
REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN PAKISTANI COMEDY DRAMAS

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ABSTRACT

Media in its various forms has become a significant part of everyday social life. It influences both how we see ourselves and the world around us to some extent. At different screens of media, images of men and women are presented in different ways and with different characteristics. Studies have been conducted at large regarding representation of gender in movies and television drama serials. This paper was meant to be an addition to this vast canvas of research through analysis of gender representation in the comedy dramas of Pakistan. According to West and Zimmerman's theory of 'doing gender', gender is performed by the people in their everyday actions and interactions. Keeping in view the concept of doing gender this study analyzed roles of males and females and tried to find out how different characters maintain their gender identities in comedy dramas. Results suggested that the characters were, at many places, observed to be acting contrary to the roles associated to their genders by the society. They did or performed gender to maintain their identities.

Keywords: Gender, Representation, Comedy, Drama

INTRODUCTION

Representation of gender roles in dramas is of significant importance. The term gender role refers to the concept of how men and women are expected to act and behave in a society. Society has attributed different roles for men and women and has typically linked them to their biological sex. Sex and gender are different entities. Sex of a person is biological whereas gender may not be something that is inborn or innate. It may be socially constructed and people may be expected to behave accordingly. It may seem to be natural but it may not be natural. People do perform gender through their interactions

with each other. They build up their distinct identities through performance or behavior. In this way, gender is done by the individuals and repeated to maintain their identities. Though, society has associated certain roles with different genders, and people are expected to behave accordingly, however, there are others who challenge these roles by acting contrary to these attributed roles.

Media in its various forms (print, electronic or social) influences the lives of people. It may play an important role in developing the beliefs of people to some extent. Television drama serials present different images and roles of men and women through characterization. One of the important genres of television drama serials is comedy drama. Comedy dramas usually address social problems in a comic and satirical manner. They serve the purpose of entertainment along with highlighting the problems of the society and bringing them to the attention of masses and concerned agencies. They are lighter in mood and loved by people.

Present research has been conducted to analyze the gender roles represented in the comedy dramas of Pakistan. Comedy dramas are filmized for entertainment of viewers. They are usually welcomed by the people and own quite a large number of viewership throughout the country. Generally, media seems to be influencing the ideas of viewers, therefore, present study was conducted to see how Pakistani comedy dramas portray different images of men and women, and whether these roles conform to the traditional roles attributed to males and females or deviate in any way.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research may answer the following questions:

- a) Are stereotypical gender roles maintained in Pakistani comedy dramas?
- b) Are social attributes of male and female maintained in Pakistani comedy dramas?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Male and female human beings are born with some biological differences or specifications. Since the time immemorial they are living together in certain social and family relations. Generally, they are assigned different roles and attributes in accordance with the prevalent social norms, values, traditions, customs etc. According to

Zimmerman and West (1987) these stereotypical roles or attributes are not attached to both male and females biologically. They are attached to them by the society stereotypically. Both male and female have the potential to perform contrary to stereotypical roles and attributes attached to them by particular societies. The reflection of these roles and attributes may be witnessed in television drama serial all over the world. In the context of Pakistani society, the same may also be observed in comedy dramas or sitcoms. Zimmerman and West (1987) claim that gender is not a biological phenomenon. They believe that it is basically performed through actions. Consequently, they came up with the concept of 'doing gender'. Present study falls within the same theoretical framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

'Gender Studies' is a topic of interest to many people. Among gender studies, 'gender roles' is a widely discussed topic across the globe and is still a topic of interest to many. Many researchers have worked on the same topic but somehow with different approaches. Zimmerman (1987) gave the concept of 'Doing Gender'. According to him gender is something that is performed by the people and embedded in their everyday interactions and routine accomplishments. Though, it appears to be natural, it is something created by people and the society. The researchers has adopted the same approach for the study. The same idea is supported by Beauviour (1997) claiming that one is not born as man or woman but rather becomes a man and woman in accordance with norms of the society. According to Weather all (2002) gender is a social construct which is produced by language and discourse. The performative notion of gender is that it is a discursively constructed or produced through social interaction (Stokoe, 2005).

Being a part of the social setup, it becomes necessary for the individuals to adapt their gender roles as determined by the society. These roles are taught to a child from very early age and he or she is made to behave in certain ways which later on become his or her habits and on the larger scale his or her individual identity as a male or a female respectively. The same is emphasized by Coates (1993) that gender is something that a child learns when he/she begins to speak in terms of the cultural roles assigned to him by the society. According to Poynton (1989) identification of a baby as a male or female has crucial social and cultural importance for the people around him. People

always think of others in terms of gender and it is something inseparable (Cross & Markus, 1993). Gender is among the basic categories used by the people for determining their social duties and their social world.

In the perspective of language as a social construct, discourse and language are important factors to determine or present the gender roles. Gender is not reflected in linguistic expressions only but also constructed through it (Weatherall, 2002). According to Bennouiss (2001) humanity, language and society are intermingled into each other. Gender and use of language particularly in advertising are very complex and complicated issues. They affect each other in respect of social and cultural factors. For example, religious beliefs are also reflected through clothing of both males and females (Behnam & Zamanian, 2014).

Sometimes, individuals may be controlled by the society through gender-based practices which are usually reflected through social powers. These may be created and recognized in inter personal relationships and encouraged in social interactions (Weatherall, 2002). According to van Dijk (2008) speaking ways can also be gendered. Social construction of any phenomenon is not possible without involvement of language. Van Zoonen (1994) suggests that reality is not just a thing that exists but it is something that is constructed by the social activities of human beings. Devore (1992) explains the behavior of North Americans regarding sex and gender. They see sex as an important factor for determining the gender and gender roles.

Coffin (2013) studied two T.V. shows “Modern family” and “Parenthood” to determine the gender roles in particular interests towards the issue of equal parenting. She observed that men were presented in those shows to be somehow challenging the gender expectations. Reimers (2003) examined the role of father and the mother in the shows from 1960s to 2000s and observed that the fathers in the shows had become more likely to bow to wishes of their wives and role of mothers had become more dominant. Similarly, Wiscombe (2014) observed the family ties in the shows aired on American T.V channels. She found that traditional roles were still prevailing in the T.V shows with married male and female and single parenthood (a single mother or a father) was still not given much representation.

Zhang (2012) observed the roles of males and females in two reality shows “if you are the one” and “only you”. One of the shows was a dating show and he observed that it focused more on women in a stereotypical manner presenting them as beautiful and physically attractive and with a purpose to get attention of men. The other reality show however, showed women as more focused and career oriented and in some equality with men. But again, the power distribution through the discourse was more tilted towards men and mostly taken over by male hosts of both the shows. As said by Simon de Beauvoir (1974) worth of female characters in media presentations or programs was usually reflected through male contemplations.

Tsatsa (2013) examined the gender roles in Harry Potter to be stereotypical or unconventional. She applied the approach of performative theory of genders. She found that Harry potter novels both challenged and did not challenge the gender stereotypes. She observed the three main characters and found that all three of them performed gender in different ways. Same gender roles were examined by Ottosson (2012) by analyzing the gender discourse in Sex and the City movies. She found that the characters still showed the stereotypical roles and their discourse was so much affected by their society and the roles attributed to them by the society, however, some of the characters were shown to be somehow challenging those roles but its outcome was not very successful. The women shown in the movies still wanted to be beautiful and physically attractive. However, at some points they also challenged those roles.

Stafford (2004) showed that T.V sitcoms were usually writers’ medium situated in family, workplace or any institution. They usually showed women as sexy in the world of men, exercising irrational power or fighting with each other. Men were generally shown as never growing up, afraid of women or self-sufficient. Scott (2011) studied the relationship of male and female in television situational comedies and observed that they still propagated the traditional and stereotypical roles of male and female. She further observed that they were not the depiction of reality but rather exaggerated versions of life. They were characterized to generate humor through unreal situations in comedies.

Reed (2013) observed the gender stereotypes in sitcom friends and found that male stereotypes were presented more than female stereotypes. Male characters were stereotypically shown as overgrown

children. Dambrot (1994) observed that the role of male and female had changed considerably in T.V sitcoms. Mothers were seen outside the home, independent and making decisions without consulting their husbands whereas fathers were seen to be more domesticized. Huda (2015) threw light on the portrayal of women in Pakistani media and found out that media in Pakistan had objectified woman. Their roles were presented in a stereotypical manner restricted to household works, victimized by the society or presented as objects of beauty and attraction.

Foregone in view, it may be concluded that a lot of work has been done by the researchers in the field of gender studies in particular to roles of male and female in different societies. Different researchers have adopted different approaches. The researcher will analyze the gender roles in the perspective of *Doing Gender* as presented by Zimmerman & West (1987). Most of the work done on gender roles refers to media studies, literature or Hollywood movies. The researchers are usually found interested in comedy dramas or the sitcoms. Previously done research work on sitcoms is mainly on American sitcoms. Very less work has been done on Pakistani comedy dramas. Therefore, the researchers intend to study Pakistani comedy dramas and find out how male and female characters perform gender through their actions and interaction with each other.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research is qualitative in nature as no numerical data is generated. The purpose of the research is to determine the gender roles. Three Pakistani comedy dramas have been targeted for the purpose. The dramas selected for the research are shown on the leading TV channels *HUM*, *ARY Digital* and *A Plus* of Pakistan. The dramas of these channels have been selected because these are popular channels of Pakistan and dramas of these channels are widely watched by the people throughout the country. The selected dramas are assigned the slots of 7 to 8 pm. Furthermore, only two episodes of each drama have been selected for the study. These episodes have been selected randomly. Hence, overall, six episodes have been examined. The number of episodes has been selected in accordance with the scope of the study. Roles of leading male and female characters in these dramas have been examined observing their actions and interactions with other characters in particular. For this purpose, the

dramas have been watched several times for accurate analysis. The research is descriptive in nature. Instances of doing gender have been focused. Dialogues of different characters have been marked and analyzed in the perspective of doing gender presented by Zimmerman and West (1987).

DATA ANALYSIS

The first comedy drama taken for the analysis is “JURU KA GHULAM”. Randomly two episodes have been taken for analysis. This drama is telecasted on *HUM TV*. The sitcom takes place in a home and the story moves around the family and small issues relevant to family. The family consists of five members including the parents and his son. Son is married to a girl and her brother lives with them (in the home of his sister). The major focus of the study are the two couples: the elderly couple *Chaudhry Saab* or *Dady G*(father) and *Bebe* (mother), and the younger couple Nomi and Pinky. Before further analysis it is very interesting to analyze the name of the sitcom itself. The name ‘juru ka ghulam’ (meaning the wife’s slave in English) shows what kind of relationship is going to be presented in the show. The name indicates that wives or, we may say the female members of the family are dominating over the male members of the family (husbands).

At several points the lead characters are seen doing gender through their dialogues and actions. For instance, at one point when Nomi yells at Pinky under the pressure of his mother (episode 3), Pinky shouts back at him as “*kia? Kia bakwas ki tum ne?*” (What? What nonsense have you said?) and then orders him to leave the room “*nikal jao mere kamray se*” (get out of my room). Such types of responses are usually not expected from the wives but here we see that wife is doing gender in her dialogues. At one other instance in the same episode Nomi asks his wife to cook food in the kitchen again by the order of his mother, the reaction of wife is very interesting. She reacts in a very surprising way saying “*kia? Tumhara dimagh tau theek he*” (are you in your senses) implying that it is something very strange for her to do. Further she tells him that she won’t cook asking as if wives are just meant to cook “*kia biwi sirf khana pakanay k lie hoti hai?*”.

There are many other such instances where the role reversal is clearly visible. In sitcoms, viewers are exposed to different new

situations in every episode. The situation in the other episode (episode 05) taken for the analysis is a very interesting one. Here Nomi's mother is forcing him to marry another girl. The reaction of his wife Pinky to all this situation does not take place stereotypically but rather as a strong woman. She threatens Nomi '*tumhain kia lagta hai tum us se shadi kar lo gay aur main tumhain zinda rehnay dun gi*' (do you think I will let you stay alive if you marry her) his reaction to all this is in a way as if he is very much terrorized by her. He replies "*main tumse pyar krta hun, main tumhare elawa kisi aur se daant khanay ka soch bhi nahin sakta*" (I love you and cannot think of getting scolded by anyone else except you).

The first thing to notice here is the denial of Nomi about getting married to another girl because of the fear of Pinky. Secondly the dialogue itself shows the dominance of Pinky and submission of Nomi. In the same episode Pinky tells Nomi to refuse the marriage or otherwise she will get angry. He obeys her "*g behtar behtar*" showing that husband is acting according to the wish of wife and the wife is doing whatever she wants to do. Thus, both the couples in this drama do gender in a way which is not very much conforming to the roles attributed by the society to men and women in order to maintain their identities.

The second drama taken for the analysis is "HASEENA MOIN KI KAHANI". The show is telecasted on *A Plus*. The running time for each episode is approximately thirty-five to forty minutes. The show revolves around a couple, the tall and beautiful Haseena and her husband Moin, who is shown to be not so handsome and tall as compared to his wife. The relation here is not so different than the previous show. In one of the episodes (episode 5) taken for the study, Moin marries an orphan girl out of sympathy. But the tables are turned on him very soon. He is very soon told by his second wife that she will have all the authority in home "*is ghar me sirf aur sirf mera hukum chalega*" challenging in a very clear way the authority of men.

In the same episode he is kicked out of his room "*chalo niklo niklo yahan se*" (get out of here). In the very same episode, he is again given a shut-up call by his wives stopping him from intervening in their conversation "*aap chup rahain, beech me na bolain*" (you stay quiet, don't interfere in between). In the second episode (episode 50) taken for analysis many such examples of *doing gender* can be

observed. For example, Moin is doing nothing and when asked to do something, he instantly answers to take money from Haseena's father which is in obvious contrast to what has been expected from men in our society. Moin has been shown doing house hold job and Haseena working in the office.

A difference is also seen in the way they address each other. Moin always address her as Haseena ji. 'Ji' is usually used for the people on higher position and is considered as a marker of respect. On the other hand, Haseena uses no such words for Moin and simply addresses him with his name. Thus, in this drama the character of Haseena is building up her identity by doing gender in a different way and the character of Moin is building the same image. Both the identities are quite contrary to the roles attributed by the society to men and women.

The last drama taken for the analysis is *DUGDUGI*. The drama is telecasted on *ARY Digital*. The running time of each episode is approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes. It is again a family show, highlighting small issues present in almost each family. There are two couples and the head of the family *Maa G* (the mother). First couple is of Shagufta and Ashraf and the other is the newly married couple of Nosheen and Azfar.

In the very first episode (episode 1) Nosheen is giving instructions to Azfar about how he is going to behave with her. She tells him "*hamesha apni awaz meri awaz se buland na krna mujhe bara gussa aye ga warna*"(never raise your voice more than mine otherwise I will get very angry). In another episode (episode 5) Maa ji asks Ashraf as if he is free and has nothing to do, he replies "*ji bilkul wela*" (yes absolutely free). The major duty associated with the males is to earn for the family but both the men of the family are devoid of this duty.

Ashraf is shown obeying his mother and wife like small kid and Shagufta threatens him repeatedly. At a point when she tells him to bring the grocery, she threatens him "*har haal me le ayeyega zarur warna khud bhi wahan so jayeyega, ghar mat ayeyega*"(do bring it otherwise no need to come home and also sleep there). In the same episode she awakens him with a threat again "*Ashraf shrafat se uth jayeye warna hamara roza hamaray qaboo se bahar ho jaye ga*" (getup instantly or I will lose my temper). The females in the show

have maintained their different identities by exercising control over their husbands and other financial/domestic issues. The power lies in their hands. On the other hand, males have built up their identities as being submissive to the ladies of the house and running away from jobs to earn.

CONCLUSION

A number of things were found common in all the dramas regarding the representation of gender. Dramas moved around the families and depicted the small household problems. Almost all the male characters had certain qualities in common. The men in these dramas were presented as lazy and less interested in going out and doing job for earning. They, in many instances, through their conversations and actions communicated this message. They were presented doing the house hold tasks, helping their wives or forced to do so by their wives. They were also shown quite submissive to their wives, obeying them and acting according to their wishes. Thus, the males were doing gender quite in contrast to what was expected from them stereotypically.

Same was the case for female characters. They also had a number of things in common when it was a matter of doing gender. They were shown avoiding the household works. They were shown more interested in other activities and least interested in doing household work themselves. At times they were also shown as working outside the home for earning. Thus, they could be seen challenging the traditionally attributed roles to them by the society. In almost all the dramas the financial control was in the hands of the women in one way or the other, a role traditionally attributed to male members of family in our society. The decision power was in the hands of the females giving them an authoritative role in the family. They were shown to be dominating their husbands and having an upper hand over them.

The females in many instances were shown to be doing gender in a way that was very much contrary to their traditional roles associated with them by the society. They were seen to be clearly challenging these roles by acting in contrast to them. Therefore, it may be concluded that gender roles may not be in born or constructed by the society but done/performed by the individuals to build up their distinct identities and repeated to maintain these identities. The different male

and female characters in these comedies dramas may be observed to be doing gender to build up and maintain their different identities which do not conform to their traditional roles at many places.

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