

# The Social Image of Women in Syrian Drama

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## **Synopsis**

The aim of the study is to know the extent to which viewers watch Syrian TV serials and what is the woman’s image portrayed by those serials and the roles she plays.

A random regular sample of 2000 single was taken.

The study concluded a group of results, such as:

- Syrian TV serials enjoy broad publicity
- Syrian TV serials treat very important subjects
- Syrian TV serials present Syrian women in a good manner consistent with reality
- Syrian TV serials are interested in the educated woman, the housewife, the young and married woman

Few leading roles of women are shown in Syrian serials

The study made some suitable recommendations

## **The Research Problem and Importance**

Television is considered one of the most widespread media among the broad categories of the masses. It is extremely capable of attracting attention, arousing interest and impacting upon the intellectual and cultural stock of the individual. The role of the dramatic forms presented by TV, such as drama, movies, series and plays is to shape the individual and collective behaviour. They endeavour to implant, annul, or modify some of the society’s values and concepts. However, televised foreign drama brings habits different from ours and from our social and religious traditions and may change the patterns of behaviour. Therefore, it is better to choose the cultural materials and produce local

TV serials to contribute to the cultural and media structure. The woman should participate in this structure and should be liberated from habits and outdated social bonds so that she may assume her real role and practice her life at man's side. Thus, the small screen should pay more attention to the woman’s causes and to her daily social problems.

However, the policy applied towards the advancement of women remains of limited effect

and value,

unless it is coupled with a genuine development that reflects itself in the woman's images and roles presented by the media.

### **The Purposes of the Research:**

The research seeks to achieve the following:

- To know the extent to which viewers watch Syrian TV serials
- To know the woman's image shown by Syrian TV serials
- To specify the roles presented by Syrian TV serials
- The manner in which TV serials deal with the woman's status

### **Previous studies:**

The research of Dr **Fawziah Faheem** is one of the researches that tackled the Arab woman and television. She analyzed a sample of the series presented on Channel One of Egyptian TV. It turned out that the serials dealt with women through 81% of the serials time. In general, the woman appeared in secondary roles such as a maid, singer, dancer, and unemployed. As for the woman's work, she appeared as a housewife, painter and student. The serials focused on the woman-man relation.

However, **Suha Zaki Abdul Qader** analyzed TV serials and a sample of TV programs directed to women. She reached the following conclusions :

Female characters form 30% out of the total characters dealt with by TV programs. Basically, the serials were about the woman's presence at home and the man's presence at the work place. It is also turned out that serials address the above-middle upper class.

**Nabil Muhammed** conducted a study about TV drama which revealed that woman's image on Egyptian TV through drama focused on the housewife, student, and employee, particularly the teacher, the journalist, the lawyer, the businesswoman, the air hostess, the social worker, the secretary, the peasant and the housekeeper.

The writer **Latifa El-Zayat** concluded that the Arab girl is tamed since childhood to play the role the society lays down for her, i.e., to beget children, to ensure the protection of the family assets. and to move from the father's ownership to the husband's obedience, and to extinct all instincts, feelings, emotions, dreams and aspirations. There is also the tutelage imposed on the woman by the man, the public opinion and the society.

The steady image adopted by the society is that of that of a woman who depletes herself, her thoughts and emotions for man's sake. It is the image of the abnegating woman who sacrifices herself, and is capable of tolerating adversities and difficulties with a satisfied, tolerant, affectionate and friendly heart. It is the image of the ever and always kind, docile, smiley,

sweet and calm woman, whose heart has no room for violence, destruction, wrath, mutiny and revolt.

### **Remarks about the previous studies:**

- 1- The general image of the woman's role as a wife has crystallized in her being a dependent of her husband and relying on him. At the same time, she loves him and takes care for his comfort. As for the divorce, it is not the wife's right and she is not expected to ask for it. However, at the same time, the wife may find herself suddenly divorced against her will.
- 2- The main image of the woman's role as a wife is a secondary role being a dependent of her husband who decides her fate. She is obedient and loving without having any right to decide such fate. This image becomes different if the wife is rich, whereupon she becomes dominant and obdurate. She can change her life if she so desires since her role is controlled by the economic condition and not by the value of the mutual marital life.
- 3- The general form of the mother's role is summarized in loving and caring. The image differs in case she was a mother of boys or girls. We find her pampering her son so much that she prefers him to the husband in some aspects, while the girls' role is limited to prepare her for marriage and find the suitable bridegroom.
- 4- The prevalent image of the daughter is the image of the obedient to her parents. Nevertheless, the main axis in her life is the man, the lover or the husband-to-be.
- 5- Most often, the woman is looked upon as being a female before being a human being. The movies are divided into two groups: the woman, in the first group, is clear and frank. Her role as a female is summarized in being a commodity that can be sold and bought. In the second group, the female appears far from being a commodity even if she derives from the same point of departure. In this group, the woman looks at her beauty and femininity considering them helpful weapons for reaching her aim.
- 6- Arab media frequently portrays the working woman works just to fill her free time, for fun, for meeting an economic need, for getting acquainted with people, or it is merely better than staying at home. Work does not seem to have a real value in woman's life.

### **The tasks of the research:**

Having examined the previous studies, we can determine the tasks of the research with the aim of knowing to what extent they are consistent with the research data, namely the following:

- 1- The woman's image in Syrian TV serials is satisfactory in the viewers' eyes.

- 2- Syrian TV serials portray the real woman's image.
- 3- Syrian TV serials focus on the roles of the educated woman.
- 4- Syrian TV serials focus on woman as a housewife more than others.
- 5- Syrian TV serials are interested in young women.
- 6- Syrian TV serials present woman's image in a manner compatible with the social and religious values.
- 7- Syrian TV serials are interested in the urban woman more than the rural woman
- 8- Syrian TV serials pay more attention to the woman of high economic standard.
- 9- Syrian TV serials are more interested in the single woman.
- 10- Syrian TV serials are more interested in woman's beauty.
- 11- Syrian TV serials deal logically with the woman's status.
- 12- Syrian TV serials are not interested in women's leading role.
- 13- The woman's image presented by Syrian TV serials depends on the director himself.
- 14- The woman's image in the historic drama is inconsistent with the historic reality

### **The general features of Syrian Arab television:**

The development of the modern media in all its forms was, through the consecutive stages, the result of pooling the scientists' efforts in different countries of the world in search of an integrated media. The beginnings were with the press as it is the message of the free word to the free world. The Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic states the following:

“Each citizen has the right to express his opinion freely and openly in words, writing, and all means of expression, and to share in the control and constructive criticism so as to ensure the integrity of the pan-Arab national structure and support the socialist system, The State guarantees the freedom of press, printing and publishing.”

According to the Syrian law and its regulations, media had remained limited to newspapers and magazines till the world reached the art of news, discussions, essay and others, and the Italian scientist Berbard, succeeded in making a radio set in 1914. The first Syrian radio station was established in 1941. The new discovery was distinguished by sending information easily to the farthest point in the world in less than a second. The art of broadcasting included complete integrated artistic groups such as radio talk, commentary, plays and special programs representing as a

whole the essence of radio kind in media kinds. Add to this is the possible adherence of the masses through broadcasting unified realistic or fictitious messages to large numbers of people who differ in socio-economic, cultural and political aspects and are scattered in more than one place.

The realistic messages are meant to be the group of news, information and instructions revolving around the events, published in the press and broadcast by radio until a more developed technology was attained at the beginning of 1960s, namely the TV transmission station.. The Syrian Arab television started transmitting on the evening of 23 July 1960 from the top of Qassioun Mountain in Damascus, where there is a transmitting station comprising a studio technically-equipped for TV work. On day one, the TV transmission lasted ninety minutes only relying on the technical staff then working in the radio station.

In 1967. the stations of Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, Slenfe were connected for the first time by means of a microwave link, whereby the programs were transmitted to all stations simultaneously. Thereafter, more transmission stations were established in most Syrian regions. Thus, transmission covers at present the whole of Syria and a number of neighbouring countries.

In 1978, the color transmission started on an experimental basis, and in 1980, transmission was in color using Pal and Secam systems. At the start, transmission period was four hours. It later increased to 7.5 hours in normal days and to 10 hours on Fridays and Sundays. In the holy month of Ramadhan and on national events transmission continued for about 12 hours and is now 17.5 hours. Besides the general program channel, Channel 2 transmit in both English and French as well as the space channel the transmission of which reaches all countries of the world.

Most of the programs of Syrian TV are locally produced. They include drama, plays, serials, political, news, cultural, economic, professional, educational and children programs besides Arab serials and plays and dubbed serials.

Television has become the number one mass communications means for many reasons, most notably:

1. It came in response of the increasing importance of the picture in an era called the picture age. When the picture was coupled with sound, movement and color, it dealt with more than one sense, and its ability to attract, outreach and impact has increased.
2. In its beginnings, TV adopted all what is positive in the press (the script) and its communication ability, in the radio (vitality of the human voice, its dramatic capabilities), in the movies (picture, motion, montage, remote, middle and close shots), in the theater (strength of presence, vitality of dialogue and compound art). The TV, however, soon knew how to digest and assimilate that to own a special expressive language, and rich distinctive embodiment elements. Thus, the talk became about TV press, TV news, drama and even about the TV film.

3. TV was able to use the concept of synchronization, to employ this power for more attraction and impact, and to present the events, phenomena and developments the moment they occur.

In this light, one can conclude that television came into being in response to the requirements of the age and to satisfy information needs. It developed in the West in general, and the USA in particular. It is pushing forward violently to occupy the first rank in the mass media system, since it came within a civilized (cultural, scientific, artistic, cultural, communications) system and material and technological potentials and conditions were provided for it.

In the Arab homeland, however, television came as a result of the development of the modern state, the expansion of its institutions, and in response of the needs of the Arab society which wants to catch up with progress and overcome years of backwardness. Television was considered one of the important forms of modernizing the Arab society. It is today playing an important role in raising the awareness of the society, bringing distances closer, and in participating considerably in knowing the world and its problems. Television has become a basic method for spreading freedom, democracy, the opposite opinion and democratic dialogue, besides identifying and presenting the social problems and seeking solutions for them.

Functions of the mass media:

Mass media is a social system that carries out a key activity for producing knowledge, reproducing and distributing it. It is the knowledge that enables us to give a meaning to this world and shape our awareness of it, and contribute to our knowledge of the dangers, and give continuity to our understanding of the present. This means that the mass media occupies today a central position in our daily life. It thus contributes to determining the fate of mankind.

The media scientists and sociologists in the West concluded that the news coverage of mass media is considered axiomatic not open to discussion. It also occupies a central position in the media activity of any free and democratic society.

This function deals with monitoring the periphery undertaken by a group that investigates the political milieu of the state. It is a central function through which the media allows communicating within the society in concert with several other establishments through the dissemination of information. Malcolm Wiley views that one of the most important functions of the media is to provide the recipient with news and crude information. However, Francis Pal says: The information broadcast by the mass media provides the society with methods that make it capable of discovering its self by itself, and enables the human being to discover his self by himself.

More important is that Pal points out that the news function makes the options related to the collective destiny clearer and the solutions to reach these options more effective and less ambiguous.

Lazar Suffield and Merton raise another function that acquires particular importance from the current society. It is manifested in the role of the mass media in strengthening the social control towards the wrongdoers and imposing the virtual norm through waging intensive media campaigns that expose their aberrant behaviour.

Mass media as well supplements the work of educational, cultural and social bodies and institutions. It circulates a mass education of specific nature and shares in reviving the heritage and in disseminating the social patrimony through the generations. Another indisputable fact is the existence of an entertainment function and advertisement function for the mass media. But analyzing the topics of both these functions and their contents follows from intellectual, educational and valuable backgrounds, and is based on economic and social assessments that are specific to the cultural situation of each society.

The functions of TV:

The functions on which TV is based are broader than those on which all other mass media collectively are based. TV possesses a broader and richer range and extent of ways and means to develop and rectify the world. Among these functions are the following:

- A means of communication:

TV is considered one of the most important achievements of science and technology during the past century. No other mass media had previously proved a super capability of attracting the attention, and arousing the interest as TV did. This increased the importance of the wide demand and great interest which many developing states showed in order to make use of its potentials to support the political trends, to raise the awareness of the public opinion and guide it in the fields of social and economic development. Hearing and vision are involved in watching TV, thus achieving the necessary base for the fruitful communication, since the rich potentials of TV have the ability of presenting the details and causing the motion.

Hence, TV has acquired much leverage and power. It is outflanked by all members of the family of different age and varying culture. Everyone watches from his own angle. Hence the important role of TV in the society.

It should be pointed out that TV at any moment of its transmission, never stops pumping information, ideas, ethical values and aesthetic taste. All of these affect man's awareness, values and trends.

TV is distinguished by its quick response to events upon their occurrence. It focuses on the materials that are transmitted by picture. Depending on the picture, TV is not only a mean of communication, but a tool to arouse the emotions more than the minds, because the TV press focuses on the event more than the result, and on the characters more than the thoughts.

The attractive visual picture and the response to events are the characteristics that brought to it that broad dissemination and that super capability of influencing the recipient public.

- A Publicity Function:

TV, through analyzing and explaining the main developments in the public life and through following up the driving forces behind these development and operations, it invades different domains of the social existence since TV is considered primarily a mean of publicity both locally and internationally.