



RESEARCH PAPER

Identity Construction and Stereotypical Roles of Women in Pakistani TV Dramas

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ABSTRACT

The article dismantles the representation of women by focusing on the identity construction and stereotypical roles associated with their characters in the selected Pakistan Television dramas. This study is based on the premise that these drama serials play an important role in constructing social beliefs and attitudes. By drawing upon the models of Fairclough (1989,1995) and Baehr (1980) the study analyzes the two popular Pakistani television Drama series of HUM TV, ZindagiGulzarHai and Hamsafar. As revealed from the analysis, traits such as freedom, boldness and outspokenness are associated only with the women of the upper class. The upper-class women are stereotyped as bad mothers but those from lower middle class are deemed as perfect in terms of the traits that can be idealized by society. The research suggests a more just and non-reductionist representation of women in general and upper class women in particular.

KEYWORDS Identity Construction, Social Stereotypes, Women Representation

Introduction

The influence of media in the modern day world is immense. Ever since the advent of television, the impact and control of the widely popular media outlets are increasing at a rapid pace. Among many sub-niches of the media, movies and drama are two important niches that address the society and make assumptions about various socio-cultural aspects of life. Movies and dramas mirror our life, and naturally, our thinking and ideologies are impacted by such reproductions. Through the TV, certain social realities are constructed and promoted via the use of images and language while others are neglected or looked down upon. A simple word may have various meanings beyond its textual level for it is often wrapped in socio-cultural and political context.

Researchers have studied the impact of language on representations in terms of language and gender (see e.g. Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002; Thorone, Kramarea, and Henley, 1983; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2003). The role of the media in creating gender identities is undeniable. TV dramas may seem to be a harmless element that is a work of fiction, but consciously and unconsciously, it excludes certain ideologies while promoting others to set a narrative about social happenings. Therefore, it is important to notice how these representations are made through the discourse. The information that we get during the research can be used to form better and realistic representations of both man and women.

In countries like Pakistan, a woman is expected to take care of home, and it is still thought that having a good marriage is better than having a good career. The society

expects a woman to conform to the social codes and perform duties as a wife and mother. Consequently, her professional achievements are given secondary importance. Similarly, women who are unable to get good matches before their 30s have to face societal pressure as they are considered left-overs. The roles and identities as such are voiced through different cultural productions especially dramas.

This research aims to examine the representation and identity construction of women in the Drama Series '*Hamsafar*' and *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*' (ZGH, henceforth). Both of these Dramas have accumulated a lot of viewership from Pakistan India and Middle Eastern countries. Moreover, it focuses on accessing the linguistic, discursive and visual means used to represent the female characters and analyze how these representations affect the identity construction and representation of the women. The paper is governed by the following research questions.

Literature Review

This study employs critical discourse analysis on the representation of women in Pakistani TV Dramas. To lay a solid theoretical foundation for the study, this section offers a review of the literature on the theory of social construction of gender, representation of women in mass media and different aspects of critical discourse analysis.

Kitch (1997) made an analysis of the previous work done in the field and concluded that there are four ways of looking at the media representation 1) the stereotypical approach: this is the type of an approach in which researcher observe two things: a) How images of women are stereotyped b) Do these images reflect real-life women? 2) To explore the alternative representations of women, that means presenting unusual images of women who are either inside the media industry or outside of it. 3) Examination of media as cultural entity 4) Semiotic analysis of media representations of women as polysomic texts. Mulvey (1975) applied the proposal of Kitch (1997) to Bollywood films and provided the following insight into the issue. Tuchman (19878) argues that the positive representation of women in the media are omitted, trivialization and condemned, which is symbolic annihilated. When women are represented in media, women are normally given weak characters needing protection from men or erotic objects who carter to the gaze of men. (Tuchman's 1978).

Scholars claim that the nature of the discourse presented in the media is generally hegemonic. Hall (1979) has defined hegemony in which certain privileged groups assert their dominance, and they do this in such a way that it seems legitimate as well as natural. Kellner (1990) argues that media is the part of the larger economic, political, social and cultural struggle. So, therefore, media is an agent to certain classes who want to assert their dominance and gain control (cited in Gamson, Croteau, Hoyne,&Sasson, 1992)

When we talk specifically about the gender issue in the media, it mostly reflects the dominant patriarchal ideology, herby feminist try to decipher it and reflect changes in the women social status and ideology. Lichter and Rothman's (1986) research is the major ground-breaking work in the understanding of women representation in the media. Lichter did work on the studies done in the United States of America from 1955 through 1986 and found out that the female characters are lesser in number, and are portrayed as weaker gender in comparison to the male.

Yang (2003) expressed the view about the media that images presented of women are either too angelic or too devilish. During the depiction, the Drama tries to carve out its own definition of the feminism. Rhodes (1995) also thinks that media has, on the one hand, helped the feminism to achieve its goal and targets, but on the other hand, it has also discouraged the feminist by presenting demonizing, polarized and blurred images of the feminists in the media. The feminists have strived to put forward the point that there is a need for transformation in the media discourse about women. Women should be represented in a more amicable way, as confident, mature and well- educated entities, instead of domestic wives or object of sexual gratification.

TV drama is a popular genre of visual communication in Pakistan. The TV dramas play an important role in reinforcing or dismantling particular ideologies. Therefore, it is a worthy effort to decode various ideologies promulgated by the television. Women are generally represented as obedient housewives, religious and loving mothers and innocent sisters. These women are ready to sacrifice their wishes to endorse the family traditions. Patriarchy is reaffirmed in most of the dramas as women are presented in dependent and submissive roles (Hussain 1996). Kothari (2005) explains that the visual representation differs massively from one political regime to another. The drama industry has also boomed in last 15 years courtesy media houses like PTV Home, Hum TV, Geo TV, Express and ARY Digital. Dramas on these channels lay out the issues of gender discrimination and women rights. The current period can be termed as a revival for the progressive drama industry after the lull of 90's (Ghai, 2014; Boone, 2014). Pakistani Dramas still lag behind when it comes to the representation of women as diverse individuals. The drama has so far failed to highlight women issues with the required intensity. "Strong professional women are often cast as villains in visual media" (Talib&Idrees, 2012). Iqbal and Abdar (2016) investigate the women empowerment, career orientation and decision making power of female characters in Hum TV operas. They find out that in most of the drama serials, women educational qualifications and career choices were not specified. They also observed the fact that females were represented as passive characters who have had their lives dependent on male characters.

Material and Methods

The research is qualitative in nature as it involves gathering, analyzing and presenting the data. The research answers the descriptive questions such as 'how' and 'why'. The drama serial *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* and *Hamsafar* were selected for this research. The primary reason for the selection of these specific dramas serials was their huge popularity in Pakistan as well as in neighbouring countries. Through the examination of the discourse that takes place through the course of these episodes, the researchers attempt to understand the representation and identity construction of women in Pakistani TV Dramas. For this study, Baehr's analysis (1980) and Fairclough's three-dimensional framework have shaped the theoretical support for the research. Fairclough's model comprises of textual, social and discursive levels of interpretation. Baehr's (1980) analysis on television drama series promulgates the view that while drama moves away from the traditional stereotypical family oriented images of the women, it constructs new stereotype image of 'liberated women'. These women promulgate women rights and are overly pretentious.

Zindagi Gulzar Hai and *Hamsafar* have 24 episodes each. But for the limited space and time, the researchers have selected five excerpts from each drama from different episodes. Data were selected because they represent the most relevant examples of conversations to examine in terms of representation of women. These episodes cover topics such as patriarchy, family feud, marriage, mistrust, dependence, liberty, and

infidelity. Both the dramas try to create a representation of women by creating the discourse around these aforementioned topics. The episodes of both serials are 34-40 minutes long, providing enough material for analysis of the discourse. For the purpose of analysis, the selected dialogues are translated into English.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the TV series *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* and *Hamsafar* are examined respectively through the discursive analysis of the specifically selected excerpts from the respective Drama series.

Zindagi Gulzar Hai

The story of *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* revolves around the lives of two families which are poles apart. Kashaf Murtaza and Zaroon Junaid, the protagonists of the drama, belong to these families. Kashaf comes from lower-middle-class family background and lives with her mother Raffia and her two sisters, Sidra and Shehnila. Raffia had been abandoned by her husband, Murtaza because she did not give birth to a son. Her father married another woman, who did eventually give birth to his son Hamad. Zaroon's rich family consists of his father, Junaid who is a cool and mature person, an independent working mother, Ghazala Junaid, and Sister Sara, who has the same views about life as her mother has. Zaroon's circle of close friends consists of Asmara and Osama. The drama series *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* sets an interesting pattern in the development of the discourse about women. This discourse divided into two categories on the basis of the economic class. We see that the ideologies and views about upper class of women are displayed positively, while the women from lower class are represented negatively.

No. 1:

(Dialogue between Sara, the daughter & Junaid, the father)

1 S Hey DAD

2 J Where are you going? (Junaid gives a questionable look)

3 S I am going on a concert.

4 J Farhan is with you?

5 S Farhan is not feeling well, so I am going with Nofal and other friends.

6 J Your dress isn't appropriate.

7 S Dad, this is fashion. Everyone is wearing such clothes these days.

8 J Fashion that makes human beings indecent shouldn't be adopted.

9 S You don't say anything to mom but always try to lecture me. I am getting late. BYE. I'll reach home late tonight.

(Sad music, depressive and Helpless Father)

Analysis

The conversation between Sara and her father (Junaid) is of typical interest in order to investigate the views drama wants to promulgate about women of a certain class. These lines ratify two famous stereotypes about women. a) The women from the upper class are party girls. b) They have male friends. c) They wear indecent dresses. d) They disregard their parent's opinion. In the shape of Sara, we witness an image of a girl who is portrayed as an independent girl who wants to have things her way. She is accused of leaving modesty by veiling behind liberty, freedom, and independence. As we witness through the dialogue that when Junaid tries to question her about a. her choice to go alone b. about her dress by calling it 'indecent', Sara is unable to justify her choice of

clothes logically. The image constructed is also synonymous to what is stereotypically believed about the women of the upper class.

No. 2:

(GhazalaJunaid&Junaid discussing Sara's behavior)

- 1 G Junaid! You shouldn't have talked to Sara like this. If you won't have talked, there won't have been any possibility of her replying like that.
- 2 J See, she is getting married, so I am genuinely concerned. Farhan's family is not that liberal and accommodating in dressing choices. She will have issues after marriage.
- 3 G If there arises a problem, she will handle it. Farhan knows what sort of dresses Sara wears. If his family were to object, they would have done so till now.
- 4 J See men object after marriage too.
- 5 G If he objects, we will see it, but I can't train my daughter to become husband's feetshoe.

Analysis

The image of GhazalaJunaid is steadily constructed with a negative vibe flowing through it. In the 4.2, the control of the discussion is in the hands of Ghazala who not only uses aggressive tone but is also adamant that it was her husband's fault to question Sara's choices. The discourse in this initial exchange also tries to represent her as an irresponsible mother who doesn't want her husband to school her daughter over her choices. From the above discussion, the audiences are given an insight into an upper-class mother who has extreme concepts of liberty and independence. With the use of aggressive expressions such as 'feet shoe' and 'we will see when he objects', Ghazala outlines her views about her views.

Ghazala explicitly asserts her position on what can be done and what can't in regard to her daughter grooming. She takes it upon her ego to resist any sort of pressure about her daughter attitude by adopting an unnecessarily ultra-aggressive attitude. This attitude is also in line with the widely spread stereotypical image of the upper class that classifies upper-class women as ones who are defiant to the extent that they forget their responsibilities. In a similar tone, we see that she takes control of the discourse and both her son and husband have a merely passive role in the discussion. This is the typical image of a pro-feminist, independent and liberal woman portrayed in our society. ZGH doesn't disappoint either by following a rather similar line.

No. 3

(Discussion between Sidra &Kashaf, two lower class sisters)

- 1 S What happened?
- 2 K I feel I can't do anything good in the world. Sir Imran has returned the papers.
- 3 S Why? Did you get a C?
- 4 K It is not C but it is also not A+.

Analysis

Unlike the liberal ladies of the upper class, Kashaf is a hard-working woman who wants to accomplish the 'real' tasks of life. As evident from the text 4.4, Kashaf is gutted by her seemingly good performance in the exams. Kashaf is poor, and thus, at her own place in life, willing to strive for success. This description is an important one in the discourse because it converges on the difference of attitude between women of both the

classes. The opposition to the patriarchy is one revolutionary aspect of this Drama. The conversation between Kashaf's father (Murtaza), Uncle and Mother Raffia Murtaza is of chief importance as a progressive text in relation to patriarchal practices in the society.

No. 4

(Discussion between Raffia, Murtaza & Wahab about Kashaf's future)

1 W You sent her to university without consulting the elders?

15 W Certainly these working women aren't capable enough to embrace a family. They have their mind on sky and inevitably get humiliated in the world.

16 R Why did you arrive at the house of a disgraced woman?

2 R Which elders? I'm the elder. I have decided.

3 W What do you mean? He has her father and Uncle.

4 R (IGNORES) You please take tea. It's getting cold.

5 M Why didn't you tell me. You have decided without consulting me?

6 R Don't accuse me of this. I have told you. I've told you several times.

7 M You have intimidated me, didn't seek my **permission**.

Wahab leaves (furious)

Analysis

Raffia, the lower class mother, has been represented as a brave soul who is not afraid to make decisions and take ownership of the situation. She is sterner in her tone and response when questioned about her right to decide Kashaf's future. (I am elder, I have decided). Her boldness is evident from the use of the word 'I' in numerous instances throughout the discussion. Moreover, Raffia takes a stand based on the rationale while asserting that there is no need for permission from anyone to send her daughter to the university. Not stooping to the pressure, she claims the responsibility and annihilates the unfair demands of Murtaza and his brother Wahab. Raffia is unapologizing in her attitude and confidently peruses what she thinks is right. The representation is the positive imagery of a single mother who has had enough courage to stand against what is wrong. As evident from the above discourse, Raffia doesn't shy away from the argument. Instead of giving up, Raffia stands for what is right and what is not. We find that she appears to have the necessary wit and courage to outfox the male members who are trying to impose themselves on her.

No. 5

(Discussion between Kashaf and Raffia)

1 R Here my dear, have some tea.

2 K why did you bother Maa, I would've served myself.

Analysis

Raffia seems to genuinely care about her daughter, showing reverence for every bit of time they spend with each other. The Drama puts women from the two different classes straight into the contrast while showing pessimism about the lifestyles of one sort of women, and optimism about the other sort of women. Kashaf family is poor, simpler, sincerer and genuine. But on the other hand, Zaroon family is rude, insincere and impure in whatever they do. This attitude also leads to an assumption in our society that the upper-class women who seek liberty and independence are not good family women.

Hamsafar

Khirad belongs to a small locality in Hyderabad and lives with her mother Mehmoona. Mehmoona brother BasseratHussain is wealthy and married to Farida. They have a son named Asher. After the doctors inform Mehmoona that she is in the last stage of cancer & that she will die soon, Mehmoona seeks her brother's help in arranging Khirad's marriage. Feeling guilty for not taking better care of sister, Basserat compensates by promising that Asher will marry Khirad, unbeknownst to both Asher & Farida. This irks Farida, who has always wanted Asher to marry his cousin Sara, the daughter of Farida's sister ZarinaAjmal. Farida accepts the decision due to pressure but soon conspires to get Khirad out of the house. At last, Farida plot gets revealed and Khirad gets a place back in the house.

Excerpt 1:

(Mehmoona discusses Asher's proposal for Khirad)

- 1 M *Please find a good match for my daughter. Solve my biggest problem (pleading and weeping). Make my death easy for me.*
- 2 B *Do you accept Asher's proposal for Khirad?*
- 3 M *There is nothing better than this for me. I am thankful but will Asher and Khirad accept the proposal?*

Analysis

At the very outset, the episode brings forward a deplorable picture of the women who is toothless in the face of adversity. While on the death bed, she is worried about the prospects of her daughter future. Powerless, as she is, Mehmoona has to make the decision to secure her daughter future. In moments of indecision, she lets go of all her ego and self-dependence, and decides to marry her daughter to her billionaire brother's son, Ashaar. Being the mother of a young girl, she has to make the compromise and that's what she does to safeguard her future. This also highlights the social insecurity that is rampant insecurity about unmarried girls without parents. The conversation between Basserat and Mehmoona is more based on empathy and emotions rather than on reason, and the overdue emphasis results in a situation that is regressive and patriarchal.

No. 2

(Conversation between Farida & Basserat)

- 1 F *So you have arranged everything between you and your sister. There is no importance of Asher's mother in your eyes.*
- 2 B *It's enough Farida. If you said one more word I will forget your status as my wife and Asher's mother. This is my house and I am the owner of this. It is my right to choose who stays in this house who doesn't. My sister will stay in this house. My niece will stay in this house as my daughter-in-law. If you don't agree with my decision, get lost from this house. You can leave the house right now. This is my first and last warning to you. If you want to stay here as my wife, you will have to accept my decisions. You will visit Appa with me. You will also make Appa believe that you accept this proposal and are happy with it. If you didn't do as directed and tried to come between this Nikkah, I will divorce you.*

(Farida Flabbergasted & Stunned)

Analysis

The conversation between Basserat and Farida brings forward the attitude of a male authoritative person towards his wife. Basserat, who is portrayed throughout the series as a soft spoken and reasonable person, suddenly leaves behind the cloak of civility and makes his wife realize that who is the real boss in the house. The fact that two of them have been together for decades makes the attitude even more striking. Farida tries to engage in a reasonable conversation as she questions the decision of Basserat to marry Asher and Khirad. Basserat tries to be logical in the conversation by bringing about the health of her sister, but when he realizes that his reason is rusty, he changes his approach to deal with Farida. Taking a complete shift, Basserat threatens Farida that if she doesn't come to term with his plans, he may well go ahead and divorce her. He does so while making it clear that it is 'his' house, and it is he who will decide the fate of his son. Such attitude from the husband is the perfect example of a patriarchal setup where we witness a husband who is unable to defend himself, uses aggression and muscle power to support his toothless decision. We witness a female character whom right to have argument is shunned, and she has to accept because of her inferior power and limited option. In the dialogue we find an epic example of woman fragility and the strong masculine patriarchy.

No. 3

(Discussion between Khirad and Mehmoona over Khirad's marriage)

3 K *Did you ask him to marry his son to me?*

4 M *No. I only asked her about your marriage. I fear leaving you alone. How will you get along in life alone? Thank God that Basserat has asked your hand for Asher. Now I will die in peace, otherwise I won't have attained peace even after dying.*

Analysis

We notice through the discourse that the patriarchy is not only limited to the male members of the society. Khirad's dialogue with her mother once again reveals the underlying social pressure towards the girls, and the circumstances that force them to make compromises. While Khirad tries to logically contemplate the outfall of her marriage, we see her mother using pressure and emotion to make her accept the decision. The message that is conveyed through the serial is of inevitability of the male presence in the life of women in order for her to survive.

No.4

(Sara expresses her anger to Khirad)

1 K *As-salam-u-alikum Sara!*

2 S *You will marry Asher? Don't dream so high Khirad. You will fall down.*

3 K *What do you want to say?*

4 S *Don't behave like a novice. Asher doesn't want you. He is only been forced into this relationship by uncle. It would be better for you to say no to this proposal and look for a guy of your own standard. He wouldn't even pay heed to an ordinary girl like you. He won't even talk to you. Do you think he will make you a wife? Don't take his politeness and good manners as his approval. There is a difference of caliber between you. You don't have any quality expect being the niece of uncle. Say no to the proposal. Khirad stands stunned (No response)*

Analysis

The drama also focuses on the difference between the upper and lower class women, trying to build a narrative about the type of social ethos both of them follow. We witness Khirad, the girl from the weaker social class being gentler in her style and outlook. Sara, on the other hand, displays her rough manners instead of using her convincing power to convince Khirad to not marry an unknown person. The glimpse of her softer behavior can be witnessed through her use of word 'Aap' instead of 'tu' in the whole series. Despite being bullied by the upper class Sara, Khirad talks in a very low tone and doesn't respond to the provocations.

No.5

(Sara expresses her views about Khirad)

S: I thought that I am perfect for you, but I have realized today that you are selecting an illiterate girl who is veiled in dupatta.

Analysis

Sara is also depicted as someone who sees lower class dupatta laden girls with an element of contempt. She thinks of Sara, a decent girl who wears dupatta as illiterate and not according to the standards. We witness in episode two that none of the female character has a hold over the situation. All of them are forced to make compromises in harsh circumstances. These compromises are made by both, upper class women and lower class women.

Conclusion

As evident from the analysis, the upper-class working women are presented as obvious villains of the society. In the serial *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*, Ghazala Junaid happens to be from the educated, liberal family but she is portrayed as an arrogant and proud lady. Her character displays misplaced ambitions, carelessness, and conceited pride. Repeatedly through the serial, she is depicted as a failed mother who was unable to get the family life together. As per the discourse, she is responsible for the turmoil in the life of her daughter and husband.

Hamsafar follows no different pattern in producing its villains as it portrays Farida, the mother of the lead male protagonist, as the main culprit who wreaks havoc in the life of her son to satisfy her ego. The drama portrays her as a vengeful woman who sets the life of her son on fire just because the marriage was against her wishes. She uses conspiracy to achieve her aims. The representation of girls from the same class is not different. They are educated, independent and modern but at the same time, they exhibit negative personality traits. Their boldness and modern way of thinking makes it difficult for them to lead a successful married life. Interestingly, the male leads in the drama prefer conservative girls in comparison to modern and liberal ones.

Both the drama serials stereotype the role of women from the upper class, however both, *Hamsafar* and *ZGH*, also construct an alternative image of a 'perfect women'. Drama also sets criteria for perfect women. The women seem to have the following four virtues as suggested by Welter (1966). 'Piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity'. In *Hamsafar* the lead possesses most of these virtues. However, *ZGH* tries to tinker with the tried and tested line by presenting the lead as a mere progressive woman who stands tall in various circumstances.

We witness that lead women are dressed up simply in traditional 'SalwarKameez' in both *Hamsafar* and ZGH. To attain the acceptance of society and show modesty, these leads cover their head with a 'dupatta'. It is observed that *Hamsafar* reinforces the patriarchal concept of 'perfect women' by constructing the lead role as weak, dependent, submissive and emotional. ZGH adopts the stereotypical concept of the 'imperfect women' but it is also more progressive in its attitude towards the representation and construction of the 'perfect women' as its lead female protagonist has more progressive traits as compared to *Hamsafar*. The lead of the drama, Kashaf as well as her mother, take up decisive steps to ensure that their liberty remains intact. Kashaf's mother stands up against the patriarchy. Her resistance coupled with Kashaf's demeanour presents a rare instance where women are presented as non-emotional, pitiless characters that have the courage to challenge patriarchy.

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