

A study on the impact of soap operas among Irula Tribal women in Bokkapuram, Gudular, Nilgiri District, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract— Irulas are a unique ethnic community living in the Nilgiri district mostly confined to the forest. This provided the backdrop for the study to ascertain the influence of soap operas in their lives. Several anthropological and ethnographic studies have advocated that TV is the main source of medium through which families get knowledge about life outside their settlement. A survey of 120 Irula women was conducted in the bokkapuram area in the Nilgiris. The demographics under seven heads were analysed on their influence of the soaps. They spend a surprisingly significant amount of time with television watching soaps. The effect is yet to be fully documented. This study concludes that, these tribal women are not aware of the impact of soaps in their lives that act as a psychological trap.

Index Terms— Irula Tribes, Impact, Nilgiri District, Soap Operas, Television viewing, Tribal Women,

1 INTRODUCTION

SOAP opera was initially a concept formed by the radio broadcasters that were supported by soap manufacturers [1]. These soap operas or 'soaps' as they are mentioned to in general were broadcasted by radio stations in the day time periods where maximum of the listeners were homemakers. The soaps then gently transformed their concepts and stories to garb the desires of their listeners who were pre-dominantly women. The idea was calmly assimilated by television soaps and the identical approach was practiced by the television broadcasters.

It is the exceptionally favored form of TV programming in the world. An immense ratio of viewers watches and appreciates soaps. It prevails the national viewers' ratings than another program that are broadcast. The acceptance and demand of soaps arrives to repose on its comfy description and its fixation with everyday matters [2].

Serials especially in India seems to have reached a saturation point where the theme seems to revolve around family and issues related to it. The only difference lies in the structure of the story. To understand how the television serials have evolved over time, it is necessary to know the history of television serials of the past and compare it with the present scenario.

Soap-opera is widespread due to its endurance, consistency and acquaintance. The acceptance of soaps seems to rest on its comfy nature and its obsession with everyday anxieties" [3]. It has been categorized as a 'ritual pleasure' which offers consolation in its intimacy and durability, its expectable familiarity being the key strength which tugs us in. Also due to the soap being exclusively grounded in one place topographical and depicting the lives of similar characters in every episode, the

spectator can be guaranteed of acquaintance and endurance. This acquaintance, nevertheless does not root it to become mind-numbing as, "the occurrence of well recognized characters leads to value acquaintance and expectedness in the viewers who bliss variation and distraction [4].

The central characteristics that describe soaps are "prominence on family life, personal affair, sexual farce, sentimental and moral clashes; some attention of contemporary concerns and so on. Maximum amount of soaps trail the lives of a set of characters that live or endeavor in a certain habitation, or emphasis on a big extended family. The plots follow the routine events and peculiar affairs of those characters. In several morning soaps in Tamil TV Network, the characters are repeatedly gorgeous, subtle, dazzling and prosperous. It tends to emphasis on more daily characters and circumstances, and is repeatedly set in working class atmospheres. Most of the soaps delve into social pragmatist plots such as family cacophony, marriage failure or financial difficulties [5].

National Readership Studies Council (2006) pointed out that, 112 million households in India own a television, with 61 percentages of those households having cable or satellite service. The survey finds that satellite or cable network reached 60 percentage in Tamil Nadu, even though the average earnings is under the World Bank poverty line of two dollars per person per day [6].

Several anthropological and ethnographic studies have advocated that TV is the main source of medium through which families get knowledge about life outside their settlement [7],[8] (Fernandes, 2000; Scrase, 2002). Jithin & Balasubramanian [9] in their study mentioned that programmes related to tribals have a great impact. Studies pointed out that the media has an enormous impact on people's healthy behavior [10], cultural consequences among viewers [11]), approaches and practice [12],[13], sexual behavior, pre-marital relationships and extra marital affair [14]. Anthropological accounts submit that the development of Television in rural regions has had enormous accouterments on an extensive range of routine life-

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style activities, including latrine construction and fan usage [15],[16].

2. IRULAS

According to 2011 census, tribal population in India was 104.5 million. Tribal population in Tamil Nadu was around 72 million. Studies pointed out that tribal areas encompass around 15 percent of the geographical area [17]. There are thirty six tribal communities in Tamil Nadu. Out of these 14 numerically dominant groups constitute 96.33 percent of the whole tribal inhabitants of Tamil Nadu. Only Malaiali and Irular have inhabitants size of beyond one lakh.

Tribes of Tamil Nadu are concentrated mainly in Nilgiri district. Irulas are a modest tribal people found in Nilgiris district and distributed in few settlements. Government of India recognized these Irula tribes as s Scheduled Tribe [18]. Among many scheduled tribes of India, the Irulas are second largest numbering of tribes in Tamil Nadu who are the largest Tamil speaking tribe in Tamil Nadu. Irulas, occupying the forest of the tri-junction of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala follow some peculiar customs [17]. They are sparingly and communally backward and habitually live in forest and hilly environments inaccessible from other communities and these Irula tribe was a clandestine tribe forever and a day [19] and majority of these tribes are below poverty line [20].

Irulas are trivial group of aboriginal forest-dwelling societies who have a livelihood for generations by catching and desquamating snakes. Their expertise in hunting and catching deadly snakes is locally legendary. They are hired by the neighboring agricultural class to catch the rodents extinguishing the crops. They suffer a lot from economic and social backwardness. These people are ignorant and illiterate. Socialization is commonly endogamous and they find more with individuals belonging to their community rather than to those existing in the nearby settlement. These tribes remain to face fiscal scarcity and lack of access to essential services.

They have their individual mode of living and diverse socio-cultural and eco-geographical backgrounds. They perform singing and dancing in full moon night of autumn season. Irulas dance around the dead body before it is buried ceremonially. Many Irulas of the river-delta farming areas of Tamil Nadu earn their living by catching snakes and rats in the rice fields. Uniqueness of Irula tribal culture is departing in a nimble manner due to various reasons.

3. BOKKAPURAM

Bokkapuram is a beautiful small settlement adjacent to Masinagudi near Gudular, Nilgiri district. Recently forest department notified some of their agricultural lands as forest land and it creates the fear among these tribals that they may be dislodge from their land. The traditional monetary action of these Irula tribes involved snake and rat catching, hunting and agriculture. The Irula tribal women are also involved in agriculture in most of the time and they are decisive in fiscal and other family accomplishments.



Image 1: Bokkapuram Irula Tribal Settlement

Irulas are one among the most backward tribes in India who are facing numerous challenges [21]. A huge amount of deviations have happened in their rituals. They never trailed any customs for marriage, puberty and so on except for marginal death rites. Inadequacy of education, blind belief and poor connection with the society appears to be the causes for the unchanging faith and practices [22]. These tribes were able to convert between tradition and modernism.

These Irula tribes have their own exclusive settlement. In this Bokkapuram settlement there are 70 families and most of them live in thatch house and some in concrete house. Most of the households do have free TV set which was provided by DMK party and Videocon D2H. Irulas at Bokkapuram have been financially and communally marginalized. In general they were not acknowledged by the society. This research tries to understand the impact of soap operas among Irula Tribal women

4. METHODOLOGY

A total of 120 samples were collected from the irula tribal women in Bokkapuram, Gudular, Nilgiri District, Tamil Nadu. The researcher used the descriptive survey method using a structured questionnaire to collect the necessary data for this study. The process of data collection was spread over a period of two months starting from January 2017. The demographic data collected about the irula tribes were across age, status pertaining to employment, educational and marriage, annual income, saving, and time spent in watching Soap Operas.

5. ANALYSIS

The women in Bokkapuram settlement are major viewers of prominent Tamil and Kannada serials. From small girls to women aged 67 watching serials daily. It is a major tool for their time pass. Most of the women in this settlement are unemployed and spent their time doing household works, collecting firewood from forest, water from the nearby river and so on. Others lead to work in nearby resorts as daily wage workers for cleaning and cooking. Around 90% of them depend on Television for entertainment.

From the collected data, the researchers identified that 84% of Irula women in the Bokkapuram settlement watch soap operas daily in which 67% prefer watching soaps over other programs. Ahmed [23] pointed out in his study that soaps

generate a world subjugated by interpersonal connection, where characters confer family related issues, romance and so on. This is the reason for the 66% of the Irula women strongly mentioned that TV serials are the best program to watch. These women watch soaps between 6pm to 10pm, the time they used to spend this time with their family earlier, but now they do their house hold work along with watching soaps.

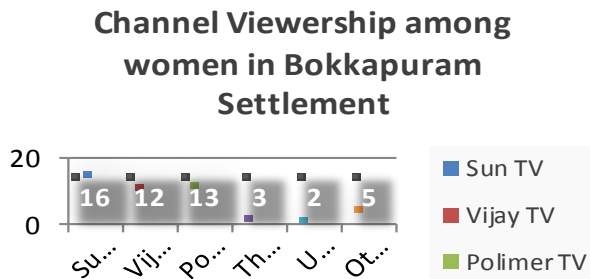


Figure - 2

Figure 2 shows the viewership of prominent channels among the women audience in Bokkapuram settlement. Sun TV tops the list with 31% viewership followed by Polimer TV. Statewise Sun TV's flagship serials are "Deivamagal" and "Nandhini" which tops in TRP ratings. Both the serials handle Family subjects. The plot of Deivamagal shows the family conflicts between the In-laws and Nandhini is kind of a horror serial which shows how the dead mother takes care of her child in the family and takes revenge of the family members who killed her so that their daughters could marry her husband to get the wealth. It is directed by the renowned film director Sundar C. These top listed serials handle family and women related issues and they are very much successful in getting more women and family audience. The respondents from Bokkapuram settlement also confirmed the involvement of women related issues for their liking of serials.

The women in this settlement also watch serials "Deivamagal" and "Nandhini". They do like the story and the actors in these serials. Vaani bhojan who played the character of "Satya" in Deivamagal is a prominent serial actress in the Tamil Television Serials. She got a wide fan base among Tamil audience. But when it comes to the lead characters in a serial, 85% women in this settlement stated that lead or main character doesn't make them watch the serials. Even though they like the story of their favorite soaps, it is interesting to notice that only 14% believes everything that shown on screen.

Most of the TV commercials focus on women oriented products and accessories during the break in between serials. Since target audiences of most serials are women, they try to incorporate certain elements which can attract more women audience such as ornaments and costumes. Women are always portrayed as a glamorous doll whose physical beauty is her only asset [24]. Costumes and Ornaments are weakness factors of most women. It is clear since 81% women serial audience do pay attention to the costumes and ornaments of the characters in the serials while watching.

The soap operas are more likely to affect the women than

men because women are found to be watching them in more numbers than men [24]. On an average, a woman from this settlement would spent minimum of 3 hours for watching Television programs especially soaps. They watch at least 4 serials per day which slowly started affecting their tradition and culture. Irulas are good at catching snakes and rats. But it is no more an expertise among Irulas in Bokkapuram settlement. The images portrayed in TV serials have a definite impact on the thought patterns of society. Women on most television entertainment programs are projected as non-thinking, sacrificing and suffering beings.

Researchers [25] mentioned that star plus was a reason of divorces in Pakistan, because females ignore their duties as a result domestic crisis developed which end in divorce. But in this tribal settlement the scenario is different. For a majority (88%) of serial audience, these are just time pass for them and help to relax their mind. Most of them (90%) do the house hold chores while watching the serials or do not do anything during the time at all. Around 66% do not allow any other members of the family to switch the channel while they are watching the serials and 60% get irritated when they are interrupted during watching Serials.

When a question was asked them whether they were aware of their surroundings when they watched the serials, a total of 76% agreed that they were not aware of the happening around them when they got engaged in watching serials. Many men usually complained that women were not aware of their surroundings when watching a serial. They also pointed out that during the prime time if we returned home for food the wife or women spared no time to serve them food. They kept themselves busy in watching the soaps and its progress. They are not aware about that these soaps showing not only unnecessary drama but also set psychological traps. In most of the soaps portraying lot of unbelievable things and most of the leading characters are playing negative role which indirectly start affecting the tribal women and their family communication.

Realizing that women are specific social entity having their own information and communication needs, various television channels have allocated a separate regular space for women in their transmission schedules. They frequently broadcast different programs that are targeted towards women of different socio economic classes [26]. Indian serials mostly portray women related issues and family problems. The sacrificing role of women is highlighted in every soap [24]. This is done so that they will get more women audience. About 95% of these women agreed that most serials portraying domestic violence against the women in household. It is shocking to know that 23% of them agreed that they are watching the serials because of that reason. Most of them (80%) like to discuss the serial stories with their neighbors as well.

Television channels are not only a mere medium of visual communication but are also a huge platform for advertising various lifestyle goods and products. They are very powerful in influencing the values, life style and culture of people [27]. None of the women feel that the soaps are spoiling their tribal

culture or tradition in any manner. When asked in detail about the traditional practices in their community to women within the age group of 17- 25, most of them are unaware of it or simply have no interest to follow it anymore. They do not even know to sing songs which used to be their traditional practice during birth, death, weddings and so on. Most of them have not followed the traditional medicinal practices even those were being a part of inheritance from the older generation. They now choose to depend on modern medicines.

Most popular Indian serials take place in urban settings. Their emancipated female characters are well-educated, work outside the home, control their own money, and have fewer children than rural women. But the situation in this tribal settlement is very much different than that of urban life. The way a woman is treated in a tribal community is very much different. The best example is the lack of dowry system in this community. Even the divorce rate in this community is very low compared to the modern society which is the base for most serials in the current scenario.

Serials do not empower women in playing their rightful role in the society as real life is quite different from what it is shown in Indian Serials [24]. So 80% of these women do not actually relate to the stories or certain characters in the serials to their life. None of the main characters in the serials ever became an inspiration or motivation for them to overcome their personal problems or to behave like them since most problems showing in the soaps are actually not the kind of problems they are facing in day to day life. Especially in the younger generation a small portion of 10% do try to behave like their favorite characters in the serials.

Even though serials cannot make their Bokkapuram audience to behave like their characters, they actually succeeded in getting them emotionally attached to the characters in their serials. The serials nowadays tend to include more emotionally touching scenes than humor content. The audience will easily fall for these emotional traps and end up being a frequent viewer of the serials.

From 84% of Irula women who watch serials daily, only 66% think TV serials are the best. Most of them (71%) would watch serials when it was recommended by friends or family members and would ask them for the updates if they miss any episodes. They do also recommend serials to their friends and family friends also.

Since most serials handle these family issues, they usually have "family conflict" elements such as fights between Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law. The television serials and certain movies all these years created an image that Mothers-in-law and Daughters-in-law always fight and they are the problem makers in a family and this is still the base plot for most family oriented serials nowadays. The respondents also made it clear that most serials they watch will have the same characters such as Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law. The Sun TV serial Nandhini also revolves around this topic. Even after all these years, Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law is still most influencing ingredient for a successful family serial.

TABLE 1
MULTIPLE COMPARISONS

LSD

Dependent Variable	(I) age of respondents in years	(J) age of the respondents in years	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
low medium and high affection of viewing soap opera	55	15	-4.00000*	1.37740	.004	-6.7284	1.2716
		25	-5.03226*	.91961	.000	-6.8538	3.2107
		35	-6.50000*	1.13735	.000	-8.7529	4.2471
		45	-4.40000*	1.08297	.000	-6.5452	2.2548
influence by the lead character	15	35	-3.50000*	1.22466	.005	-5.9258	1.0742
	25	15	2.25806*	1.06248	.036	.1535	4.3626
		55	4.25806*	.83688	.000	2.6004	5.9158
	35	55	5.50000*	1.03503	.000	3.4498	7.5502
associating with the lead characters	55	45	-4.00000*	.98554	.000	-5.9522	2.0478
	15	35	-2.50000*	.85595	.004	-4.1955	-.8045
		55	2.50000*	.87609	.005	.7646	4.2354
	25	35	-1.45161*	.55429	.010	-2.5496	-.3537
		45	2.54839*	.50833	.000	1.5415	3.5553
		55	3.54839*	.58491	.000	2.3898	4.7070
	35	45	4.00000*	.66301	.000	2.6867	5.3133
		55	5.00000*	.72341	.000	3.5671	6.4329

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The impact the serial viewing created on the respondents, the influence of the lead character on their life and identifying and associating of the lead characters into their personality was cross tabulated with the demographics and an F test was run to elicit the precise effect of each demographic variables on the dependent variables. The following are the results of the test.

The demographics were cross tabulated with the impact of serial viewing, associating with the personality of the lead character and identifying and associating of the lead characters were calculated by combining the statements pertaining to each characteristic and creating a class interval data of two

and three levels.

In the initial analysis, it was found that marital status of the respondents, their educational attainment and the annual savings potential had no effect on the serial watching. However, all other demographic variables like age and so on had influence on the serial watching, the influence of the lead character on their life and identifying and associating of the lead characters into their personality and its impact. A detailed analysis of the individual demographic variable and its impact on the dependent factor like serial watching, the influence of the lead character on their life and identifying and associating of the lead characters into their personality is give below.

The opinion that the soaps spoil the tribal culture and it has a bad influence on the viewers is significantly different among the teens, middle age and the elder generation. The significance is revealed in the post hoc comparison of the anova results and the most significant opinion was between young adult and the elders. The fact that they forget what is happening around while watching soaps and keenly watching the fashion and designs that appear in the soaps is significantly different among respondents of different age group. The most significant perception was found between young adult and elders. Drawing inspiration from the characters and getting motivated by their action are differently perceived by people in the different age groups. A significant anova allowed us to ascertain the most significant difference which was found among young adult and respondents over 55 years of age.

Respondents in different age groups had different impact from the serials. The F test shows that the difference between youth, middle aged and the old aged respondents were highly significant which is supported in the post hoc comparison also. The results are shown in the mean plot [fig 3].

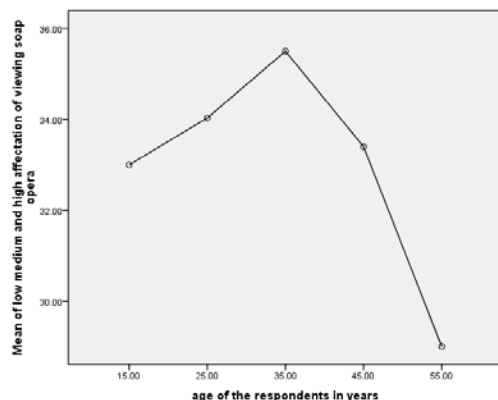


Figure - 3

The employment status of the respondents also had significant influence on the soap opera watching, drawing inspirations from the characters in the soaps and identifying with the stylistics in the serial. The coolies and farmers had a significantly different impact from serial watching from that of the unemployed tribesmen. This is reflected in the F test with significance. Income was also a significant indicator of the impact of the serials. Respondents with no income and those earning 3000 – 5000 per month had a significant impact of the serials on them. It is also reflected in the post hoc test run after obtaining a significant F value in the anova test.

A feeling of retaliation while watching soaps and irritability when interrupted are perceived differently by respondents with different monthly income. People with no income and a monthly income of less than 5000 differ significantly in their opinion about irritation, relaxation and time pass. The believability factor seems to be differently imbedded in people with different incomes. The post hoc comparison after a significant F test reveals with respondents with no income with people drawing above 5000 per month. The same is the case with related the stories with their life situations.

6. CONCLUSION

With a viewership of 84%, Serials are most prominent piece of entertainment for the Bokkapuram community. They enjoy watching soap operas and it had become a part of their day to day life and it preoccupied with the tribal women every day concerns. These tribal women start enjoying the portrayal of several things that are happening regularly. The collected data shows that these Irula tribes had a tradition of doing certain activities which were part of their livelihood were somehow lost. The young generations here are not much bothered about following their tradition and want to live a modern life that they watch on TV. But the same time portrayal of luxurious spending in the soaps is not directly motivating these Irula women to follow them in reality.

This research reveals that the lead characters portrayed in these soaps leaves no explicit impact on their day to day life. They watch these soaps mainly for entertainment even TV has distorted our social and cultural settings. Existence of television in every home plays an important role in carrying about revolution among viewers which cannot be unnoticed or overlooked. What is shown in TV especially in soaps that make it such latent object for shepherding in change? Loss of knowledge about their inherited knowledge and lifestyle are clear indications of the impact of television especially soaps. For most of these women, it is their only way of connection to the urban life style. This study reveals that the soaps are not only entertaining the mass audience but also affecting their behavior, attitude and minds in different ways. These tribal women are not aware of this impact of unnecessary drama but also set psychological traps.

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