

**TELEVISION SOAP-OPERAS AS A TOOL FOR WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SERIALS ‘UDAAN ZINDAGI KI’
AND ‘NIMKI MUKHIYA’**

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ABSTRACT

Communication theorists always believe in the power of Television as a strong medium of communication which enlightens people in terms of informing, educating and entertaining them. Undoubtedly, television has always been used as a tool to promulgate the idea of social change and the empowerment of common masses.

To build a strong nation it is essential to make people understand their social responsibility as a citizen as well as a human. Women being an important and strong stake holder in the society should know their abilities, roles and rights equally. It is necessary for them to know the real meaning of empowerment which actually can help in breaking their stereo typical image which is only confined to a mother, daughter and daughter-in-law in Indian society. They should understand their worth as an emancipated woman and individual of equal status who does not need to borrow the identity of her male counterpart.

In India, since, 1959, television has been playing a key role in the daily lives of people. One of its major content, the tele-serials or soap-operas is a constant source of entertainment and motivation for audience. It plays a pivotal role in enrooting the image of women as a strong foundation of a modern society. Presently, soap-operas like Balika Vadhu, Udaan Zindagi Ki, Nimki Mukhiya and a recent one ‘Kesari Nandan’ have helped in breaking the stereotypical image of women in our society and shaping a new image as independent women and torch bearers of the society. However, this study has been centered on ‘Udaan Zindagi ki’ and ‘Nimki Mukhiya’ as the subject.

In the paper, an attempt has been made to understand how these serials have portrayed its woman characters as protagonists. The study is a textual analysis based on observation of the researcher.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Television, Soap-Opera, Development

INTRODUCTION

Television is playing a key role in our society in promulgating the social changes. Since its inception in India in 1959, it's serving the functions of informing, educating and entertaining the masses. It's a strong medium of put forth the idea of creating the awareness and empowering the masses. Empowerment being the idea of knowing your own individuality and power and using it to make your own decisions. When it comes to women empowerment, it's more a concept of woman knowing her worth as an individual of equal status and not as person of secondary status which is controlled by her male counterpart in the society. It's an imperative to empower the woman and giving them the equal opportunities at the right time. Empowering a woman can further pave the way for the development of a nation. Television plays a pivotal role to fulfil the need of the society and a tool of constructing a social structure. One of its genre Soap- Opera, which are popularly known as tele-serials or TV serials, which are the representation of social arena in a fictional outlook. As these serials are very popular among masses it can be used as a tool of disseminating the idea of women-empowerment in a creative way. However, the present study is espoused around the two of the serials *Udaan Zindagi ki*, on Colors TV and *Nimki Mukhiya* on Star Bharat. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse how these serials have put forth the phenomenon of women empowerment and shows the centre characters as protagonists.

LITERATURE AND RESOURCE REVIEW

There are some previous studies on the portrayal of women in television serials, one of which is done by Dr. Aaliya Ahmed (2012), titled "Woman and Soap-Opera: Popularity, Portrayal and Perception", which was based on the portrayal of woman in different characters in how well TV soap operas represented it. There is an another paper of Dr. Aaliya Ahmed et al (2012) titled "Construction of contemporary women in soap operas". In this paper she focused on the potential of television to envisage the path for empowerment. Another study was done by Robin Zutshi et al, titled "Representation of women characters (Indian TV series) in modern era". These studies have provided a base to the present study to understand the characters in a better way. In an another study titled- Portayal of women in Television (TV) Serial by Shashi Kaul et al, (2017) she focused on the sex-stereotyping woven in soap operas in TV does not depict the real picture of women in India.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the role of television soap-operas as a tool of promulgating the phenomenon of women empowerment among masses.
- To analyse the portrayal of central characters of soap-operas '*Udaan Zindagi ki*' on Colors TV and '*Nimki Mukhiya*' on Star Bharat.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study is the textual analysis of both the serials based on the observation and interpretation of its central theme and the portrayal of its major characters and their relation with the respective social structure. For the purpose of brevity, in this paper the analysis of the serials is based on the observations made by the researcher. The episodes of the serials can be available online on Hotstar and Voot.

Soap Operas and Empowerment:

Soap Opera is a television or radio drama serial dealing typically with daily events of the lives of same group of characters. The 'Soap' in it refers to the fact that the early sponsors of these series were soap manufacturers. The 'Opera' refers to the scale of dramatic incidents present in these programs. The earliest instance which was found is from the Pittsburg Press of 1938. Soap operas are basically the television series based on fictional stories related to day to day lives of people (world histories.net, n.d.). It is an intertwined representation of reality and the fiction with the help of groups of fictional characters.

Soap Operas are so popular among the audience in India, specially the women audience seek relief from routine activities of their daily lives. It seems to be an upright alternative of emotional release of the audience because when they watch the fictional characters fighting with the odds of their lives, they relate it to their own lives and participate vicariously in those characters' life journey (Aggarwal et al, 2001). This attribute of soap- operas made it possible to raise the idea of empowerment among the masses.

According to the Cambridge dictionary the 'Empowerment' is the ability to give someone official authority or the freedom to do something. According to Erin Murphy-Graham, "Education does not automatically result in women's *empowerment*, as the social and economic context in which women live can pose overwhelming constraints on their choices."(2012). The idea of putting forth the phenomenon of empowerment among the women is to make them strong in terms of decision making and knowing their worth as an individual of equal status rather than borrowing the identity of their male counterpart for their identification in the society. The presentation of women characters in the lead or centre roles in these series can pave the way for other woman to understand the true meaning of empowerment.

Story Plot of 'Udaan Zindagi Ki'

The serial is broadcast on Colors Tv on Prime Time. The main plot of the story revolves around a district Azaadganj, near Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The central character is Chakor, a girl born to the parents who are bonded labourers under an upper class *Zamindar* Kamalnath Singh, who is

also the MP of the area. The story starts with an incident where the mother of Chakor, mortgaged her unborn child (Chakor) to Kamalnath's wife for some monetary help. After a leap of seven years, Chakor, emerged as a smart kid with a quest of education and independence. She as the bonded labourer of Kamalnath always tries to rebel against the atrocities done by him and chooses not to succumb to the pressure. To fight with this a marathon racing Coach Arjun Khanna helped her to make her own identity. She had a quality of being a racer since childhood, which was later nurtured by him by providing her a good education and a professional training of a marathon runners. Chakor's teacher told her popularity is the only weapon she can use to defeat Kamalnath. After a leap of 10 years she emerges as a popular marathon champion. After making her own identity she returns to Azaadganj to fight back all the atrocities which Kamalnath has done to her family and the other villagers. Chakor is portrayed as the protagonist who fought with all the odds and finally got success in making her village free from the stigma of '*bandhua giri*' or bonded labor with the power of popularity. She is portrayed as a strong headed determined woman who fulfilled her dreams as well as emerged as a torch bearer of the village and stood with them to fight for their rights.

Story plot of '*Nimki Mukhiya*'-

The serial is broadcast on Star Bharat at 8.30 pm, Monday-Friday. The story revolves around a village Kursawapur, near Patna, Bihar. The central character is Nimki, a girl who belongs to the marginalized class of society. She is the only graduate common girl in village having her own quirks. But her destiny changes when the Panchayat head/ Mukhiya seat for the upcoming election there is reserved for marginalized class woman. With some dramatic sequences she has been projected as the candidate and eventually, she wins the election and become the Mukhiya of the village. But the previous Mukhiya, Tetar Singh, who belongs to an upper class, never wanted that position out of his control and to fulfill his hidden motive to rule Kursawapur under her name, he convinced Nimki to get married to his son. But after realizing the wrong intension of her father-in-law and husband she fights against their ill treatment and chooses to separate herself from them and stand strong for her identity. Her self-believe made her realize the power of her position and seriousness of the responsibility of being Mukhiya of the village. She with full dedication towards the village panchayat works for the development of her village without any fear. For this the block development officer of Kursawapur, Abhimanyu Rai helps her finding the right way. After that fighting with all odds she becomes the empowered woman who stands tall for her family and the villagers.

CONCLUSION

As we have discussed the plot of both the serials, it is discernible that television being a strong medium of communication has a power to influence people and leave an impression in their

lifestyle. The study shows that both the characters Chakor and Nimki started their lives as ordinary village girls from a marginalized section of society but eventually transformed as a sportsperson and a political leader respectively.

Despite the state of their villages, both the characters showed that education, efforts and self-belief are the tools of social change and can transform an ordinary life into a strong and empowered one if nurtured in a positive direction. Both the characters emerged as the torch bearer of their respective societies. This also gives an insight that an empowered woman can be a source of motivation and inspiration to others also.

Another factor which made it possible for both the serials to rule the minds of people and gain popularity in terms of higher TRPs is their broadcast at prime time. It is the time when most of the women watch television this can surely leave an impression on their minds and influence them to lead their life in a strong way.

So, here we can say that television has a potential to deconstruct the stereo typical image of woman which can only be portrayed in roles of a home maker, mother, wife, daughter-in-law etc. It can enroot a new image as a strong, empowered woman who establishes herself as strong base of a society.

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