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## The Portrayal of Domestic Violence against Women in Contemporary TV Serials: A Study on Two Popular Serials of the Star Plus

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### Abstract

As we know, drama is the powerful tool in shaping people attitudes and opinion, it is highly necessary to study how women are portrayed in it. For this purpose, this research is carried out on the Indian contemporary TV serials, which can help us to examine how TV dramas are showing women. In this paper, researcher explicates gender-based violence and examines how it is typically depicted in contemporary television serials. I have used content analysis as methodology to understand the portrayal of domestic violence against women in contemporary TV serials. On the basis of TRP, I have chosen two popular soap opera from star plus namely- Anupamaa and Shaadi Mubarak which was aired in 2020. I have taken first 100 episodes from both the selected serials for doing content analysis. After viewing and closely observing the above-mentioned series, I constructed three major content categories as my objectives for the qualitative and quantitative content analysis.

The findings of this paper indicated that contemporary TV serials promote domestic violence against women as day-to-day content in the form of verbal or physical abusing and also promote the patriarchal stereotyped content by showing men as powerful, adventurers, aggressive who control major aspects of life that are social, economic and political while women characters are portrayed mostly in subordinate, submissive and subservient roles. However, the findings of the study reveal that contemporary TV serials defaming the image of working women by showing them always in the negative roles.

**Keywords:-** Domestic Violence, Portrayal, Women, Content analysis and TV Serials.

### Introduction

Domestic violence/Gender violence is a broad term that encompasses several different types of violence directed at an individual based on their gender identity. Specifically concerning violence against women, gender violence can include assault, homicide, domestic or intimate partner violence (IPV), rape, sexual harassment, breaches of fiduciary trust, stalking, incest, and child abuse, all of which can result in medical, psychological, and/or behavioral consequences for the victim (Robinson, 2003). These types of violence do not only involve physical abuse but can involve verbal or psychological abuse as well, such as gaslighting or mental manipulation, controlling behavior, and sexual or reproductive coercion (Modi et al., 2014; Sweet, 2019). Gender violence may be isolated to a single event, or it could be a chronic or recurring issue particular in instances of IPV, sexual harassment, or stalking (Palazzolo & Roberto, 2011).

The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The World Health Organization (WHO) considers violence against women to be a public health problem that is rooted in gender inequalities and continues to perpetuate them, and this is especially true for sexual violence and IPV (WHO, 4 2021)

- **TV Serials and Soap Opera -**

"A soap opera, often known as a daytime serial, is a serialized work of fiction that airs on television or radio on a regular basis. The name "soap" originally referred to the involvement of detergent companies in using daytime serials to market and promote their products; nevertheless, opera came to relate to the genre's tendency to be larger-than-life and overly melodramatic" (Sultana, p-109).

"The crucial element of a soap opera is its open-ended nature of narrative, with stories spanning several episodes. The defining feature that makes a television program a soap opera, according to Albert Moran, is "that form of television that works with a continuous open narrative. Each episode ends with a promise that the story line is to be continued in another episode" (Bhattacharjee, 2016, p-2). According to S.F Norton "Soap operas are properly known as 'continuous dramas,' because the episodes are not divided into separate seasons and air week after week throughout the year. The soap opera follows a serial format. Soap episodes are often brief (maximum 25 minutes), however four or five episodes are typically aired every week, with an ensemble edition airing on weekends. In recent soaps, scenes also tend to be quite short; around two minutes this is to be considered the maximum viewing time for one scene to avoid the audience becoming bored. The episodes of a serial are sequential as the plot evolves in a continuous way" (Anitha, 2014. p-11). "Continuity also promotes increased involvement because viewers become part of the lives of the characters" (Newcomb, cited in Modleski, 1982). "Soaps are characterized by a number of distinct features: the speed of production, the continuous use of sets, large casts and convoluted story lines which are spun out for weeks an end" (Sarkar, 2012. p-5).

- **The Portrayal of Domestic violence against Women in TV Serials**

The Portrayal of domestic violence against women in contemporary serials is an amusing fashion continues to send the message that male aggression and domestic abuse is acceptable. In contemporary TV serials, the content of domestic violence shows frequently in many forms like verbal abuse, physical abuse and domestic or intimate partner violence (IPV) against women characters by male protagonist as their husbands, sons and fathers. Indian contemporary TV serials portray women as oppressed and victimized characters while male as violent characters for e.g., in the Anupamaa Tv serial, Anupamaa who is lead character portrays as dedicated mother of three children and wife who adores and sacrifices for her family every time where as her husband Vanraj is a rude, cruel man who constantly insults her and having an extramarital affair with her sectary Kavya Gandhi.

On television, both men and women are shown in stereotyped and traditional ways. This contributes to gender roles being more polarized. Emotionality, caution, co-operation, a communal feeling, and conformity are all attributes linked with femininity. Rationality, efficiency, competition, individualism, and ruthlessness are all attributes linked with masculinity (Ahmed, 2012 p-2). "Content on television is stereotyped," says actress Sharmila Tagore. No women go to work on their show, which still revolves about son preferences and kitchen dynamics".

- ❖ **REVIEW OF LITERATURE-**

**Renee Liana Delcambre** (2016) in her work entitled "Domestic Violence in Mass Media: An Analysis of Messages, Images, & Meanings in Motion Pictures" intended to extend this foundation of research by looking at the framing efforts within the motion picture medium. It is an analysis of the depicted domestic abuse and violence in films and how the subsequent messages may impact the understanding of this harmful behavior within individuals and society at large. In this paper, researcher has used rhetorical criticism which examines communication symbols within an object or subject to reveal

insights that ideally will aid in understanding and improving human communication. Media have the ability to impact an audience's construction of serious social topics and issues. She said that analyzing the communication of a serious, deviant practice like domestic abuse, depicted in popular films, can assist in directing needed attention to a major social issue and provide readers the opportunity to see and discuss what is normally hidden and left unspoken within most cultures.

**Sajida Awais, Atif Ashraf and Ghulam Shabir** in their paper entitled “Relationship between Representation of Violence Against Women in TV Drama Serials and Reactivity of Viewers” aims to explore the role of viewer’s reactivity of entertainment and empathy in their perception of violence against women among viewers of Lahore, Pakistan. They also formulated to gain more clear insight which is the role of viewers’ gender in viewer’s reactivity and perception of violence against women. In this paper, researchers have used Quantitative method and Sample was consisted of 500 viewers of the thirty dramas serials of Geo, ARY Digital and Hum TV which presented violence against women. The participants were drawn through purposive and snowball sampling strategies. The sample has 233 male participants and 267 female participants. The findings indicated that viewer’s reactivity of both enjoyment and empathy correlated with perception of violence against women. Gender differences were found only for the one sub scale of perception (i.e., domination). The findings also highlighted that perception of violence against women was more inclined towards active violence being portrayed by the entertainment channels and chances to imitate the same behavior in society cannot be ruled out.

**Khan and Zaheen (2010)** in their paper entitled “*Portrayal of Women by Star Plus Soap Operas-A Feministic Perspective*” seeks to examine the portrayal of women (feministic perspective) by Star Plus soap operas. The researchers employed a content analysis approach to investigate how women are portrayed (from a feminist perspective) in Star Plus soap operas in order to uncover patterns of values and ideas related to women's empowerment. From January 1 to June 30, 2010, the researchers examined eight Star Plus soap operas that aired during prime time. As per the results come from content analysis of Star Plus soap operas suggest that the shows are primarily focused on spreading radical feminism ideology through the representation of female characters. This research also indicated that matriarchal society or women's control prevails in most soap operas, with female characters represented as forceful and decision-making authorities. Overall, the findings imply that Star Plus soaps are primarily concerned with portraying women in strong and decent roles.

**According to Bharti and Kumar (2016)**, is the truth that Media as a cultural industry, which constructs and sells out ideals of masculinity and femininity. However, the image of women depicted in the media, such as on television, in movies, in newspapers, and in magazines, does not reflect reality. According to the authors, positive representation of women in the media is required to retain their true dignity and status that will assist to decrease the disparity and gender inequalities. However, if media portrays male dominance and work as a means to disseminate this stereotyped culture, the entire situation will be stacked against women, preventing their advancement and empowerment.

#### ❖ STATEMENT OF PROBLEM-

We live in an era saturated by media. Our views of ourselves and gender are influenced by the films and television we watch, the radio programs we hear, and the magazines and newspapers we read. Gender portrayal in media has always remained a subject of investigation for media researchers. In Indian population where women are far less privileged than men, the way TV serials portray and represents women becomes an important topic of research. Several studies have been conducted on the socio-cultural and economic impact of TV serials on women and their perception towards them but no specific study has been conducted to examine the content of contemporary TV serials and the roles

of women portrayed in those serials. The researcher used this opportunity to investigate the content of the portrayal of domestic violence against women in contemporary soap operas and investigate the stereotype role of women as well.

#### ❖ OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find out the portrayal of domestic violence against women characters in contemporary TV serials
- To know the portrayal of gender stereotyped role in contemporary TV serials
- To examine the portrayal of working women as negative role in contemporary TV serials

#### ❖ RESEARCH METHODOLOGY-

##### • Content Analysis-

Content analysis or textual analysis is a research method used to analyze and interpret the characteristics of various forms of communication, such as text, images, or audio which involves systematically analyzing the content of these materials, identifying patterns, themes, and other relevant features, and drawing inferences or conclusions based on the findings. According to Berelson (1952:489), “Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Aahuja, 2001. p-273). I used this method to quantitatively and qualitatively to examine the content of two soap operas from Star Plus. I used content analysis as a technique in this work to help translate serial images into content categories that can be tabulated and studied.

##### • Sample: Selection of Soap Operas-

The quantitatively and qualitatively content analysis is based on two well-known serials namely Anupamaa and Shaadi Mubarak that aired on star plus which is renowned Indian TV channel. I have selected the first 100 episodes of both the above-mentioned serials for doing quantitative as well as qualitative content analysis. The time period of these 100 episodes for taking the Anupamaa serial start from 13 July 2020 to 5 November 2020, and the Shaadi Mubarak serial from 24 August 2020 to 17 December. In this work, I have research only the content which shown in above mentioned episodes

##### • Unit of Analysis-

The unit of study for the content analysis will be all female characters featured in the two TV shows described above. In Anupamaa serial from Star Plus, total female characters are ten up-to 100 episodes namely Anupamaa, Kavya Gandhi, Pakhi Shah, Leela Shah, Dolly Shah, Devika, Jhilmil, Rakhi Dave, Kinjal Dave, and Nandini Lyer. From the Shaadi Mubarak serial, total female characters are 12 namely Preeti Jindal, Rati Jindal, Kusum Kothari, Juhi Kothari, Aastha Kothari, Priyanka Kothari, Kajal Kothari, Chanda Rathore, Sneha Tibrewal, Kushala Tibrewal, Nandini Tibrewal, and Sheena Shah.

##### • Content Category-

The following content categories have been created with the objective of this study in consideration:

- The Presenting domestic violence directly or indirectly against women characters
- The Portrayal of Stereotyped gender roles in contemporary TV serials
- The Portrayal of working women as negative characters

## ❖ RESULT AND DISCUSSION-

This research study aims to explore the domestic violence against women in contemporary TV serials namely the Anupamaa and the Shaadi Mubarak. In this relation, total female characters of selected TV serials being telecast during Prime Time (7pm to 9pm), 2020 were analysed. After watching the first 100 episodes of both the serials, the studies have discussed it in the table and graphs quantitatively and also qualitatively.

### **Objective -1: To examine the Portrayal of domestic Violence against Women Characters in these serials:-**

The content of presenting violence which is verbally or non-verbally against women characters is an important phenomenon of serials which gradually increase day by day in contemporary TV serials. This content category is constructed to know how many/number of women experienced violence in contemporary TV serials.

**Table:1 Distribution of Portrayal of domestic Violence Against Women Characters in the selected contemporary TV serials:**

Serials name	Violence directly or indirectly against women characters in contemporary serials					
	No of females experienced Domestic violence		No of female not experienced Domestic violence		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Anupamaa	4	40%	6	60%	10	100
Shaadi Mubarak	6	50%	6	50%	12	100

(Source: TV Serials)

Table:1 illustrates that the amount of domestic violence in contemporary TV serials has been increasing day by day, whether mentally or physically. Data shows that 40% of the women faces domestic violence in the Anupamaa serial in which Anupamaa (lead character),Kavya, Jhilmil and Kinjal Dave face abuse from their husbands and in-laws, whereas in the Shaadi Mubarak show, out of the total population fifty percent women experience violence in the form of verbal abusing like- Preeti Jindal experience domestic abuse from her son Tarun Jindal, Priyanka Kothari faces physical and mental violence from her boyfriend Tarun Jindal and Sheena shah from her Boss in office, Nandini Tibrewal from her husband and so on . As a result of the observations of serials, it can be concluded that domestic violence towards female characters is became the continue and significant content in contemporary TV serials.

### **Objective 2: The Portrayal of Stereotyped Gender Role in contemporary TV serials-**

Women are frequently shown in television serials as vicious, impractical, and neglecting characters that are not portrayed in a positive light throughout the decade. This content catagories created to know the stereotyped gender role still present in the contemporary TV serials namely- Anupamaa, and Shaadi Mubarak

**Table:2 Distribution of the portrayal of stereotyped gender role in selected TV serials:-**



Serials name	Stereotyped gender role					
	Assertive		Submissive		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Anupamaa	2	20%	8	80%	10	100
Shaadi Mubarak	3	25%	9	75%	12	100

(Source: TV Serials)

Table :2 shows that in the Anupamaa serial, 80 percent of the entire female characters are submissive, while 20 percent are assertive, and in the Shadi Mubarak serial, 75 percent of the ladies are submissive and 25% percent are assertive. However, it appears that the content of stereotyped gender role is continuing in contemporary serials.

- **Objective 3: The Portrayal of Negative Characters is mostly Working Women-**

The portrayal of negative characters as working women is common content in mostly serials throughout the last two decade. For example, in the famous ‘K’ series of Ekta Kapoor, we remember the role of “kumolika” in Kasauti Zindagi Ki, and role of Ramola Sikand in Kahin Kisi Roz and Mandira from KSBKBT and many more. This content category is created to see what change takes place in contemporary TV serials.

**Table:3 Distribution of portrayal of negative characters is mostly working women in selected contemporary TV serials**

Serials Name	Negative characters are mostly working women					
	Female characters		Male characters		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Anupamaa	2	100	0	0	2	100
Shaadi Mubarak	2	100	0	0	2	100

(Source: TV Serials)

The data in this table clearly reveals that there are 4 negative characters as working women in selected contemporary serials whereas no single male portrays in a negative role. As a result of the research, it is apparent that women in serials play the majority of negative characters. The change we see in contemporary serials is the numbers of negative characters are increased as working women.

- ❖ **Qualitative Content Analysis of Selected Serials-**

For a better understanding of women's representation in contemporary TV series, qualitative content analysis was also conducted for the same episode as quantitative content analysis

- **The Presenting domestic Violence Against Women Characters-**

While TV serials are generally considered of as vehicles for entertainment, they now spend the majority of their time focusing on violent content. In soaps, there is more verbal aggression, such as

threats and humiliation using vulgar language. Contemporary TV serials continue to promote and support this type of content, both directly and indirectly. For example, in the Anupamaa television series, Anupamaa's husband Vanraj was constantly insulting and torturing her in front of their children and in-laws from the introduction of this serial. Similarly, in the Shaadi Mubarak serial, Tarun always humiliated and mistreated his mother in front of his wife. However, the findings suggest that contemporary TV serials chosen for content analysis clearly indicate stronger negative content than positive one, such as smoking, drinking, kidnaps, rapes, extramarital affairs, violence, and other anti-social aspects are depicted far more frequently than religious approaches such as pooja, prayers, and so on. These anti-social characteristics appear on a daily basis or every other episode. As a fact, this type of content is depicted in every serial, but in a different way, which advocates violence in real life and desensitises us to it, as well as a future generation who will believe that such personal freedoms and violence are acceptable in marriage and personal relationships.

- **The Portrayal of Stereotyped Gender Role in selected TV serials-**

Gender stereotypes were reinforced by the roles given to female characters in the serials made. Girls and women should be beautiful, obedient, compassionate, cultured, recognize the significance of family relationships, soft spoken, and homely, among other qualities. Women who conform to traditional norms are admired by all, whereas those who "fight against the patriarchy" are bold, vocal, or desire to change conventional social customs are constantly chastised and endure numerous issues throughout their lives. The women in these soap operas provide the message to the viewers that woman's prime focus should be her house and children. And also, for girls, their husband's house is more essential than their own. It is their primary residence, and despite all difficulties, they should not abandon it. A girl's primary identity can be traced back to her marital status. This type of gender stereotype can also be seen in recent selected serials, such as Anupamaa, where her mother constantly socialises her by stating that your husband is like your god, and his home is everything for you, whether they are good or bad, after marriage you have to live with them for the rest of your life. Serials with this type of content promote gender stereotyped which negatively socialise viewers. From the first episode of Anupamaa, she was presented as a meek housewife and a dutiful mother and her husband constantly humiliated and insulted her, saying just one thing: your job is to cook for us. Apart from that, Anupamaa respects her husband and regards him as a god. Similar things happen in other serials as well. The content of TV serials depicts the various roles of female characters, with women primarily depicted as housewives instead than decorative characters, with little emphasis placed on her achievements or ability to make independent decisions in a working role.

- **The Portrayal of Negative Characters is mostly working Women-**

Only female characters were depicted in a bad light in the serials studied, as evidenced by a look at the characters of the soap operas. In these serials, women were portrayed as villains whose major goal was to deceive, scheme, and manipulate people. Kavya and Rakhi Dave from Anupamaa, Rati Jindal and Nandini from Shadi Mubarak, all played negative characters. Women who are clever, trendy, modern, and aggressive are not of good character, according to these serials. Even working women are not accorded the same level of respect and affection as homely and subservient women. As a result, the image of a genuine woman, or a common woman in general, who is not a protagonist in a drama but a social being, deteriorates.

❖ **CONCLUSION** - As every coin has two sides, the same way, TV serials can foster gender biases and lead to empowerment of women as well. We know that there are many popular TV serials who came up to challenge the content of domestic violence like – Pratigya in Star Plus, Doli Aarmano

ki in Zee TV and Saubhagyavati Bhava in life ok and more recently Anupamaa and the Shaadi Mubarak serials from Star Plus. However it observed that, after some episodes makers and content writers of these serials have forget their original concept/objective of making these serials and promote the same twist and repeated content such as - extra-marital affairs, domestic violence/abuse, Saas-bahu conflict for gaining much TRP. It was also discovered that the content writer of these serials only present customs, traditions, respect for God, love and affection between family members during the celebration of the festivals and marriage functions, and that the usual family arguments and drama continue during the rest of the days. Women are mostly represented doing home chores such as laundering, cooking, house cleaning, being sex objects to satisfy men, as victims who really need men to protect themselves, and so on in everything from print media, novels, television programmes, movies, and computer games. This creates a common perception of women as being intended to make men happy, to be completely reliant on them, and to perform domestic tasks like a servant. The findings suggested that contemporary TV serials defaming the image of working women by showing them always as negative character such as Kavya Gandhi and Rakhi Dave in Anupamaa, and Rati Jindal and Nandini Tibrewal in Shaadi Mubarak serial.

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