

Disadvantaging the Disadvantaged: Television and Women

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Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of women in Indian television programmes and discusses its implications for women and society. Content analysis of the portrayal of the female protagonist in the most viewed programmes on Indian television reveals that by and large, the portrayal of women on Indian television is confined to their 'lives in the matrimonial home'. Further, the only skills and qualities attributed to them are those, which make them good homemakers and hence help them adjust well to the 'matrimonial home'. The findings of the study imply that in being unable to echo the varying and contemporary roles of women, television is not only making inconspicuous the years of progress and advancement shown by women, but also perpetuating the already inbuilt social prejudices against women. Therefore, when proceeding with self-regulation in television programming, gender bias is an important factor to be considered.

Key words: Gender, society, television, women

1. Introduction

Communication is a potent force, which has a strong bearing on the way societies develop. It plays a crucial role in the growth of cultures and is an important institution of the modern world. It is a medium via which habits, ideas and values are acquired and perpetuated in society (Sandhu, 2015).

One of the most pervasive mediums of communication is television. The accelerated growth in its reach and the development of a number of different channels that cater to diverse tastes has made television an important member of every contemporary household (Singh & Sandhu, 2011a). People rely on television 'to discover new life styles, validate ideas, beliefs and aspirations, find answers to their questions, to relax, to socialize and to enhance their image of the self and their view of the world' (Johnson, 2001). Television acts as 'informer, educator and purveyor of ideas' (Al-Ghabri, 2006) and influences various social, political and economic processes that revolutionise societies and the lives of its inmates. Therefore, given the ability of television to influence public and private outlooks, we need to be wary of the impressions that television creates on the minds of the viewers.

For a long time now, criticism has been levelled against television for a variety of reasons. Of the commonly cited issues, an important one is the stereotypical presentation of women and a failure to reflect them as equal to men.

On account of the gender hierarchy that is deeply entrenched in our society, women are at a disadvantage. Their situation is further worsened by the way they are portrayed on television. Televised portrayals of women generally depict them as passive, docile and meek (Usha, 2004). Women are normally depicted in domestic settings, mostly as cooking, cleaning or taking care of the family (Mayne, 2000). These negative attributes and unrealistic domestic portrayals, in contrast to the dominant televised portrayals of men, reinforce the secondary and subordinate position of women in society (Singh & Sandhu, 2011b). However, of all the gender stereotypical roles that women are portrayed in, of utmost concern is the excessive focus on the sexuality of women (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Parekh, 2006). In many cases, the depiction of women as sex objects poses a challenge to the accepted norms of decency and borders on the pornographic (Pollay, 1986).

Further, comparison with the idealised images on television undermines the self-confidence of women and lowers their satisfaction with the way they look (Richins, 1991). This is found to have severe behavioural and psychological consequences, including feelings of inadequacy and loss of self-respect (Lavine, Sweeny, & Wagner, 1999).

As can be seen, past research has claimed that television plays a crucial role in disadvantaging women (Richins, 1991), which already constitute a disadvantaged section of the society. However, limited research in this area of inquiry is available in the Indian context. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to examine this claim in the Indian setting and discuss implications for society in general and women in particular.

The next section of the article reviews the available literature on the subject. Subsequent sections underscore the study methodology and findings. The article ends with a section on the implications and limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

Many studies relevant to the current research have been undertaken over the past years across many countries. Based on these studies, it is reasonable to assume that women are represented in stereotypical ways on television.

Malhotra and Rogers (2000) undertook a study to analyse the changes in the portrayal of Indian women on television due to the development of private satellite television. After a content analysis of the top rated television programmes, the authors found that women on television programming were seldom depicted as working outside the house or as having a life outside the house, thus reinforcing their stereotypical image of 'homemaker'. In the same year, Mayne (2000) conducted a study with almost similar results. The author found that in television advertising, women were mostly depicted in domestic settings, and when outside the house, they were generally seen shopping for household goods. Their portrayal on television thus appealed to their sense of duty as the caretaker of the family and the cleaner of the house. The inference of these portrayals is outrageous since they imply that women can find fulfilment in polishing and cleaning. Such portrayals of women not only problematize gender issues, but also institute the dominance of men in the society (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998; Sandhu, Mahajan, & Sharma, 2012).

Lee (2004) on the other hand, claimed that on television women were portrayed in diverse roles. But while listing the roles of women, the list did not go beyond homemaker, caretaker of children and endorser of beauty products. In some rare cases, women were also found working in offices. Although claiming to redefine the discourses of women's modernity and liberation, the study found television actually doing injustice to the portrayal of the 'modern woman'. Women on television are still depicted in roles defined by men (Radhakrishnan, 2001), mostly as their appendage or admirer (Sharpe, 1976).

Further, research has also shown that televised portrayals of women depict them as inconsequential, emotional and decorative with no real function (Chao, 2005). Women are generally shown as having no opinion of their own, leave alone air it. In most cases women are portrayed as unobtrusive silent suffering heroines, encouraging women viewers to adopt the same role in real life (Usha, 2004).

Another very serious accusation that one comes across in past research is the excessive focus of television on women as sex objects (Singh & Sandhu, 2011c). In various studies undertaken (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Scrace, 2002), television was found to be replete with sexualised portrayal of women, in some cases bordering on the indecent (Parekh, 2006). Such portrayals degrade the status of women in the society and establish norms, which work in their disfavour (Sandhu, 2013).

Social scientists and researchers have also been anxious about the impact of idealised images of physical attractiveness on the minds of female viewers (Richins, 1991). Past research indicates that it is normal for women to compare themselves with media images, and when they cannot measure up to them; their self-image gets diminished (Kelmen, 1961).

It may be of interest to point out here that the general dominance of men on television is also extended to the way children are portrayed on television (Browne, 1998; Graves, 1999; Maher & Childs, 2003). Out of the six measures used by Childs and Maher (2003) to examine gender preference in the portrayal of children on television, four measures exhibited the preference for boys over girls. This finding established a social gender hierarchy with boys as dominant figures and role models.

Of a graver concern however, is the way little girls are shown on television - as under training for becoming dependent, subservient homemakers, with heavy focus on how to please men when they grow up (Schaffter, 2006).

As we can see, past researchers have severely criticised the portrayal of women on television. It is time to test the validity of the claims they have made in the Indian context.

3. Methodology

Content analysis was used to examine the portrayal of women in Indian television programmes (Childs & Maher, 2003; Maher & Childs, 2003). Content analysis is the most recommended method to analyse gender roles in televised portrayals (Rubie-Davies, Liu, & Lee, 2013). The content variables were identified on the basis of previous research studies on gender role portrayals on television.

3.1 Sample

To examine the portrayal of women on Indian television, a list of the most popular television programmes was prepared. Towards this end, TVRs¹ of the top ten programmes for each week were considered over a twelve-month period (from 27th December 2009 to 1st January 2011) and a consolidated list was condensed. Every programme, which featured even once in the top ten programmes during the period under consideration, was included in the study. It was considered appropriate to exclude reality shows (because on these shows the portrayal of female protagonists is not strictly scripted), movies, award shows and live telecast of sports events from the study. The final list constituted of 23 unduplicated Hindi programmes (it may be of interest to point out here that while assessing the popularity of a television programme, national ratings were considered and none of the programmes in regional languages / English made it to the final sample), out of which 20 programmes were soap operas/drama series, one was a comedy, another one was a thriller and the last one was a historical programme. The final list of the programmes included in the study is shown in table 1. Table 2 exhibits the different categories to which these 23 programmes belong.

For every programme listed in table 1, the portrayal of the female protagonist was studied. In one case however, it was difficult to make out who the female protagonist was (in case of *Bidayi*, formerly aired on Star Plus), and hence the portrayal of both the female leads was examined. Thus, the final sample constituted of 24 female protagonists (refer to table 1).

3.2 Study Variables

The portrayal of each female character included in the current study was examined across the 11 variables enlisted in table 3. This list of variables was compiled by reviewing the previous relevant studies on televised gender portrayals/roles. Table 3 also contains the justification for inclusion of these variables, along with the scales (and their categories where ever relevant) used to measure these variables.

As can be seen from table 3, five of the 11 variables used in the current study, were coded on categorical scales and three variables were rated on five point Likert scales (with 1 indicating low and 5 indicating high). For the last three variables, open-ended responses were collected.

3.3 Coding and Reliability

Independent coders (of different genders), who consistently watched at least one of the television programmes included in the study, were approached for the purpose of coding (Mayne, 2000; Childs & Maher, 2003; Maher & Childs, 2003). In all, 51 coders were approached. However, only 32 coders (male = 16 and female = 16) consented to be a part of the study. The author made the coders familiar with the variables and the coding procedure in a training session. Portrayal of five female characters was coded in the training session. The doubts and queries of the coders were also resolved in this session.

Post the training session the coders did the actual coding in the presence of the author. However, the coders were not allowed to speak with the author or each other during coding. Two coders (one male and one female) coded the portrayal of each female character included in the study. A pre-prepared coding sheet was used to capture the responses of the coders.

The reliability of coding was established by the reliability index as proposed by Perreault and Leigh (1989). Its results for the categorical variables are shown in table 4. The author removed the disputes in coding, independent of the coders (Childs & Maher, 2003).

4. Analysis, Findings and Discussion

4.1 Variables Measured on Categorical Scales

Table 5 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the categorical variables. Each variable has been discussed separately in this sub section.

Level of Education

According to the data collected across this parameter (refer to table 5), 8.33 per cent of the characters under study were found to be in category 1 (illiterate), 16.67 per cent in category 2 (some years in school/high school) and 58.33 per cent in category 3 (some years in college/graduate). Particularly worrisome however is the fact that only 16.67 per cent of the characters studied were in category 4 (post graduate/professionally qualified).

Times are changing and the sex ratio in schools, colleges and professional educational institutes, though still skewed in favour of men, is progressively showing a higher participation of women (Census of India, 2011). Television can help improve this participation further by highlighting the importance of education for women, and the positive change it can bring in the life of women and society. Education is one of the most effective ways of combating gender inequality (Sandhu, Singh & Batra, 2014) and that is how television should popularise it. Towards this end, the statistics discussed in the preceding paragraph must be significantly changed and women on television should be portrayed as educated and empowered.

Employment Status

From the statistics depicted in table 5, it can be deduced that the majority of women on television are unemployed. In this context very interesting examples can be cited. In *Pavitra Rishta* (formerly aired on Zee TV), Archana, the female lead, completes her education and picks up a job after she gets divorced. In another case Sadhna leaves her part time job of tutor after marriage (in *Bidayi*, formerly aired on Star Plus). The inference of these depictions is that a career is an inappropriate choice for happily married women. These portrayals are highly sexist and may have a negative impact on women's struggle for equal representation in all walks of life.

Further, this data also reveals another significant fact that most of the women on television do not enjoy financial independence. It is a well-known fact that in the absence of financial independence, women cannot be truly independent. Thus, the point to ponder over is why does television persist in using images/portrayals of women, which disfavour them?

Decision Making Authority

58.34 per cent of the portrayals examined depicted women as decision takers, 20.83 per cent as decision makers and another 20.83 per cent as both (refer to table 5). Further, an attempt to assess the kind of decisions made by women who fell in the last two categories revealed that women mostly made decisions concerning domestic matters. Very often these decisions constituted acts of supreme sacrifice to make others happy. It can thus be safely surmised that across this variable, the findings of the current study are in synchronization with the findings of the previous studies, which reveal that women on television have little or no decision making power (Sharpe, 1976).

Role

Data exhibited in table 5 depicts that 70.83 per cent women on television are depicted in roles defined by others (i.e. wife, mother, daughter-in-law etc.), 12.50 per cent women are portrayed in independent roles and 16.67 per cent in roles that fall in both the categories. This shows that in very few cases, women on television have an identity of their own.

Social Consideration of Role

Table 5 depicts that for the most part (nearly 71 per cent of the time), women on television are depicted in traditional roles. Previous research has established that television depicts reality (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). Therefore, this data reveals the ideology of the Indian society, which is not yet ready to accept women in non-traditional roles.

4.2 Variables Rated on Likert Scales

Table 6 shows the ratings of the three variables rated on Likert scales. Analysis of each variable has been discussed separately in this sub section.

Physical Beauty

A high mean score of 3.92 across this variable (refer to table 6) indicates that women on television are portrayed as beautiful and physically attractive. The only stark exception that the author found was in the case of Nahusha (the protagonist of *Laagi Tujhse Lagan*), before her proverbial transition from 'the ugly duckling to the beautiful swan'. During the initial episodes of the series, Nahusha was depicted as a dark unappealing woman, only to shed her disguise in the later episodes.

Past research indicates that women viewers tend to compare their body and looks with the picture perfect images they see on screen and any disparity displeases them (Richins, 1991). Consequently, their satisfaction with their own looks reduces (Richins, 1991). What the viewers fail to see is the fact that the looks of the actresses on television are perfected through artificial means and for the same reason are unnatural and unachievable in real life. Also, in many cases televised portrayals are not altogether genuine and an attempt is made to present ersatz reality as authentic reality. To quote an example, the character of Perna Sharma in *Kasauti Zindagi Ki* (now off air and not included in the current study) can be cited. When the actual age of the actress was in mid twenties, she was enacting the role of a grandmother on screen. Since, none of the grandmothers in real life look like her, her televised portrayal was dishonest and unnecessarily enhanced comparison standards that dissatisfied the audience. Further, not only the looks of these protagonists, but also their dresses and make up become a point of comparison and the viewers tend to ape them. Therefore, television portrayals set standards of beauty and fashion in the society.

Given this inference, care must be taken to ensure the beneficence of the standards established by television. In line with the same thought, the example of Ragini (one of the female protagonists of *Bidayi*, formerly aired on Star Plus) can be cited. Ragini's parents were finding it difficult to find a match for her because she was dark complexioned. The implied message is that only fair girls are marriageable. An ethical issue thus arises here and its implications need to be examined in the light of their impact on the mind and psyche of the viewers.

Focus as Object of Sexual Gratification

The findings of the current study across this variable are very heartening (refer to table 6). A mean score of 1.42 for this variable indicates that in Indian television programmes an undue focus on women as objects of sexual gratification is missing.

For countries prone to sexual violence (India is one among them (Khazan & Lakshmi, 2012; Takahashi, 2015), an excessive focus on women as objects of sexual gratification is inappropriate. It not only offends and degrades women, but also leads to rise in crime and violence against them (Scrace, 2002). In the light of this argument, it can be said that by not placing too much importance on women as sex objects, Indian television programmes are moving in the right direction.

Believability of Portrayal/Role

The believability of the portrayal/roles of women on television was found to be quite low (mean = 1.75) (refer to table 6). Though this low believability could be attributed to a number of different factors, there are primarily two reasons for it. First, television depicts the life of women as revolving around 'marriage, in-laws and husband', and in doing so fails to reflect women in their changing contemporary roles. Second, the portrayal of women is rendered unrealistic on account of the extreme self-effacing and unassuming nature of their characters (refer to figure 3). Women are generally shown as extremely sacrificing, smilingly putting the happiness of others before their own, ready to help every one all the time, docile, patient etc. These qualities in the characters of women examined in the study made their roles highly unrealistic.

Further, women are portrayed in positive as well as negative roles in television programmes, but whenever they are depicted in a positive light, they are shown to have most of the above-mentioned attributes. What is it, if not unfair to women?

4.3 Variables With Open-Ended Responses

Settings in Which Seen

From the data collected against this variable, eight distinct settings emerge in which women are seen on television. These settings are shown in figure 1. As can be seen, the most important setting in which women are seen on television is 'home', followed by kitchen. The other settings are religious places, social events/with friends, doing social work, office, dressing up and lastly, shopping. However, the low number of responses across these settings reflects their relative unimportance. It is reasonable to assume from this data that television is ritualising the standards set by society where a woman's primary role is to take care of the house and family.

Skill Set

Table 2 exhibits the skills of women on television. These skills correspond perfectly with the traditional roles in which women are generally seen on television and completely fail to reflect the social evolution of women. As can be seen from figure 2, the significant skills attributed to women on television are those of a good homemaker, a good cook, a good mother, wife, daughter-in-law etc. (roles defined by others).

Qualities/Attributes

Just as the skills of women on television correspond with the traditional roles played by them, so do their qualities/attributes (see figure 3). The most important keywords used by the coders of the current study to describe the qualities/attributes of the characters played by women on television are 'sacrificing' and 'patient', followed by 'conscientious', 'sincere' and 'docile.' These attributes are in keeping with the typical expectations that the Indian society has from women. Women in India are expected to be sacrificing and patient, always making way for others, especially men, and that is how television portrays them. It may also be pertinent to mention here that this finding of the current study supports the extant relevant literature on televised portrayals of women (Usha, 2004).

To conclude, it can be said that women on television are depicted in traditional roles, which confine the existence, interests and hobbies of women to the home. Not only do these characters not have a life outside home, but also no authority inside it. Further, the qualities and skills attributed to female characters on television make them suitable only for the conventional role of a good homemaker.

Indian television seems to be making no effort to help this 'marginalized section of the society' (Jha, 2007). Rather, television is further putting women at a disadvantage by emphasising the strong patriarchal element of the Indian society.

5. Conclusion

*'Man for the field and woman for the hearth,
Man for the sword and for the needle she,
Man with the head and woman with the heart,
Man to command and women to obey...'
Alfred Tennyson*

The portrayal of women on Indian television could not be more in line with the above description. Lord Tennyson considered women as unequal to men, unintelligent and fit only for the house, and that is how the contemporary Indian television depicts them. Women are portrayed in stereotypical and unrealistic ways, which while being suggestive of an overarching patriarchal order also perpetuate her image as the weaker gender in the society.

Further, on Indian television, the lives of women revolve around marriage, husband and in-laws. If women are shown as married, then her sole focus is on pleasing and impressing their husband and in-laws. And if women are shown as unmarried, then they are under training for the same. These portrayals are not only offensive, but also unjust to the real image of the modern day Indian women.

Of significance however is the fact that the current study did not find an excessive focus on the sexuality of women characters. While the programmes under study were found to have employed sensual themes, an overdue focus on the same was not missing. Though this finding is contrary to the findings of most previous studies that examined televised portrayals of women (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Scrace, 2002), it is desirable.

It defends the image of the Indian women and is in tune with the Indian value system, which is known for upholding the integrity of women.

6. Implications

The subtlety of the roles played by women on television suggests that they are inferior to men, but of greater concern is the implication that they are individuals of no consequence. Their stereotypical portrayals of good homemakers with no decision-making powers reaffirm the undesirable gender equation already conspicuous in the Indian society. These portrayals also reinforce the already rampant social prejudices against women.

Behaviours and roles, which are befitting of both genders, are learnt through the process of socialisation and television plays an important part in that (Johnson, 2001). Television perpetuates gender appropriate behaviours and roles in the society. With the Indian television perpetuating the suitable roles for a woman as that of a mother, housewife and caretaker of the family only, it is definitely putting women at a disadvantage in the society.

Further, the roles of women on television shape the expectations that the society has from them⁴. Since on television, women are seldom shown as having lives or opinions of their own, the society starts expecting the same from them in real life. Therefore, over a period of time, television viewers may expect women to confine their lives to the home, just like their televised portrayals. Not only this, it may also discourage women viewers with unconventional aspirations. Such women may believe that women's roles depicted on television are the only appropriate roles for them. Hence, the way women are portrayed on television works in their disfavour and puts them in a further unenviable position than they already are.

Certain critics feel that television is only mirroring the truth (Courtney & Whipple, 1983). The truth as on date however is that television is not. The traditional image of a woman has undergone a change. Today, she is a career woman and the 'modern woman' finds it difficult to identify with the woman shown on television. While the life of the woman on television is limited to the house only, the contemporary woman's life extends beyond it. She has interests outside the house too and she acknowledges them without guilt or shame. Her portrayal on television thus is ineffective and unrealistic as it fails to depict social change and portray the actual image of the contemporary woman.

Another line of thought is that television only portrays what is acceptable to the society (Mayne, 2000). Televised formats are time tested and in synchronization with popular public opinions. Since according to the current research, women on television are only depicted as housewives and mothers, the implication is that the society is not yet ready to accept women in more forward roles that equate their status with men.

In a society where women are fighting hard to gain equality, it is not fair to represent them as secondary or inferior to men. With their participation on the rise in all spheres, be it sports, politics, business, science or even the armed forces, the way women are 'put down' by television is inappropriate.

7. Recommendations

It is time for television to acknowledge its responsibility in perpetuating the image of women as 'fit only for the house' and hence inferior and unequal to men. To moderate the situation, television must start representing women and their male counterparts in equal roles.

An attempt should also be made to depict a more realistic picture of women, which reflects them as individuals who have the right to live and pursue their interests and dreams. Television must not reduce the image of women to the sacrificing, patient, giving individuals we currently see on television. The way women are depicted on television should do justice to their real image. Hence, women on television ought to be portrayed in all their modern roles along with that of a homemaker. Thus, while attempting self-regulation, gender bias is an important factor for the content writers and directors to consider.

Lastly, television can also be used to create awareness regarding the rights of women and popularise their status as equal to men. This would not only be an effective way of fighting the deeply entrenched gender bias in the society, but also prove to be cost effective. Television is considered an authority on most issues (Johnson, 2001; Singh & Sandhu, 2011a). Let us exploit its position to better the standing of women in the society.

8. Limitations and Further Research

The results of the study could be biased because most of the programmes included in the current study were soap operas. The portrayal of women in other categories of programmes was not studied thoroughly owing to the insufficient representation/absence of other categories of programmes in the list of top rated programmes. Further, the findings of the current research could also be inaccurate because for each programme included in the study, only the portrayal of the female lead was examined. An analysis of portrayals of all female characters in each programme is likely to yield more accurate results. Also, coding/scores of the variables could have been biased on account of the perception of the coder.

The limitations of the current research provide scope for further research. Future research can be undertaken to understand the portrayal of women in different categories of programmes and different categories of roles. An attempt can also be made to understand the influence of the stereotypical portrayal of women in television programmes on her psyche and outlook. Future researchers may also examine the portrayal of men and compare the results with the results of the present study.

Notes

1. Expanded as Television Viewer Rating, TVR assess the popularity of a television programme. One single TVR represents one per cent of viewers surveyed in a given minute (retrieved 4 February 2011, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audience_measurement).
2. TAM is one of the two organisations that provide television ratings in India. They do so by physically collecting the data. They release this data weekly. Off late, their ratings have become quite popular and also vital for most media plans.
3. Cited in a press release on the importance of education for women stressed during anti-discrimination committee meeting on Burkina Faso reports (2000) (retrieved 2 February 2011, from <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000127.wom1168.doc.html>).
4. Advocates of the Cultivation Theory believe that over a period of time, viewers start accepting the view of the world that they are exposed to on television as reality (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2000; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

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Table 1: Top Television Programmes (not in order of TVR)

S. No.	Name of the programme	Channel on which formerly/currently aired	Female Protagonist (name of character portrayed)
1.	Pavitra Rishta	Zee TV	Archana
2.	Saath Nibhana Saathiya	Star Plus	Gopi
3.	Pratigya	Star Plus	Pratigya
4.	Sasural Genda Phool	Star Plus	Suhana
5.	Na Aana Is Des Laado	Colors	Sia
6.	Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai	Star Plus	Akshara
7.	Laagi Tujhse Lagan	Colors	Nahusha
8.	Tere Liye	Star Plus	Taani
9.	Jhansi Ki Rani	Zee TV	Rani Lakshmibai
10.	Ram Milaye Jodi	Zee TV	Mona
11.	Balika Vadhu	Colors	Anandi
12.	Chand Chupa Badal Mein	Star Plus	Nivedita
13.	Bidayi	Star Plus	Sadhna and Ragini
14.	Behenein	Star Plus	Purva
15.	Uttran	Colors	Ichcha
16.	CID	Sony Entertainment TV	Kajal
17.	Tarak Mehta Ka Ulta Chasma	SAB TV	Daya
18.	Agle Janam Mohe Bitiya Hi Kijo	Zee TV	Laali
19.	Yahan Mein Ghar Ghar Kheli	Zee TV	Swarn Abha
20.	Sab Ki Laadli Bebo	Star Plus	Bebo
21.	Choti Bahu	Zee TV	Radhika
22.	12/24 Carol Bagh	Zee TV	Simran
23.	Bhagyavidhata	Colors	Bindya

Source: TAM Peplemeter System², India**Table 2: Programme Categories in the Final List of Programmes**

Programme Category	Frequency	Percentage
Soap opera/drama series	20	86.95
Comedy	1	4.35
Thriller	1	4.35
Historical programme	1	4.35
Total	23	100

Source: Author's study

Table 3: Content Variables and their Description/Justification

Variable	Definition/Justification	Type of scale used for measurement (and categories, if any)
Level of education	This variable was included in the current study to assess the level of education of the female protagonist. The justification for including this variable lies in the fact that women's education is considered a 'gateway to women's empowerment' ³ and is one of the best ways to fight gender inequality in any society. It was thus considered important to evaluate whether or not television is helping to spread this message among the masses.	Categorical scale with four categories <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Illiterate 2. Some years in school/high school 3. Some years in college/graduate 4. Post graduate/professionally qualified
Employment status	Women on television are seldom depicted as career women or persons of professional standing (Nowak, 1990; Malhotra & Rogers, 2000). This variable has been included in this study to test the validity of this claim and, in turn assess the level of financial independence of the female characters included in the study.	Categorical scale with three categories <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unemployed 2. Employed in a part time job 3. Employed in a full time job
Decision making authority	On television, power and decision making authority is vested only in men and women are depicted as servile to them (Sharpe, 1976). Since this tends to patronise women, it was in considered an important variable for the current study.	Categorical scale with three categories <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decision taker 2. Decision maker 3. Both
Role	Women on television are depicted as individuals of no independent standing and their roles are generally defined in terms of their relationship with men such as wife, daughter-in-law, girlfriend etc. (Radhakrishnan, 2001). Since, a woman is more than a daughter-in-law, wife and mother, it was considered vital to assess her portrayal on television across this variable.	Categorical scale with four categories (categories 1, 2 and 4 have been adopted from Gilly (1998), as cited in Royo-Vela, Aldas-Manzano, Kuster-Boluda, & Vila-Lopez (2007)) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Roles that define character in terms of relationship with others (i.e. wife, mother, daughter-in-law etc.) 2. Roles that define character independently (career woman, professional etc.) 3. Both 4. Others
Social consideration of role	This variable refers to the way the role of the female character is perceived by the society (as traditional or non-traditional or somewhere in between). For women, the roles of wives, mothers, secretaries, nurses, clerks and teachers are considered traditional (Chao, 2005) Past research indicates that women are mostly portrayed in traditional roles (Schneider & Schneider, 1979). This variable has thus been added to the current study to assess how the portrayal of women on Indian television fares across this	Categorical scale with four categories (Sexton and Haberman (1974), as cited in Royo-Vela et al., (2007)) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Traditional 2. Non-traditional 3. Both 4. None

	variable.	
Physical beauty	Television is responsible for creating a beauty myth, because only slim, fair and beautiful women are shown on television (Wolf, 1990). When female viewers compare themselves with these perfect televised images, their concept of the self undergoes a change and they lose confidence in their looks (Richins, 1991). Since physical appearance of television models is found to have a profound influence on the psyche of women, this variable was included in the list of content analytic measures used in the current study.	Five point Likert scale with 5 representing the maximum level of physical beauty
Focus as object of sexual gratification	Television has been accused of injuring the integrity of women by portraying them as sex objects (Scrace, 2002). For the same reason themes, which are sensual, erotic or suggestive of the same have been condemned (Pollay, 1986). To assess the extent to which televised portrayals of female characters on Indian television focus on the sexuality of women, this variable was included in the current study.	Five point Likert scale with 5 representing the maximum level of focus
Believability of portrayal/role	Television does not portray women in realistic roles (Mayne, 2000). To assess the validity of this claim in the Indian scenario this variable was included in the study.	Five point Likert scale with 5 representing the highest level of believability
Sill set	In most cases the only skills attributed to women on television are those of a good housekeeper and cook (Malhotra & Rogers, 2000). Since, the contemporary woman is so much more than that, this variable was included in the current study.	Open-ended
Settings in which seen	Women on television have been generally shown in domestic settings, such as the kitchen, cleaning the house, running from one room to the other while doing odd chores etc. (Mayne, 2000). The current study attempts to find out whether this is true in the Indian context.	Open-ended
Attributes/Qualities	Key words used to describe the personality of the subject.	Open-ended

Source: Author's study

Table 4: Inter Rater Reliability of Coding of Categorical Variables

Variable	Number of observations	Number of categories	Number of agreements	I _r
Level of education	24	4	22	.94
Employment status	24	3	23	.97
Decision making authority	24	3	21	.90
Role	24	4	24	1.00
Social consideration of role	24	4	20	.88

$I_r = \{[(F_o/N) - (1/k)][k/(k - 1)]\}^{0.5}$, for $(F_o/N) > \text{or} = (1/k)$, where k = number of categories, F_o = number of agreements and N = number of observations

Source: Author's study

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Categorical Variables

Variable Category	Level of Education	Employment Status	Decision making authority	Role	Social consideration of the role
1	08.33	70.83	58.34	70.83	70.83
2	16.67	04.17	20.83	12.50	16.67
3	58.33	25.00	20.83	16.67	12.50
4	16.67	Not applicable	Not applicable	0	0

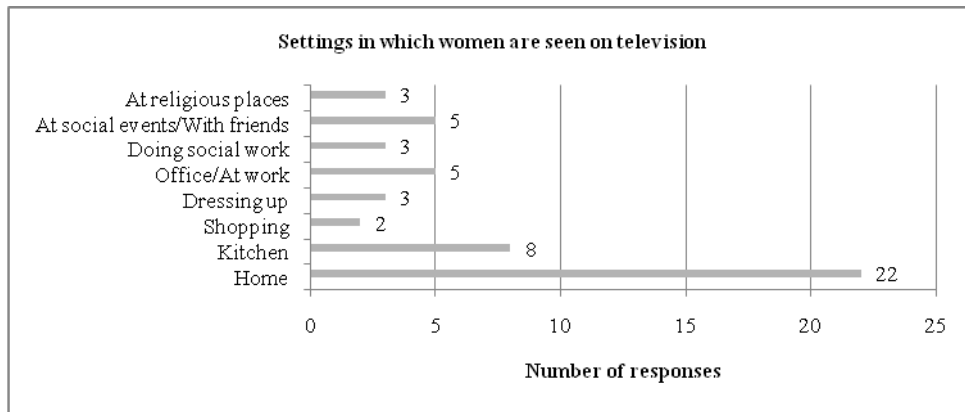
All figures in percentages
 For definition of category refer to table 3
 Source: Author’s study

Table 6: Ratings of Variables Rated on Likert Scales

Variable	Mean
Physical beauty	3.92
Focus as object of sexual gratification	1.42
Believability of portrayal/role	1.75

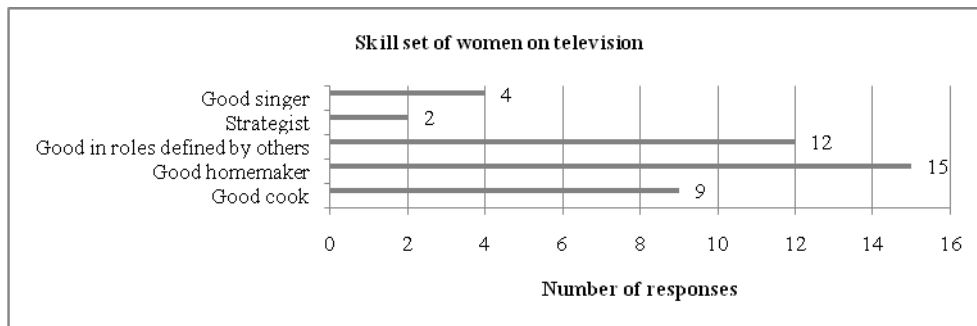
Variables were rated on a five point Likert scale (1=low and 5=high)
 Source: Author’s study

Figure 1



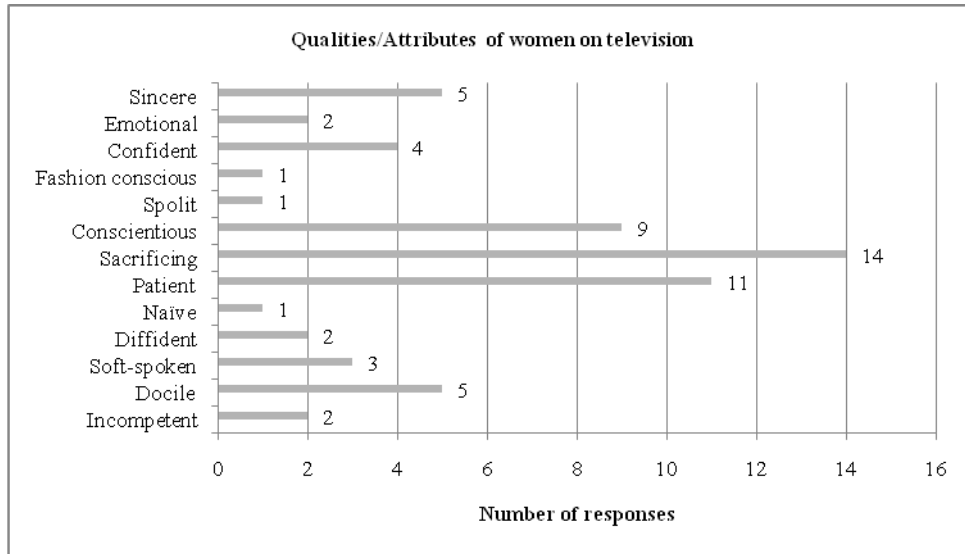
Source: Author’s study

Figure 2



Source: Author’s study

Figure 3



Source: Author's study