

**LIBERALIZATION AND THE NEW WOMAN
CONSTRUCTION OF THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN INDIAN TV
SERIALS**

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ABSTRACT

In India and elsewhere society influences television and television in turn influences society. Television serials or soaps as they are popularly referred to have a great impact on society – with regard to national integration, identity, globalization, women and ethics. India experienced the cable revolution in 1991; television and satellite viewing with ‘n’ number of regional channels gaining popularity and serials vying with each other for TRP’s – television rating points. The Indian media and entertainment industry comprises various segments that include television, print, films, radio, music, animation, gaming and visual effects, and digital advertising. India has one of the largest broadcasting industries in the world with close to 161 million TV households. There are about 800 satellite television channels, 88 teleports, 245 FM radio channels, and 170 community radio stations operating in India. Hence the present research focuses on Television serials and their impact on the common women of India as the serials that are telecast on different channels are women centric. The serials delve into the travails of women from different backgrounds and vividly detail them. The present research also focuses on the depiction/construction of women characters post economic liberalization period as it has played a major role in the life of common Indian women.

Although Television and its content is a much debated topic, surprisingly the question of construction of women characters and their impact on contemporary women of India has been less discussed. There is an opinion that “*the female characters even empower women in urban and rural India.*” (Shoma Munshi-2010). It is this aspect that the present research seeks to probe and seek answers as

to the social, psychological and financial impact of women characters of television serials on the common women of India today. (Through responses to questionnaires on selected sample of women)

The methodology employed was to distribute questionnaire to a selected sample of women who regularly watch serials in the age group of 18-45 years. The methodology in selecting serials for the study was their popularity based on TRP's. In order to make it representative of the State, respondents were selected from Bangalore, Mysore, Gulbarga and Belgaum. 200 samples were administered the questionnaire and their feedback collected. Analysis of these responses was conducted in a four pronged approach.

The questionnaires were analyzed for the following points:

1. Post Feminism considers media content be it serials, reality TV shows etc., as texts. As the serials selected for the study are women centric, the female characters have been analyzed from the post feminism perspective
2. Psychological Impact of lead/negative protagonists' on the women respondents through the theory of Simulacra and Simulation by Jean Baudrillard as it is a direct comment on technological content and its interpretation.
3. Socio-financial impact of lead/negative protagonists' on the women respondents through their choice of clothes and accessories and
4. Cultural impact of lead/negative protagonists' on the women respondents through time spent on viewing and change in cultural celebrations like festivals/rituals etc.,

The outcome is the construction of female characters in serials is not realistic. Their depiction is such that it makes a huge psychological impact on the young impressionable audience and transports them into a state of 'Hyperreality' which is dangerous, where an individual cannot distinguish between 'reality' and 'fiction'. The socio-financial impact of women characters has been huge and women in the age group of 18-45 years have made major changes in their wardrobes, which has a great impact on further spending (consumerism) and materialism. The cultural impact is seen with change in food habits, language, observing of ritual which is a new feature and money spending again fuelling consumerism and materialism.