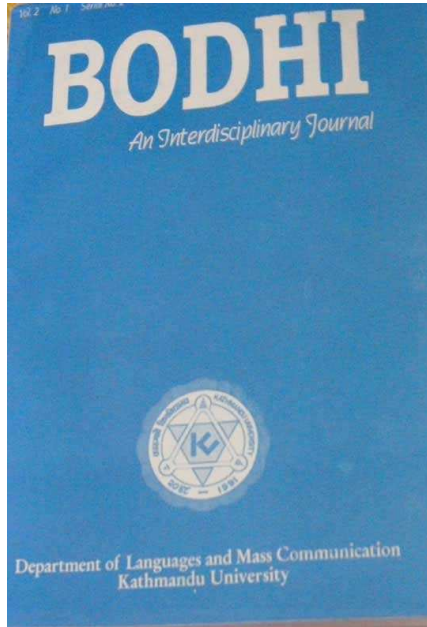


BODHI: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Vol. 2, No. 1, Serial No. 2, 2008



Published by

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND MASS
COMMUNICATION

KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY, DHULIKHEL, KAVRE, NEPAL

<http://www.ku.edu.np/media>

media@ku.edu.np

Portrayal of Women's Issues in PTV Drama Serials: An Overview

- Saleem Abbas Qaiser & Firasat Jabeen

This article attempts to present an overview of portrayal of women's issues in Pakistan Television (PTV) drama serials. Women's issues have been concerns of PTV programs since its early days. Particularly, drama serials have been significant in this regard. However, it is a matter of study whether they are really serious on the problems of women or whether they portray women in a stereotypical images.

Regarding the episodic drama on PTV, Fatima Suraiya Bajjia and Haseena Moeen are two names who began play writing right from the establishment and consolidation of PTV, earning much fame by dilating upon women issues. Haseena Moeen in 1970s wrote serials like '*Kiran Kahani*', '*Uncle Urfi*', '*Parchaiyaan*', '*Rohi*', '*Shehzori*' and '*Bandish*'. Fatima Surraiya Bajjia authored '*Shama*' and '*Aagahi*'. These plays, putting forth domestic woman as their focal point, talk of the day-to-day domestic issues.

Similarly, Fatima Suraiya again in 1980's wrote plays like '*Afshan*', '*Ana*' and '*Zeenat*' while Haseena Moeen presented block busters like '*Dhund*' '*Ajnabi*', '*An Kahi*', '*Chaoon*', '*Dhoop Kinaray*' and '*Tanhaiyaan*'. All these plays deal with the feminist issues and lives of women belonging to the middle strata of our society. Besides, they primarily bring the concept into lime light that a woman, on going beyond her conventional role, risks both her femininity and humanity simultaneously. Haseena's plays enjoy certain features making them unique and superior to PTV's other authors. Her characters, belonging to a certain background are well-developed, well-shaped and well-spoken figures belonging to metropolis (*Daily Mashriq*, April 24, 1982). Almost in every play of hers, a naughty, lively but head strong girl is sure to be found there. Haseena's heroines mostly belong to the middle class which she is primarily

interested in. 'Kiran Kahani' portrays the life of a girl whose personality suffers from incompleteness owing to the mutual estrangement between her parents. She is deprived of the belief and confidence which is the gift of parents' compatibility to their children (Moeen, n.d., t.49:18). 'Bina' in '*Uncle Urfi*' is an intensely sensitive character standing for all the girls who embrace death at the hands of fate and circumstances.

Abdul Qadir Junejo in 1980's came up with violence over women as his concern and thus wrote '*Diwarain*' from Karachi Center (A.Q. Junejo, personal communication, September 18, 2006) presented in 1983, the play targets the inhumane custom of '*Karokari*' besides discouraging the Sindhi and feudal values. The writer boldly hits all the beastly attitudes towards women that are being practiced in the name of custom. '*Karokari*' a custom belonging to the ancient times of Barbarism is still being practiced in the interior of Sindh which is all ignorant of education and civility. It has devoured an unknown number of people.

It is the female play wrights who have effectively talked over the issues concerning women. The most recent voice in this realm is that of Noor ul Hudsa Shah. She gained an unprecedented fame by writing '*Jungle*' in 1984. Written with a Sindhi background, the very play is the story of a social set up where woman is crucified sometimes through orthodoxy and at times by curbing her freedom.

The way a woman is sabotaged in a martial law regime is greatly manifested in '*Neelay Hath*'. Mohammed Azeem's this production received much applause on part of public (Behzad, July 10, 1989). After this, Asghar Nadeem Syed picked on women issues as his subject for '*Aasmaan*'. He is always keen about the representative characters of women. Prostitute enjoys a special place among his female characters. '*Shamshado*' in '*Piyas*' is one such character. Others like *Seema*, *Taaj Bibi* and *Jeeraan* are special in their own ways being purely womanish. '*Seema*' is a representative of the girls born in an air of

suspicion and disbelief, and are the captives of their traditions. They, for the sake of property, are tied to lunatics and invalids. Yet, they wish to see the world with open eyes adopting behaviour of resistance and defense for the realization of their dreams and safeguard of their rights (Syed, n.d., t.12:30). Many 'Taaj Bibis' are still alive in our society who are born in a big *haveli* and brought up just to be transferred and imprisoned in another big one, for whom these mansions and *havelis* are no less than prisons and torture cells. Who apparently own uncountable money and riches but that is not wear or enjoy. That's why Taaj Bibi, to her daughter Seema talks of the small casket of jewels and jewellery,

"Is sanduqar' I main tumhari man ki jawani band hai.
Tumhara baba nahi chahta k main in ko pehnu. Ye
zewar nahi hath-kariyan hain. Shadi ki rat hamain in
main jakar dia jata hai or phir marne k bad riha kia jata
hai" (Ibid. t.30:05)

(This casket encloses the youth of your mother. Your Baba doesn't want me to wear them. They are shackles not jewellery. We are chained through them on the wedding night and then released at our death.)

The character of *Jeeraan* symbolizes love and freedom. In 'Piyas' she is a young girl who, on being forced to marry an old 'Malik Mastou' flees away from her home and takes shelter in a shrine and *Darbar* where she becomes a yogi in the love of 'Jewna' (Ibid.). Noor ul Huda Shah in 1990 wrote 'Hawwa ki Beti' which was directed by Sahira Kazmi from Karachi center. The play deals with women who are particularly victimized in the feudal system and younas Javed's 'patt Jahr' is of supreme importance in the connection. The play was presented from Lahore Center in 1991 and had been directed by Rashid Daar. It focuses the life of a girl born in a feudal family. She marries with her choice and thus falls a prey to the ferocious system. Her husband is killed while she is sent to the mad house. The play can be regarded as the most sensitive creation on the issue (Akhbar-e-Jahan, January 16-23, 1991, p.69).

The year 1992 sees '*Aroosa*' and '*Kassak*' by Fatima Suraiya Bajjia and Haseena Moeen respectively. Both the plays deal with the problem of women, their moral values and the preservation of old traditions. PTV earns much credit on the behalf that it nowhere leaves its orientalism even at the times when women would be found without '*Dupattas*' in bazaars (F.S. Bajjia, personal communication, November 17, 2006). And Bajjia goes to the extent that her '*Aroosa*' even while swimming in the water, is wearing *dupatta* (Bajjia, n.d.b, t.19:35).

Most of Bajjia's plays deal with household and social issues. But the element of suspense and interest is woven so finely with the plot that one never finds passivity or boredom. In an interview to '*Akhbaar e Jahan*', Bajjia gives the reason for writing social plays,

“Since the Kalashnikov culture has already killed many innocents, so why should we add fuel to this fire. We are contented with focusing the remaining other issues of the society. This too is no less than a Jihad.” (Akhbar-e-Jahan, August 22-28, 1994, p.71)

Similarly, Naheed Sultana Akhtar, in 1992 wrote the famous drama serial '*Aanch*'. The play revolves around the theme of second marriage and the domestic conflicts arising out of it. PTV Peshawar Center in 1993 presented '*Gul-e-Lala*'. Written by Saad Ullah Jan Barq, the play was directed by Masood Ahmed Shah. The play fully projects the old injurious customs of the frontier and the out dated family values. Obstruction to women education, their crucifixion for property and their victimization to family customs are the major issues. 'Jabbar Khan', one of the leading characters of the play, on being strictly against women education exclaims,

“Education brings many evils along with it.”
(Barq, n.d., t.28:31)

At another place, he declares,

“A woman is just to serve.” (Ibid., t.16:19)

‘Zarmina’, a prominent character of the play, strongly opposes such ideas saying, “It is this repetition of ‘fragile’, ‘fair’ and ‘weak’ that has reduced our women to nothing.” (Ibid., t.22:18)

She succeeds in her mission regarding women rights and education. The play proved to be of fundamental value in terms of its contribution to the issue.

Fatima Surraiya Bajjia, by writing ‘*Ghar Ek Nagar*’ in 1994 raised the value of action, patience and compromise in many matters as a way to happy matrimonial relations and solution to many family intricacies (Bajjia, n.d.a, t.34:15).

Musarrat Kalanchwi’s ‘*Raigzaar*’ remained prominent in 1995. The play was directed by Rashid Dar. The writer in the play has given a most living exposure to the life at ‘*Cholistan*’ like those of water, poverty, dead customs, especially the *Watta Satta* (exchange) marriages.¹ She says,

“The projection of Feminist issues is my major concern. Southern Punjab is a prey to many deprivations. Likewise, its women are also chained into many social, economic and religious complexities. Marrying four times on part of men, *Watta Satta* marriages, marriage with the Holy Quran and early marriages among women are common here. And among some marriages are just to take away the right of

¹ The tradition of such marriages is more common especially in “Sarayki” areas. In this tradition the family members of a man send a proposal for a girl and in return they also have to present their own daughter to get married with the girl’s brother. Usually this is done to secure girl’s future in her in-laws. So that in case of dispute, the other family should keep in mind that their own daughter can also be divorced. Its an old ritual which has less benefits and more drawbacks.

inheritance from them. So, I definitely pick on such issuers in my plays.” (M. Kalanchvi, personal communication, January 12, 2007.)

Musarat kalanchwi has presented a most realistic picture of the land-lords belonging to the southern Punjab. Punjab with special reference to the reckless treatment to the women. This not only clears the picture of inflicted woman of our society but also reveals that the greatest target of our social deprivations, negative cultural behaviors and social bitterness is no other but ‘woman’. The characters of *Mehroo*, *Zeeno* and *Sukho* are the prototypes of the same suppressed woman of our society.

Another drama serial ‘*Reza Reza*’ stands distinct. It was written by Iftikhar Hayder in 1995 while directed by Arshad Tabassum. The play takes up the story of two women who bring up their children on two different lines. The one makes her child an active while the other an inactive and idle member of the society. The play, in addition to this, tells that how effectively a woman can contribute to the development and structuring of a society (Haider, n.d., t.21:09). Musarat Kalanchwi in 1996 wrote another play ‘*Musafat*’ which had been directed by Mohammed Azeem. This thirteen episodes’ play presents the pen picture of the kind of woman who keep faith in their own perseverance than strength (Akhbar-e-Jahan, December 9-14, 1996, p.68). Such women, trying to walk side by side with the men, are often entangled into complex problems. The play is a story of one such girl who is trying to survive in this suffocated society. But she is being suspected and satirized all the time. This affliction is brought upon her from no where but from her own family but she, I despite all these hurdles owns a great will power and knows to advance and strive for the accomplishment of her goals.

Younas Javed in 1996 wrote drama serial ‘*Ranjish*’. It entails issues like the problems like joint family system, *Watta Satta* marriages and the forced marriages. In 1998, Jamil Malik’s drama serial ‘*Musafatain*’ and that of Mansha Yad’s ‘*Rahain*’ raised voice against the suppression of women rights, clash

between rural and urban life and the orthodoxy. Bushra Rehman's play '*Piyasi*' in 1999 deals with the problems of women and their revolt against orthodoxy.

'*Zaib-un-Nisa*' was presented in 2000 with reference to women rights. The play was authored by Azra Babar and directed by Sahira Kazmi. Dr. Tariq Aziz's drama serial '*Dupatta*' also throws light on women and various other issues. Although it was a serialized series² but the play fully projects the problems of women working in cities. And again in 2000, Musarrat Kalanchvi's '*Dhoop aur Saaibaan*' portrays a picture of women rights and social inequalities. Therefore, an analysis and study of PTV drama serials from its beginning till 2000 shows that 64% of the plays presented in the decade of 70s present women as prominent characters. Overall, 54% plays deal with feminist issues. These 54% deal further with issues like the problems of rurality and urbanity, family matters and human rights.

The established orthodox mentality and values grounded in Pakistani society make women face many problems. The altering political and social scenarios in Pakistan also affected attitudes concerning women to a large extent. And, mass media in every era has reacted to the afflictions and unjust reservations regarding women. Especially, the drama on PTV has comprehensively brought forth the feminist issues in a positive way.

² In Serialized Series, each episode has a complete story but some main characters are permanent in every episode. These characters are called "Stalk Characters"

References

- Akhbar-e-Jahan (January 16-23, 1991).
 Akhbar-e-Jahan (August 22-28, 1994).
 Akhbar-e-Jahan (December 9-14, 1996).
 Bajjia, F.S. (n.d.a). *Ghar Ek Nagar* (Drama Serial) DVD1.
 Islamabad: Shalimar Recording Company Ltd.
 Bajjia, F.S. (n.d.b). *Urusa* (Drama Serial) CD4. Islamabad:
 Shalimar Recording Company Ltd.
 Barq, S.U.J. (n.d.) *Gul-e-Lala* (Drama Serial) DVD1.
 Islamabad: Shalimar Recording Company Ltd.
 Behzad, K. (July 10, 1989). Nile hath ek khobsurat peshkash
 thi. *Daily Nawa-i-Waqat*.
 Haider, I. (n.d.). *Reza Reza* (Drama Serial) DVD1. Islamabad:
 Shalimar Recording Company Ltd.
 Moeen, H. (n.d.). '*Uncle Urfi*', Shalimar Recording Company
 Ltd. Islamabad. CD3, t.49:18.
Daily Mashriq (Film Edition), Lahore, April 24, 1982
 Syed, A.N. (n.d.). *Pyas* (Drama Serial) CD3.
 Islamabad: Shalimar Recording Company Ltd.