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## Representations of Women's Language in Telugu Soap Operas

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### **Abstract**

*Soap operas are popular means of communication on Television the language used in these soaps by the artists can influence the society to a greater extent particularly women audiences. Taking this point in to account the current study aims at identifying the language usage in Telugu soap operas and its influence on its viewers. The aim of this study was to investigate representations of women's language in Telugu soap operas. The study focused on the region based identification of language, usage of polite or indecent language by women role models in the selected soap operas and viewers perceptions on them. The data consisted of content analysis of female dialogues in randomly picked up episodes of the selected Telugu soap operas and a survey with the soap operas viewers was designed to obtain a general background regarding women's identification with soap operas and their language. The findings of this study make it clear that the usages of language in few episodes of these selected soap operas are highly objectionable and indecent. Few important relationships like wife and husband, daughter-in-law and Mother-in-law etc... were mostly portrayed disrespectfully through the usage of indecent language and bad postures. Viewers are highly critical about this portrayal and requested the soap opera makers to use proper and decent language which can increase the dignity of language of each region of both the Telugu speaking states.*

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**Keywords:** *Telugu Soap-operas, Women's language, Viewers perceptions, content examination, indecent language, homemakers.*

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### **Introduction**

The soap opera has a universal appeal as it constitutes the most popular type of television in the world (Allen, 1992; Brown, 1992), particularly daytime television (Babrow, 1987). Negative perceptions that are based on the nature of soap opera have led to its viewers being condemned, denigrated and stereotyped for their addiction (Griffiths, 1995).

The term 'soap opera' derives from the fact that these types of serials were sponsored by a soap manufacturer when they first started in the United States of America. While the word 'soap' in 'soap opera' alluded to the sponsorship by manufacturers of household cleaning products, the word 'opera' suggested an ironic incongruity between the domestic narrative concerns of the daytime serial and the most elevated of dramatic forms (Cantor and Pingree 1983).

'Soap operas' are no doubt popular because the expectations about the genre are based on personal experiences, and the individual nature of each soap opera is created through an established long-term familiarity; this is the main reason for its success. The target group of this genre is 'Women'. Media are very effective, powerful and influential in

disseminating new knowledge, useful for behavior change among women, thus influencing women's thinking and attitude as well. Hum Log in 1987, which reached an audience of 80 million, promoted smaller families and equal status for women. Humraahi focused on the rights of women to equal education and employment, to choose their own partners, and to determine whether and when to have children. The exposure of woman to media, portrayal of women in media, are some of the important dimensions to be analyzed to examine the role of media in shaping women's attitude. This paper is concerned with investigating the projection of women's language and the influence of media role models on women audiences. Since soap operas rely heavily on authentic representations of their characters in order to maintain the loyalty of a mainly female audience (Geraghty 1991:9), they provide an excellent medium for the current research concerns. Furthermore, as written dialogue in television shows needs to reflect authentic language use, the construction of these texts is inevitably a reflection of internalised perceptions and assumptions about female speech patterns (Biber & Burges 2000:23; Tannen & Lakoff 1994:139). The present study focused on the region based identification of language, usage of polite or indecent language by women role models in the selected soap operas and viewers perceptions on them for this purpose this paper analyses female language usage in Telugu Soap opera

### **GROWTH OF REGIONAL LANGUAGE SOAP'S**

Indian television serials are telecasted in different languages throughout the country depending upon the region. The television serials of India deal with different messages and themes for the society, or at times they are merely entertainment. Comedy, family relationships, social issues, mythology, children's shows, patriotism etc... are the few popular themes around which the Indian television soaps revolve. Hindi serials are however the most popular ones on Indian Television. With the coming up of a large number of channels through cable network, the exposure and expanse of television serials in India also increased. One of the most prominent names in the field of Indian Television is Ekta Kapoor who is regarded as the queen of Indian television serials, launching her 'K' series with *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kasauti Zindagi Ki*, *Kkusum*, *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki* and *Kasam Se*. Other than the mentioned ones, there are many more popular Indian television serials like *Saat Phere*, *Maayka*, *Balika Vadhu*, *Mata Ki Chowki*, *Pratigya*, *Chand Chupa Badal Mein*, *Tere Liye*, *Maryada*, *Ye Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* etc. There are several English serials which have also gained and still gaining immense applause from the Indian audience, owing to their global backdrop. After the regional network started on Indian television, several channels were launched that catered to the needs of local audience. Kannada serials reached out to its audience through channels like DD Chandana, Zee Kannada, ETV Kannada, Asianet Suvarna, Udaya and Kasthuri TV. A number of Tamil serials are aired in the regional channels like Star Vijay, Sun TV, Jaya TV, Kalaignar, Raj TV and Makkal. These Tamil serials are sometimes translated in Hindi and aired in national channels.

The Telugu serials enjoy a wide group of transmitters. The Saptagiri channel airs popular serials, namely *Ruthuragalu*, *Manishi* and *Hima bindu*. *Nishabdham* is a popular Telugu serial aired on ZEE Telugu. The Malayalam serials can also be seen on channels like Surya, Kairali, Asianet, Jeevan, Jaihind and Amrita. Indian Television is a vast diaspora of entertainment, movies, news and music. However, Indian television serials have earned a great success over the others for various concerning factors including show, subject, casts, continuing episodes, time slot and so on. The Marathi serials are particularly aired on ZEE Marathi, Saam Marathi and Star Pravah channels. Similarly Gujarati serials have their own set of channels to reach out to their local audiences. The Indian television serials have gained

fame in every form and thus created a massive competitive market on the basis of TRPs. The Urdu serials like Mehfil-e-Mushaira, Aao Urdu Seekhein, Guftgu, Hamare Masail, Zaban Pe No Lagaam and Hum Honge Kamyab are some of the popularly viewed Indian soaps. Punjabi serials have achieved great status in the northern parts of India. Soaps in India like Shree, Naaginn, Teen Bahuraniyaan and Rakhi are popular with the Punjabi audience. Oriya serials mainly revolve around the religious connotations of the state and also its tradition, through channels like DD Oriya, O TV and ETV Oriya. The Assamese serials are well-known for depicting their colourful social life, across DD Northeast channel. Indian television serials are among the most engaging slots on Indian television. The serials are telecasted after a full-fledged survey of its targeted audiences and their preferences. For instance, the family dramas are mainly aired during the afternoons and in the evenings, while the comedy shows are telecasted at teatime. Thus, the Indian television serials hold a special place in the hearts of dedicated television lovers in India.

### **Review of Literature**

There are very few studies conducted on analyzing the portrayal of language and usage in serials particularly in a country like India where values are given most importance and in the both the Telugu states which is selected for this study.

Representation and identification are two key concepts in feminist research into cinema and television consumption, which can be extended into the wider framework of Cultural Studies.

**GH Brody (1980)** in an observational study on “**Effects of Television viewing on family interactions**” observed that most research on the effects of television viewing has addressed itself to the problem of assessing the relation of television to aggressive behavior in children and adolescents but has failed to address how television viewing influences socialization within the family. The present study was designed to assess how family interaction patterns are influenced by television viewing. Twenty-seven middle-class families were observed for 20 minutes in a familiar living room setting within a child and family centre. During half of this period a television program selected by the child in each family was shown. During the remaining time the families were free to interact with toys, magazines, and newspapers that were available in the living room. Half of the families viewed television first, while the order for the remaining families was reversed. Results revealed that children oriented toward their parents less, talked less, and were less active and that fathers oriented toward their children and spouses less, talked less and made fewer positive facial expressions during television-viewing than family play. Little behavioral difference, however, was found for mothers between the television-viewing and family play phases.

**Dr. Aaliya Ahemed (2012)** in her study on “**Construction of Contemporary women in Soap operas**” found that A popular entertainment genre like soap opera can contribute to the process of changes at two levels. The first level is that of generating a thinking role of women. The meanings derived from the knowledge of soaps challenge the dominant discourses about the role of women in the family, on the silencing of women’s voice, on the social expectations of women’s behavior and about the power of women’s relationship with other members of society. Aspects like the pleasure of close-knit family, clothing styles, elaborate wedding spectacles, continue to have a meaning in the life of women. These resistive readings are enveloped in subtle contradictions and are not obvious to a casual observer. The second level is that despite its public negative evaluation, women find time and space for these soaps in their lives. It provides for experiences, learning and pleasure for women in which feminine discourse can be spoken of and appreciated.

**Shoma Munshi's (2009)** *"Prime Time Soap Operas on Indian Television"* is the first of its kind to examine prime time soap operas on Indian television. It examines five prime time soaps, and argues that this particular genre of popular culture provides important resources for insights into contemporary social issues and practices. Focusing on the complex constructions of family, tradition, 'Indian-ness' and gender, the book also analyzes narrative structures of soaps in the context of their fractured and never-ending time frames and plot outlines. Meticulously researched and persuasively argued this study tracks how prime time soaps in India have made the small screen a big medium in reaching out to people.

The most influential theory on women's language was developed by **Robin Lakoff** in her book "Language and Woman's place" (1973). Using introspection only, Lakoff identifies several interrelated features of 'women's speech', among them super-politeness, avoidance of profane language and heightened indirectness. Lakoff argues that this language style both reflects and contributes to the oppressed role of women in a patriarchal world, as women are pressured into adopting the features which are deemed non-assertive and as a consequence, have to assume a demeaning position in society (Lakoff 2004:77-85). The overall effect of women's language, Lakoff claims, is that it "submerges a woman's personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly, on the one hand, and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject-matter and uncertainty about it" (Lakoff 1973: 48).

**Weather all (1996:61)** claims that "the language used in television provides widely available representations of language use in the real world." Furthermore, studies that have investigated linguistic sex roles on television have shown that men dominate women in a way that can also be found in real-life language use (Wober quoted in Weatherall 1996:61).

### **AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to investigate representations of women's language in Telugu soap operas. The study focused on the region based identification of language, usage of polite or indecent language by women role models in the selected soap operas and viewers perceptions on them.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To identify and analyze the content of various serials in relation to the representation of women's language telecast in different Telugu television channels
- To examine the portrayal of language culture in these serials.
- To find out perceptions of homemakers about the content and representation of language in these soap operas

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Most of the soap operas are for and about women, and the researcher wanted to discover why it gives pleasure to millions of women and to relate that insight to the practice of socio-cultural values in their daily life and the effects language used in these soap operas on its women viewers.

Soap's representation of women and values invites a serious challenge. And this naturally, needs a reexamination of these soap operas in relation to representation of Telugu

language in soap operas. Hence, it is proposed to conduct a research study encompassing some of the above issues. Accordingly a research study is formulated as follows “Representations of women's language in Telugu soap operas”

### RESEARCH APPROACH

The research questions make it imperative to adopt both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Based on the TRP's of the year 2010, this study analysed Content of four top rated serials Mogalirekullu (Gemini TV), Muddu Bidda (Zee TV), Chandramuki (E TV) and Anna Chellellu (Maa TV) qualitatively and quantitatively. Out of the four selected serials three serials Mogalirekullu, Muddu bidda and Chandramuki have completed more than 1500 episodes and Anna Chellellu serial completed 600 episodes. Out of 1500 episodes from the three serials 150 episodes were selected for analysis for both qualitative and quantitative way and 50 from Anna chellellu.

Apart from Content analysis this study also includes a survey conducted with a sample of 300 participants from three regions of both the Telugu sates. The survey was conducted in three regions (Costal Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telengana) with the sample size of 100 from each region during the months of June and July of 2013. The researcher spent one week in each district to gather the data. Two districts from each region one urban and one rural area have been purposively selected for the study. In depth Interviews with these soap operas directors were also conducted for achieving set objective.

### DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The following tools were used for data collection.

- a) Observation: Selected soaps have been observed for proper understanding of the content both qualitatively and quantitatively.
- b) Questionnaires: Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect the data related to the opinions of the soap opera makers of these selected serials
- c) In-depth Interviews: With the soap opera directors was conducted. Self-administered questionnaire was prepared to know the intentions of the directors over the usage of language in soap operas.

**Sample selected for the Content Analysis of Study of each serial: Table: 1**

S No	Serial Name	Channel Name	Episodes Completed More than..	Sample
1	<i>Mogalirekullu</i> (Petals of Screw pine tree flowers)	Gemini TV	1500	150
2	<i>Muddu Bidda</i> (Loving child)	Zee TV	1500	150
3	<i>Chandramuki</i>	E TV	1500	150
4	<i>Anna Chellellu</i> (Sister Brother)	Maa TV	0600	050
	Total	4 Channels	5,100	500

## Scope and limitations

Researcher used purposive sample for this study which invites the problem of external validity. So the results of this study cannot be generalized across the entire population of Telangana and AP. The study is an attempt to provide a broad way to explain the phenomenon, which was not deep enough. Due to limitation of resources, this study used a limited sample and was subjected only to homemakers.

## Data analysis and interpretation

**General Profile of the sample:** A vast majority of respondents (83%) are between the age group of 25 to 45 years. In the sample an overwhelming (93.7%) respondents watch fiction based programmes like daily serials regularly.

**Viewing pattern :** In all the areas of research there is a good viewership for soap operas. Most of the soap opera viewers are middle aged homemakers. Out of the four serials selected for the study, Mogalirekullu was liked by most of the viewers for its presentation and content in relation to social, cultural, economic values compared with other three soaps Chandramukii, Muddu Bidida and Anna Chellellu.

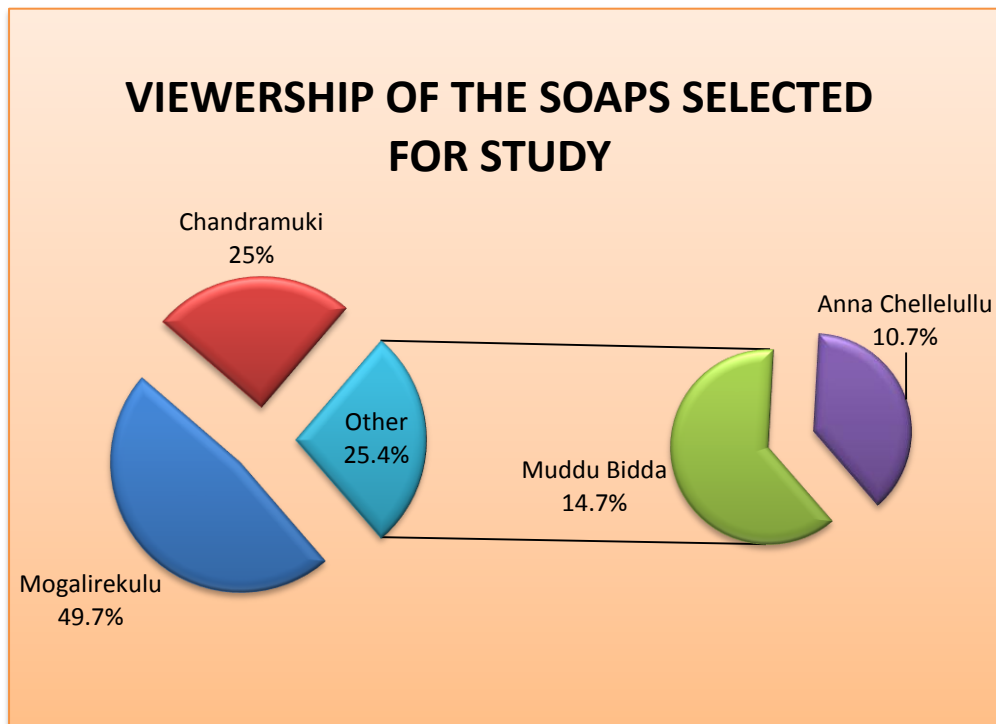
Homemakers prefer family oriented soaps than love stories but they complain that all the stories start with love angle and end with family fights.

Viewer's main purpose behind watching soap operas (93%) is time pass but there are few respondents who admitted their addiction.

**Telugu Soaps Selected for study:** Four Telugu serial have been selected by the researcher to do content analysis to know the viewer's perceptions about the portrayal of social, cultural and economic values in them. Out of these four serials three are top rated they are Mogalirekullu, Chandramuki, Muddu Bidida and one is below average serial Anna Chellellu selected from the four Telugu entertainment channels Gemini TV, MAA TV, E TV and Zee Telugu.

All the participants watch the four serials selected for the study. Among the sample most of the participants watch Mogalirekullu which stands in first position with 49.7% of viewership. Second highly viewed serial is Chandramuki from E TV with 25%; third and four positions were occupied by Muddu Bidida 14.7% and Anna Chellulu 10.7%. (Please see below)





**Portrayal of socio-cultural values:** Social values and family relationships are portrayed mostly negative in Telugu soaps. Family relationships like mother in law and daughter in law, husband and wife and respect towards elders in family and other family members, honesty between husband and wife are mostly portrayed in negative way to attract the attention of the audience towards the soap and highlighting the negatives mostly bad content for long time to retain viewer's attention for the sack of TRP's.

**Table 1: Soap Operas are portraying Social , cultural values**

Viewers			Portrayal of values in Soap opera			Total
			Positive	Negative	Neutral	
OCC	Home maker	Response	43	80	103	226
		Per cent	19.0	35.4	45.6	100
	Working from home	Response	15	34	25	74
		Per cent	20.3	45.9	33.8	100
Total		Response	58	114	128	300
		Per cent	19.3	38.0	42.7	100

Women working from home are self-employed with occupations like stitching, selling homemade food products and running chit funds etc...

The data in Table 1 reveals that 42.7% of the respondents feel that values in soaps are shown in both the ways positively and even negatively. But a thirty eight percentage (38%) of respondent very clearly mentioned that the values are mostly negative in nature. Very less 19.3% percentage felt they are shown positively.

### Husband and Wife relationship

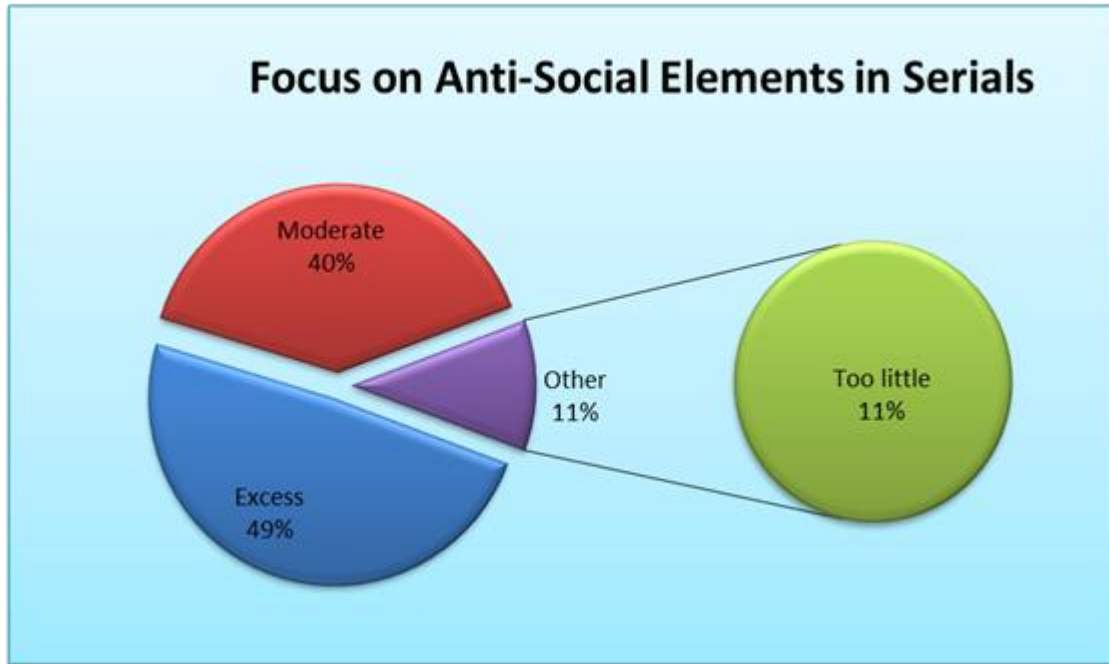
In reality the society is men dominated but soaps create women's world. Focused group sample categorized two ways of portrayal of this relationship in soaps one is women dominating husband and the other is husband harassing good wife this is commonly seen in all soaps. "This relationship is long living but in serials it is short and full of hatred, throughout the story they don't live together after all twist and turns they meet in the last episode ...what we see all through the serial is only fights of wife and husband" told Swathi housewife from Tirupathi. Survey data supported these statements with 58% of audience accepting that divorce is the solution given by soaps for marital problems and 42% of them felt these issues are solved through discussions.



### Increasing negative content in soaps

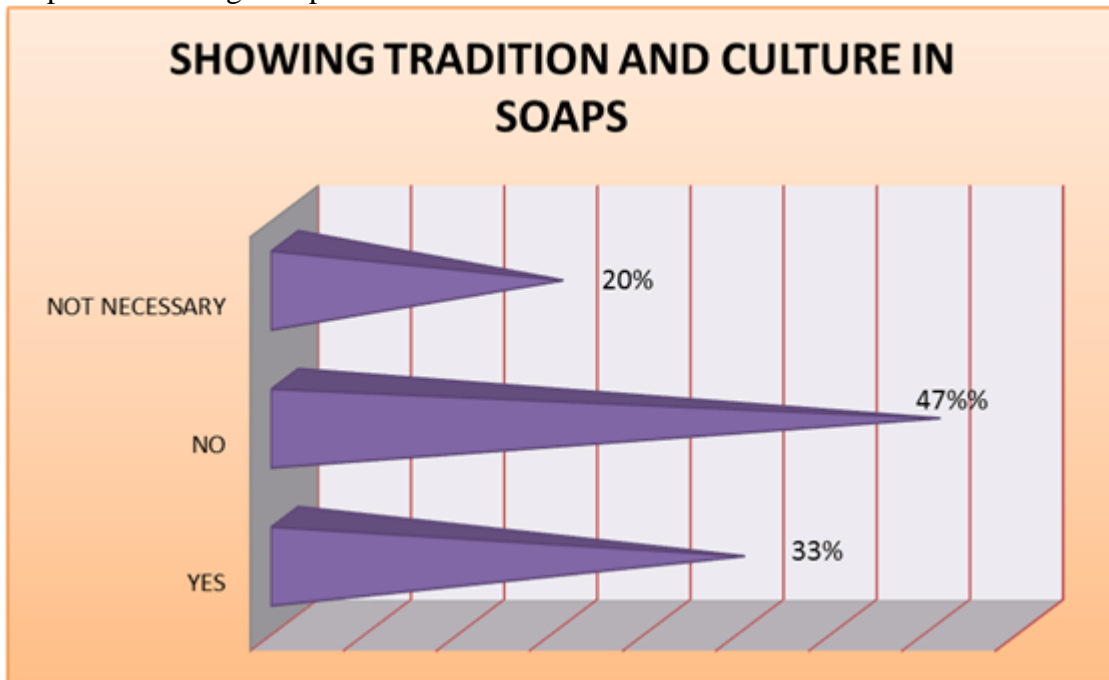
Both survey and focused group discussions clearly stated that negative content like Smoking, drinking, kidnaps, rapes and violence and other anti-social elements are shown quit often than religious methods like pooja, prayers etc...these anti-social elements are seen daily (49%) of the respondents agree to this and 40% of them said it is moderate.11% respondents stood neutral. (Please see below)





#### Portrayal of Tradition and culture in soaps

Indian culture often labeled as an amalgamation of several cultures. The culture of India refers to the way of life of the people of India. Three regions of Andhra Pradesh have different dialects, religions, dance, music, food and customs which differ from place to place within the state. Soap operas viewers in focused group discussion opined Telugu culture misinterpreted in Telugu soaps.



Viewers compared Telugu soap operas with other language soaps and pointed out many differences between north and Telugu soaps in relation to projection of cultural aspects like dressing, lifestyle, language and customs. Most of the viewer's made it clear that Telugu soap operas don't portray AP's culture; they mix state culture with other cultures only for name sake they add few episodes celebrated traditionally during big festivals. When asked the same

question during the survey 47% of them said no to cultural values in soaps, 33% gave yes as answer and 20% said not necessary to showcase once culture.

### **Qualitative content analysis**

In the qualitative content analysis it is observed that although the percentage of socio-cultural values is more in soaps, most of the time these values are portrayed negatively. For instance, fights between family members for property, for revenge taking and for love affairs are shown very frequently. Few important relationships like mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, husband and wife are always fighting for some family issues. Values like respecting elders, affection among other family members, and helping each other, are missing in order to increase the tension among viewers to grab their attention. Disrespectful language used by the male and female characters of these serials is found commonly in all the soaps. It is also portrayed as though family members quite often address each other with objectionable/vulgar language.

The frequency of violence is observed as excess in soap operas. Verbal violence is identified daily, like threatening to kill someone, warnings, blackmails, harassments etc...Whereas every week at least one or more murders in action are portrayed in soaps. Economic aspects like urban life style is a common feature found in all the soaps, the characters' attires do not match with the context in which the artist is acting. This is giving mostly unrealistic appeal.

Finally, it is observed that social, cultural and economic values found in soap operas are mostly portrayed negatively. And based on the quantitative content analysis the duration of the negative values is more than the positive values, and even the frequency of the negative content is double than the positive content of a five day soap in a week.

### **In-depth interviews with the soap operas:**

The directors of these soap operas Mr. Yata Sathya Narayana (ETV-Chandra Muki) and Mr.Prabakar (Muddu Bidda and Anna Chellelu) also agreed that the values are misrepresented in most of their soap operas as well and expressed that they are helpless in this regard as they blame the viewers for making them include lot of negative content because the TRP's are going down if there is no negativity in the content of these soaps. Mr. Yata Sathya Narayana and Mr.Prabakar said they are compelled to include provoking language, indecent language for few episodes to attract the attentions of the viewers. Disrespectful language between wife and husband in the current society has become common so they questioned what is wrong in portraying that is happening in society through their serials. They agreed to the fact that the language culture, dressing culture, relationships are changing in society taking that change in to consideration these soaps are made.

Whereas Mr.Prabakar says that he is more concerned for the people who are dependent on him directly for their livelihood were as viewers who are only money making sources for him, so he admits that such negative content which attracts public is necessary to gain profits to save his team and get benefits for the channel which is running his soap operas. He also said if anyone who thinks the content is not good to watch the remote-control is in their hands they can tune the channel.

Both the directors felt there is no need of any censor board for soap operas, as viewer are free to censor what they don't want.

## CONCLUSIONS

Language which is very important means of communication is mostly being misrepresented in Telugu soap operas. Content analysis done on the soaps that have been selected for this study reveals us the facts that expect the language of the positive characters of the soaps, the negative characters are popular because of their indecent language. Most of the women Characters in the selected soaps except Mogalirekullu soap, used language that is objectionable at times and provoking violence as well. Important relationships of family life like wife and husband, in-laws and other characters at times used degrading language in their regular conversations as well to create tensions in the minds of the viewer and make them watch the soap. Mostly language is used to either create humour or to stereotype some areas and people of two Telugu states. Few soaps stereotyped urban areas as decent language users and rural people as indecent language users which is not a complete fact in reality. Negative characters of these soaps mostly have some accent of few rural districts of both the Telugu states like Rayallaseema from Kadapa and Srikakulam district from Andhra and even Telangana accent.

The directors of these soaps feel that currently the language trends are changing in society they felt that using bad language has become fashion for youth which is why they are portraying those in their soaps. But other side viewers claim that their language with family members and in society is not as degrading as it is shown in soaps. They felt that though a part of the society is developing this culture of using vulgar words in their regular conversations but that should not be portrayed in mass media as major highlights which can damage the societies which are not yet being influenced by such culture. And the parents also raised concerns for their kids as they are also watching these soaps along with them and there is every possibility for this younger generation adopting such language culture which is dominating the soaps and can create problems in future. Most of the viewers strongly feel the beauty that is there in Telugu language irrespective of any region is not being portrayed properly as the current soap opera makers don't understand the importance of language in serials. Viewers are highly against to some female villains who speak vulgar, cheap and awful language on Television. They feel TV is a very powerful tool of communication and can influence people to use such language which can affect the rich Indian culture.

With the data it is very clearly indicated that the viewer's addiction to the soap operas and the profit making intentions of the media owners is leading the society towards wrong directions. People are strongly questioning the language usage in these soaps but they are not leaving their habit of watching these soaps, as that is the only way of time pass for most of them. But many studies have proved the fact that constant exposure to such degrading language can affect their communication in future. Increasing rating competitions are making the media owners forget the fact of media responsibility and accountability to society, as a result future generations will have to suffer. This paper makes a sincere request to the soap opera makers and media owners to stop degrading the regional language by indecent projection in soap operas which will destroy the real beauty of the Telugu language instead they should protect regional languages by portraying them positively.

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