



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

GENDER, CULTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS: A STUDY ON THE RISING POPULARITY OF TRANSLATED SOAP OPERAS IN MALAYALAM

CHRISTINA MARY GEORGY

M A English Language and Literature, Institute of English, University of Kerala,
Trivandrum, Kerala, India.



ABSTRACT

Indian Soap Operas are noted for their success in attracting the audience, especially the women, with their new and unique story lines. Though in India patriarchal families dominate the society, the role of women is considered vital with issues related to the preservation of culture and carrying the values to the next generations. In the process of attracting more female audience, contemporary Hindi soaps are presenting the values differently from reality. There is huge fan following for such soap operas even in the southern states like Kerala. As a result, most of the Northern soap operas are making their entry in to the Malayalam market, with the aid of dubbing. The fight between the dubbed and the regional soap operas highlights the massive popularity of the dubbed versions that create certain identifiable influences upon the contemporary Malayalam daily soaps. Hence, it is important to study the way the content is portrayed in these soaps, particularly in India where socio-cultural values immensely influence the lives of people. The paper examines the various aspects behind the rising popularity and impact of these translated soaps on Malayalee culture with special reference to gender,culture and relationships.

Key words:gender, culture, relationships, society, woman,

INTRODUCTION

Culture is art elevated to a set of beliefs, attitudes, values and ideals that are characteristic of a particular society or population. The process of understanding the culture of people includes the understanding of the society as well. Indian Culture, often labeled as an amalgamation of several cultures, spans across the Indian subcontinent and has been influenced by a history that is several millennia old. Change is an inevitable aspect in any dynamic society. It is integral to its progress and development. India, with its diverse culture, has evidently manifested this change over the centuries. Change in social mindset results in change in culture which is a social domain that emphasizes

the practices, discourses and material expressions, which, over time, express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of life held in common.

The media, in its various forms, functions as one of the major strategies through which cultural communication is achieved and social images built up, exerting tremendous impact upon society by playing a pivotal role in shaping the culture and lifestyle of the masses. The visual media, primarily the television, affects the socio cultural, political and even the spiritual stand of people in general. Soap operas have become part and parcel of the lives of viewers all over the world. A soap opera or soap, is a serial drama on television or radio that examines the

lives of many characters, usually focusing on emotional relationships to the point of melodrama. The term 'soap opera' originated from such dramas that were typically sponsored by soap manufacturers in the past including Colgate-Palmolive and Lever Brothers.

The history of soap operas can be traced back to the 1800s when novels such as Dickens appeared in newspapers in serialized formats. Originally directed at women, soap operas functioned as a vehicle for advertising. The term 'soap' was gained from its association with the advertising of soap products. A crucial element that defines soap opera is the open ended nature of the narrative, with stories spanning several episodes. The defining feature that makes a television program a soap opera, according to Albert Moran, is that it is a "form of television that works with a continuous open narrative. Each episode ends with a promise that the storyline is to be continued in another episode". The first televised Soap Opera was 'Peyton Place' which ran from 1964 to 69 and eventually appeared on British TV. Despite the success of soap operas in America, Britain did not take them seriously at all. But later, slowly the craze for soap operas developed not only in the UK, but even in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and all over the world.

GENDER, CULTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The saga of success of soap operas in India started with *Hum Log*, a story about a middle-class family and their acquaintances, which began airing on Doordarshan in the 1980. With almost all serials dominated by women, most of them are adjudged as 'Saas-Bahu' dramas with an ideal female protagonist, a 'vamp' or antagonist, a lowly husband and a big business empire. Now a days the leading Malayalam Television channels air translated Hindi Soap operas during the prime time slots. This novel trend has resulted in the immense popularity of these translated Hindi Soap operas among the 'Malayalee' (Kerala household) audience all over the world and has brought about certain obvious influences in the cultural value systems in Kerala.

The popular dubbed shows in Malayalam include the following: "Balikavadhu", "Madhubala",

"Premam"(aired on Surya TV)
"AkkareanenteMaanasam",
"MounamSammadham", 'Priyamanasam' (aired on Asianet Plus) "Sitayanam" , "Vezhambal" , "AyushmanBhava" (aired on Asianet), "Karnan" (aired on MazhavilManorama), "Adalat", "Pranayavarnangal"(aired on Kairali TV). These include wide variety of genres including the mythology ("Mahabharatham", "Kailasanadhan"), family drama ("Valsalyam", "HridayathilSookshikam"),romance ("Pranayavarnangal", "Premam") and even crime thrillers ("Adalat") and the supernatural("Naagakanyaka","Kavacham").Some shows like "Naagin" and "MounamSammadham" have completed several seasons as well.The youth and adolescents are considered to be the most ardent viewers ofthese dubbed serials. It had a significant appeal among the middle aged too. These shows are liked by most of the viewers for its presentation and content, in relation to cultural differences when compared to other prominent Malayalam daily soaps.

Traditional Malayalam serials are purely family based dramas that are psychological traps where the audience is emotionally as well as sentimentally bound. They usually portray one or more woman protagonists, with certain set notions, who take the plot forward. Neither do they associate much importance to the male characters nor initiate a male oriented subject in Malayalam soaps. Whereas, in these dubbed versions, we often see an equally important hero, like the case with the male protagonist in "MounamSammadham",who makes his star entry in the very first scene that portrays him as an extremely rich man who gets down from his private helicopter. Spotted in black suit and glasses he sets a lasting impression in the minds of the viewers, an avatar that is pretty much new to the regional soap audience.

Man woman relationships are explicitly portrayed, quite different from the set notions of the regional soaps which are strictly restricted to the traditional social norms and customs. Intense romantic scenes, enhanced with appealing Bollywood background scores, are allotted more time for the sake of seeking attention. Certain

notable instances include the depiction of the concepts of premarital dating, living together, break ups and contract marriage portrayed in "Premam" and "HridhayathilSookshikam". The inclusion of witty situations adds to the uniqueness of these shows. It is the novelty in the concept as well as execution that grabs the attention of people towards the dubbed versions of Hindi serials. Through subtle dialogues and screenplay, the reality in relationships is staged without much prejudice, breaking all the set notions of Malayalam serials which are popular for its usual themes like:

- a) Conflict between mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law;
- b) The quest for the illegitimate child;
- c) Extra marital-relationships; and many more.

Breaking of family relations has become an inevitable aspect of Malayalam serials that often weaves a psychological trap where the viewers are emotionally as well as sentimentally bound. Family relationships like mother in law, daughter in law, husband and wife and respect towards elders in family and affections among other family members are portrayed positively in dubbed versions like "Priyamasam" that depicts sibling relationships and family love.

Traditionally, most of the commercial serials in Indian television used to project women in an unrealistic, unworthy and garish role with majority of them projecting stereotypical, Indian family settings. But the last decade had witnessed a gradual change in the characterization of women in Indian television. In Malayalam soaps, heroines still have certain set notions; if the woman is portrayed as bold she becomes the villain who breaks the traditions. Rarely do we find male antagonists in our regional soaps. Most of the translated soap operas presents sharp contradictions to the set notions of the melodramatic regional sagas. As per the general trend in Malayalam serials, all family members are socialized to accept the authority of those ranked above them. Daughters of a family command the formal respect of their brother's wives, and the mother of a household is in charge of her daughter in law. When the wife moves in with her in-laws, she

is often expected to sever the ties with her own family and is offered the least authority. A sharp contrast to such a patriarchal notion is portrayed through the vibrant heroines who goes all around the place starting ventures, enjoying utmost freedom and support from her joint family. Rarely had the Malayali audience seen such strong, vibrant female characters like the heroines in in their regional soaps. It has to be noted that these dubbed versions has to some extent influenced the Malayalee audience through their manner of execution of ideas so much so that we get to see more of adaptations from the Hindi Soap Operas which presents the concept of strong woman. Certain influences can also be spotted in the regional serials like "Pranayam", "Chandanamazha" and "Parasparam"

The translated soaps present a very different cultural background especially when it comes to traditional rituals. Owing to India's rich cultural diversity, wedding traditions differ slightly according to the regional boundaries. The north Indian wedding involves a lot of fun, frolic, celebrations, rituals and holy ceremonies that are totally dissimilar from those practiced in the southern states like Kerala. The North Indian weddings are more colourful and vibrant. They also create indelible imprints on the mind of viewers in terms of ornaments and clothing. Exquisite dressing style preferred in the show had received much accolade. The designer salwars and lehengas that were seen during the marriage functions and other special occasions were checked out by many, especially the youth. Heavy jewellery, both trendy and traditional are displayed which appear attractive to the audience. It is also observed that the content writers portray about customs, traditions, religion, love and affection between family members, creating significant influences in the cultural value systems rooted in the Kerala society. Certain North Indian festivals like Holi and Rakshabhandan are being celebrated among the youth, especially in campuses. Though the major influence comes from movies, it can be considered that these translated serials too have played a significant role.

CONCLUSION

This paper brings into light the great extent to which the translated soap operas have reached the Kerala household. These shows proved to be a great setback for the regular regional sagas and transformed the image of Malayalam television industry by giving a contemporary twist to romance. The background score, the intense romantic scenes, stunning chemistry between the lead pair and the caressing Bollywood melodies as background scores acted as the triple entities that made the show a visual treat. They result in a very high Television Rating Point (TRP), often making them the most popular show ever aired on Malayalam channels. They often extend beyond their professed time slots, resulting in one hour shows and sequels. Thus, owing to their explicit portrayal of man woman relationship through their, intense romantic sequences, portrayal of strong women and the exhibition of a wide variety of culture, these translated soaps have achieved immense popularity within a short time span.

References

- Carol, Henderson, "Culture and Custom of India". Wordpress, 10 February 2002.Web. 10 February 2017.
- Gauntlett, David. *Media Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. London: Taylor, 2008. Print.
- Geraghty, Christine. *Women and Soap Opera: A Women's Space*. Delhi: Oxford, 1999. Print.
- Hays, Jeffrey. "Family and gender Roles in India".Reuters.5 November 2013.Web.17 February 2017.
- Munshi, Shoma." Prime Time Soap Opera on Indian Television". New Delhi: Routledge India, 2009. Print.