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The Portrayal of Woman in the Popular Translated Soap Operas in Malayalam : A Study on
'Is Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon?'

Abstract:

Soap operas are cultural artifacts created by specific cultures, which reflect those cultures and in turn affect them. Daily soaps are the most trending and culturally affecting tool among the mass media instruments that impart multifarious socio cultural and religious impacts upon the viewers. They are capable of prohibiting the rigidity of caste systems, dowry system, child marriage, female infanticide and other prominent evils in the society thus creating national integration and marital harmony. Noted for their success in attracting the audience, the role of women in soap operas is considered vital with issues related to the preservation of culture and carrying the values to the next generations. With the aid of dubbing, most of the contemporary Northern soap operas that have made their entry in to the Malayalam market, present the values differently from reality. The paper examines the various aspects behind the rising popularity and impact of the translated version of the popular Hindi soap opera, "*Is Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon?*" on Malayalee culture with special reference to the portrayal of woman.

Key words: culture, gender, media, patriarchy, society, woman

INTRODUCTION

“Women’s literature is in a sense the literature of the colonized”, wrote Christiane Rochefort, the noted Feminist critic, referring to the marginalization of the woman’s voice and the exploitation of her body by the mainstream cultural orthodoxy. This statement aptly defines the role of the woman in television in general. Television is an arena of interior colonization. Consequently it has brought in a received visual awareness as well as an aesthetics conceived in male terms. The woman does occupy an enviably prominent position on the small screen in this publicity-hungry age. However, when it comes to the power equation, her image is controlled and manipulated by the implicit, but dominant patriarchal frames.

India, in its ancient culture, has to its credit the prominent concept of ‘Ardhanareeshwara’. As the name itself signifies, Lord Shiva and his better half Parvathy are considered as equal. Lord Shiva, both the creator and destroyer, is also called Umaparameswaran. India, a country owing to such an adorable culture has yet to change its age old attitude towards women. The picture of woman was first sketched by man. It was he who had chiseled the concepts of beauty and sensuality in her consciousness. Similarly, an Indian woman’s life revolves around the traditional norms laid by patriarchy

The various art forms mirror the diverse aspects of the society. Daily soaps being one of the most popular art forms, often portray the characters of a particular culture. Hence the representation of women in soaps differs within regional boundaries, revealing more facets of the character’s personality. For instance, the comparatively stronger woman of the present generation is often explicitly mirrored in the Hindi soap operas, whereas most of the heroines of Malayalam still hold the old concept of good woman fight.

Many studies have been conducted nationally and internationally to examine the impact of soap operas on different categories and age groups of audience. However, limited studies have been conducted on the regional daily soaps of Kerala. Reviews of selected studies are listed below.

W. Karaj, in his study of “Wonder Woman: The Portrayal of Woman in Television Soap Operas”, explores the depiction of women in the soap operas aired during the latter half of 2000. The researcher tries to analyze the portrayal of single motherhood, family support and socioeconomic status. Robert Jensen’s (2008) study on “Cable Television and Woman’s Status in India” explores that the introduction of cable television is directly associated with the significant decrease in the reported acceptability of domestic violence towards woman, as well as increase in woman’s autonomy.

This study believes that it is immensely worthwhile to study the portrayal of woman and its impact of contemporary Hindi soaps dubbed into Malayalam as they are immensely popular and has prime time slots on the biggest TV channels in Kerala. It therefore takes up for study one such Hindi serial.

DISCUSSION

Much of the prevalent stereotypes of woman arise out of the confusion with regard to terminology and usage – the term “sex” being used in place of “gender”. Notions of woman as the “other”, exist even among the ‘educated’ and the intellectual. It was these notions that were reinforced by the earlier soaps in Indian television. The women portrayed in these sitcoms were often stereotypes, whether it is the role of wife, sister, daughter or mother. Their dialogues affirmed and underscored the subsidiary position of women in the socio-cultural and political aspects of the society. This message was efficiently presented through

emotion-filled dialogue-packages, highly appealing to the female television-addicts who then tend to conform to and dread to deviate from, the conventional role assigned to them.

The first mega-serial made in Malayalam, “Sthree”, broke all records and celebrated the subordinate position of women in the Malayali psyche. It was assumed that a woman has to appear, act, or talk in a particular way, if she were to be socially acceptable. The heroine became the epitome of the ‘male ideal’ Malayali woman – soft-spoken, submissive, obedient, non-complaining, chaste, and devoted. She was supposed to be decently and modestly dressed as opposed to the tomboyish or and garish clothes worn by the anti-heroine in the serial.

According to the general trend in the traditional Malayalam soap operas, if the women characters are good, they suffer all along in silence, and perhaps will be rewarded in the end; or else, their reward is the happiness of their loved ones; if they are mean they are normally rewarded with some punishment in the end. Often no woman is consulted with regard to her opinion in the matter, for she is not expected to have an identity, This seems to be in contrast to the projected image of the modern woman in translated soaps, who displays a certain inherent vitality and independence quite alien to the Kerala woman. An example in point would be Khushi Kumari Gupta, the female lead played by Sanaya Irani Sengal , in the Malayalam dubbed version of “*Is Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon?*”

Love stories are eternal, and this one,” *Is Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon?*”, had literally blown hearts away, and still continues to do so in different languages all over the world. Arnav and Khushi were the uncrowned king and queen of Star plus and all TV shows. Their steaming chemistry, the love-hate relationship, Khushi’s filmy dialogues and the small town girl’s sensibilities were a perennial source of entertainment. The love saga of Arnav and Khushi had been loved by millions around the world. The show became so popular that it was

dubbed in different languages and is still aired in different countries. *Mounam Sammadham*, the Malayalam dubbed version of the show has created immense fan frenzy in Kerala society.

This show, unlike other tear-inducing narratives, is an inspiring story that depicts the success of Khushi, providing positive vibes to the viewers. The plot illustrates how a woman can succeed despite all the unfavorable circumstances in one's life. The very first episode of the show draws our attention towards the beautiful heroine, Khushi, a simple young girl from Lucknow. Her immense will power and enormous potential enables her to fight against all odds despite her poor financial background. In spite of being the adopted daughter, the vivacious girl embodies the most sought 'Angel in the house' image by taking up the responsibilities of her family. Her fondness of making jilebes when she is absolutely stressed out, as well as her manner of speaking to the Almighty for help enforces a unique charm upon her character. Hence, through the enchanting, beautiful, cultured, intelligent and proud heroine, the show presents a strong contrast to the set notions of the 'ideal' Malayalam serial heroine who is often soft-spoken, submissive and devoted.

Heroines have certain set notions in the Kerala serial culture. Suffering has become the part and parcel of their lives. A totally different outlook on woman is portrayed through Khushi, the iron lady who has the courage for dealing with villainy with a sure and firm hand. She is presented as a very confident and independent girl who informs her father about the job offer and manages to get his permission to work. She tries her level best to survive at the AR company despite Arnav's disgusting teasing. Her appointment as Lavanya's new assistant puts Khushi in a new world where she feels completely out of place. Withstanding the immense fun made of her for her Indian attire, Khushi sticks on to her ideals. One such instance can be spotted in episode 12 where Arnav asks Khushi to take part in a fashion shoot when the original model storms out. Not only did she repudiate it but also advocates her strong belief in the Indian tradition and culture, by wearing a red traditional saree. Another

notable instance is when she confidently utters “. Not even the great Arnav Singh Raizaada can achieve anything without the blessings of Almighty...” for which he scornfully replies, “...You do have immense faith in your Almighty, don't you? Let me see, how you are saved...” (E 3).

Decently and modestly dressed as opposed to the tomboyish or and garish clothes worn by the second heroine, Lavanya Kashyap, Khushi wins over the heart of the Raizaadas. Khushi, being a traditional girl with values, makes her entry into the Raizaada house as a trainer to Arnav's fiancé, Lavanya Kashyap on the importance of tradition and its immense significance, in order to mould her into a perfect daughter-in-law (E 61). In fact, Lavanya Kashyap is presented as if a foil to Khushi.. She often shows the guts to challenge Arnav. She decides to take revenge on Arnav for the constant humiliation and insult (E 73). She bothers and embarrasses him in front of his clients (E 80), insults him when he blocks her way and shouts at her. Her immense patience is displayed when Arnav blackmails her and forcefully bullies her to enter into a contract marriage with him. Her love for Payal made her endure all the misfortunes and humiliation.

Throughout the serial, a very determined heroine is projected whose astonishing courage makes her take “Never give up!” resolutions. She is even reluctant to change her surname post marriage. In one episode we see her introduce herself as Khushi Kumari Gupta Singh Raizaada instead of Mrs. Arnav Singh Raizaada. During the initial stages, she runs a sweet shop (E 52) which made her gain a better living. Later when her aunt falls sick, the responsible niece decides to assist her and successfully manages to receive tenders for her chicken work sarees (E 8). Even post-marriage, she wanted to stand on her own feet and hence started a parcel service named KKGSR parcel service that supplied lunch to the employees at the AR office. She also takes tuition for primary school kids. All her ardent efforts culminate in the fruitful accomplishment of the Mrs. India title too.

Khushi was renowned for her simple but colourful appearance. Often spotted in attractive anarkalies, Khushi created much fanfare among the youth. Her long plaited beautiful hair added on to her charm. She turned out to be a trend setter who brought the sensuality back to the sari with her modern twist of wearing bright colored designer sarees with back hooked blouses. Moreover, her style of wearing dramatic eyeliner and nose ring also became very popular with women of the younger generations. Thus the translated soaps and their explicit portrayal of strong women has created certain obvious influences among the Kerala serial culture, promoting the straight serial makers to experiment with novel trends.

CONCLUSION

Rarely had the Malayali audience seen such strong, vibrant female characters 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 prime time serial like “Pranayam”, an official remake of “Yeh Hai Mohabatein“ (a popular show which is being aired on Star Plus, based on custody by Manju Kapur), “Chandanamazha”(an official remake of “Saath Nibhana Sadhiya”) and “Parasparam”(an official remake of “Diya Aur Bathi Hum” a popular show aired on Star Plus).

The study unfolds the fact that the couple whom their fans lovingly call them “Arshi”, created a rage among youth. Through their intensely poetic dialogues like “..Whenever you come near me, the rhythm of your heartbeat rhymes with mine, creating the magical unison of hearts...” (E 209) and “ ...whenever I’m away from you, a deep desire would arise in me to be with you...”(E 210), they ignited fire on the screens. The way he looked at her and her

soft, shy but intense response, away, every scene screamed perfection. The background score, "Rabba Ve" which served as the soul of the show was well received by audience. 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. The show resulted in a very high Television Rating Point (TRP), making it the most popular show ever aired on regional channels. Hence, the show 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.

Acknowledgement:

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