

GENDER STEREOTYPING AND INDIAN CARTOON SHOWS

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ABSTRACT

Cartoons are not just for entertainment; they play a significant role in how children observe and perceive the world and in how they develop their sense of their society. Cartoons could cultivate and influence children in both positive and negative ways. When cartoon shows depict gender stereotypes, violence or unrealistic portrayals of behaviour, they shape negative perceptions in children’s cognitive reflections. Such content may influence children’s behaviour and attitudes.

This paper analyses three cartoon shows, viz. *Chhota Bheem*, *Mighty Raju*, and *Chikoo Aur Bunt*, based on their highest viewership and popularity. A total of 15 episodes were selected for content analysis by applying the triangulation method. It was observed that in these three cartoons shows, female characters are mostly portrayed in supportive roles, often shown as dependent on their male counterparts.

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1.1 Introduction

The definitions of Gender and Sex are not the same. The conception of gender is social and cultural. It refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are not biologically determined; it is shaped by cultural norms and societal expectations. On the other hand, the conception of sex is rooted in biology. It refers to biological differences, typically categorized as female or male, based on chromosomes, genes, reproductive organs etc.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the meaning of stereotype is “a set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong.” According to social psychology, the meaning of stereotype is a generalized belief about a particular category of people (Cardwell & Mike, 1999). Stereotypes exist in many forms. It can be based on sex (whether someone is female or male), based on gender (social and cultural roles of females, males and other identities), based on socio-economic status (rich or poor), based on nationality, based on culture, based on occupation, based on skin color (called as colorism), age, race, religion, etc. People make use of stereotypes to explain their own or others’ behaviors (SA, et. al, 2002). According to Huntington (n.d), racial stereotypes also likely come to mind, such as associating black people with criminals or Asian Americans with humble or brilliant scientists. The American journalist or a political commentator Walter Lipmann coined the term ‘Stereotype’ in his book “Public Opinion” in 1922. Where he described stereotypes as “Pictures in our heads” that helps us interpret the world.

When we talk about Gender Stereotypes, we are referring to the common and often unfair beliefs about how females and males are supposed to behave. These stereotypes can affect both females and male. Gender stereotypes are cultural constructs, shared at the societal level, that describe what men and women are “Known” to be like (Fiske, 1998). From birth, individuals are taught/given messages about how they should behave, dress, speak, think, and interact based on their gender. In our society, there are many misconceptions about what men and women should be like. Boys and girls must behave in a certain manner just because of their gender. For example, people often believe that men should always be strong, should control their emotions, that's why men should not cry and those who do are called cowards. And men are responsible for

earning money for their family, while women should be soft in nature, caring and do chores (cooking, cleaning, laundering, etc.). Men are stereotyped as independent, agentic, and goal oriented; women are stereotyped as interdependent, communal and oriented towards others (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Heilman (2001) emphasizes that men are considered to be emotionally strong, assertive and workplace achievers whereas women are often considered to be emotionally unstable, weak and timid. Stereotypes about academic fields are often relative between gender groups. Believing one group is “good at mathematics” may imply indirectly that the other group is not (Cvencek, Nasir et al. 2015). According to Huntington, (n.d) Stereotypes typically revolve around our primary social identities. Examples of gender stereotypes such as the belief that men don’t have emotions they can only express anger. While women of girls are emotional.

Our society is quick to outfit male infants in blue and girls in pink, even applying these colour-coded gender labels while a baby is in the womb (Lumenlearning.com). According to (weinraub et al. 1984) Gender Stereotypes are widely held beliefs about the characteristics, behaviors, and roles of men and women. Gender stereotypes create widely accepted norms that each gender and associated behaviors are binary (Safary, 2024). Along with gender identity and ideology, gender stereotypes underlie discriminatory behaviors based on the categorization of a person as a man or a woman (Moya, M; Puertas, S.D).

“Women Stereotypes” refers to preconceived and oversimplified notions, beliefs or generalizations about women based on their gender. These stereotypes often arise from cultural, social, or historical norms and can encompass a range of characteristics, behaviours, or roles that are attributed to women as a group. Stereotypes about women may include expectations regarding their appearances, behaviour, abilities, roles in society, or even their emotions (Thamanna & Subramani, 2024). In many societies, the stereotyping of females is more pervasive and socially reinforced than that of males. The overt social and economic inequalities more commonly experienced by women, such as lower rates of schooling and employment, less pay for similar jobs, under representation in leadership positions (Vigod & Rochan, 2020). The latest Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) report has revealed no improvement in biases against women in a decade, with almost 9 out of 10 men and women worldwide still holding

such biases today. Half of people worldwide still believe men make better political leaders than women, and more than 40% believe men make better business executives than women. Women are more negatively stereotyped at work than men (Forbes.com). On the other hand, men are also trapped in the trap of social expectation. Men are also seen as strong, aggressive, they cannot cry etc.

1.2: Evolution of Cartoon

In fine art, a cartoon (From Italian: Cartone and Dutch: Karton- words describing strong, heavy paper or paste board and cognates for cartoon) is a full size drawing made on sturdy paper as a design or modello for a painting, stained glass, or tapestry (Wikipedia). “Fantasmagorie” was the first animated cartoon made in 1908 by the French director Emile Cohl. After 6 years in 1914 another animated cartoon was released, whose name was ‘Gertie The Dinosaur’. It was produced by American cartoonist and animator Winsor McCay. It was one of the first successful animated cartoons (Wikipedia).

“El Apostol” directed by Quirino Cristiani in 1917 became the first full length animated feature film, which was 1 hour 10 minutes long. Walt Disney and UbIwerks’s ‘Steamboat Willie’ which was released in 1928. It was a landmark in the history of animation. It was the first film starring Mickey Mouse to be released with synchronized sound, it rendered silent animation obsolete and launched an empire (MOMA).

After that, many cartoon shows were made by Disney Animation Studio, such as “Pinocchio” (1940), “Fantasia” (1940), “Dumbo” (1941), and “Bambi” (1942). In 1950, the same studio made an animated show “Cinderella”, which was a successful film and was able to succeed at the box office, and it received critical acclaim. “The Flintstones”, American animated sitcom produced by Hanna-Barbera Productions in 1960. It is considered the first successful animated sitcom to broadcast in Prime Time Television. This innovative move made it the first cartoon to be broadcast during peak adult viewing hours, marking a significant shift in television programming (EBSCO).

In the late 1980's and 1990s, traditional hand-drawn cartoons began to merge with digital tools. Software such as Toon Boom, Adobe Animate gave access to animators

to simplify the process, making it more efficient. For example- “The Simpsons” (1989), “Looney Tunes” etc.

CGI came around 90’s “Toy Story” (1995) directed by Pixar, It was a completely CGI animated feature film. Using CGI, animators can make more realistic animation. Today, CGI gradually develops with more advanced rendering techniques just like real things. At present most of the cartoons are made by using CGI with the help of softwares like Blender, Maya, 3ds Max, Cinema 4D etc.

Nowadays, there are many TV channels that broadcast cartoons non-stop (Ghilzai et al, 2017). And watching cartoon shows on TV channels or on YouTube channels has become a daily habit for children. Children are like white papers. You can draw on it, which is behaviour and personality. Children are accepting any influence and information affecting his character in the future. Cartoons are what attracts the children's shapes and most of their behaviour (Wijethilaka, 2020). Children learn about the world at an early age. When they watch stereotypical cartoons on television at an early age, they start to believe that whatever they see in the cartoons is true. But, the truth is that most of the information shown in cartoons is stereotypical and fictional. However, at an early age, children fail to understand the difference between reality and fantasy. As a result, they form their views about society based on what they see in cartoons on television (Bartleby.com). Cartoons and animated movies are the most entertaining activities for kids for over more than 80 years. With the help of cartoons kids can learn about the world around us about new animation and other important things (Das, 2019).

1.3: Significance of The Study

Cartoons are not just for entertainment, they play a significant role in how children learn about the world and what children think about their society and people of the society through cartoons. Cartoons could influence children in both positive and negative aspects. When cartoon shows depict gender stereotypes, violence or unrealistic portrayals of behaviour, they shape negative perceptions on children’s brains. And this type of content may influence children’s behaviour, attitudes.

These three cartoons are the most viewed cartoon show in India. A researcher conducted a survey among 100 children between the ages of 4 and 12. And out of 100 children 91 children watch cartoons. Among these 82 children watch Chhota Bheem, approximately 90% of the children watch Chhota Bheem. About 75 children, or 82.41%, watch Mighty Raju, while 79 children, making up 86.8%, watch Chikoo Aur Bunty. From this data, it is observed that more than 80% of the children watch all the three cartoon shows- Chhota Bheem, Mighty Raju and Chikoo Aur Bunty. That's why researcher selected these three cartoon shows for study.

1.4: Review of Literature

For decades, animated films have been very popular and commercially successful all over the world. It has evolved from 2D to Hyper realistic animated films. During the 1910s, the production of animated 'Cartoons' became an industry in the US. In India the journey of animation started with the Government setting up the cartoon films unit in 1955 in the Film Division Complex in Mumbai. The first Indian animated film was 'The Banyan Deer'. Which was made by animator Ram Mohan in 1957. So, he is also known as the "Father of the Indian Animation Industry".

Since that time, many animated cartoon shows have been produced in India. For example: Ek Anek Aur Ekta (1974), Ghayab Aya (1990), Adventures of Chhota Birbal (2002), Chhota Bheem (2008) and Roll No 21 (2010). And many foreign made animated cartoon shows began to be broadcast in India in local languages (Hindi, Tamil, Telugu etc). For example: 'Doraemon' began airing in India on 2 May 2005. 'Chin-Chan' began airing in India on June 19, 2006. 'Tom and Jerry' began airing in India in 1996. All of them became very popular among Indian children. Now watching cartoons has become a part of children's life and children learn a lot from cartoons like social behavior, Moral and ethics, Language and communication, Gender roles etc. And some cartoons depict women or girls in stereotypical ways which can influence children and can change their perception of women or girls.

According to Thompson & Zerbinos (1995) as children start spending most of their time watching television and animated cartoons at a very young age, gender representation in programs of children needs great importance and attention. Many

subversive elements can be seen in cartoon movies. These elements include fantasy, violence, subliminal messages, and western trends (Siddiqui, 2022). Heroic roles and instrumental helping are more consistent with the male role (Eagly & Crowley, 1986) and boys were preferring superhero roles more than do girls (Ruble & Martin, 1998). According to Wasko, J. (2005) The content of cartoons has changed over the years, but their role in reflecting and shaping social norms and values has remained constant. From early newspaper comics to contemporary animated television shows and movies, cartoons have reflected social change while perpetuating stereotypes, particularly in areas like gender, race and socio-economic status. According to (Arma an Gokcearslan, 2010) Female characters are depicted as a status lower than males in cartoon films made before 1980. Male characters were depicted larger in number and appear more frequently, and male characters were prioritized.

However, there are some special cases because some cartoon shows sometimes show stereotypes such as gender, race, skin colour etc. According to Tufts researchers ‘Some kids animated shows feature diverse characters, but too many still reinforce stereotypes, and that is a problem. The heroine is depicted as a young or adolescent who is fragile, gentle, kind, beautiful, everyone loves her, extremely feminine, domestic and empathetic (Holt JE, 2010). In ‘Cinderella’, Cinderella is shown as being tortured by her stepmothers in the movie. In this location, the prince sets out to wed the woman whose foot fits into glass heels that are delicate and delicate. He has no memory of the woman’s personality or even her face from the night he danced with her. Like in other films, the protagonist in this one was shown to be slim and beautiful. On the other hand, the antagonistic characters, like her stepmother and stepsisters, are shown to be unattractive (Karma A, Bhad A, 2023).

In the ‘Burhi Aair Sadhu’ (1911) by Lakshminath Bezbarua there are some female characters, where females are represented as powerless, interdependent. (Talukdar & Gogoi, 2020) in their paper “Retelling of Assamese Folktales from a Feminist Perspective: A Reading of Tejimola and the Tale of Kite Mother’s Daughter” writes, In the folktale Tejimola, the lead character Tejimola is socially or literally represented as a powerless little girl, voiceless, afraid and has no strong point of her own. Even if she is the main protagonist of her story. She is not seen or observed as a powerful persona. Same is the case with the wife of Potter from The Kite Mother’s Daughter Just because

she is dependent on her husband, she is deprived of her own child. And (Talukdar & Gogoi, 2020) find certain truths about the societal system and how it creates an order which eventually people are bound to follow. The status or position of women appeared to be very low in the past due to the strict patriarchal norms of the society and women were restrained within the four walls of the house.

Jeanne & Debra (1996) argued that in most of the animated films, the male characters are usually portrayed as aggressive, full of action and violent whilst female characters are proved to be passive and useless as well as subordinate to man. According to (Barcus, 1984), In children's cartoon films, 75% of the characters were male and 21% were female. Thompson & Zerbinos, (1995) in their research paper 'Gender roles in animated cartoons: Has the picture changed in 20 years?' examined 175 episodes of 41 different cartoon films and reported that male protagonist's number is more than that of female protagonists. Compared to female characters, male characters were given much more prominence, appeared more frequently, engaged in more of almost all of the noted behaviors, and talked significantly more. Cartoons, especially "Chase- and pratfalls," were predominated by active, noisy, male characters. Female characters were less numerous, needed to be rescued, caused trouble, talked less, worked at home, and tended to fall in love at first sight (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1997). (Towbin et al. 2008) in their paper 'Images of Gender, Race, Age, and Sexual Orientation in Disney Feature-Length Animated Films' wrote Women are helpless and need protection. This theme occurred in 11 movies (Dwarfs, Bambi, Cinderella, Peter, Lady, Sleeping, Robin, Oliver, Mermaid, Lion, and Hercules). Lauzen, et al. (2008) studied a sample of 124 prime time television programs airing on the 6 broadcast networks during the 2005- 06 season, In this study researchers confirm that female characters in prime-time television continue to inhabit interpersonal roles involved with romance, family, and friends. In contrast, male characters are more likely to assume work-related roles.

Ahmed & Wahab, (2014) examines ten most popular and regular animated cartoons broadcasted in cartoon networks and it is revealed that 90% animated cartoons are male oriented and only 10% animated cartoons are female oriented. And 67.4% of the characters were male only 32.6% of the characters were female. Also it revealed that 70.4% male characters were portrayed as strong and powerful in most of the animated films while only 29.6% females were shown in powerful and strong characters. The

findings revealed that 90% female characters were portrayed as sexually attractive, physically smart, beautiful while at the same time only 10% male characters were represented as sexually attractive and smart.

In many cartoon shows (such as Rudra, Shiva, Gattu Battu, Little Singham), female characters are often underrepresented in roles that showcase intelligence or leadership, are weak in magic, and are portrayed as helpless and dependent on male counterparts. For example, in Scooby-Doo, Velma is the intellectual of the group, but her character is sometimes overshadowed by her less assertive demeanor compared to male characters (Hentges & Case, 2013). (Alsaraireh, et. al, 2020) in their paper 'Critical Discourse Analysis of Gender Representation of Male And Female Characters in The Animation Movie, FROZEN' analysis the speech styles of female and male characters in the animation movie, Frozen. From the discourse analysis they find in the animation movie portray that women hesitate a lot, use different intonations to show feelings, are more polite, talk more than men and on the other hand like to interrupt more than women. During the last few years a number of studies have proved that in the majority of animated cartoons, not only the female are portrayed stereotypically but also the male characters as well as depicted in a stereotypical manner in media all over the world (Ahmed & Wahab, 2014).

Researchers have found fewer female characters, limited roles, dependency on male counterparts, lack of leadership, etc in most of the cartoon shows. For example, Shumaila Ahmed from the School of Malaysia and Juliana Abdul Waheb from Pakistan wrote a research paper on the topic 'Animation and Socialisation Process: Gender Role Portrayal on Cartoon Network'. They selected 10 foreign cartoon shows for research. However, while international research on gender representation in cartoon shows is extensive, there is a distinct lack of scholarly writing on Indian cartoon shows. Few academic studies have examined how cartoon shows portray female characters. A notable research gap is created by the paucity of comprehensive analysis about the stereotyping of women in Indian animated entertainment. This study attempts to close that gap by critically analyzing how female characters are portrayed in Indian cartoon shows, whether or not these portrayals perpetuate gender stereotypes, and how these portrayals may influence the gender attitudes of children. In the framework of media and gender studies in India, the research tackles a socially significant topic through this

targeted investigation. Considering all these, the objectives of this paper are: (i) to observe how cartoon shows portray female characters. (ii) to identify stereotypical elements in these three cartoon shows: Chhota Bheem, Mighty Raju and Chikoo Aur Bunty. (iii) to understand children's perceptions of gender roles. Research questions are : (a) What are the roles played by female characters in 'Chhota Bheem', 'Mighty Raju' and 'Chikoo Aur Bunty'? (b) what is the number of female and male characters in the three cartoons? (c) how much screen time is given to female characters in an episode?

1.5: Methodology

Researchers selected three cartoon shows for study based on their highest viewership and popularity. These cartoon shows are Chhota Bheem, Mighty Raju and Chikoo Aur Bunty. A total of 15 episodes were selected for content analysis - five episodes each of the above three cartoon shows.

The researchers used both qualitative and quantitative methods, also known as a mixed method. For the qualitative method, the researcher conducted visual content analysis of the total 15 episodes of the three cartoon shows. Through the content analysis, the researcher identified the number of female characters, the number of male characters, the screen time of female characters and the total duration of the episodes.

For the quantitative method, the researcher conducted a school-based survey to explore children's perceptions of gender roles and women.

1.6 Data Analysis

1.6.1: Chhota Bheem

Chhota Bheem is an Indian animated TV show. Which is broadcasted on Pogo TV directed by Rajiv Chilaka and Binayak Das. It was made by Green Gold Animations based in Hyderabad. It aired on Pogo TV in India on 6 april, 2008. This show is available in many languages such as English, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada etc.

The cartoon series is set in a village in the state of Dholakpur. The show revolves around Bheem, a young boy who is strong and intelligent. Bheem is a well-loved figure in the village, known for his good heart and helping nature. His closest friends are Chutki,

Raju, and a talking monkey named Jaggu. The show revolves around Bheem and his team who use their skills to solve various problems affecting the village.

1.6.2: Mighty Raju

Mighty Raju is an Indian animated cartoon series created by Green Gold Animations and directed by Rajiv Chilaka. It aired on Pogo TV in 2015. This story is based on a small boy named Raju, who lives in Arya Nagar with his parents and his dog 'Moby' and they have a robot named Cheeky. A four year old Raju is not an ordinary boy. He is a Superhero. He received superpowers when his pregnant mother accidentally consumed a compound created by his scientist father. As a result, Raju is born with immense strength, intelligence, and the ability to fly at super speed. Due to his super power, people called him 'Mighty Raju'. Whenever any danger comes to Arya Nagar, Raju transforms into Mighty Raju and saves everyone from the danger. Despite being a superhero, Raju plays a double life-going to school, helping friends, and secretly saving everyone from any danger. In his school he has two closed friends, Gopi and Julie.

1.6.3: Chikoo Aur Bunty

Chikoo aur Bunty is an Indian animated television series. It aired on Nickelodeon on 18, October 2021 produced by Hitech Studio. It is written by Gaurav Malani, Seema Malani and directed by Vishwajeet Shinde. It is a comedy series focused on the relationship between siblings. It revolves around the rivalry brothers, Chikoo and Bunty, who compete for affection, gifts and often escape parental attention, especially when they cause mischief in the home, neighbourhood schools or playground.

1.7: Analysis

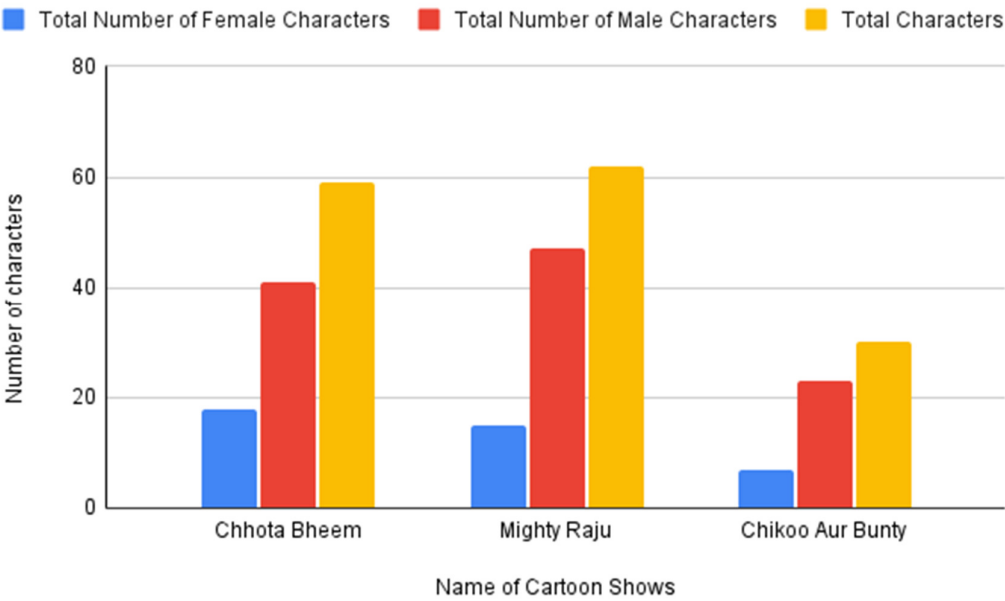


Figure 1. Shown: In the five episodes of ‘Chhota Bheem’ there are 59 characters in total. Among them, the number of male characters is 41 and the number of female characters is 18. Where male characters made up approximately 69.9% of the total, while female characters accounted for only 30.5%.

In the five episodes of ‘Mighty Raju’ there are 62 characters in total. Among them, the number of male characters is 47 and the number of female characters is 15. Where male characters made up almost 76% of the total, while female characters accounted for only 24.19%.

In the five episodes of ‘Chikoo Aur Bunty’ there are 30 total characters. Among them, the total number of male characters is 23 and only 7 are female characters. Where male characters made up approximately 76.6% of the total, while female characters accounted only for 23.3%.

Figure 5. Female screen time in the three cartoon shows ‘Chhota Bheem’, ‘Mighty Raju’ and ‘Chikoo Aur Bunty’.

Screen Time of Female Characters

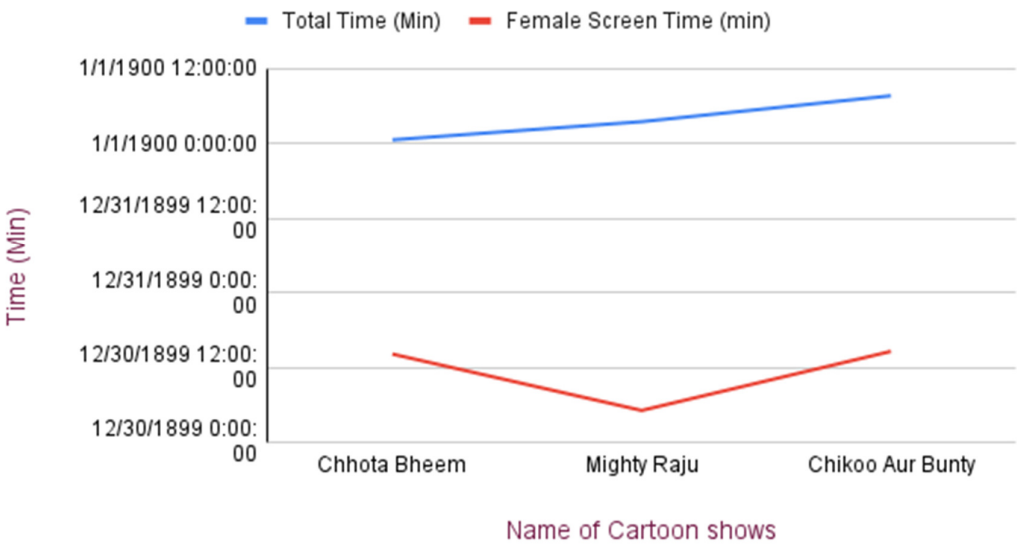


Figure 2. shows that in the five episodes of ‘Chhota Bheem’ the total duration is 48 minutes and 35 seconds, and the total screen time given to female characters is 14 minutes and 8 seconds. Female characters received approximately 29.09% of the total screen time in the five episodes.

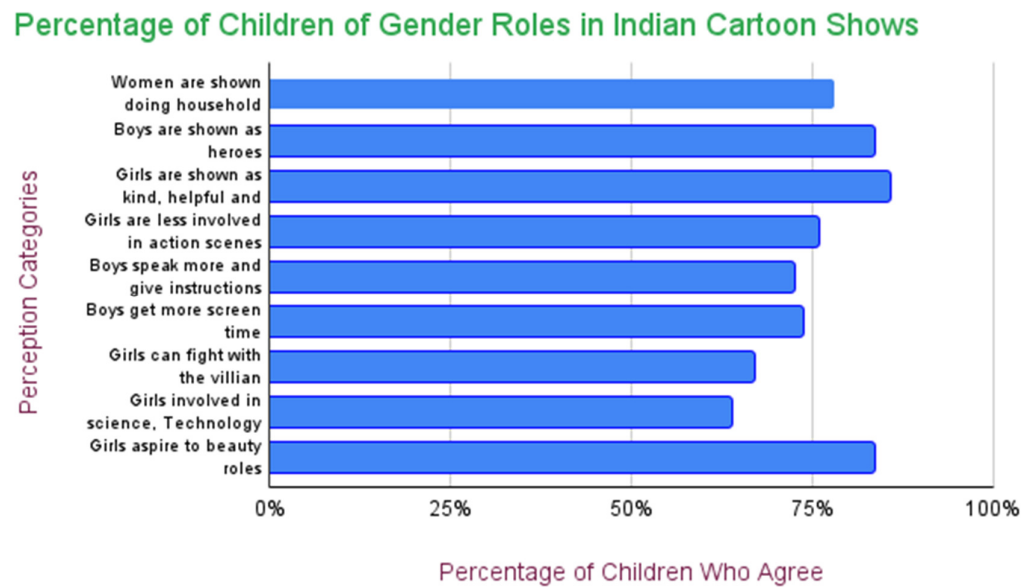
In five episodes of Mighty Raju, the total duration is 51 minutes and 31 seconds, and the total screen time given to female characters is 5 minutes and 6 seconds. Female characters received approximately 9.9% of the total screen time in the five episodes.

In five episodes of ‘Chikoo Aur Bunty’, the total duration is 55 minutes and 40 seconds, and the total screen time given to female characters is 14 minutes and 33 seconds. Female characters received approximately 26.14% of the total screen time in the five episodes.

In ‘Mighty Raju’ screentime of female characters is very low compared to ‘Chhota Bheem and ‘Chikoo Aur Bunty’

To understand children’s perceptions of gender roles researcher conducted a survey and collected data from 100 children on how students or children perceive female gender roles in cartoons.

Figure 3. Gender stereotypes in the cartoon shows



In figure 3. It is found that out of 100 children, 91 watch cartoons, and out of 91 children, 71 children agree that women are shown doing household chores in cartoon shows, especially in ‘Chhota Bheem’, ‘Mighty Raju’ and ‘Chikoo Aur Bunty’. 76 children agree that boys are shown as heroes in cartoon shows, 78 children agree that girls are shown as kind, helpful and emotional, 69 children agree that girls are less involved in action scenes, 66 children agree with that boys get more screen time. 61 children agree that in cartoon shows girls can fight with the villain. 58 children agree with that girl involved in science, technology or problem-solving in Indian Cartoon shows and 76 children agree that girls aspire to beauty roles.

Here most of the children agree that girls are kind, helpful and emotional and fewer children agree that girls are involved in science, technology. Most of the cartoon shows portray that women are kind hearted, weak in science, and boys/male are aggressive, indiscipline etc. This type of thing can influence children negatively and it can change children’s behavior, attitude.

1.8: Conclusion

The researchers observed that female characters in cartoons should be portrayed as strong, independent, and capable of leading instead of being poor and dependent. There should also be an equal number of male and female characters. It was found that many Indian cartoon shows often portray male characters as scientists, police officers, or action heroes, while female characters are usually portrayed as housewives, teachers, or nurses. Therefore, the cartoon creators should work to break these stereotypical patterns. They should portray girls and women in different roles such as athletes, inventors, doctors etc. Such representations have a direct effect on children's behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions of gender roles.

Furthermore, when the mother is portrayed as a housewife who performs household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for the family, children may come to believe that these tasks are solely the mother's responsibility. Such depictions reinforce traditional gender roles. So cartoon shows should avoid storylines based on the idea of 'boys do this' or 'girls can't do this'. Instead, equality and shared responsibility should be promoted in all aspects of life.

Wijethilaka, (2020) in their research paper, 'Effect of Cartoons on Children' stated that children are highly impacted by cartoon shows. Cartoons are more than just a source of entertainment, they are powerful tools that can shape the thinking of young children. Watching cartoons can influence the children's behavior, attitude. But most of the parents are not aware about it. So to aware parents such conversations and discussions should be conducted. This will help them understand how gender roles are portrayed in televisions, media and how these portrayals can influence their children's behavior, attitudes etc.

In the three cartoon shows 'Chhota Bheem', 'Mighty Raju' and 'Chikoo Aur Bunty', female characters are mostly portrayed in supportive roles, often shown as dependent on their male counterparts.

However, in real life, women or girls are strong, independent, and capable in every field. They excel in Science, Technology, Engineering and mathematics, Sports, leadership and many other areas. In India inspiring figures like Mary Kom, Lovlina Borgohain, Hima Das, Sania Mirza, Kiran Bedi, Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, a senior

officer in the Indian Army. These real-life role models challenge the stereotypical representations often seen in cartoons and emphasize the need for more empowering portrayals of female characters in children's shows.

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