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<b>Article:</b>	<b>Storyline Depiction of Transgender Issues in Pakistani Dramas</b>
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### Abstract

This study analyzed the effect of exposure to a TV storyline on “**Khuda Mera Bhai**” and “**Alif Allah Aur Insan**” (ARY Digital & HUM TV) and complementary effects of screening other TV series featuring transgender individuals. Researcher has done content analysis and constructed a coding sheet regarding transgender issues which highlighted in these two selected dramas of two different channels. After watching all relevant episodes of both dramas, coders had filled coding sheet given by researcher. Content Analysis disclosed the exposure of both selected dramas Khuda Mera Bhi hai and Alif Allah Aur Insan. Depicting the storylines of transgender individuals were affiliated with more supportive attitudes towards transgender characters and their issues. Attitudes of more conservative TV audience became more and more positive as they saw more media portrayals of transgender individuals. The findings highlighted the potential for entertainment content to influence attitudes toward minority groups.

**Keywords:** *Storyline, Depiction, Transgender, Issues, Pakistani Dramas*

## Introduction:

Dramas as a medium of entertainment are also source of information, education, and propaganda and opinion formation. Role of the dramas in the modern world cannot be underestimated. Drama has perhaps the greatest potential to be the most effective mass media instrument. A drama has certainly some clear advantages over other media. It combined primarily, both audio and video and is thus very appealing to the eyes and the ears. With the development of color cinematography, and stereophonic sound, it is certainly one up on other media (Elsaesser, 2002).

Transgender did not fit in this gender dichotomy. Anthropologists have identified more than two, supernumerary sexes in many societies which are named differently depending on the social system. Normal people do not like marginalized group and take them as abnormal. They are neither men nor women rather they are misfit in both genders, male female society (Ahmad, 2012).

In this study researcher selected two dramas that was on aired on “ARY Digital” and “HUM TV”. One was “*Alif Allah Aur Insaan*” and other one was “*Khuda Mera Bhi Hai*”.

“Alif Allah Aur Insaan” was a Pakistani Sufi spiritual drama series which aired on Hum TV from 25 April 2017 to 13 February. It was created by Momina Duraid. It was written by Qaisra Hayat, based on her novel of the same name. Series was directed by Ahson Talish.

“Khuda Mera Bhi Hai” is a Pakistani drama serial that aired on ARY Digital from 22 October 2016 to 10 April 2017. The serial was written by Asma Nabeel, directed by Shahid Shafaat and produced by Sana Shahnawaz. The serial sheds light on the stereotypes, gender discrimination and marginalization that intersex people faced within Pakistani society, and their identity crisis.

Drama serial *Khuda mera bhi hai* (2016-17) portrayed eight transgender roles in which all of them are performed by cisgender actors. Out of 58 mini-episodes, 53 portray discussions about transgender. The drama revolved around an intersex child (Noor) and her family. To present phases of age (i.e., baby, toddler, teenager, adult), the character of Noor is acted by four actors of different age groups. Furqan Qureshi performed as grown up Noor, which was the major phase of the role.

Drama serial *Alif Allah aur Insaan* (2017) showcased five supporting transgender characters (Shammo, Nurgis, Firdos, Neelam and Aslam) in the traditional profession of street dancing and singing. Shammo was a progressive transman. He fell in love with a nomadic girl, Rani, but she hated her because of her gender, timidity and stigmatized profession of transgender. He switched her profession to please her and becomes a hairdresser/ beautician.

Study focused on finding the answer for what kind of images reflected through these dramas. The TV shows being considered are telecast through Pakistani entertainment channels and are available on YouTube. Due to a limited number of available TV shows. Methodology of quantitative content analysis is suggested to study the portrayal of transgender roles (Capuzza & Spencer, 2017).

The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the depiction of transgender in media particularly on Pakistani television.
- To find out the ethical, social and economic issues of transgender presented in Pakistani Dramas.
- To explore the depiction of storyline of transgender in Pakistani Dramas.

**Statement of problem:**

People are driven by certain myths related to transgender but very few have tried to know them. As transgender are the neglected and marginalized part of our society so research wanted to explore media reality about them. Media reality is what portrayed on television screen. Many researches have been conducted in the world, focusing on the impacts of television on viewers, particularly on their behavior. And there is a wide range of studies carrying content analysis of media particularly television content. Present study is focusing on the portrayal of transgender and their picture presented on TV screen.

**Rational of this study:**

Researcher selected this topic because very little research has been done on this topic in Pakistan. It contribute in literature. Transgender are one of the most ignored people in our society. There is very little research done on how they are treated and perceived in our society. Due to convenience of content availability and language similarity, Pakistani media selected for this storylines. There are some dramas that depicted transgender role in our society in which they are often out casted or used for comedy.

**Research Questions:**

RQ1: How Pakistani dramas changed the perception of society regarding transgender?

RQ2: To what extant storylines of Pakistani Dramas were in the favor of transgender?

RQ3: How Pakistani dramas presented social and economic issues of transgender people?

**Literature Review:**

Fahim, S. (2018), He Explained in their study that topic was “*Influence of advertising on gender roles and stereotypes in Pakistan*”, He stated that in a region where the world’s largest mass displacement took place in 1947, socio-political and religious influencers have been long-established drivers of societal evolution. On a historic backdrop, gender roles and stereotypes embedded in culture and religions of the sub-continent. He investigated gender roles and stereotypes in modern-day Pakistan, which was created in 1947 as a result of the partition of British India. Inspiration for this thesis is drawn from personal life experiences and complexed evolution of gender roles in the country. Gender roles studied in relation with advertising. Whether or not advertising reframes and influences gender roles in the minds of the Pakistani consumers will be investigated through in-depth, quantitative interviews.

Stotzer, R. L. (2009), explained in their study entitled “*Violence against transgender people: A review of United States data*”. He wrote transgender people face many challenges in a society that is unforgiving of any system of gender that is not binary. However, there were three primary sources of data in the United States for discerning the rates and types of violence that transgender people face throughout their lives — self-report surveys and needs assessments, hot-line call and social service records, and police reports. Data from each of these sources are discussed in length, as well as some of the methodological issues for these types of data sources. All three sources indicated that violence against transgender people started early in life, that transgender people were at risk for multiple types and incidences of violence, and that threatened lasts throughout their lives. In addition, transgender people seem to have particularly high risk for sexual violence.

Pamment, C. (2010), expressed in their study entitled “*Hijraism: Jostling for a third space in Pakistani politics*”. He wrote the tropes of mainstream and peripheral

transgendered performers are explored for their playful negotiations in the body politic of Pakistan.

Davis, D. (2009), He find out in their study entitled “*Transgender issues in the workplace: HRD's newest challenge/opportunity*”. He explained Transgender issues in the workplace represent the bleeding edge of the cutting edge in the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) diversity human rights movement. By becoming aware of the issues involved and conceptualizing interventions to help managers as well as employees, HRD can add value to the organization, fostering social equity as well as organizational effectiveness. This article will provide a backdrop for HRD scholars and practitioners to understand the myriad of considerations involved in this emergent workplace issue.

Beemyn, B. Et al (2005), explained in their study entitled “*Transgender issues on college campuses*“. They wrote that Colleges and universities are beginning to consider the needs of transgender students, but few understood how to offer support to this segment of the campus community. They addressed issues and provides suggestions for student affairs professionals.

This study has used framing theory and Uses and Gratification theory that how the transgender issues were represented in electronic media on different TV Channels Hum TV and ARY Digital.

Many scholars see the framing theory of communication as an extension of the Agenda setting theory which stated that the media is not telling us what to think about, but rather what to think about (Lane, 2001). Theory of framing is more focused. Baran and Davis (2009), stated that the concept of framing “examined the idea of how people use expectations to make everyday life meaningful” (p.35).

Media Framing does not focus on accessibility but rather on application, the extent to which certain messages connect within the minds of the public and then influence their perception and behavior during the process of opinion formation (Zhou 2007 & Scheufele 1999). Media Framing can be described as the mechanism through which certain facts are presented at the detriment of others and promoted to discuss the issue, make moral decisions and find different solutions to the matter proposed (Entman, 1993).

According to (McQuail, 2005), the theory of use and gratification is generally used as a theory that is strongly linked to media effects studies. It is a method to impart wisdom into how and why people are looking for particular media to meet specific needs. The concept of use and gratification was first proposed by the American sociologist Elihu Katzin 1959 in which he clarified that social study was near extinction as scholars focused only on the impact that the media had on individuals. He consequently indicated that researcher’s focus more on how the media are used (Severin & Tankard, 2001). There are several needs and gratification for people. They are categorized into five needs like Cognitive needs, Affective needs, Personal Integrative needs, Social Integrative needs, Tension free needs

### **Research methodology:**

Research methodology is a gateway to conduct the research study. It is a specific procedure to identify and analyzed the information about research topic and research questions. Methodology is a part of any research design which allowed the researcher to critically evaluate the research project overall validity and reliability (D. Leedy, 1974).

For our study researcher did qualitative research. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to

understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research.

Content analysis is a research technique used to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material. By systematically evaluating texts (e.g., documents, oral communication). “ARY Digital” and “HUM TV” two channels were selected as universe of this study. Time period will be selected by the researcher for this study was 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017. Two dramas which are selected for this research they are most convenient because they specially highlighted the issues of transgender (Social, Economic, cultural & ethical) that’s why convenient sampling selected for this study. There were so many transgender based dramas on-air on different channels but two dramas selected for this study. One was “Alif Allah Aur Insaan” and other one was “Khuda Mera Bhi Hai” was the population of our study.

Dialogue analysis, Pictorial display, Facial expressions, Body language and Text analysis are the unit of analysis of this study. Script is the combination of visuals and words that’s why there are two categories one is Dialogues and other one is Shots.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Researcher has been selected two transgender based dramas “*Alif Allah Aur Insaan*” and “*Khuda Mera Bhi Hai*” from electronic media. *Alif Allah Aur Insaan* is Pakistani Sufi spiritual drama series which aired on Hum TV from 25<sup>th</sup> April 2017 to 13<sup>th</sup> February 2018. On the other hand *Khuda Mera Bhi Hai* is a Pakistani drama serial that aired

on ARY Digital from 22 October 2016 to 10 April 2017.



Dramas Serial *Alif Allah Aur Insaan* had 43 episodes and other hand *Khuda Mera Bhi*

*Hai* had 26 episodes. Both dramas presented the life of transgender in our Pakistani society.

These dramas highlighted the issues which faced by transgender in the society.



### RQ1: How dramas changed the perception of society regarding transgender?

In the social landscape of Pakistan, the oppressed *Khwaja sara* community is living a socially excluded life. Understudy data mainly depicted social isolation/rejection of this community. Their portrayed within their secluded homes

and oppressed lifestyle in dramas is a true depiction of reality. They are disowned by their families. Both dramas depicted the disrespectful social behavior towards Khwaja saras. Moreover, they depicted sexual harassment and used of derogatory language for trans\* people. Some episodes of both dramas discussed the stigmatized jobs of the Khwaja sara community.

Commonly traditional Khwaja saras presented as street dancers, singers and beggars in feminine garments with loud make-up. Shammo (in Alif Allah aur Insan) and Noor (in the drama serial Khuda mera bhi hay) are shown as progressive transgender. Shammo starts hir career from scratch as barber and gradually progressed to a make-up artist at the end. Noor's father (Zain) envisaged the stigmatized future of his hermaphrodite child. They did not feel courage to face his family and friends discouraging and shameful remarks. Resultantly, he disowned and left the newborn at the dera of eunuchs. However, the baby's mother (Mahagul) shown courage.

Despited the strong social pressure and family opposition. She brought the child back and put all her energies in her upbringing and education. After facing hard circumstances against social taboos and stereotypical norms, she proved that intersex children can be useful citizens in society. At the end of the drama, Noor appeared as a successful businessman. A sympathetic social attitude was also visible in both dramas. This attitude was sometimes full of kindness. But sometimes reflected pity on Trans\* people. In the drama serial, Alif Allah aur Insan, a customer at the hairdresser's shop gave Shammo some money for food, because he had not eaten in the previous two days. As a philanthropist, Mikael's kind attitude towards orphans and especially towards Noor's education and upbringing depicted a silver lining in these shows.

These transgender-based dramas changed the perception of the society, in which transgender played the major character role, through camera shots and strong dialogues in both dramas. Shaamu and Noor played major transgender role in dramas and highlighted the transgender issues, which they were faced in the society.

***“Bata zara kiun Allah Mian sirf un logon ka hai? Nahin mein insan nahin hun kiya?”***

***Bata bol? Kena kiya chah rahi hai tu....?”***

***“Haaye pagli hamain insane kon samajhta hai....?”***

***“Agar wo larka nahin ya larki nahin to kiya iska matlab yeh hai k un s saray rishtay cheen liye jayen unko parhaya na jaye, unko zaleel kiya jaye?”***

***“Yeh salook bilkul sahi nahin hai isko badalna ho ga, aur sirf tu he badal sakta hai..... mera kiya kasur hai? Agar mein aisa hun tu is mein mera kiya kasur hai? Mene to nahin bnaya apnay aap ko? Agar tu nay mujhe paida kiya to tu he aasaaniya paida kar mere liye....”***

Different camera frames used in both dramas like close up shots and mid shots to emphasize the transgender issues properly. Mostly close up shots, mid shots and extremely close up shoots used in dramas while shooting the drama. Script specially wrote for the disclosure of transgender.



Dialogues which were used in both dramas are mostly in the favor of very strongly and strongly supported to the transgender people and highly discussed the transgender cultural, economic, behavioral, societal, educational, communications, shelter/ Protection and gathering issues which they faced in the society. The dialogues which supported the transgender and their issues have given below:

**“Arshi : Wo ahan say belong karta hai isay wahin chor aao....**

**Log kiya kahain gay? Kesi kesi batain karain gay? Tumharay baap ki izzat? You have to understand....”**

**“Noor: kiya mein bhayanak shakal ka hun jo ap meri taraf daikh bhi nahin saktay? Kiya mujhe koorh hai jo ap mujhe choo bhi nahin saktay? Kiya mein neech hun? Kamina**

**hun? Kiun kiya apnay mere sath aisa? Jawab di jiye... log to apni na’jaiz aulad ko apna letay hain, mein to phir apki jaiz aulad hun.... Kiun kiya apnay mere sath aisa...?”**

**“Ab kiya hijray parhain gay school mein...?”**

**“ Hum jesay logon ko kon kaam deta hai? Hamain to koi bheek bhi nahin deta....”** RQ2: To what extant storylines of Pakistani Dramas were in the favor of transgender?

Script transmitted from time to time and place to place. It is transmitted person to person and the transmitter is not a mere messenger; the transmitter of the script must know the script and be able to teach it to others. This teaching may be conscious or through empathetic, emphatic means.

Storyline of both dramas were especially designed for transgender community. Storylines of both selected dramas were presented the cultural issues of transgender regarding language, communications and education.

While writing the script the writer make sure that language which is used to construct the dialogues for the transgender issues that should be in the favor of transgender. Content of the script highly supported to the transgender issues.

Selected dramas in this research study highlighted cultural issues regarding communications. In our society transgender faced communications issues that reflect trans phobia, ignorance, or arrogance created frustration for these transgender individuals. Such behaviors most notably include nonverbal distancing and expressions of



disapproval and dismissal of the transgender individuals overall or of their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences.



The storylines of both dramas represented the educational issues regarding transgender people. There are no special schools and educational institutes for transgender people in Pakistan that's why they faced educational issues. Due to this issue, they did not have awareness about life and other social issues. They didn't have idea that how they make their lifestyle better and how they live in the society?



**“School Principal: I am sorry! Ap bohat bahadur Maa hain lekin mein yahan Noor ko admission nahin day sakti....**

**Mah Gul (Noor's Mother): Noor intelligent hai, mentally normal hai, iski physical disability say kisi ka kiya lena?**

**School Principal: Ap khud sochain yeh form to kiya ap dunya ka koi form bhi daikhain gi to wahan 2 he options hon gay male ya female, teesra option koi nahin hota....**

**Mah Gul (Noor's Mother): To ap k kehney ka matlab hai k Noor school mein nahin parh sakta?**

**School Principal: Infact aisa koi case kabhi school nahin aaya, aisay bachon ko koi school laata he nahin hai, I am sorry....”**

Above mention dialogues have shown the educational issues of transgender community.



The dialogues which shown cultural issues have mentioned below:

**“Wo hamari zindgiyon ka nasoore bun jata, wo bacha nahin tha, wo muaashray ka mazak tha, aik hijra tha wo....”**

**“Wo tumhara khoon hai, tumharay jesa nahin hai, maan’na mushkil hai lekin wo yahan nahin reh sakta....”**

**“Hamain paida he kiun kiya tha agar aisay he logon k samnay zaleel karwana tha to? Her koi hamain zalil karta hai....”**

**RQ3: How Pakistani dramas presented social and economic issues of transgender people?**

Pakistani dramas presented social and economic issues of transgender regarding jobs, society, educational issues, shelter/Protection and gathering issues through content and visuals. Transgender is also a part of the society and they have equal right of everything in the society that is available to all other genders. The discrimination based on their class and gender made the transgender community one of the most disempowered group in Pakistani Society.

Transgender Community could not get their basic rights, which included Right to Personal

Liberty, Dignity, Freedom of Expression, Right to Education and Empowerment, Right against

Violence, discrimination and exploitation.

**“Izzat to shayad hum hijron k naseeb mein hai he nahin....”**

**“Yeh jo tera Allah batain karta hai na sub yaah to sirf mardon k liye yaah sirf auraton k liye... hum hijron k liye nahin....”**

Above mentioned dialogues have shown that how much they dishearten and faced the problems in our society.



In Pakistan, transgender faced discrimination, abuse, and problems regarding basic human rights. For example, related to education, health care and employment etc. Their conditions were painful until Supreme Court given ruling in 2009 allowing transgender for registering themselves on National Identity Cards as transgendered and having franchise (right to vote) in general elections.

**“Arshi (Noor’s Grandmother): Sharam say mari ja rahi hun khandaan walon ko kiya kahain gay? Kiya kahain gay logon say k hamari bahu nay hijra paida kiya hai....?”**

**“Zain (Noor’s Father): Mahi hum log isay apnay sath nahin lay k ja sktay, yeh hum say belong nahin karta, hum isay kesay paalain gay? Kitna chupayen gay hum isay aur kis kis say chupayen gay? Or kab tak? Kabhi na kabhi to sub ko pata chal he jaye ga na? hum her roz marain gay, hamaray ghar walon ki her roz beizzati ho gi....?”**

**“Mah Gul (Noor’s Mother): Mujhe pta hai k kiun nahin accept karnay day raha isay koi? Koi kiun khud nahin accept kar raha? Aur kiun mujhe nahin accept karnay day raha koi? Kiun k wo society say dartay hain, wo dartay hain k log kiya kahain gay....”**

**“Shaamu: Hum logon mein rishtay hain kahan hotay hain baaji? Nargis (Shaamu’s Guru): Hamaray hamain apnay hamain nahin apnaatay , hum aik dusray ko to apnaatay hain na....”**

The above mentioned dialogues have shown the societal issues regarding transgender.



Transgender faced behavioral issues in everyday life as dramas represented that normal people did not give them respect, even our society did not accept them, they faced rejection as well. Their behaviors with transgender were also very insulting. Their rank is very low in our society.

***‘Lekin hum toh khokle hain na baaji. Na bhalaa kya bighara hum ne Allah ka...jo jism bhi nazuk, uss mein dil bhi nazuk rakh diya, kyun kya bighara?’*** – Shammo expresses to his mother in Alif Allah Aur Insan.

***‘Tu hi khailay ga? Khail sako gi kiya? Bhaag sako gi Dhanno? Aaye haaye.... daikho dosto iski aankhon mein to motay motay aansu aa gaye.... Mama nay btaya nahin kiya k mard football khailtay hain....?’*** Kids’ passed comments about Noor when Noor trying to play with them in Khuda Mera Bhi Hai.

***‘Rani (Street Beggar): Tobah tobah paleed aadmi, tujhe sharam nahin aati? Sari dunya mein tu he reh gaya hai mujh say muhabbat karnay wala....?’***

Selected dramas Alif Allah Aur Insan and Khuda Mera Bhi Hai were also represented the Protection / shelter issues of Transgender, which they were faced in our society. They faced legal protection and shelter issues in our society. The dialogues, visuals, camera frames and pictorial display which were used in both dramas were presented that both selected dramas represented the Protection / shelter issues of Transgender.

Alif Allah Aur Insan and Khuda Mera Bhi Hai represented the economic issues regarding jobs of Transgender in society. They faced job issues because in Pakistan there are no special educational institutes for transgender where they get education and get respectful jobs. Due to educational issues, they faced poverty and at the end, they became street beggars, dancers and prostitutes. If our society accepted them specially their parents took stand for their children as we seen in drama serial Khuda Mera Bhi Hai then the transgender did not face these types of issues.



The dialogues have given below which shown the economic issues of transgender regarding jobs in both dramas:

***“Firdous: Khuda nay hamain hijra bnaya hai to is mein hamara kiya qasoor hai baaji?”***

***Shaamu: Qasoor hai Hamar, Qasoor kiun nahin hai aai bari... hum log mehnat kar***

***k kiun nahin kamatay hain?***

***Firdous: Nokri karnay jayen to nokri kum or chair khaani ziada kartay hain, tamasha bnatay hain, Mazak bun k reh jatay hain hum....”***

There are a few examples of typical transgender roles which were performed by cisgender actors, but the physical on-screen presence of transgender actors is very rare. The first transgender news anchor, Marvia Malik, appeared on the Pakistani television screen on

March 23, 2018 and gained much coverage in national and international media. Similarly, Kami Sid, a transgender model and actor, also started her career in showbiz recently.

Selected dramas also represented the gathering issues of Transgender among normal people of the society. The normal people of our society did not want to meet the transgender people. Our society had not good perception regarding transgender people. Our society had the perception that Transgender were only born for dance and for entertainments. Such objects which can be harassed and will not be able to speak up. There is no law that could protect them they are objects of amusement and shame as we seen in both dramas. Shaamu and Noor faced all of these issues in both dramas.

*“Nazneen: tum hijray yahan kiun aaye ho? Ronaq laganay k liye apko yeh hijray he milay thay?”*

*Firdous: Choti malkani itna gharoor na kar apnay mukammal insaan honay per, jis khuda nay tumhain bnaya hai isi nay hamain bnaya hai... haaan....*

*Nazneen: Jao jao pehlay apni auqaat to daikho tum ho kiya? Pehlay puray inssan to bun jao phir mujh say bat karna....?”*

*“Noor: Hum sub ko Khuda nay bnaya hai? Phir yeh discrimination kesi? Kiun log insaano mein farq kartay hain? Babbab Mian, unko aaj tak unki Maa say nahin milnay diya gaya kiun k wo aisay hain... yahan tak k unko unki Maa ka janaza bhi nahin uthanay diya gaya...”*

Results shown that mostly gathering issues of Transgender among normal people of the society represented in both dramas “Khuda Mera Bhi Hai” and “Alif Allah Aur Insan

#### **Limitations and Recommendations**

- Due to time constraints, I just covered Pakistani media.
- Currently, I selected content analysis because it was convenient for me and easy to do for me.
- In future, if I will conduct study on the same topic I would like to compare Pakistani media with international media like India and America.
- In future, I will used another methodology like close ended questionnaire, surveys, transgender in-depth interviews or transgender focus group study along with religious scholars to discuss their cultural issues.

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