



Portrayal of Transgenders in Pakistani TV Serials: An Analytical Study of “Alif Allah Aur Insaan” and “Khuda Mera Bhi Hai”

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Abstract

This research attempts to analyze the portrayal of transgenders in two Pakistani TV serials: *Alif Allah Aur Insaan* aired on HUM TV 2017 and *Khuda Mera Bhi Hai* aired on ARY Digital 2016. This research aims to show how Pakistani TV serials portrayed the real-life situation of transgenders in our society. For this purpose, two theories: Queer and Framing are used as a theoretical framework. The Queer theory put a focus on social construction while the Framing theory deals with the perception of people in society towards transgenders. As the study focuses on whether T.V dramas are the real depiction of transgender life or not; both theories have their own merits of the application. This research is based on the qualitative method. Data has been taken from randomly selected dialogues of transgenders from both selected dramas on YouTube channels. From the data analysis, it can be analyzed that both selected dramas have represented the issues transgenders face in their real life. The protagonist character Shammo from “Alif Allah Aur Insaan” and the character Noor from “Khuda Mera Bhi Hai” depict the real-life situation of transgenders in our society. From the findings, it can be concluded that the identity of transgenders is portrayed stereotypically and Pakistani T.V dramas are depictions of the real-life situations of transgenders.

Keywords: Identity, Queer, Drama, Transgender, Portrayal

1. Introduction

Transgender term is used to refer to those individuals whose inner gender identity which they sense does not go with the sex, biological or physical characteristics, they are given by birth. It can also be defined as the term used to refer those individuals whose bodies do not fit binary ideas of male and female. Some other words which are used to refer such individuals in Pakistan are “hijra”, “Shemale”, “Chaka”, “Khwaja sara” etc. If we have a look on our society from the perspective of transgenders, we will see from what they have to go through as they are facing a lot of discrimination due to which they are affected economically, socially and have to go through educational, safety and health crisis. Transgender is a personality that has the characteristics of both masculine and feminine. Behavior with transgender is extremely intolerant in all the fields like medical, law, and families. Also in dramas, no proper roles are given to them, and a deep-rooted fear of sexual and gender non-conformity is a basic problem in the refusal of citizenship rights to these communities (Karnataka, 2003). They do not only face discrimination but disrespect as well, as people call them names just because of the gender identity they are having. Transgender is a category consisting of a field of knowledge, discrimination, violence, and mechanism of disenfranchisement. How people think about gender, identity, sexuality, and politics generally reflects the stereotypical perception of people toward transgender people from history to the present which is not positive (Valentine, 2007). Recently some of the researchers have worked on the portrayal of transgenders in media, transgenders are represented as dancers, beggars, criminals in Bollywood movies and transgenders are not satisfied with portraying them in such a way (Yaseen, Batool, and Naseer, 2020). It gives the conclusion that in most of the Bollywood movies they are represented negatively. Likewise, this research work aims to analyze their portrayal in Pakistani dramas. In Pakistani society where transgenders are perceived negatively it is really important to see how T.V dramas are playing a part in propagation of stereotypical image of transgenders. For this research dramas are selected because among other media or social media platforms, dramas have much more influence on perception of the audience. Dramas somehow mirror the true image of society most of the times. This can be rightly said that dramas hold the power to influence the perception of people by framing things such as objects, characters, personalities etc; just like add agencies which tends to manipulate the viewer's or audience's mind through visuals or language they use. Intention of this research work is to find out how the identity of transgenders is constructed through T.V dramas, do dramas depict their real-life situation, do they show case their experiences and are they pointing out their problems or not.

1.1. Objectives of the study

- To analyze what kind of identity of them is being framed by T.V dramas.
- To analyze how framing of their identity in T.V drama is influencing the way in which people perceive them.
- To know whether T.V dramas are mirroring their real life or not. If yes then to study what kind of ideologies Pakistani society is having about transgenders.

1.2. Research Question

- How identity of transgenders is portrayed with the help of framing in Pakistani T.V dramas?
- Do Pakistani T.V dramas depict the real-life situation of transgenders?

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2. Literature Review

Jobe (2013) has done the research work on Transgender representation in media. Because media is the major source for spread of information. Media represents both influential and reflective group of people in society. Researcher has done the qualitative research for transgender representations in American society. Data has been collected from twelve examples of television, news and movies from 1975 to 2013 for portrayal of transgender issues. After the analysis of data, researcher has concluded that media misrepresent transgender society in America. And transgenders face a lot of discrimination in their society. Media represent their characters as a negative stereotype and type of jokers.

Spencer and Capuzza (2017) have critically analyzed regression, progressing or transgressing on the small screen in U.S. TV series. They qualitatively analyze the lead and supporting transgender characters in U.S. Scripted TV dramas and comedy shows of past years. Transgender is considered as wrong bodies when the discourse of this drama is done then it is embedded with a more refined and diverse story on transgender identity and subjectivity. As transgender is not a minor community and never be neglected. But it shows that people dislike them and give them very few roles in the drama. They show the drama of transgender but the character is performed by normal men and women, not these people. Their progress is very low on the Tv screen this shows they face discrimination from every part and every field of society.

Irudayaraj (2020) critically analyzes the instrumental role social media play in the recognition and affirmation of the identity and rights of transgender persons. He says that the transgender community also uses social media for their use. As they face discrimination, the humiliation of rights, and bad behavior from people. By using the qualitative method using some apps that provide a safe platform for these people to interact with other people. This helps in keeping the humiliation away and helps them to inspire and become self-reliant. They use these apps to earn money. The transgender activeness on media helps these people that society changes its negative perception.

Khalil, et al. (2020) have analyzed the representation of transgender community in Pakistani two English Newspapers: Daily Dawn and Daily Express. Social media is one of the most important sources which represent the transgender and highlights their awareness and problems. For highlighting the social issues which transgender community is faced they used content analysis as a research design. The researchers adopt systematic sampling technique for sample design of total articles, newspapers which published in recently 2 years. After data analysis they conclude that both newspapers have not enough coverage to represent the transgender community and their issues. They identified that transgender is underrepresented and marginalized in targeted newspapers. And it also identified that mostly newspapers published the transgender community on the back pages of news reports. By comparing, Daily Newspaper giving more coverage and importance to transgender community as compared to Dawn News.

Shakeela (2020) has done the research paper on portrayal of Transgender's in play '*Seven steps around the fire*' 'According to her, transgender is very familiar community in Indian society. Their presence in marriage functions and child birth events are considered as a good sign of fate. But they also considered as incomplete and third generation that are not able to marriage and for child birth. Qualitative research has been done and data is collected from Mahesh Dattani's play *Seven steps around the fire*. In this play, transgenders issues and sufferings are discussed through the character of Kamla. This play is a tragic play because two tragic incidents are happened in this play. First is murder of Kamla because she is a transgender and second is death of Sabbu. Kamla is very beautiful and she loves with minister's son Sabbu. Kamla gets murdered due to transgender discrimination and then Sabbu dead. This play shows the feeling and emotions of transgenders like other human beings and deals with transgender discrimination in society. Sharma (2020) has done her research on how the role of viewers who perform their beliefs about transgender while watching drama. According to her media changes the views of people about transgender by watching the drama full of emotions. She uses the qualitative method to analyze the viewer participation with emotion and cognition will change the belief and attitude of people toward the transgender community. In popular Tv dramas, watch for this purpose main focus is on the narrator and analyzing the narrator performance distinct from another character. People have the strongest predictor of viewer belief about transgender persons. And this research shows that people have negative perceptions of transgender that they predict the drama of what is going to happen.

Yasin, Batool, and Naseer (2020) have critically analyzed portrayal of transgender in selected movies and explores the problems and challenges that transgender faced in society. For this purpose, Framing and Queer theory is used as a theoretical framework. Content analysis, intensive interviews and surveys have been collected for data analysis. They conclude that social media depicts the portrayal of transgenders in Bollywood movies in a stereotypical way. Bollywood movies represent the transgender as beggars, sex worker, and dancer. They depict the transgender as a comic figure instead of take stand for their social rights such as health and mental issues, unemployment and many others. Bollywood movies represent transgender as a disrespected generation, by making fun and as a source of entertainment.

Waheed, Bajwa and Khushi (2021) analyzed storyline depiction of transgender issues in Pakistani T.V Dramas: Alif Allah or Insan and Khuda Mera Bhi Hai. Content analysis has been used as a theoretical framework and they construct a coding sheet about transgender issues that highlights in these selected dramas. After analyzing the data, researchers

finally conclude that these TV serials depicts the transgender role as a positive character. These dramas highlight the transgender rights in our society. And they represent their community as a respectable like other generations.

3. Research Methodology

Igwenagu (2016) says that the set of systematic techniques and methods used in research work are referred as research methodology. The present research work follows the systematic techniques and methods. Descriptive qualitative research method is employed in this research paper in order to analyze the portrayal of transgenders in Pakistani Dramas. This study includes two selected dramas; Alif Allah or Insaan and Khuda mera Bhi hai. Both these dramas have been broadcasted on different channels; Alif Allah or Insaan on HUM T.V and Khuda Mera bhi hai on ARY Digital. The content for this research work has been collected from internet as dramas can be downloaded from internet freely. After that researchers have watched both the dramas and some important facts about queer character such as their actions, outfits, habits and how other character behave around them has been observed. Much attention is given to the dialogues and situations in the dramas during analysis.

4. Theoretical Framework

Erving Goffman's framing theory (1974), which was given under the title of Frame Analysis at first, and queer theory have been taken as theoretical framework for the present research work. Intention of the Framing theory is to emphasize the fact that perception of something by people is influenced by the way it is presented to people. Such influence directly controls the choices of people and the way they think of something. The main source of framing is media. It controls the mindset of people in such a way that it tells people what to think and sometimes how to think. The reason for the application of this theory in this research work lies in the fact that media impacts on our perception and beliefs about transgenders by representing or framing their identity in a certain way. By providing the ways to analyze the nature of representation, framing theory has helped in analyzing the portrayal of transgenders in Pakistani T.V dramas.

Queer theory analyzed the specified beginning of queer Gender and sexuality as the concepts which are social and cultural construction. Queer theory challenges such concept; and the focal of the theory is the concept that identities are not fixed at all, and on the basis of such social or cultural constructions it cannot be defined that who we are. Queer theory is applied in the present research work to analyze the identity of transgenders, also said to be gender queer as individuals (Farooq 2020). As transgenders have been the part of media such as movies and T.V dramas especially, queer theory will help to analyze the nature of their portrayal of representation.

5. Analysis and findings

The representation of transgenders (or gender queer) is the main queer feature which research is basically concerned with. In Pakistani drama industry there is not as much characterization of transgenders, only few dramas deal with their representation. The two selected dramas are specifically highlighting the issues that come across the way of transgender community and at some points most of the dialogues delivered by queer characters represent their feelings about being a transgender as well. In these dramas the focus is on identity portrayal or representation rather than identity construction which is one of the main requirements for the research. Queer characters of the drama are portrayed in a realistic manner. This statement can be supported by the analysis of dialogues given below:

Extract in Urdu:	English Translation:
<p>Trans 1: main ab yeah naach gaana nai karna chahti hoon, main mehnat kar k kamana chahti Hun, naach gaany sy mera dil beththa hai.</p> <p>Trans 2: hum Jacy logo ko kon kaam daita hai hum jaiso ko to qi bheek bhi nahi deta.</p>	<p>Trans 1: I do not want to do this dance thing anymore. I want to earn diligently. Dancing makes me disappointed.</p> <p>Trans 2: Who will give work to people like us? Nobody even gives alms to people like us.”</p>

The occupation of transgenders shown in Alif Allah or Insaan is mainly dancing. They are shown as people who do dancing performances on events to increase the magnificence of it. This dialogue mentioned above indicates it clearly that not every transgender chooses this occupation willingly. They have to choose it because of the lack of other options. The phrase “people like us” which seems to be drawing them different is actually indicating their identity which is transgender and the focus on this phrase emphasizes the lack of acceptance of their identity in our society.

Extract in Urdu:	English Translation:
<p>Principal: yeh Noor keliye bhi sahi nahi hai. Ap khud sochain kahin bhi duniya main ap iska form fill karny jain gi to us main sirf do hi khany hon gyn male or female, kahin bhi teesra option nahi ho ga.</p> <p>(Khuda Mera bhi ha, Ep 09)</p>	<p>“Principal: It is not right for Noor as well. Think it over yourself; if you go anywhere in the world to fill Noor's form you will only get two boxes, one for male and another for female. There will never be a third option.”</p> <p>(Khuda Mera bhi ha, Ep 09)</p>

The major issue faced by transgenders is illustrated in the above dialogue. When Noor, who is a transgender, is taken by her mother Maha Gull to the school for admission; principal rejects giving Noor admission on the basis of not having any of the binary gender identity. He mentioned the fact that admission forms do not have gender identity box for transgenders. Not getting educational opportunity is the core issue of them being unemployed and choosing the occupations like dancing. The exaggeration of his dialogue by use of the phrase “anywhere in the world” indirectly indicate the extent to which their identity is neglected. They are deprived of the fundamental right of equality and due to the third gender stigma they are deprived of the educational rights.

Extract in Urdu:	English Translation:
<p>“Trans: hum jaisy bcho ki maain hmyn paida hoty hi hum ko dhudkar deti hain, Kiyu kay hum hijra paida hotay hain. hmari zindagi main muhabbat ki kami hoti hai.”</p> <p>(Alif Allah or Insaan, Ep 20)</p>	<p>“Trans: Mothers of children like us, abandon us right after birth because we are born as a transgender. Our life lack love.”</p> <p>(Alif Allah or Insaan, Ep 20)</p>

The dialogue mentioned above depicts that parents do not want to accept a transgender as their children so they abandon them rather than raising them up with the same love with which they raise their other children either male or a female. They leave them without having a thought that how will they survive which makes them feel unloved throughout their life. They are deprived of the love of their parents; they do not spend their childhood like other children (male and female) of their age. Cherry on the top is when they grow up, they have to face a lot of hate and discrimination in our biased society and only have the people of their own community to rely on. This dialogue is the presentation of their sentiments and feeling.

Extract in Urdu:	English Translation:
<p>Noor: Kiya main bhiyanak shakal ka hoon jo ap meri traf dekh nai rhy? kia mujhy koorrh hai jo ap mujhy chuu bhi nahi sakty? kia main neech hun, kameena hun? Kiyu kia ap ny mery sath aisa? Jawab dejiye, Array log to apni najaiz olad ko bhi apnaa letay hain main to phir bhi apki jaiz olad thi.”</p> <p>(Khuda mera b hai, Ep 15)</p>	<p>“Noor: Am I of dreadful face that you cannot look at me? Do I have leprosy that you cannot touch me? Am I low cast, a bastard? Why did you do this to me? Answer me. People even accept their illegitimate child but I am your own.”</p> <p>(Khuda mera b hai, Ep 15)</p>

The above-mentioned dialogue depicts the story of every transgender in our society. Character Noor is transgender in this drama. When he was born his father Zain did not accept him as his child because of him being a transgender. As In our society third gender child is considered as a curse for parents therefore parents abandon them likewise Zain did the exact same thing. After some years Noor asked his father why he did not accept him? He asks his father many questions but answer lies in a single statement that he is a transgender. Is being transgender a fault? His own family tried snatching the right of good life form him, which would have happened if his mother was not his side.

Extract in Urdu:	English Translation:
<p>Rani: yeah, tum kia keh rhy ho? dafa ho jao yhan say. yeah, jo tum naach gaany ka kam krti ho na haram hai yeah, tum dozakh main jao gy. paleet aadmi, tumhain sharm nai aati, saari duniya main ak tum hi reh gye ho mujh say muhabbat karny waly. paleet insan paray hatt jao mery pass say."</p> <p>(Alif Allah or Insaan, Ep 1)</p>	<p>Rani: What are you saying? Get lost from here. This dancing profession of yours is Haram, you will go to hell. Impure human, are not you ashamed? Are you the only one left in this world to love me? Impure human! Get away from me."</p> <p>(Alif Allah or Insaan, Ep 1)</p>

Rani, a street beggar, is one of the major characters of the drama whom Shammo, a transgender, fell in love with. This dialogue is delivered by Rani when she is confessed by Shammo. In the same settings before confession, she gives quite positive thoughts about transgenders that along with being a transgender they are human as well and should value themselves. Shammo got courage and confessed but ironically Rani's opinion which were positive before changes to negative one. Yes, she said that they are humans but "Impure one." She is extremely frustrated by the fact that Shammo has confessed to her despite of being a transgender. Her frustration makes her reveal her true thoughts that being a transgender makes a human impure. Indirectly she gives superiority to herself being a binary gender.

Extract in Urdu:	English Translation:
<p>Boys in ground: tu bhi khail saky gi kia? bhaag sako gi Dhanno? Hy Hy dekho dosto iski ankho main to mottiy mottiy ansu aa gye. Mama ny btya nahi kia k mard football khailty hain?</p> <p>(Khuda mera bhi hai epi 13)</p>	<p>Boys in ground: can you be able to play? Can you be able to run, Dhanno? Look friends! there are big fat tears in his eyes. Did not your mother tell you that football is played by men?</p> <p>(Khuda mera bhi hai epi 13)</p>

This dialogue shows how people laugh at transgenders. Society made this nonsense rule and norms that transgender is incomplete gender and they have no right to spend their lives respectfully. Noor is transgender in this drama. When he goes to park to play football, some boys laugh at him, abuse and insulted him. They said that he does not have the ability of play football as it is the play for men. This dialogue depicts that our society gave the perception about transgenders as a someone who is supposed to make fun of and pushed away. Third gender is also the part of our society just like male and female. They have equal rights to do everything in our society which is done by for male and female gender. Gender discrimination in transgenders community due to class and gender made them disempowered community in our society. This community could not achieve their fundamental rights like freedom of expression, liberty, right to education. This dialogue depicts how our society violates their rights, discriminates them and disrespect the because of their gender identity.

Extract in Urdu:	English Translation:
<p>Nazneen: Jao apni oqat to dekho. Pehlay puray insan to ban k ao phir mujh sy baat karna. tum ho kia? jo niklo yhan say."</p> <p>(Alif Allah or Insaan, Ep 1)</p>	<p>Nazneen: go look at yourself. Be a complete human first before talking to me. Go get out of here."</p> <p>(Alif Allah or Insaan, Ep 1)</p>

Throughout history, the profession of transgender is dancing and singing which is the only source for the transgender community to earn money. In the drama Alif Allah Aur Insan when Shammo, a transgender, along with his other transgender fellows went to the wedding event to sing and dance as it is his profession to earn money. Instead of supporting these people, Nazneen, one of the major characters of the drama, insults them without caring about their self-respect and lashes out on them at a wedding. This disrespectful and ignorant behavior of her despite of being educated enough shows that people don't accept transgenders and they do not accept their presence at the festivals and on happy occasions. People treat them as neglected and leftover parts of society. Nazneen even call them incomplete humans indirectly because they are neither male nor female but transgenders. It indicates the fact that

Nazneen's character think that it is compulsory to be a male or a female to be a complete human, this ideology represented by her character about transgenders is actually present in our society.

6. Conclusion

By concluding the research paper, it can be said that Pakistani T.V dramas focuses on representing real social issues that come across the way of transgenders such as discrimination, less occupational options, less educational opportunities, abandoning etc. In Alif Allah or Insaan they are represented as dancers and in real life they are dancers professionally most of the times. Khuda mera b hai depicts how parents abandon them and the problems getting education are also represented. From analysis and findings, it can be concluded that the identity of transgender is portrayed in a stereotypical way. Their identity is framed for the sake of representation rather than construction and it can be rightly said that their portrayal is the representation of their real-life situations.

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