



## **WOMEN IN TV SERIALS- A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF POPULAR TAMIL TV SERIALS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Television has been considered by many scholars as powerful medium in India today. In spite of the emergence of new media, Television makes impact on the viewers due to the visual nature of it.

Because of its very inherent nature, television not only reflects the values of our society but also influence them (Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner & Warth, 1989). The various messages that are disseminated in and through Television contribute to the change in the perception of reality of the viewers. As Chandra & Bhatt (1999:56) pointed out Television affects the attitudes and behavior patterns of individuals, who have access to it, through its varied projections.

Television as powerful medium influences the views of women to greater extent. According to Chandra & Bhatt (1999:56), Television as one of the socializing agents should carry greater responsibility in its developmental role for women's equality. Television medium can be considered as the right direction to change the future for women in our country (Shukla, 2015).

The images portrayed in Television serials have been the study area of many scholars in and around the world. It was because these visuals and images of women as shown in Television serials have made great impact on women viewers. It was because of this reason the author of this paper analyzed four popular Tamil TV serials and wanted to see how women were portrayed in these serials.

The author focused on three major factors which describe the status of women in general. They were economic status, social status and emotional status. The analysis of the portrayal of women in Tamil TV serials were based on these three factors.

### **Need of the Study**

The study is needed to find out the kind of images of women being portrayed in Tamil TV serials. It would also help the researchers and feminist media critics to know whether women are shown in a constructive manner or stereotypically.

### **Objective of the Study**

The study aims at finding out the different aspects of constructive roles that women are portrayed in, namely; Economic Status, Social Status and Crisis Management Capacity of Women.

### **Research Methodology**

The Study has incorporated the Content Analysis method. The author did a content analysis of four popular serials from the two most popular Tamil TV channels, Sun TV and Vijay TV, who were offering the most number of Tamil TV serials in 2014-2015. Hence, the researcher selected two serials from each of these channels - “Nadaswaram” and “Deivamahala” from Sun TV network and “SaravananMeenakshi” and “AandalAlagar” from Vijay TV which were both prime time serials. A random Coding sheet was prepared and used for this purpose.

The researcher watched 50 episodes from each of these four popular serials, i.e.200 episodes. The following were the findings of the Content Analysis.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

It appears that the mass media has not fulfilled their duty as an effective instrument in the process of empowerment of women. Women are used to sell any product as soap, towel, and detergent (*Sharma, 2014*).

There is no doubt that the stereotypical portrayal of women and minorities in India could help to reinforce cultural stereotypes rather than stimulate new thinking about the roles in Society (*Kumar, 2005*).

On Television, which is a pervasive and powerful medium of communication in India, the portrayal of Indian women is superficial and is rarely linked with their real concerns. Women

have to consistently make adjustments at home, carry the entire burden of household chore, provides constant care as wives and mothers (*Sharda, 2014*).

Varma (2006) who writes in *The Hindu*, a daily newspaper, referred to a study of the portrayal of women characters in many popular Tamil serials, where he claims that women were negative stereotypes in most programs and warned that this trend could unleash sociological havoc in the long term. Desai (1996) remarked that women on television entertainment programs were projected as non-thinking, sacrificing, and suffering beings while educated and motivated women were seen as the scourge of the patriarchal order of the society.

As mentioned above many scholars were of the opinion that women were shown in Indian TV serials stereotypically. There were few studies revealed that women were portrayed in a constructive manner. These are different views on the portrayals of women in TV serials.

**Economic Status:** this variable referred to the factor whether women were shown as owning wealth or not.

Kishwar (2007) has stated that popular Indian TV serials portrayed an illusionary world where women in joint families were portrayed as leading rich lifestyles. Mahadevan (2010) analyzed K-serials among 20 working class and middle class families in the Indian capital Delhi and in Kollam, a small city in the South Indian state of Kerala.

**Social Status:** This variable referred to the factor whether the women were included in the decision making process of their families or not.

Rajan (2014), remarked that women were hardly seen in any decision making position in business or anywhere in the economic sector. In their study of 27 television programs, Krishnan & Dighe (1986), found that there was this constant reaffirmation of a woman's duties to the family as wife, mother and so on over her rights to resolve conflicts, etc.

But Tous-Rovirosa (2013) claimed that in TV serials of Spain, women were depicted as having decision making rights.

**Emotional Status:** this variable referred to the factor that whether women were shown as weak and helpless when it came to the crisis management capacity.

Tous-Rovirosa, (2013) in her study on 'The Representation of Women's Roles in Television Series in Spain- Analysis of the Basque and Catalan Cases', revealed that the personality traits of the female characters were being broken from the old stereotypes and the image of women now

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being portrayed was a good reflection of real life. The women were strong and independent; they took decisions; they undertook actions and were involved in different story lines, without necessarily being linked to their relationship with men.

GnanaBharathi (2011) did a study on the Portrayal of women in Tamil TV serials. Her study compared two popular serials of that time namely, 'Metti Oli' and 'Chitthi'. One of the important revelations of the study was that women were often portrayed as weak willed characters who 'cry very easily'.

As it was mentioned above, there were different opinions on the portrayal of women in TV serials.

## **THEORITICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Symbolic Annihilation Theory**

Feminist perspectives on the media examine the devaluation of women in the media.

They were interested in questions of representation and gender. They analysed structures of power that influence the devaluation of women in the media. They see the media as central to the discrimination against women.

Unequal portrayal and access to the media. There were few women employed in the media and very few in positions of power and influence. Women's issues were ignored in the media.

When they were included, they tended to be trivialised. Women were portrayed: In the private not the public sphere as sex objects. This resulted in what Gaye Tuchman referred to as the 'symbolic annihilation' of women in the media.

Symbolic annihilation is a term first used by George Gerbner in 1976 to describe the absence of representation, or underrepresentation, of some group of people in the media (often based on their race, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, etc.), understood in the social sciences to be a means of maintaining social inequality. This term is usually applied to media criticism in the fields of feminism and queer theory to describe the ways in which the media promotes stereotypes and denies specific identities. Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation." (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 182)

Gaye Tuchman (1978) divided the concept of symbolic annihilation into three aspects: omission, trivialisation and condemnation. This multifaceted approach to coverage not only vilifies communities of identity, but work to make members invisible through the explicit lack of representation in all forms of media ranging from film, song, books, news media and visual art.

In Gaye Tuchman’s writing, *The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media*, she suggests that television do not accurately depict women. Touchman used the term ‘Symbolically Annihilated’ to describe how women were extremely underrepresented in television in today’s society.

Since the 1970s, scholars of feminism have used the concept of annihilation to express the effects misrepresentation and/or absence of women and girls in mass media.

The author based the study on ‘Social Annihilation Theory’ and analyzed how women were portrayed in Tamil TV serials.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### Portrayal of Women in Tamil TV serials- A Content Analysis

#### Economic Status

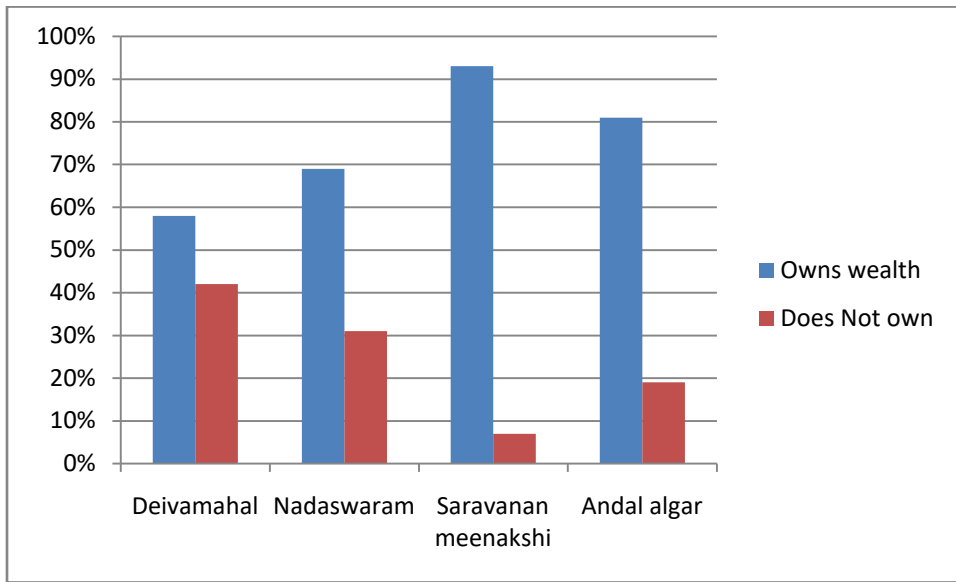
To find out the economic status of women as portrayed in Tamil TV serials the researcher used the variable ‘Owns wealth’.What was meant by “owning wealth” was that whether they had share in the family property, lived in sophisticated house, wore jewels, owned car and were able to spend money as they wanted.

Economic status	Serials			
	Deivamahala	Nadaswaram	Saravananm eenakshi	Andalalgar
Owns wealth	58%	69%	93%	81%
Does Not own	42%	31%	7%	19%

**Table1. Portrayal of Economic Status of Women in Tamil TV Serials**

According to the above table, 95% female characters of “SaravananMeenakshi”, 81% female characters of “AndalAlagar”, 69% female characters of “Nadaswaram” and 58% female characters of Deivamahal were shown as women owning wealth.

“Owning wealth” meant that they had a share in the family property, lived in sophisticated houses, wore lots of jewellery, owned atleast one car and were able to spend money as they wanted.



**Figure1. Portrayal of Economic Status of Women in Tamil TV Serials**

Kishwar (2007), has stated that popular Indian TV serials portray an illusionary world where women in joint families are portrayed as leading rich lifestyles. The results of the Content Analysis of the four selected Tamil TV serials looked similar to the observations. Though it looked positive Kishwar remarked that these kinds of portrayals were glimpses into an illusionary world.

Even the results of the analysis of K-serials by Mahadevan (2010), pointed out that women shown in larger Hindu family were depicted as leading affluent lifestyle and women of upper caste. Therefore, women in Tamil TV serials, as shown in various other Indian TV serials, were shown leading rich lifestyles and therefore fell into the “owning wealth” category. This has been taken as a sign of the emancipation of the economic status of women in Tamil TV serials.

## Social Status

To find out the social status of women as portrayed in Tamil TV serials the researcher used the variable ‘Having rights in decision making process of the family’. This variable referred to the fact whether they were included in the decision making process of their families or not.

Rights in decision making process	Serials			
	Deivamahala	Nadaswaram	Saravanan meenakshi	Andalalgar
Given	15%	19%	23%	32%
Not given	56%	1%	4%	5%
Not applicable	29%	80%	73%	63%

**Table2. Portrayal of Social Status of Women in Tamil TV Serials**

This variable was used to study whether the women were included in the decision making process of their families or not.

The extracts from the above table shows that 32% female characters of “AndalAlagar”, 23% female characters of “SaravananMeenakshi”, 19% female characters of “Nadaswaram” and 15% female characters of “Deivamahala” were shown as having rights in family decision making process.

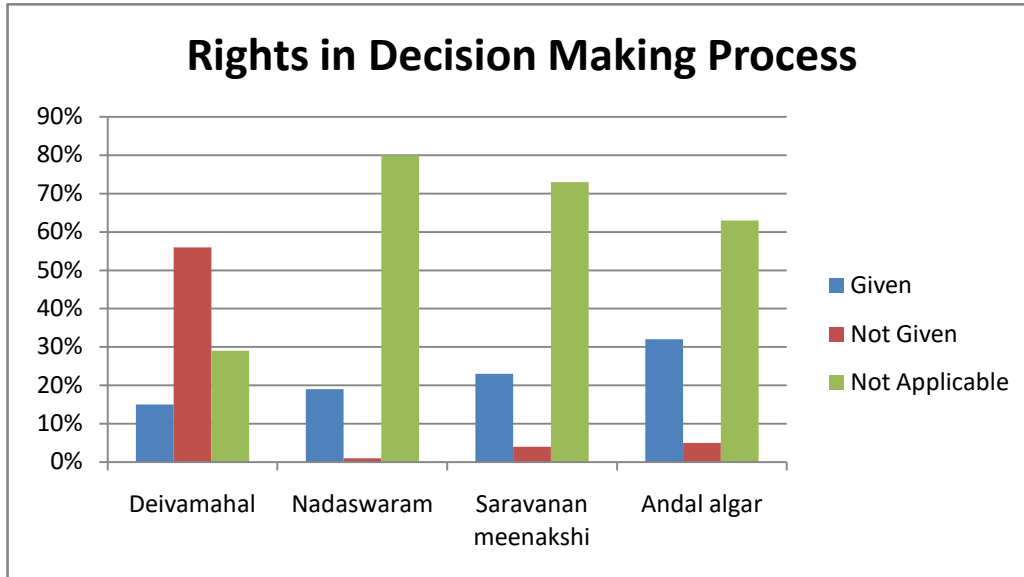
It was found that among 20% of total appearances of women in “Nadaswaram” which had incidents of decision making, 19% appearances showed women were given share in the decision making process of the family.

In the same way among 27% of total appearances of women in “SaravananMeenakshi” which had incidents of decision making, 23% appearances had women making decisions in their families.

In 37% total appearances of women in “AndalAlagar”, which had incidents of decision making, 32% appearances showed women were given share in decision making process of family.

Only in “Deivamahala” 56% female characters were shown as not being given a role in their family decision making process. In other serials there were very few portrayals as women not included in family decision making process.

Therefore, the study concluded that there were portrayals of women (32% in “AndalAlagar”, 23% in “SaravananMeenakshi”, 19% “Nadaswaram” and 15% in “Deivamahal” ) shown as having rights in the family decision making process.



**Figure2. Portrayal of Social Status of Women in Tamil TV Serials**

The results of the Content Analysis proved there was no gender discrimination as pointed out by Sharda (2014). Women were not shown as inferior to men but were treated on par with men as far as decision making rights in the family went.

This results go contrary to the remarks of Rajan (2014), who said women were hardly seen in any decision making process in Indian TV serials. It was also against the study by Krishnan & Dighe, (1986) who analyzed 27 Indian TV programs and remarked that women were denied of this right to participate in their family decision making process.

Women in these four Tamil TV serials, except in “Deivamahal”, were shown as persons having rights to resolve conflicts that arose in their families.

The results of the present ‘Content Analysis’ went along with the claim of Tous-Rovirosa (2013), who observed from the TV serials of Spain, that women were depicted as having decision making rights.



## Emotional Status

When the portrayals of the Emotional Status of women in the serials were analyzed it was referred to the fact that whether a particular character was “Weak” (crying, not able to face the struggles) or “Strong” (faces all problems, not crying, motivating others, with courage).

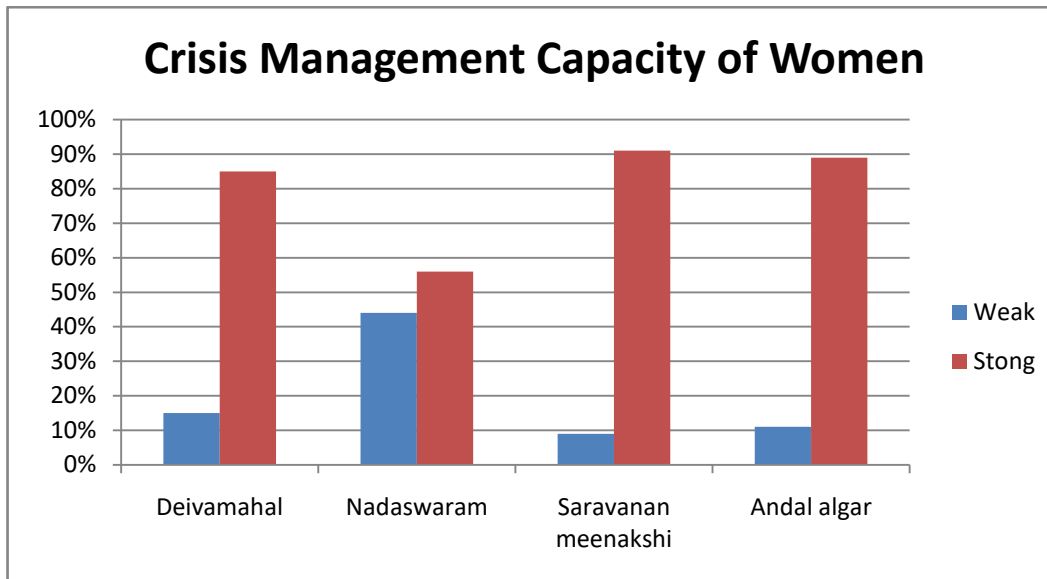
Crisis management	Serials			
	Deivamahala	Nadaswaram	Saravananm eenakshi	Andalalgar
Weak	15%	44%	9%	11%
Strong	85%	56%	91%	89%

**Table3. Portrayal of the Crisis Managing Capacity of Women in Tamil TV Serials**

When the portrayals of the crisis managing capacity of women in the serials were analyzed it was referred to the fact that whether a particular character was “Weak” (crying, not able to face the struggles) or “Strong” (faces all problems, not crying, motivating others, with courage).

The above table reveals that 91% female characters of “SaravananMeenakshi”, 89% female characters of “AndalAlagar”, 85% female characters of “Deivamahala” and 56% female characters of “Nadaswaram” were shown as facing crisis courageously. It was only in “Nadaswaram”, that 56% of female characters appeared ‘strong’; while the rest 44% characters appeared ‘weak’. This result was similar to the results of the study done by GnanaBharathi (2011).

Therefore, the researcher concluded that Tamil TV serials (91% in SaravananMeenakshi, 89% in AndalAlagar, 85% in Deivamahala and 56% in Nadaswaram) portrayed women as strong. It meant women were shown, in the chosen episodes of these four serials, as facing problems with courage.



**Figure4. Portrayal of the Crisis Managing Capacity of Women in Tamil TV Serials**

The present results of the ‘Content Analysis’ largely supported the study of Spanish TV serials done by Tous-Rovirosa (2013), where the women were shown as strong characters to a great extent.

## CONCLUSION

The present study results reveal that women in Tamil TV serials were shown in a constructive manner in all the three aspects of the portrayal of women.

First the analysis on the portrayal of the economic status of women revealed that women in Tamil TV serials, as shown in various other Indian TV serials, were shown leading rich lifestyles and therefore fell into the ‘owning wealth’ category. This has been taken as a sign of the emancipation of the economic status of women in Tamil TV serials. Though the aspect of realism is found missing women were shown with good economic status.

Secondly the analysis on the portrayal of the social status of women explored that women in Tamil TV serials were shown as ‘having rights in decision making process of family’. Women in these four Tamil TV serials, except in “Deivamahala”, were shown as persons having rights to resolve conflicts that arose in their families. This results find similarity with the results of analysis of Spain TV serials. This has been taken as a sign of the emancipation of the social status of women in Tamil TV serials.

Finally it was revealed from the analysis of the emotional status of women that Tamil TV serials portrayed strong women instead of always showing weak women as done earlier. This results go contrary to the study results of Gnanabharathi (2011). This has been taken as a sign of the emancipation of the emotional status of women in Tamil TV serials.

The study results go against the understanding of the theory of 'Social Annihilation' which stated women were underrepresented in TV. The present study proved that women in Tamil TV serials were shown in a constructive manner.

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