

Journal of Peace, Development and Communication



Volume 06, Issue 02, June 2022
pISSN: 2663-7898, eISSN: 2663-7901
Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V06-I02-18>
Homepage: <https://pdfpk.net/pdf/>
Email: se.jpdc@pdfpk.net

Article:	Portrayal of Female Characters in Pakistani Private TV Dramas
Author(s):	Farhan Mushtaq Centre of Media and Communication Studies, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.
	Dr. Arshad Ali Centre of Media and Communication Studies, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.
Published:	13 th June 2022
Publisher Information:	Journal of Peace, Development and Communication (JPDC)
To Cite this Article:	Mushtaq, Farhan. & Ali, Arshad. (2022). "Portrayal of Female Characters in Pakistani Private TV Dramas" <i>Journal of Peace, Development and Communication</i> , vol. 06, no. 02, 2022, pp. 257–274, https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V06-I02-18
Author(s) Note:	Farhan Mushtaq is a Ph.D. Scholar at Centre of Media & Communication Studies, University of Gujrat and Senior Programme Producer at Pakistan Television Corporation. Email: Farhanmushtaq73@gmail.com
	Dr. Arshad Ali currently serves as Associate Professor at Centre of Media & Communication Studies, University of Gujrat.

ABSTRACT

Over the decades, television transformed human life in different ways by providing society with new interpretations; also, by strengthening and cultivating old ones. Broadcasting of information and entertainment-based programs played a pivotal role in transforming Pakistani society as well. In the year 2002, the mushroom growth of private TV channels in Pakistan increased the demands of viewers for diverse content. The private networks along with heavy news production started entertainment telecasting majorly television dramas which is a “female-viewer-attracted” industry. The aim of this trend study is to critically observe how female characters are portrayed in the TV dramas of Pakistani private television channels from the year 2006 – 2016. Textual analysis is selected as method of analysis backed by theoretical framework of media representation theory in relation to feminism. It was found that there is a perspective of gender dichotomy in the TV dramas. Male lead character is active while female is passive in nature. Portrayal of women in drama re-assert patriarchal and sexist notions associated with behavior, occupation and appearance.

Keywords: Portrayal, Textual Analysis, Female, Media Representation Theory, Feminism

INTRODUCTION

One of the most influential forms of mass media, in terms of education, information and entertainment, is Television. Effects of television have been a debatable issue since half a century (McQuail, 2005). Broadcasting of information and entertainment-based programs played a pivotal role in transforming Pakistani society (Rehman, Hassan, Aziz & Amin, 2014). Pakistan Television Corporation is the single public TV network in Pakistan and private sector comprises of numerous TV channels. In the year 2002, the mushroom growth of private TV channels in Pakistan increased the demands of viewers for diverse content (Hassan, Mehwish & Muhammad, 2013). The private networks along with heavy news production started entertainment telecasting and now provide the audience with a variety of content including morning shows, telefilms, feature films, international content (shows and dramas), award shows, comedy and music programs but majorly television dramas.

Drama is a special way of depicting various forms of arts: including but not limited to plays, mime, opera, musicals, ballet, etc., performed in the theater and broadcasted through radio or television. Legendary Pakistani TV actor Talat Hussain puts that “Drama is the reflection of society” (The News International, 2017). Television drama series are always considered a “female-viewer-attracted” industry which is the main reason that our media industry is making dramas entirely focused on them. The female characters These dramas are also serving them as a big source of acquiring knowledge about domestic issues, fashion trends, home economics, social & personal relationships and about the perception of life (Turow & Gans, 2002). Viewers form their stereotypical beliefs about gender roles and issues by witnessing the portrayal of women on television. In light of previous studies, female characters were divided into various categories which includes good woman, bad woman, victim, prostitute and member of showbiz industry (Endendijk, Groeneveld, & Berkel, et al, 2013; Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999; Ford, 1997). The portrayal of female characters on television has been a topic of utmost importance in feminist research that is why

media representation theory is employed in this research to textually analyze female characters being portrayed in Private tv channel dramas.

Research Significance

According to the World Bank (2018) 48.6 percent of the total population of Pakistan constitutes of women. In today's world, the women and their role in society keep changing, so does their portrayal in Television dramas. Apart from just home-making, Pakistani female plays a multi-dimensional role which is evident in agriculture, teaching, trade and commerce, industrial sector, health sector, media industry and nearly in all walks of life. Despite of these diverse and multi-dimensional roles in the real world, it is anticipated that their portrayal in the television dramas is still stereotypical and revolves majorly around domestic and love life. Beginning of 21st century holds great significance when we talk about Pakistani dramas, it was the time when PTV was heading towards its ultimate decline and in 2002, private entertainment channels started getting licensed to go on-air. There is a research gap as no in-depth trend study of portrayal of female characters in Pakistani Private TV channels' dramas is conducted in past two decades. Geo Entertainment, Hum TV and ARY digital are the pioneers and most watched entertainment channels of Pakistan because major portion of ads goes to the most watched television on the basis of TRP (Television Rating Point) that is why the researcher selected these channels to analyze.

Literature Review

This study in a way develops on Dr. Arshad's ground breaking longitudinal research "Portrayal of women in Pakistani Feature Film" (2011). In his study he employed textual analysis under the framework of feminism. He studied various categorizes of female characters in Pakistani Films which majorly included heroine, villain victim, prostitute, showbiz figure. In the similar manner, various categories were designed for this study which are discussed under the chapter of discussion and analysis. Khan, Ullah and Ahmad (2018) identified that

there are two areas where all characters operate: public and private. Over the years studies have shown that television series primarily feature female characters as house wives and their key responsibility is to take care of children and the home, while male characters are portrayed more career oriented (Anderson & Taylor 2002). Signorielli and Bacue (1999) also came to the conclusion when any work involves love, care, or nurturing, it is not usually considered work; however, work related to occupation, leadership or production is usually easily understood as work which replicates in Pakistani society as well that “outside” work for female is seen as a privilege given to them and women are adored for domestic duties (Nida, 2020). In addition to this, television dramas portray male characters according to stereotypically so-called male characteristics such as resoluteness, will-power, jurisdiction, and reasoning, rather than emotionalism. Whereas female characters are shown as dependent of men, melodramatic and hyper emotional (Khan, Ullah & Ahmad, 2018).

Similarly, Rameez ul huda and Amber (2015) considered media a social change agent and studied the overall portrayal of women in media both in print and audio-visual domain. They concluded that women are objectified, presented in a stereotypical manner and termed this portrayal as “morally corrupt” representation of women. Ashfaq & Shafiq (2018) conducted content analysis of six TV drama serials of three popular Pakistani TV channels (Geo, ARY and HUM). They concluded that good woman in dramas is the one who follows patriarchal traditions and bad woman is the one who is bold and professional. Iqbal and Abdar (2016) studied the female characters in eight dramas of Hum TV and found that qualification and professional career of seventy percent women characters was not defined.

Finally, to wrap this literature review the following text fits perfectly to sum up potential of media portrayals; Kelly Oliver in her book “Women as Weapon of War” (2007) argues that TV coverage of prisoners’ abuse at Abu Ghraib: A former American prison complex in Iraq projected women in a sexually provocative way. Thus, normalizing sex and

violence against women in TV content to such an extent that “we are used to living with it... it does not touch us... in-fact perhaps we even crave it...” (Kelly, 2007).

Research Objectives

Primary objectives of this study are:

- To study the portrayal of female characters in Private TV channel dramas of Pakistan.
- To assess the potential of this portrayal to cultivate misogynistic standards in the minds of viewers.
- To aid the television drama writers and makers in understanding the female portrayal over the years through a feministic perspective.

Research Questions

This study intends to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How female characters are portrayed in terms of physical appearance?

RQ2. How female characters are portrayed in terms of occupation?

RQ3. How female characters are portrayed in terms of behavior and traits?

RQ4. Does this portrayal exhibit patriarchal notions that suppress females in society?

RQ5. Do the plots around which the female characters revolve have the potential to manifest successful romantic relationships as the only life goal in the minds of Pakistani females?

Research Methodology

A qualitative research design is concerned with establishing answers to the why's and how's of the phenomenon in question. In media analysis researcher rely primarily on written and visual data that is why the qualitative research design is adopted in this study.

Textual analysis will be done through a feministic lens with an intention to defy stereotypical treatment of females in Pakistani TV. Textual analysis is a useful method in the field of media studies to interpret different form of texts in particular culture and time. The introduction of textual analysis in mass media research is credited to John Fiske and John

Hartley (1978) who demonstrated how TV content can be used as a text by analyzing themes, ideas and storylines. Text refers to any mode of communication. For example: books, newspapers, billboards, blogs etc. and audio-visual media such as films, television programs, radio shows, songs, graffiti, photos etc. In this study, stories and characterization in the dramas will be treated as text for analysis. Thus, an in-depth detailed review of dramas will be conducted to collect evidence regarding the different portrayals of female characters through textual analysis which is the most suitable method for this study.

In 1990s and early 21st century feminist analysis matured into more nuanced application of theoretical framework. Reinharz and Davidman in 1992 argued that there is no single technique for conducting feminist research; every feminist research is always guided by feminist theory. Therefore, author of this study developed theoretical framework of media representation theory in relation to feminism. The media representation theory proposed by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (2014) develops on the premise that how different outlets of media portray stereotypical images of genders. As discussed in the literature review, the producers of the dramas in Pakistan are preoccupied with portraying certain positive and negative images of women on screen. Shohat and Stam (2014) critique this preoccupation with images, because it can lead to a sort of essentialism where the viewers effortlessly divide portrayals into a defined set of already established notions in real life.

Operationalization of terms

Female Character. On-screen women above the age of eighteen refers to female characters in this study.

Dramas. A play of television which comprises of a minimum 13 episodes and maximum 26 episodes excluding TV operas, telefims and long plays.

Population

All the Urdu drama serials on-aired on three private TV channels: Hum TV, ARY Digital and GEO Entertainment between the year 2006 – 2016.

Sample

Total of fifty-two (52) dramas are selected for analysis of female characters. Convenience sampling technique is used for the collection of data. Minimum one and Maximum two dramas per year are selected.

Discussion and Analysis

This part of the research is utmost importance as it builds relevance of result with the focus of study. Hereafter, different categories of female characters observed in sample are discussed:

- Female character of a good woman.
- Female character of a bad woman.
- Female as a victim
- Female character in the showbiz industry and prostitution

Female Character of a Good Woman

A good woman is usually a housewife, housekeeper which is inherently a subordinate position. The good woman in drama is so domesticated that she does not care about her own needs and desires. A good woman is always ready to sacrifice herself for her family, kids and husband. The portrayal of sacrificing quality in female lead characters is common among all channels. Her topic of conversation is also restricted to petty issues such as food menu, dress selection, school work, laundry etc. A good woman in the role of wife, sister, mother or daughter, is confined in her physical movement. She is naïve enough to get easily manipulated. A traditional good woman steps out of her house for work only because of adverse circumstances viz. unavailability of appropriate male support. She is dependent on her male relatives for livelihood, money, transport and permission. Women are showcased impulsive

decision makers and they weep aggressively over petty issues. It is predominantly showcased that it is a commendable trait that woman suffers in silence, especially in an abusive marriage or household. A good woman forgives and accepts intimate partner violence, forceful marriages and betrayal with open-heart.

Female Character of a Bad Woman

TV dramas' bad woman comes in all roles; be it sister, mother, daughter or wife. Character of a bad woman is typically designed in comparison to the "good" version. A bad woman is usually modern and works for the sake of her own growth. Badness in a woman is directly proportional to her level of education and wealth. The more educated and wealthier she is, more villainous she is. A bad woman is usually boldly dress, center of all evils, does not perform house chores efficiently. is logical and egoistic.

This dichotomy of bad and good is showcased in every role be it heroine vs villain; good mother vs bad mother or good prostitute vs bad prostitute. A bad woman has no dependence in life and does not sacrifice her needs and desires. A bad woman steps out of unwilful marriage easily. However, there is one similarity between good and bad woman i.e., they both act blind in love and leave behind their principles to win the man. This portrayal is based on misogynistic values and patriarchal notions which suppresses women and her liberty to work.

Female as a Victim

Female characters are showcased as victim of various assaults namely: rape, kidnapping, honor-based violence, domestic violence and intimate partner violence as well. Violence on women is normalized in Pakistani TV dramas which includes slamming, battering, slapping and killing. She is verbally and physically abused, imprisoned and beaten; this treatment normalizes violence against women so much so that the viewers' perception of reality can be cultivated. A woman especially daughter and daughter-in-law are slapped and slammed

over petty issues by their father, mother, and mother-in-law. These issues for which a woman is slapped are of wide spectrum which includes (but are not limited to) not fulfilling household jobs, going to a friend's house, behaving cheerful in a wedding, asking to get admitted in a college, putting forward her opinions, declaring her love for a boy or asking for a divorce. Not even a single drama of the sample was without violence against woman.

After killing or house imprisonment; the most common honor-based violence is the forceful marriage. In every other drama, the girl is forcefully married to a man. Forceful marriages are normalized in a manner so much so that a woman (educated or uneducated; rich or poor) does not step out of the marriage and falls head over heels in love with her new husband. Rape and sexual harassment are treated as both main and side track of dramas. It is very troublesome to witness that in not even a single drama the culprits were executed through the route of law. In most dramas, woman remain silent after rape incidents and forgives the preparator. Rapist is not blamed often but the female victim is blamed for "seducing" the rapist or not wearing appropriate clothes or going out to college or for work. The rape is directly associated with the chastity of the woman therefore, all the focus is on her chastity being violated and no importance is given to her trauma and mental condition.

Female Character in The Showbiz Industry and Prostitution

Prostitution derives with underlying issues of human trafficking, financial disparities, runaways in love affairs etc. Whereas, it is blatantly showcased that women have no drastic economic issues and a reason for their smooth entry into elite prostitution is mere laziness, heart break and revenge. It is constantly reasserted that women of showbiz industry are prostitutes. Similarly, modelling profession is showcased as unethical and immoral; and woman working as a model is termed as a prostitute. It is filmed that the struggle and guilt of a showbiz female personality ends if a pious man rescues her from the "unethical" field and helps her lead a "pious" life. If a man does not become a savior than the woman of showbiz

industry must die or must abdicate her worldly life and repent to God until death. Also, that, a woman who belongs to showbiz is a used good and not supposed to be someone worthy of marriage. A man telling a woman her stature and life roles is quintessential patriarchal attempt of suppression and confinement of woman in domestic roles. Female members of the showbiz industry (such as singers, actors and models) and prostitutes are dress in a similar, vulgar and seductive manner. They wear revealing and skin fitted clothes, usually strapless and sheer. Such visual conditioning of audiences towards a particular profession puts a question mark on the whole work force associated with the field especially females, as they are already restricted to work in the field of their choice in Pakistan.

RQ1. How Female Characters Are Portrayed in Terms of Physical Appearance?

With a few exceptions, every lead woman in drama, be it heroine or villain, is glamorously slim and smart. The favorite and most showcased complexion is fair and glory. Dusky skin complexion is not liked and is showcased to be a source of shame for woman. The heroine has to have shiny and silky straight hair. Villains and prostitutes are shown with curly hairs which stigmatizes curly hair and develops hate for curls in society. The physical appearance is shot and showcased through the male gaze. Eye makeup is done in a way to make the female's eyes more romantic and seductive which are further shoot in extreme close-ups. A lead female character has to possess such enchanting beauty that the male lead falls in love with her at first sight. False and unrealistic beauty standards are propagated through the TV dramas as Pakistani skin color is not peachy fair or light but lies on the spectrum which ranges from whitish to dark. As far as, dresses and attires are concerned eastern dresses and western dresses comes with a clear distinction of good and bad character. A heroine wears flowy dupatta and shalwar kameez of pastel and romantic colors. Shalwar kameez is sewed in a way that enhances her curves. Heroine wear full sleeves or half sleeves shirts. A pious woman covers her head with a dupatta which is usually white and she also wears abaya in her public

appearances. A modern woman does not care about the dupatta and wears bold colors and sleeveless kameez as well. A modern woman wears jeans and kameez styled tops as well. After the transformation, a modern woman starts wearing light colors and dupatta as well. Other than shalwar kameez, in some dramas, women wear sarees as well. A bad woman wears western clothes and does not wear shalwar kameez. A bad woman wears clothes in a manner that her brassiere, calves and cleavage are visible.

RQ2. How Female Characters Are Portrayed in Terms of Occupation?

Female characters are domesticated in a manner that their public lives are given little to no importance. The women of drama have the following occupations: housewife, writer, doctor, fine artists, NGO workers, actress, model, singer and prostitute. With a very scarce exception, the major occupation of the female character in Pakistan TV drama is housewife. No matter if the woman is educated or not, her sole purpose in life is to take care of the house and her husband. Writer, doctor and fine artist are the overlapping professions of female housekeepers. The women are discouraged and constantly cursed by their male counter parts on working in public professions. The women working in NGOs are stereotypically showcased as a modern, careless and spoilt women. Actress, model and singer are treated in the same manner as prostitutes. In Pakistani dramas women education is showcased as a source of increasing shamelessness and indecency in society. Level of education is not disclosed. If the level of education is mentioned than the field of study is not disclosed or given the slightest of importance. Science education is a field restricted only to men and women are confined to house jobs.

RQ3. How Female Characters Are Portrayed in Terms of Behavior and Traits?

The behavior and traits of lead female characters re-asserts the stereotypical nature of on-screen treatment. The good woman is traditional, hopelessly romantic, submissive, sacrificing, selfless, virtuous, anti-modern, domesticated, dependent, brave for family, suffers

in silence, forgiving, loving towards her husband despite infidelity, emotional, irrational, faithful and honest to her husband. The good woman is shy, fearful and innocent as well. The bad woman is opposite of good woman. She is modern, rational, egoistic, non-domesticated, unforgiving and untraditional. Portrayal of marriageable young woman in all dramas is incomplete without the usage of adjectives like “beautiful”, “innocent”, “simple”, “honest”, “God fearing”, “obedient”, “family oriented” and “humble”. The clear distinction between the traits of a good woman and bad woman, puts woman in black and white segregated boxes. While, humans are grey in their nature. The represented behavior and traits of female characters thus defines women via their enchanting appearance and obedience to honor patriarchal discourses while men play characters that reaffirms their intellectual superiority and thus legitimizes their dominance

RQ4. Does this Portrayal Exhibit Patriarchal Notions that Suppress Females in Society?

The representation of female character is complimentary of male prejudice and exhibit sentiments that aids suppression of female. The universe designed for women in Pakistani TV dramas makes the women what and how the male gaze wants to envision them, in terms of appearance, occupation, behavior and traits. The dependence of female characters on male characters; normalized intimate partner violence and honor-based violence against women; normalized forceful marriage; domesticated roles of women and no trial for men for wrong doings, are all representative of male prejudice. Women through their captivating appearance, dependence and obedience honors patriarchal discourses while men play characters that reaffirms their intellectual dominance and superiority. It is daunting to see that in Pakistan most writers are females and they pen regressive and misogynistic representation of women in TV dramas. A woman’s self-identity is showcased relational to her kin only.

RQ5. Do the Plots Around Which the Female Characters Revolve Have the Potential to Manifest Successful Romantic Relationships as the Only Life Goal in the Minds of Pakistani Females?

The emphasis of all dramas is on the love story between man and woman. There are sub-plots of rape, domestic violence and honor-based violence. However, the key plot is love story which turns into household drama between husband and wife. It is also worth mentioning that in almost all dramas the woman's moral character is accused of infidelity and she proves her innocence by various means. Love stories are designed in a way that showcases woman as a non-goal-oriented individual who wants to get married as soon as possible. Such plots increase the dependence of female characters on male counterparts. Plots starting off with forceful marriage transforms into romantic love story by the end. Love triangle is also main plots of every drama. In these love triangle-based stories, usually there is another woman trying to steal the husband of the lead female character. The other dimension of the plot is woman vs woman dichotomy, which is usually between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Domestic dramas of the aforementioned nature normalize domestic violence in society as daughter-in-law suffers in silence. Only the romantic trajectory of woman is showcased and no career or professional journey is documented.

Conclusion

The issues faced by woman in Pakistan varies drastically across classes, regions, urban/rural divide and socio-economic developments. health issues, plight of education, career struggles and in-office discriminations and women excelling beyond obstacles in practical life are not showcased in dramas. It seems that the stakeholders of drama industry trying to portray women in particular context i.e., a sexist school of thought about women is being disseminated through drama. The perception of millions of audiences especially women about the ideal woman is being constructed in a dauntingly demeaning way. Channels Owners, Investors,

Production Houses, Directors are continuously ignoring the basic human rights, potential and honor of woman as an individual. It is a matter of great concern because this practice may end eventually in the form of amplified social and gender inequality and un-equilibrium of society.

Unfortunately, the plight of woman as an individual part of the society is not documented. The mere focus of dramas is on the romantic narratives. Sadly, every story is a domesticated love story. Domestic violence and intimate partner violence is not treated as an issue, in fact normalized. Women are not shown taking part in political or communal activity which cultivates that woman are not capable enough of handling public activities. It is also worth mentioning here that work for woman is not treated as a part of women's growth as an individual but a privilege bestowed by the men. Inheritance of wealth and property are one of the main issues women face in South East Asia and not even a single drama of the sample discussed or highlighted the associated issues.

Woman and technology are two entities alien to each other. The factor which is almost completely missing in contemporary Pakistani TV Drama is female representation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The development in STEM is associated directly to the prosperity of society and state in digital era. Women are almost the half of total population of Pakistan and if they do not participate in STEM, then how the society would work as progressive unit. This study can serve as the bridge between academia and TV industry as there is a huge gap between the research and implication.

In light of this study, the author recommends the following points for both professionals and researchers:

- i. The drama writers must give independent voice to the female TV characters in the reel world so that it gets cultivated in the real world as well and serve the larger discourse of feminism.

- ii. Drama fraternity must develop female characters that are more independent, non-stereotypical and free from misogyny.
- iii. Future researchers can study the trend of portrayal of male characters in Pakistani dramas in the similar manner in relation to female characters.
- iv. This study serves as a strong rationale for impact study of portrayal of female characters and cultivation analysis for future research work.

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