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**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POPULAR BENGALI
SOAP OPERA TEXTS: INTERPRETING FEMALE
VIEWER'S RECEPTION IN URBAN TRIPURA**

Introduction

In Indian society a steady growth of violence against women is evident in every sphere which considerably differs with the nature of violence committed against men. Violence can be defined as an overtly threatened or accomplished application of force resulting in injury or destruction of person or property or reputation (Megargee, 1982). As a reflection of reality, the portrayal of atrocities against women is also rising in almost every media contents including both nonfictional and fictional. Though the nature and intensity of this violence vary with the genre, the content of violence against women is never sparse. Enormous intellectual efforts have been invested in identifying its potential to generate aggressive behaviour among its viewers, while a little emphasis is given on its creative interpretation by the audience. In opposition to these studies on media effect, the reception theory recognizes the audiences capacity of decoding and appropriation of those dominant media messages depending on their socio-cultural heterogeneity and personal life experiences. Depending on these social circumstances reading can be both 'combative and compensatory' for women (Radway,1984). Based on this reception ideology, the present paper as a part of larger ethnographic work, tries to focus on the typical structure and its' reception of encoding violence against women in three Bengali popular soap opera texts namely, *Istikutum*, *Rashi*, *Jalnupur*. The reception of female audience engagement and their interpretation of those texts is carried out in Agartala, the only urban center of Tripura, one of the North Eastern Indian states.

Soap opera is commonly considered as a women's genre as its appeal can be more intense for its female viewers. On this ground, the study only considers the appropriation of violence against women by its female audiences. For these female viewers soap narratives are expressions of the real world.

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Therefore, the violence that is happening in actual situation is expected to be reflected in soaps in a way that does not defy its generic conventions.

Today, women are increasingly the victim of violence in almost every social setting like family, neighbourhood, workplace, etc. Such act of violence should not be seen merely as an aggression of one individual against another, rather it is deeply rooted in the unequal power structure and subordinated status of women in our society. In many cases these acts are overlooked or accorded with little importance as a result of our social attitudes or religious values of naturalizing male superiority over women. Due to their discriminated social position women also many a times tolerate, accept or even justify this violence as natural, customary and often necessary to control female aberrant behaviour. In this socio-cultural setting, media portrayal of violence against women has huge potential for creating and influencing the mindset of its female viewers towards the male violence against them.

Rather than criticizing the genre for its persistent portrayal of domestic, physical or psychological violence against women, it is important to highlight the way viewers perceive those representations and the role of the existing cultural constructs in their perception. In this light the paper tries to identify the nature and extent of violence against women encoded in soap opera text; the power of those text messages in structuring audience interpretation; and the socio-cultural factors of audience interpretation and appropriation of those messages.

A reception study stipulates an in-depth qualitative analysis that can be better explored through ethnography (Oakley, 1981; Clifford, 1988; Hammersley, 2004). Thus, the present study is based on the feminist ethnographic method. In order to prioritize diverse cultural backgrounds and heterogeneity of women viewers, firstly, some primary informants with diverse socio-economic, religious, educational, occupational, age and family background are selected. Further, samples are drawn with the snowball sampling method. As the existing literature highlights the significance of family viewing, therefore, ninety one women of forty five families and five groups are taken as a unit of analysis in this work. For the collection of data three research strategies has been adopted, namely observation, unstructured interview and informal group discussion. Practically, all three methods are used in combination as and when required for carrying out the goals of feminist research.

Positioning of urban female viewers in the social milieu

Soaps are largely constructed as per the rhythms of urban middle class women's life experiences. Concurrently, it speaks in favour of village culture and lifestyle in order to ensure the engagement of non-urban viewers. The construction of such stories is solely guided by the profit motive that doesn't intend to bring any changes in the gendered power structure. The

storylines are extended as per the unremitting account of TRP ratings and the scripts are modified according to the viewers' choice for securing a steady commercial success. The audiences are neither passive receiver of media messages nor their mental world is free from cultural endowments. Thus, along with the way of representation, the reception of a message is vastly structured by viewer's positioning in family and the social power structure. Their viewing practices itself explores the gendered family hierarchy which is powerful enough to mould their thinking, reasoning and analysis of a particular situation.

Agartala, a newly developing urban center, lacks the major parameters of urbanity in its true sense, despite being the state capital of Tripura. Here, no such media production house is established yet. Therefore the Bengali female audiences are mostly engaged with the soaps produced in West Bengal. The growth of the urban periphery brings with it a concomitant transformation of lifestyle, family culture, mentality and value system. These changes are consequential to the transformation of the way of looking at the issues raised in soap narratives. In Agartala, Bengali female audience of these soaps are mostly socialized with rural structure, personal, intimate relationships and joint family values as they still have rural connections in some way or the other. Many of them spend their childhood days in joint family. Moreover, most of the Bengali populations of Tripura are migrants of present Bangladesh. Hence the experiences of partition and culture of Bangladesh are still prominent in their views, lifestyle and psyche. All these factors contribute to the uniqueness of urban population of Agartala and their interpretation of media productions of a developed urban centers. In Tripura, the women of urban locality are still not liberated, extrovert or forward like their counterparts of metropolitan areas. But unlike the rural folk, they have felt the need to come forward. Most of them are still not able to drastically challenge their role expectation and be assertive of their own viewing preferences against the masculine choices. In many a cases male family members are strongly against such womanly viewing preference on ground of representation of immorality, cunning scheming or melodrama. Depending on the nature of family, men, even directly oppose their wives' viewing, or at least spoil their emotional attachment by constant comment, mockery or ridicule. The dominated housewives are not in a position to establish their preference; hence they choose to watch the repeat telecast in the absence of their husband. Even the highly educated, economically independent women also prefer to watch in isolation for an uninterrupted viewing or to hide their inferior taste rated under masculine parameters. Regarding this tendency J. Stacey (1994) draws on Gray and Taylors findings that 'women audience's pleasure in soaps and romances can frequently be felt to be embarrassing and foolish by the women themselves who have had to defend their taste against male derision' (p.40). The patriarchal stigma associated with this genre generates a clear cut division between 'us' and 'they' among the urban viewers. A small educated section

tries to maintain their superior elitist position by rejecting such preference as trivial; though an intimate talk reveals that many of them have knowledge about every minute detail of these storylines. In this social condition, where women are not even free to establish or express their choice due to their subordinated position or for the uncritical acceptance of masculine cultural standards, it is difficult to expect a radical challenge to the regressive mediated message of violence from their part.

Hopefully, unlike most of the findings of western researchers such as Ang (1985), Stacy (1994), Modleski (1982), Gray (1992) etc., it has been found that a large segment of educated viewers is now able to assert their preference without being ashamed which approaches to the feminist aims. The following comments reflect the growing assertiveness of the women:

'Why people say that serials are spreading immorality. It is just the opposite. Many things we should learn from it.'

Or

'We don't think it is a bad habit. Entertainment is essential for everyone and an individual have the right to choose her preferred form of entertainment.'

This is an important indicator of women's liberation at least in the field of their preference. They themselves feel that the female soap characters can be a source of strength in their lives. During in an interview a semi educated 'house wife' from a very conservative background asserts in this regard:

'It might not be important for the women like you as you are smart enough and have the ability to protest. But for women like us, who never went outside home without any male members, it is extremely important. By watching the activities of "Rashi" I am gaining courage to protest any misdeeds especially against eve-teasing. Now I feel I should speak out like her.'

Besides unconventional representation the narratives speak in favour of preserving the traditional feminine roles. The protagonist may be strong enough, but she is never expected to ignore her conventional duties. A slight deviation from feminine role expectations often brings criticism, even from the educated, liberated female spectators. Woman's socialized conception of womanhood draw on heavily in evaluation of characters overpowering all other parameters like education, occupation or urban positioning. Despite getting urban exposure and independence a large section of them are not even conscious about offences against women. Hence, any emotional violence is not considered as violence. Rather, some of them consider male aggression as natural and even expected and thereby consider tolerance and submissiveness as the essential criteria of a 'good' woman that can contribute in maintaining the family unity. It is considered as the sole responsibility of women to sustain the marital bond even at the cost of her desires and dignity. Considering marriage as a sacred bonding most of them can't even imagine about separation or divorce of a woman under any circumstances. Hence, they often suggest

adjusting in case of physical or mental torture by the in-laws. Opposed this role expectation, the progressive section of female viewers and youngsters strongly challenged the idealization of extreme tolerance, submissiveness and selflessness associated with 'good women'. They assertively express against those feminine role expectations and consider such representation as regressive and far from reality. This interpretive divergence signifies the transitional value system of contemporary urban women in Tripura who neither completely denies their traditional role nor follows them uncritically. Thus when the same scene of women's oppression or violence is not even recognized by a section of viewers, it can be robustly disapproved by the other.

Unfolding women's representation and underpinning coercion

The positioning of women in soap narratives is a crucial factor for looking into the origin of violence and the way it is viewed. The majority of the popular soap narrative represents a blend of tradition and modernity. On the one hand the values of joint family, the primacy of the marital bond, sacrifice, patience or tolerance of a woman is extremely glorified and on the other the power and strength of a woman is highly appreciated. Such balance helps to sustain its authenticity among viewers across the generation. In order to ensure the economic success most of the Bengali soaps avoid experimental thematic structure. Hence, after the commercial success of a particular storyline the basic theme starts to be imitated. One such plotline begins with a village girl of marginalized section who is forced to get married with an urban middle class or upper class boy with reputed background due to situational pressure, and thereafter comes to the city. The situation is constructed in such a way that the girl is bound to adjust with the adverse situation and lives under the mercy of her husband and his family. On the other hand, due to the imposed marriage with a girl of dissimilar background, the boy's family members can't get sympathized with that girl too, though they are represented as kind hearted. In such a situation any misbehavior, insult or mental assault of the newly married girl seems a normal reaction for its viewers. Also such narrative prescribes for patience and tolerance without protest from the girl's side as a necessity and a sensible choice for a woman in such position. Thus the construction of narrative structure itself makes a path for a portrayal of violence against a newly wedded wife without creating any negative feeling for the husband or in-laws.

In the story, the boy must have a commitment prior to his forced marriage. Hence, initially he never accepts his wife and recurrently insults her in every possible way. The harassment may also take the form of repeated threats to throw her out. But gradually the tolerance, softness or selfless nature of that village girl attracts him and they eventually fall in love. Here also the submissiveness of a girl is represented as a feminine quality that can bring happiness in her marital life. In contrast to this, the sense of self-esteem of

the urban girlfriend of her husband is symbolized as a cause of her own misery. This sense of dignity of an educated, independent woman is portrayed as an expression of her pride, self-centredness, or snobbish nature. By establishing a connection between women's self-esteem, modernity, independence and her villainy this woman is portrayed as negative character and thereby any emotional torture for her is treated not only as normal but an essentiality for its viewers.

The second phase of complicity starts when the girlfriend of the male protagonist becomes jealous due to their growing intimacy and starts creating tension between the couple. During this phase she even attempts suicide under depression after her failure to break up the couple of frequent bold efforts. Only during her emotional breakdown the narrative representation sympathized with her. Hence, in the encoded message women's bold conducts are clearly disapproved and her dependent, helpless nature is appreciated in an implicit way.

Unlike the stories of other genre, it never ends up with a perfectly happy ending. There is always a possibility of recurrent problems. These narratives are all about various relational and familial problems in women's lives and the prescriptions to overcome those. All these feminine texts and viewing practices contribute in producing a decentred, flexible, multi focussed, feminine subjectivity in contrast to the masculine subjectivity (Fiske, 2001, p.195). These narratives or characters do not signify any drastic alteration of the tradition nonetheless they do not follow the convention. It speaks against child marriage, asserts the need for female education, vocal about customary oppression of widows and thrust on self-dependence of women. On these soaps an attempt is also made to deconstruct some stereotypical image. In the promotional scene of highly popular soap opera *Istikutum*, the leading character *Baha* asserted, 'Not someone's daughter or wife, my name shall be my identity'. In the following episodes when she became an IAS officer her husband publicly said that he is proud to be her husband. In another serial *Rashi* of *Zee Bangla* channel, the female protagonist *Rashi* never bothered to take permission from her husband before taking any risky step which is most unconventional to the existing power structure. In *Jalnupur* of *Star Jalsha* channel, the leading woman *Kajal* also divorced her husband *Neel* despite his repeated requests for forgiveness and concentrated on her dance career. Her refusal represents her silent but bold protest against his misdeed. Such a narrative turn symbolizes that a woman may show unimaginable tolerance to win the heart of her husband, but once her feeling is unremittingly hurt she can rigidly refuse him. Similarly *Baha* took transfer for an informal separation when she sensed her husband's soft corner for his girlfriend *Mun* and his infidelity to her. *Rashi's* sister *Mili* took divorce after knowing the reality of her husband *Rick*, with whom she eloped against the will of her family. Despite her intense love for her husband *Uji*, *Rashi* also decided to be separated because of his mistrust and accusation.

Along with these path-breaking images of women in the depiction of extreme form of patriarchal values is also common. For instance, as a part of marriage ritual Baha wipes her husband's feet with her hair or a rebel like Rashi silently accepts her status as a maid in her in-laws' house, an extremely docile girl Kajal tolerates every insult without protest. The stories prescribe how the rejection, insult and humiliation of the in-laws can be converted into acceptance, love and trust. It is only a woman's tolerance, softness, selflessness, kindness and sacrifice that can make such miracle possible. Baha was treated as a maid; Rashi was mentally tortured; Kajal was repeatedly insulted and even physically assaulted in her in-laws' house but they did not react, rather shed tears silently. Though Rashi was rebellious by nature, she also initially accepted her status as maid without protest. It is only with increasing emotional attachment to her husband, she gains her status. So the stereotypical qualities of a woman are re-emphasized and tolerance to violence is to some extent sanctioned in the soap narratives at-least in dealing with the issues of relationships. Such depiction is made partly as a representation of reality and partly because viewers can connect with the pain of another woman more easily and thereby come closer to these characters. Regarding the family violence a viewer of poor socio economic background expressed that:

'It makes me feel that I am not the only woman who is tortured in the family. These women might be richer and educated than me, but they are equally unhappy and sufferer.'

When viewers can relate to a character it ensures their engagement as well as an increased TRP (Television Rating Point). It encourages the producers to replicate such situations and scenes from a purely profit motive. At the same time a reassurance of overcoming such situation and a strong protest of women at the concluding part works as an accomplishment of unfulfilled desires of the spectators. So the story can achieve its commercial success from both these contrasting representations. Hence, the soap stories and characters depict a combination of conventional and non-conventional. To a certain level tolerance to all mental or emotional harassment is encouraged and even appreciated, but these leading ladies are able to revolt too. Such a contrasting representation of submissive and bold women allows the text to be open for its varied interpretation. Thus, these narratives can't be accused of promoting regressive values or for sanctioning violence against women in an explicit way. It always leaves clues to look into the issues from another perspective associated with the feminists' aim. For assuring its appeal to a heterogeneous audience a single issue is mostly analyzed differently by various characters, allowing the viewers to see through diverse perspectives according to their own subjectivity. So, the influence of any message depends on its social currency, people's willingness to reiterate, and the value of a specific story in a social context (Kitzinger, 1999).

Representation of violence in Soap Operas

Soap stories are not predominantly violent stories like an action film. But they contain a considerable amount of violence against women within and outside the family. Despite their thematic similarity these three soaps differ in terms of their level of violent content. The violence portrayed in *Istikutum* is largely a psychological one. It is a story of a poor tribal village girl Baha who got married with a renowned journalist Archi due to situational pressure. Archi used his wife as a maid to humiliate and harass her frequently, though her in-laws loved and supported her and also provided opportunities for further study. Finally Archi got married with his girlfriend Kamalika suppressing his previous marriage. Subsequently, he fell in love with Baha and divorced Kamalika. In this storyline both wives faced emotional violence by their husband. But throughout their journey they got support from the majority of the family members. So both torture and a compensatory healing mechanism work simultaneously in this storyline. Along with that, there is always a generic reassurance of overcoming all hardship at the end which makes this portrayal of violence less problematic for its viewers.

After divorce, Kamalika get involved with further relationships and in every case it ends up with separation. In this mental condition she committed several suicide attempts. Not only in this story, but in almost all soaps suicidal attempt by female characters due to emotional strain or helplessness is a familiar plot line. This is termed as 'self-inflicted violence' by 'World Report on Violence and Health' (Njaine, 2006). In *Jalnupur* the leading character Kajal attempted suicide twice when Neel refused to marry her and later, after their marriage, when she was asked to leave the house due to some misunderstanding. In the same soap another leading character *Pari* who was mentally challenged attempted suicide when she was told that her husband doesn't love her. In the third serial *Rashi*, a supporting character *Ashmi* attempted suicide when her husband was murdered and another character *Parama* also did the same after the death news of her husband and child. Thus, the narrative construction of soap opera indicates suicide as the only solution for a woman in critical situations. But at the same time on every occasion, these women are rescued and they finally win over these adverse situations. This typical narrative structure allows the possibility of aberrant reading of the explicit message.

Suicidal attempts are drawn, two directions, for the protagonists, it is always due to their failure in love life and for the antagonists, it is a trap or emotional threat to bring back their hold over their men. So the suicide attempt of a protagonist brings her closer to the audience on sympathetic ground and her mental weakness is not at all marked. On the other hand, such attempts of antagonists are received as part of her cunning scheming and thereby rejected by the viewers. But even in this case the act of self-inflicted violence itself is not condemned, it is only the motive behind such action that leads to its rejection by the viewers.

Compared to *IstiKutum* the story of *Jalnupur* includes more physically violent scenes. In this story, a less educated village girl *Kajal* compelled to get married with an established city boy *Neel*. Initially she was also not accepted by her in-laws and during this phase was even slapped by a distant relative. Apart from *kajal*, many other female characters are slapped by the male members on different occasions. But all these scenes are represented as an expression of excessive love, care and possessiveness of the offender and thereby produce no protest from the other family members. If the girl is a villainess then the patriarch is endowed with the authority to slap her to bring her into the right path. The circumstances of such scenes are constructed to justify the violence as a means of rectification of the villainess which is solely a male responsibility. None of these stories thrust physical violence at the domestic sphere, rather, their main concern is to portray women's emotional strain and fight for legal rights in relationships. The nature of this fight is also typical in soaps. This is not a direct protest or rebel by a woman instead she tries to win the hearts of the family members by love, sacrifice, selflessness and tolerance ignoring the extreme insult, rejection or humiliation.

Generally the majority of family members do not involve in violent activities. It is mainly the villainess who can go to any extent in terms of cruelty and cunning scheming. In soap stories every major role, including negative one, is performed by female characters. Villainesses may have some male knaves who execute the crime, but the mastermind is always a woman. Their violent acts may range from mental harassment to kidnap and even murder. For instance, in *Jalnupur*, *Arshi* gave poison to *Kajal*. Similarly *Bhumi* tried to kidnap *Pari* for the purpose of trafficking and also for murder. In this soap the possibilities of violence against a mentally challenged woman is depicted in detail that have potential to generate awareness about the possibilities of violence against those marginal sections and the need for their protection.

Portrayal of violence is highest in the soap *Rashi*. *Rashi's* mother-in-law *Apola* attempted to kill her in a car bomb blast. After that *Apola's* family was destructed in another bomb blast. Then the new villainess *Shirsha* made several attempts to kill *Rashi*, kidnap her, trapped her cousin sister and tried to throw her in prostitution and many more. But in every case she was finally defeated by the courageous and intelligent actions of *Rashi*. Throughout this violent storyline viewers' generic knowledge about the ultimate win of good over the evil diminishes their feeling of pain and suffering on such criminal offences.

Though soap texts attempt to reflect the real life incidences, it never shows any sexual violence against women. Even if such situation arises, the girl is rescued at the critical moment. On the contrary, reality based crime series; cinema or even news channels sexual violence is a common theme. In cinema, such scenes are used as a setting to assert the strength and power of

a hero i.e. to construct masculinity. Here, the protagonist offenders are treated as a role model for exerting their power and aggression. And violence is shown as a triumph of good over evil. Crime serials and news channels try to dramatize sexual violence or use horrific footage of those incidences but it is always avoided in soaps. It may be due to the reason that the soap world seems to be the most secured zone for women where their views, emotions, feelings are heard by the others, they can exert power over others including men and talk is given more emphasis than action (Allen, 1995). In this safe zone there is a probability, from the part of the female viewers, to reject the portrayal of this harsh reality of their vulnerability to sexual violence. Though the contemporary western soaps are highlighting sexual violence, the Indian, especially the regional soaps are not bold enough to speak about this issue and handle its related consequences.

Unlike film, soap opera violence never takes a form of unrealistic presentation of heroism. Rather, it is very natural and spontaneous. For instance the physical violence is designed by a female mastermind and thus requires no heroic action to assert her power. Instead, emphasis is given to her shrewd and intelligent execution of violence without being exposed to others. Violence on TV is not portrayed as 'exciting' or 'entertaining', rather, as 'educational' or 'relevant' while at the same time 'disturbing' and sometimes 'offensive'. Thus its' social relevance overpowers the effect of fantasy (Schlesinger, Dobash, Dobash, & Weaver, 1992). Therefore, it is the generic feature and contemplation about target audience that constitute the unique nature of soap opera violence that prioritise emotional violence against women over all other form of violence.

Socio-Cultural aspect of Audience Interpretation of Violence

Reception theory acknowledges the possibilities of multiple meaning of a text, based on social condition of its reception (Ang, 1985; Modleski, 1982; Palmer, 1986; Fiske, 1987; Gledhil, 1988; Hobson, 1990; Geraghty, 1991; Morley, 1992; Brown, 1994; Zoonen, 1994; McQuail, 1997; Livingstone, 1998, 2007; Pitout, 1998). A text is produced at the time of reading through its complex interaction with the audience and their discursive practices. Thus, audience interpretation may not be as per the explicit messages. The degree of closure encoded in the message can definitely facilitate or restrict the possibilities of resistive reading (Livingstone, 2005). Still, it can be critically interpreted by the audiences with their diverse socio-cultural background and life-experiences.

An intimate discussion with the female fans reveals the way they make sense of the portrayal of violence and the motivations of the offenders. Regarding the violence committed by villainess, a young educated woman suggested that:

'These are so unrealistic. In real life we cannot find a single person with all good or all bad qualities. But in serials a villainess is completely negative in all respects.'

Like her, the distinction between 'goodies' and 'baddies' is challenged and their motivation of violence against a particular woman or a group of women seems unjustified for a number of viewers. Contrary to this 'oppositional reading' few aged and middle aged viewers comment that:

'There are few people in our society who can't tolerate happiness of others. They continuously attempt to humiliate and mortify them in front of others.'

Or,

'My sister-in-law used to behave like these villainesses and tried to embarrass me in every situation in order to be in the good book of my mother-in-law.'

Or,

'Can't you see the news of violence committed by in-laws in frequent basis? All these real incidences are reflected in serials.'

It shows that the realism in the content of recurrent violence by the villainesses depends on the life experiences of the viewers.

Bourdieu (2001) termed 'symbolic violence' as a gentle violence which is 'imperceptible and invisible even to its victims'. It may take the form of denial of resources or voice, treating inferior and also feeling inferior, etc. Our patriarchal system imposes and maintains domination over women by naturalizing these forms of violence. Regarding this naturalization Munshi (2010) analyzed how women are idealized and men are fantasized. In this structural setting majority of the viewers hardly recognize verbal abuse, insult or humiliation by a husband or in-laws as a form of violence. The acceptance of orthodox values which Bourdieu called 'doxic acceptance' makes these scenes of emotional violence nothing more than an expression of women's practical life situation with which viewers can empathetically attach. This is expressed through such comments:

'My son and husband prefer to watch movies, especially those action scenes. But I hate violence. So I hardly watch with them. Serials are peaceful. It never shows violence.'

For these women, violence means extreme physical form of violence with arms, bloody fight and impersonal violence. The portrayal of violence is least recognized if its consequence is not extreme.

Justification for the use of violence is also an important factor in making sense of violence. In this sense violence is seen from two different perspectives: Violence against the protagonist and violence against the antagonist. In the first case any emotional violence, except those inflicted by the villainess, is justified as an expression of love, care, possessiveness or helplessness. This is reflected in the following comments:

'Initially, Archi used to insult Baha out of resentment due to their forced marriage. He actually loved Baha from the very beginning.'

'Kajal was slapped by Vinayak as she suppressed her problem from them, which generate additional trouble in her life.'

'Neel treated Kajal very badly due to misunderstanding. Actually, he loved her so much, but she was not responding to his appeal.'

Thus, if the context of violence can be justified by the socio-cultural standard of the viewers, and if it is compatible with their role socialization, then it is hardly considered as violence.

In case of violence against villainess the justification of acceptance of violence is different. If the violence is seen as an act of revenge, then it is not only accepted rather cherished. It has been observed that when all the evil scheming of the villainess is exposed then her insult, physical assault and harassment is highly enjoyed by the viewers. In our patriarchal system, it is the male responsibility to bring back a female violator of social norm to the expected standard of behaviour through the use of violence. Thus, when the villainess is slapped by her husband, it is supported by the majority of the viewers irrespective of their background. In this regard a viewer said that:

'To what extent a husband can tolerate? After repeated forbid it becomes the responsibility of the husband to teach her a lesson. He should naturally slap her or even more than that'.

In soap opera, the offender of violence against women is mostly a female. It is analyzed by the viewers in diverse ways. A professor of psychology and also a soap opera fan explains this incident as an expression of male domination and the consequent tendency to accuse women for women's misery. Contrary to this explanation a large number of viewers believe that within the familial setting women can conduct more villainous activities than men. One of them replied:

'In the larger society we can see male criminals. But you know within family women can make most dangerous scheming against women of which men can't even think about'.

In another genre, the realism of violence depends heavily on the technicalities of representation like light, sound, camera work, duration of the scene, suddenness or isolated setting, etc. But in case of soap opera violence, it has been found that its impact depends upon the way these violence affect the storyline rather than their realistic representation or use of special effect.

Conclusion

Soap opera as a women's genre aims at intensifying the involvement and attachment of its female viewers. In order to assure this magnetic influence, it tries to reflect women's everyday life with a combination of realism and melodrama. Roy (2012) argues that 'by representing real life situations

with sharp demarcations of good and bad these serials are deviating from modern reality where boundaries between victim and victimizer get blurred'. Moreover, for the purpose of maintaining popularity their contents hardly throw any direct challenge towards the conventional social practices and patriarchal values. Consequently, they allow less opportunity to symbolize all sorts of violence against women, which can expose women's vulnerability in our society. Since their storyline revolves around domestic setting with predominantly female characters, the nature of violence is mainly domestic and emotional with few exceptions. Such violence is mostly interpreted as an outcome of female provocation, especially when the offender is a male protagonist or it may be considered as an expression of possessiveness out of love. Likewise, the majority of the female viewers hardly conceptualize emotional torture as a form of symbolic violence. These revelations resonate with the concept that 'viewers are active, but within the parameter set by the text (Roscoe, Marshall, & Gleeson, 1995)'. Beyond textual limitation, audience interpretation of violence is further constrained by the traditional normative structure of the society. Moreover, the Hindu Bengali women viewers migrated from the then East Pakistan, carried their cultural memories along. Therefore, the patriarchal structure didn't alter much when it comes to gender stereotypes to either choose to watch or receive the patriarchal messages from the popular soaps. At the same time the heterogeneity and the subjective positioning of the viewer can facilitate the possibility of its critical reading. These open texts provide a judicious blend of conventional portrayal of women in subjugated role, the possibilities of their revolt against oppression, and a reassurance of the triumph of the victims of violence over the offender. Hence, soap narrative and representation have the potential to produce numerous interpretation of the same text which may promote women's traditional oppressive role and can also endorse self-respect among its female audience. This understanding will contribute to the exploration of women's perceptions of violence in a larger context which has a potential for political analysis. In this sense, the political potential of soap opera in generating awareness and organizing protest against all sorts of violence against women deserves further attention.

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