom ads, in the ads of many categories".

An advertisement for *Nirma* washing powder shows four women who plunge into the muck and together they push the ambulance out as the male onlookers watch passively. *Nirma* switched from portraying women as home-makers to women as change-makers, and also displays women as powerful and active in the face of male impotence or unwillingness. As stated by Deepali Naair, "Nirma's positioning from the 1980s to 2015 has evolved to match the wavelength and thought processes of the 21st century Indian women". An advertisement for *Titan Raga* watches shows the progressive, confident and passionate woman who makes her own choices and does not live to regret them at all ... becoming a mom by choice, completing PhD, after motherhood, at the age of 45. While the ongoing ad of *Titan Raga* watches 'Khudse Naya Rishta' breaks the stereotype concept of beauty and brings in the concept of being comfortable in her own skin and embracing who she is. *Tanishq*, a jewellery brand has come up with an advertisement that introduces concept of remarriage of a dusky bride who has a daughter, thus breaking stereotype of fair-skinned brides. In an advertisement for *Havells* appliance, a young girl politely tells her prospective mother-in-law, that she isn't a kitchen appliance. *Samsung Galaxy J7 Max* portrays

modern day female youth paying the bill using her mobile after partying with a male shows economic independence. Advertisements of *MakeMyTrip* where Alia Bhatt is contemporary tech savvy female using gadgets way smarter than Ranveer Kapoor symbolizes her as today's female who can manage outside-home matters at ease. This progressive mindset has been accepted and well portrayed by several brands like Olay on being fearless in life, Gits on celebrating life, Greenply on women can, SUGAR cosmetics on accepting the skin color, All out's StandByToughMoms, Reliance Fresh on female's Goa trip at the age of 50, Benetton's Equal by Half – United by Half, Johnson's on co-parenting and sharing equal responsibilities etc...

Similarly few more advertisements such as the ones for *Taaza* brand tea, *Bournvita*, *Tupperware* She Can You Can, *Ariel Matic* washing powder, *Stayfree* and *Whisper* brand sanitary napkins emphasizes on empowering women to become independent.

2.4. News Channels

The role of news channels in development of social movement in cases such as Nirbhaya rape case cannot be undermined. A global protest arose as a result of dissemination of information by the news channels. Organizations such as UN Women have welcomed the attention given to this incident, which underlines the need to improve conditions for women in India.

Similarly, some time back, Rani Tripathi, a girl who conducted sting operation on her dowry-demanding fiancé and his family, was acclaimed as a hero by the TV news channels. It helped her to find a life partner who saw her on a news channel and married her without demand of dowry.

Laxmi Saa, an acid attack victim, launched her own talk show *Udaan* on the channel News Express. In the domain of stereotyped glamorous hosts, the news channel valued her talent more than her beauty, respecting her identity as a woman.

2.5. Government Campaigns

Traditionally, India was a patriarchal society with less scope for empowerment of women. However, the inception of change in the portrayal of women on TV implies a profound transformation in the way parts of Indian society have viewed women in the last few decades. Also, TV has played a significant role in the progress and the evolution of women by bringing a

change in thought process of the society as a whole. This is just a beginning of a new era of progressive Television as a media. As it is rightly said, “Small changes can make a big difference.”

3. Conclusion

Traditionally, India was a patriarchal society with less scope for empowerment of women. However, the inception of change in the portrayal of women on TV implies a profound transformation in the way parts of Indian society have viewed women in the last few decades. Also, TV has played a significant role in the progress and the evolution of women by bringing a change in thought process of the society as a whole. This is just a beginning of a new era of progressive Television as a media. As it is rightly said, “Small changes can make a big difference.”

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