



RESEARCH PAPER**Unveiling Reverse Gender Roles in Pakistani Drama *Sinf-e-Ahan*: A Textual Analysis****¹Fatima Chaudhary, ²Mamona Yasmin Khan* and ³Ali Baqar³**

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ABSTRACT

The study delves into the Pakistani drama *SINF E AAHAN* to explore the portrayal and implications of reverse gender roles. The research uncovers the significance of this narrative deviation from traditional gender norms. A meticulous analysis of the study elucidates the consequences of reversing gender roles within the context of Pakistani society. The study offers a comprehensive textual analysis of the popular drama serial *SINF E AAHAN* shedding light on the portrayal of reverse gender roles and its broader implications with the description of a positive image of Pakistani culture and Pakistani people. For this purpose, the drama *Sinf e Ahan* is analyzed qualitatively under the theoretical framework of Reverse Gender Roles by Geetha (2002) and Learned Optimism (Seligman, 1990). The findings of the study contribute to the growing body of research on gender representation in media and its impact on general perception. The findings clearly show a reversal in gender roles through the description of women's empowerment in Pakistani society and the supporting role of male members in the success of female characters to highlight the positive image of Pakistani society in the world.

KEYWORDS Optimistic Thinking, Pakistani Society, Reverse Gender Roles, Women Empowerment

Introduction

Drama is also an important part of media which plays a vital role in this field so drama describes the mirror of any society of all the prevalent ideologies embedded in that society that is why the drama industry is a spoke person of societies' cultures as well as traditions so Pakistani dramas also shows all these characteristics. Gender roles are the roles assigned based on gender and the division of gender roles is visible through media. Pakistani dramas also represent the culture, ideologies as well as changes in the ideologies with time (Ali et al.; 2015).

Traditional gender stereotypes can be reversed with the change in the mindset of nations of the world and the media can play an important role in portraying such Chang in society and inculcating the ideology of reverse gender roles in the minds of people (Ward & Grower, 2020). In Pakistani context after a long war of hatred on the topic of male oppression of females. The drama *Sinf- e- Ahan* is just like a breath of fresh air. The drama describes the journey of female characters from traditional to reverse gender roles in a very positive and balanced manner. The most important factor of this drama is its positive approach to describing the cooperation between male and female characters to reduce the elements of hatred regarding Pakistani sun cultures such as Pakhtoon and Balochi cultures that badly treated their women. This drama gives a positive approach regarding the

progress of the nation. From the first to last episode this drama has truly picturized the real issue of Pakistani women and also suggests a very balanced approach that with hard work and mutual collaboration between men and women All types of issues can be solved without showing hatred talks and aggressive behavior in Pakistani society so this drama has been portraying a positive image of Pakistani nation and culture all over the world.

Gender is not a universal law rather it is a worldly phenomenon to perform something based on the ideology constructed by the society, culture, and religion of that part of the world.

“When we say gender is performed, we usually mean that we've taken on a role or we're acting in some way and that our acting or our role playing is crucial to the gender that we are and the gender that we present to the world” (Butler, 2009). So, gender is the game of performing duties or acts assigned by worldly customs, not by nature. Hence, when a child is born, he does not perform gender rather he acts as a human being but culture and society assign some traits to one sex and some to another sex such as dress colors are not decided by nature for inborn babies rather, they are decided on the base of cultural norms and customs of that era and geographical area.

In the Pakistani context, gender stereotypes are also the result of social construction (Khan et al., 2020). So, Blue color is associated with a baby boy and pink with a baby girl. In the same way, Gender is performed everywhere from admonishing girls for behaving like boys to teasing boys for being timid like girls. “Although a child has an inborn capacity to play the rules and objects are undoubtedly the product of culture” (Belotti, 2003). So Basically gender is all about the allocation of a set of attributes and roles to human beings based on socially constructed ideologies of any culture of the world. These constructed duties regarding gender are famous as gender stereotypes or traditional gender roles which are altering with time in the world (Geetha, 2002).

Gender roles or Gender stereotypes are just like the roles played by the actors (men and women) in the play or movie of the gender produced and directed by the culture and societal norms of any culture on the stage or cinema of the globe. Gender stereotypes or traditional gender roles are just like a group of traffic signals having light of different traits, roles, duties, and qualities to highlight gender in society, and such signals are designed and controlled by social, cultural, and religious norms. Men and women perform in society according to the roles assigned to them (Copenhaver, 2002). Commonly different traditional codes show traditional gender roles such as differences in dressing code, code of manners, way of behaving, and style of living (Eckert & Ginet, 2013). For example, women as subordinate, oppressed, weak, and poor souls, and men as superior, oppressor, strong, and superhuman beings.

“The assigning of these gender roles and stereotypes starts from childhood when parents buy their daughters dolls houses and their son's video games and remote-control cars. They tell their baby boys not to cry because they are somehow naturally supposed to be emotionally strong and stable as compared to the girls who are considered to be weak and vulnerable” (Geetha, 2002). Hence, hatred developed between these two genders and reached an extreme point which was the great cause of the destruction of family relationships and society and the media is playing a very important role in this regard. But now, this trend is reversing and A new trend of gender reverse roles is emerging which is describing that both males and females are positively performing best roles and no one is inferior or superior because males and females can equally participate in every field through mutual collaboration and positive thinking.

Reverse gender roles refer to the trend shifting from orthodox gender stereotypes to modern gender roles which are more acceptable and are according to the need of time. As we know gender is socially constructed so with time as every constructed phenomenon is changing due to changes in the world view of nations socially assigned acts, characteristics, and duties regarding gender are also changing which is the major demand of the time. Nowadays gender roles are reversed as women are playing games like cricket, hockey, and boxing, and men are doing gardening, cooking, stitching, etc. "Now as the time is passing the gender roles are reversing. Women are performing different roles in every field. Women have started working, going to offices, driving cars, and have even become pilots, and managers of international 128 firms, thus reversing the traditional male role." (Razzaq, 2022). Hence, In this modern era, the traditional gender ideology is reversing because women are no longer considered passive, oppressed, or subjugated beings just because they are now less fearful of men and circumstances thus highlighting reversed gender roles by being independent and active in different social scenarios. Men can also be supportive of women in every field.

In the globe, nothing remains constant. Everything such as custom, thought, tradition, etc.

is changing with the change in world view (Stetsenko, 2010). Similarly, the concept of gender stereotypes is changing with time by the reversal of gender roles in different parts of the world. Pakistan is an Islamic country and In Islam, there is no concept of patriarchy and matriarchy. In the teachings of Islam men and women are different but they have equal rights according to their positions as is described in the following verses'

1. "Their Lord responded to them: "I never fail to reward any worker among you for any work you do, be you male or female – you are equal." (Qur'an, 3: 195)

2 "The believers, men and women, are helpers, supporters, friends and protectors of one another, they enjoin all that is good, and forbid all that is evil, they offer their prayers perfectly, and give Zakat (obligatory charity) and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will bestow Mercy on them. Surely Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise." (Qur'an, 9: 71).

Issues arise when men and women blindly follow Western standards of life and imitate Indian movies in our media industry. As we know media is the fastest and best way to train or educate people in any way as a result negative impacts regarding gender stereotypes come because Western society and Indian culture are highly patriarchal. Hence our electronic media especially dramas can play their role in the positive representation of our real Pakistani culture to change the mindset of people and in this way, gender roles can be changed positively.

Media is the basic tool to inculcate any type of ideology and plays an important role in describing gender roles (Seabrook et al.; 2017). "Media is a term which covers all the means of communication which have functions such as informing, raising awareness, education, socialization, entertainment and agenda setting, including all kinds of oral, written and visual image" (hot). "Media is known as a powerful tool for social change and education and it can define, record, and preserve human history and culture" (Babul & Nayaz, 2019, p. 336).

In the past years, Most the scholars such as Benedik (2018), Koenig (2018) Babul and Niaz (2019), Fatima (2019), Ward and Grower (2020), Shabbir (2021), Butler (2020), Butt (2021) conducted researches on gender roles. In these studies, women were portrayed as

subordinate, oppressed, weak, and poor souls, and men as superior, oppressor, strong, and superhuman beings. Such sorts of research led to the hatred between men and women at its stream point and destroyed the family bonds in society. Furthermore, this trend is reversing and A new trend of gender reverse roles is emerging which describes that both males and females are performing their best roles equally and no one is inferior or superior. (Olah et al.; 2020) Hence males and females can equally participate in every field through mutual collaboration and positive thinking and social institutions such as media can play an important role in the inculcation of this positive ideology.

The current study has explored reverse gender roles in the selected Pakistani drama *Sinf-e-Ahan* (2021-2022) with a positive description of cooperation between male and female characters. The textual gender and positive discourse analysis of the selected characters' conversations will reveal the phenomenon of modern trend shifting in the constructed identities. In the modern era, women are no longer considered passive, oppressed, or subjugated beings just because they are now less fearful of men and circumstances (Razzaq, 2022). Thereupon reverse gender roles are highlighted in the form of active participation of women in different fields of life and supportive and caring roles of men for women with the aid of present research in the Pakistani context. Hence this study is helpful in positive image building of Pakistani culture by representation of reverse gender roles and by challenging the traditional stereotypes with an optimistic approach.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The research is conducted under the theoretical framework of "Reverse Gender Roles" by V Geetha (2002) and the theory of Learned Positivism by Martin Elias Peter Seligman (1990) is used as a supporting theory.

Theory of Reverse Gender Roles (Geetha, 2002)

V. Geetha is a well-known socialist, independent feminist activist, writer, and translator. She belongs to India. She has written on several social issues regarding gender, caste, education, and civil rights. Her medium of writing was English and Tamil and she has done great work on gender history and culture. Her famous works are "Undoing Impunity- Speech after sexual violence", "Gender (Theorizing Feminism)" and "Towards a non-Brahmin Millennium". In her Book "Gender (Theorizing Feminism) published in 2002, she has explained the concept of gender, traditional gender roles and reverse gender roles in contemporary Society. She says with the change in time, power structure, and societal rules gender roles are also reversing and the media is acting as a significant tool for the spread and implementation of this change.

Theory of Learned Optimism (Seligman, 1990)

Martin Elias Peter Seligman is a cognitive psychologist and writer. He belongs to America. He has written about positive psychology with different perspectives like learned helplessness, pessimistic to optimism, and learned optimism. He gave the theory of learned optimism in his book named "Learned Optimism" published in 1990. The concept of learned optimism was developed in contrast with learned helplessness which refers to the pattern of thinking where a person feels that he cannot change the negative situations and this situation leads a person towards pessimism (Dhillon, 2018). The concept There are the following key points of this theory.

- Optimism refers to positive thinking which can be learned by challenging negative viewpoints. It refers to the process of understanding and challenging pessimistic thinking.
- This is the concept of positive psychology and it aims to develop positive approaches to view worldly matters and issues.
- Learned optimism helps people to respond optimistically to difficult situations to find positive impacts from them and in this way, they can live a better life.
- An optimistic approach helps to compete with problematic situations by struggling hard and hope.
- Education and continuous self-talk are the best way to learn how to think optimistically and positively and everyone can think positively and solve the issue positively.
- By learning optimism many social issues can be solved without being depressed so it improves mental health.

Pakistani dramas portray traditional gender stereotypes Hence destroying Pakistani cultural and religious norms. They are negatively portraying women by imitating Western lifestyles and Indian movies. So traditional gender stereotypes should be removed by the true description of Pakistani cultural and religious values. (Tabassum, 2021)

Two types of gender stereotypes (positive and negative) are present in each society. Both types of stereotypes consist of a set of traits that are constructed by society and are associated with sexes in any context of society. The magnitude of gender stereotypes is different in different age groups. The other two types of stereotypes are descriptive and prescriptive. Prescriptive gender stereotypes portray the gender as it should be and descriptive stereotypes give the description of gender as it is (Koenig, 2018).

The concept of a new family is significant in the practical description of reverse gender roles. In the present era reverse gender roles are emerging in a fast manner and are common in society. Women are doing jobs and earning just like men. Therefore, women are becoming economically independent. Hence, in the modern age gender roles are reversing in daily life practices, and nowadays they are being explored by challenging the traditional gender stereotypes (Olah et al.; 2020) There is a clear description of the change in gender roles played by Female protagonist (Butterfly) of the novel "Social Butterfly". She can think and speak what she wants. She has full freedom of expression and thought but she is not economically independent. It seems that her roles are reversing because she is not behaving like a traditional heroine but at some points, she is also performing traditional roles. As literature reflects contemporary society and "Social Butterfly" is a modern novel it shows that although traditional gender roles are reversing in the modern era still there is a need for change because traditional gender roles are not completely changed in every sphere of Life (Razzaq, 2022).

Men and women are different in their speech styles in Pakistani society. This difference in speech is neither constructed by society nor shows the inferior and superior status of men and women but it is based on the culture of this society. Men and women use different patterns of speech to fulfill their needs according to their cultural requirements but the behavior of these two genders is constructed by societal norms at that time. They have to play their traditional gender roles in society so for this purpose they choose different language styles according to the cultural needs of the time. Hence gender is not based on language rather language is associated with gender and depends on cultural norms and periods (Khan et al.; 2020).

Media plays an important role in the development and socialization of gender stereotypes. It shapes the beliefs and mindsets of the young generation and children. So they make their lifestyle including dress colors, toys, habits, manners, and behaviors by learning traditional gender roles in media programs. So, dramas, movies, talk shows, and other constituents of media highlight traditional gender stereotypes in the different spheres of life which has a great impact on the lives of youth and children who follow these norms, and behaviors associated with the concept of traditional gender acts and perform them in their daily life happenings (Ward & Grower, 2020).

Media is a powerful tool and it can play a vital role in the progress of nations and countries. It is not only a source of entertainment but it can educate the views in a good or bad way. It can be used as a weapon for revolutionary purposes. No one can deny the importance of media. It is doing the best job of changing the mindset of people as the world is changing day by day. In the modern world, media is helping to enlighten people by challenging old stereotypical concepts and inculcating modern ideologies in the minds of people. It is also performing the duty of shaping societies in positive manners according to modern trends and removing negative ideologies. Hence media is acting as a fourth pillar of the nation's life around the globe (Sharma et al.; 2015).

Pakistani TV dramas stereotypically represent women. They commonly describe the portrayal of females with the following perspectives of fashion, fun, food, family, and furnishing which are associated with feminism. But now times are changing and media especially television dramas can educate society positively to change their worldview according to the needs of the time. Hence dramas should change their content to play their powerful role in the inculcation of optimistic ideologies regarding women's empowerment and the education of the nation. In this way, cultural values and morality-based content should be promoted through dramas by challenging the negativity and hatred in society (Babul & Niyaz, 2019).

Learned optimism refers to learning the ability to think positively by continuous self-talk in a hopeful manner about the issue in any difficult situation. This is also associated with gender. All men and women have equal ability to think positively or negatively. Learned optimism helps to see the bright and positive aspects of the picture rather than only the dark side. Hence it helps to remove any time of anxiety with the hope of changing the time and solution of issues in difficult situations. (Dhillon, 2018)

The review of the above articles shows that many research scholars have conducted studies on traditional gender roles and reverse gender roles and in Pakistani dramas most of the research shows traditional gender stereotypes but current research is based on the exploration of reverse gender roles and their impacts on the positive image building of Pakistani society and culture.

Material and Methods

Research Design

The present study is qualitative in its nature. The research paradigm is interpretive. It is based on a textual analysis of Pakistani *Sinf-e-Ahan* under the theoretical framework of Reverse Gender Roles by Geetha (2002) taken from her book *Theorizing Feminism*. The theory of Learned optimism by Martin Elias Seligman (1990) will be used as a supportive theory to support the argument.

Data Collection

It is episodic data taken from all the episodes by employing purposive sampling techniques for the selected data to be representative and suit the nature of this study.

Primary data is taken in the form of English subtitles of characters' conversations of Drama *Sinf-e-Ahan* (A Women of Steel) written by Umera Ahmad, directed by Nadeem Baig, and produced by Next Level Entertainment and Six Sigma Plus with the collaboration of ISPR. The subtitles of interactional utterances of characters are selected and noted after careful listening and watching of drama.

Results and Discussions

Sinf e Ahan is a portrayal of reverse gender roles in Pakistani society with a positive description of Pakistani culture.

Life is a great blessing of Allah Almighty. But we human beings spoil our lives when we try to color our way of living from the brushes of others. In the same way, each culture has its customs and traditions and to judge one's culture from the rules and regulations of other cultures is dangerous. There are different stereotypes associated with Pakistani culture because of analyzing the lifestyle of Pakistani people through the angle of the European gaze. The drama *Sinf e Ahan* describes the story of the empowerment journey of four female characters who belong to different areas of Pakistan and clearly shows that Pakistani culture is not suffocated for female characters. In the third episode, the female characters are going to ISSB for the test. They all have difficulties in their ways but their common aim was to pass the ISSB test. "Commonly beauty and emotions are associated with girls; intelligence and hard work are associated with males. Women always try to be more beautiful and men always to be more powerful but with time roles are reversing by challenging the common stereotypes related to gender". This can be seen in the following scenes of the drama

Rabea and his brother

"The way you're studying it seems you're planning to top in the ISSB in the whole of Pakistan So, shouldn't I think like that? Coming on top doesn't mean anything, just pass it. Brother, it might not matter to you but for me, it's very important to come first in everything That's the one thing that will make you fail the ISSB Oh, but why? Besides, they need youngsters like me over there Oh really! there's a long way to go right now it ISSB I'm not worried about the ISSB, I just know that I'll make it Let's see" (Baig, 2021-2022)

Prewash and Father

"Father: Do the best you can in the test, you're very brave". (Baig, 2021-2022)

Prewash: "Yes Father I'll be right here, just call me if you need anything. Father, they will keep our phones for as long as we are there, but don't worry And don't call me again and again, okay? Okay, good bye Good bye" (Baig, 2021-2022)

In the following scenes, it has been seen through the lenses of the theory of reverse gender roles the passion and firm aim of female characters who are intelligent and working hard to pass the ISSB exam to join the army. Keeping in mind the domain of *learned Optimism*(1990) by Seligman it can be easily observed that how male members play an important role in supporting the female characters as father, brother, fiancé, and cousin.

The following lines represent the reverse gender roles in this episode as well as the contribution of male members in the progress of females.

The above conversations represent the Rabea and Pariwesh as strong and intelligent and male members as caring and supporting in the same way Arzoo, Shaista, and Mahjabeen are also sensible strong, and intelligent characters so here can be easily seen how gender roles are reversing and it also has been highlighted that male members are taking care the female characters and supporting them instead of creating problems in their way of progress.

One more thing can be seen here all the female characters come with their male member. Arzoo and Pariwesh come with their fathers, Arabia with her brother, Shaista with her fiancé and Mahjabeen with her cousin so if we observe through the lenses of positive discourse by

Martin it can be seen how caring and responsible male members are in Pakistani society who protect as well as cooperate with their females in every step of life for their progress so here we can challenge the misconception and stereotype that Pakistani males are oppressors and Females are oppressed rather it can be seen through the lenses of Geetha that gender roles are completely reversing in Drama Sinf E Ahan by challenging the traditional gender stereotypes

In each episode of the drama, the struggle of female characters has been shown to gain powerful status in life and the most beautiful aspect is that the female characters Abroo, Mahjabeen, Rabea, Prewesh, and others represent women of different classes who belong to different subcultures of Pakistan. Prewesh represents Balouchi women who belong to the culture of Balochistan and are challenging the stereotypes associated with the culture. The Owner of their village supports Prewesh and happily accepts the victory of Prewesh in a shooting competition Prewesh is an ideal shooter who wins the competition in the army college and her father is a great support for her the following lines clearly show how the character of prewesh is positively presenting Balouch culture by challenging the traditional gender stereotypes and is portraying the phenomenon of reverse gender roles in Pakistani society through the lenses of reverse gender roles by Geetha.

Thinking of Preswesh in the Last episode

“PMA taught me that equality can't be gained easily in life but you can grab it with your talent”. (Baig, 2021-2022)

These lines clearly show that Pakistani women can gain success through hard work and Pakistani culture is not patriarchal women can do what they want and male members help and support their women. Shaista belongs to Pukhtoon culture and her father and tribe feel proud of her selection in PMA. Arzoo belongs to the poor class, Shaista belongs to the elite class and Rabea belongs to the middle class and all of these characters are symbols of reverse gender roles in Pakistani society. And the male members in this drama are also signs of positivity in Pakistani culture.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, Drama Sinf e Ahan is just like the colorful painting of Pakistani culture having different subcultures with different traditions. This drama reflects the phenomenon of reverse gender roles by challenging the traditional gender stereotypes associated with Pakistani people and by the representation of powerful female characters along with their

journey of empowerment. Hence, it becomes clear that Pakistan is not patriarchal or matriarchal. Our country is made in the name of Islam for the implementation of the Islamic lifestyle and teachings of Islam. So the best way to remove all types of oppression from our society is to follow the Islamic way of life and teachings of Islam because Islam is a religion of peace that does not allow any type of oppression in any situation. Patriarchy and matriarchy are two extremes of cruelty but Islamic society is a balanced society so for this purpose we should educate our people with the teachings of Islam Education of Quran e Pak should be included in our educational course outline with translation and explanation and all the trainings session should be based on the verses of Holy Quran and our leaders should also get knowledge about sharia and ayat of Quran. By focusing on a specific cultural context, the study provides unique insights into how media narratives can challenge and redefine gender roles. The analysis serves as a valuable resource for scholars, media professionals, and audiences interested in understanding the complexities of gender dynamics in contemporary Pakistani society.

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