



Negotiating Tradition and Modernity: Gender Roles and Culture in Selected Pakistani TV Dramas

Muqaddas Bibi¹, Barirah Nazir²

¹MPhil Scholar, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Sargodha, Sargodha & Professor, Department of English, Romi Science Girls College, Mandi Shah Jewna Jhang, Jhang,

Email: muqaddaskhan031@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Sargodha, Sargodha.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: March 08, 2026
Revised: March 25, 2026
Accepted: April 05, 2026
Available Online: April 13, 2026

Keywords:

Gender Representation, Feminist Media Analysis, Gender Performativity, and Male Gaze, with regard to Pakistani Television Dramas.

Corresponding Author:

Muqaddas Bibi

Email:

muqaddaskhan031@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59075/tamsaal.v4i4.83>

ABSTRACT

The Pakistani television dramas contain strong cultural texts that ridicule and create the social image of gender, tradition and modernity. The paper will be a critical analysis of the ways in which gender roles in the selected HUM TV dramas were created and negotiated, that is, the series Udaari (2016), Parizaad (2021), Zard Patton Ka Bann (2024), and Tann Mann Neel (2024). The study relies on the feminist critique of the media and evaluates how masculinity and femininity have been produced on the media to character growth, plotting and the visual storytelling and questions the gendered representation of honor, morality, family needs and social status. The paper employs the notion of gender performativity by Judith Butler to discuss how gender identities are actively operated/managed through the frames of the culture, and the theory of Male Gaze by Laura Mulvey to discuss the visual regimes that define the locations of the characters in relation to the patriarchal spectatorship. By qualitative approach, which relies on the analysis of textual and visual content, the selected scenes, dialogues, and character arc are addressed to answer the research questions. The findings suggest that even though these dramas have a tendency to support the patriarchal frameworks with the acts of normativity and gendered morality, it has also created space of resistance as it foreshadows other masculinities, female agency and the problems of traditional power structures. Locating the contemporary Pakistani dramas into the context of feminist theoretical debate, the research study will contribute to the existing discourses of media in terms of gender and culture in South Asian area whereby television drama is the lively site of bargaining tradition and modernity.



© 2026 The Authors, Published by ULLR. This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Common Attribution ([CC-BY 4.0](#))

Introduction

The central position of the Pakistani television dramas in the cultural world of South Asia is because, it is a form of entertainment, they make an impact that is not merely the entertainment but also the influential social text, they affect, reflect, and spread the hegemonic cultural values. HUM TV and other television networks have been a marvelous medium because the channel that

creates content that tackles the complex social issues particularly those affecting gender, classes, morality and family set-ups. The Pakistani dramas play a significant role in generating the meaning of masculinity and femininity by employing the strong narration and imagery to the negotiation of the tensions between tradition and modernity of a society that has experienced a sudden change.

The discussion of gender representations in the media has been an object of objective research and discussion and by far the most noticeable case on the same has been the feminist media studies that purport media texts to be embedded within ideological paradigms that authorize power relations. The Pakistani TV dramas tend to depend on the socially instilled concepts of patriarchy, honor (izzat), morality and family responsibility. These notions are not gender-neutral, yet they are highly gendered since they describe specific roles, actions, and expectations of men and women. Masculinity has been associated with power, emotional restraint and monetary duty and femininity has been constructed on the concepts of sacrificing, being submissive and ethical behavior. However, the emerging Pakistani plays attempt to blur these dualities in all the more, through the portrayal of characters that contradict, haggle or renegotiate the conventional gender categories.

This paper will focus on four HUM TV dramas, namely, *Udaari* (2016), *Parizaad* (2021), *Zard Patton Ka Bann* (2024), and *Tann Mann Neel* (2024) to examine the ways in which gender roles are being created and played out in the environment of tradition and modernity. The reason behind the selection of these plays is due to their cultural topicality, popularity, and presentation of the social gender issue in diverse historical periods. All these give a good collection of texts where one can search the methods of the Pakistani television news to adapt to the shifting social reality and remain at the same time linked to the traditional cultural patterns.

The representation of gender in these plays is not only in the words, or even in the plot itself but also in the visual beauty, the development of the plot, how these characters are depicted and what symbolism is applied as an image. The visual narration is quite instrumental in establishing the illusion of spectators particularly in the circulation of the characters in the frame, emphasis on body appearance, or spectatorship control. These representational strategies are more inclined to the patriarchal gazing, and they establish the power structures of the genders, despite the appearance of the story in question as progressive (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). In this way, that is why both the textual analysis and visual analysis are significant to obtain an idea about ideological labor performed by means of these dramas.

To cope with these anxieties, this paper will use the Feminist method of media analysis in the application of two strong theoretical approaches, namely, the concept of gender performativity by Judith Butler and the theory of the Male Gaze by Laura Mulvey. The Butler theory does not support gender as an established or innate identity but on the contrary, it is produced in the process of repetition performances, which are regulated by the societal norms. One can analyse the means by which the actors in Pakistani dramas act, either by following or breaking the gender roles prescribed by the culture by their actions, language and affiliation (Tapal, 2023). To complement this, one may apply the theory of the Male Gaze formulated by Mulvey to critically interpret the visual imagery as disposed to put a male spectator on the upper hand and place the female characters in the role of the shown objects with the help of a patriarchal order.

This paper sets out to examine the development of characters, narrative, and visual narratives in the selected plays and how they are used to construct masculinity and femininity. It also examines the recurrent gendered topics of honor, morality, family and social position and how these topics are called upon in order to preserve or disdain the cultural conventions of patriarchy. In addition to this, the paper looks into the way/whether the dramas negotiate, resist or reproduce the dominant structures of patriarchy within the Pakistani society.

The significance of the research is that it is applicable to the Pakistani feminist media literature. Despite the fact that the issue of female representation in media has been evaluated by previous studies, it is time that analytical studies are done and they must use not only the latest TV programs but also use sound and feminist theories. The given research addresses this gap because its focus is on the HUM TV dramas produced between 2016 and 2024 and presenting the insights into the shifts in the dynamics of gender, culture, and media representation.

Lastly, this paper renders the Pakistani TV drama a vibrant cultural arena where tradition and modernity compete, overlap and co-exist. The paper implies that the media, especially television drama, is the location of ideological conflict as well as a potential social transformation by using a critical feminist perspective that identifies the police to reinforce and destabilize gendered power dynamics.

Gender, Media, and Representation: Feminist Perspectives

Feminist media studies claim that media texts are at the centre of production and circulation of gendered meanings in society. Rather than mirror the reality, television dramas are fundamentally involved in the process of creating cultural conventions, delivering more messages of specific kinds of masculinity and femininity as opposed to others. Rosalind Gill (2016) insists on the fact that the contemporary media cultures are still structured according to the gendered power relations, however, the texts may look progressive or empowering at the very beginning (pp. 36). Similar to feminist scholars, the interpretation of gender within the mass culture is to be taken with the critical tone since they are inclined to popularize the patriarchal ideologies through the repetition and familiarity.

Judith Butler formulated the theory of gender performativity that can be useful in determining how gender identities are constructed through repetitive social and cultural practices. Gender Trouble (2015 Routledge reprint) states that Butler views gender as something that is performed continuously and operates under the conditions of normative expectations and regulatory discourses (pp. 33 34). The repetition and social sanction are upheld to ensure such performances are upheld and the violation of the normative gender roles is visible and threatening (Willard et al., 2020). The importance of the media representations in this has significant role since they re-create what is acceptable in terms of masculinity and femininity in several stages which are later naturalized.

Feminist criticism later has generalized the findings of Butler in her work of media analysis in the manner in which fictional characters project their gender in stylizing acts, body gestures, speech patterns and behaviors of caring. According to Gill (2016), the characters that comply with the norms of dominant gender are often rewarded, and those that defy the dominant gender norms are either marginalized or punishments, which confirms the supposed aspect of gender roles being perceived as natural and not created (pp. 45 47). This argument would be particularly

true of the television drama, where the long-form narration makes it possible to replicate the gender performances with the help of the episodes and the narrative lines.

Visuality and the Male Gaze.

Visual representation is another area of media gender construction that is significant. The concept of the Female gaze by Laura Mulvey remains focal in the feminist visual studies. In *Visual and Other Pleasures* (2016, British Film Institute edition), Mulvey talks of the larger organization of the visual media of the mainstream around the masculine position of the viewer, objectifying female characters and providing the male characters with agency and control of the narrative (pp. 19-21). Although the theory is firstly elaborated in relation to the city of cinema, the theory of Mulvey has widely translated to the analysis of television due to the visual conventions and spectatorship relations.

According to the feminist of our time, the Male Gaze is present even in the contemporary television dramas manifested through camera angle, framing, lighting, and interest in the storyline. Smith (2017) adds that the female characters tend to be seen through the prism of visual analysis based on the beauty of the body and emotional helplessness, and the male characters are placed in the role of individuals who actively make decisions (*Journal of Gender Studies*). These visual effects support the hierarchies of patriarchy by locating the viewer to the male perspectives even in films that claim to locate the foreground to the female one.

Straight Male Gaze in combination with the theory of performativity developed by Butler can be an outstanding way to realize how gender is performed and understood. Not only are the gendered behaviors represented by the media texts, but the bodies are also regulated in terms of consumption, thereby, affirming the normative demands of gender through spectatorship.

Patriarchy, Masculinity, and Cultural Power

Also, the feminist media analysis is devoted to the image of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity as applied to the reformulation by Connell and Messerschmidt has remained significant in the explanation of how powerful models of masculinity are produced and maintained in the cultural texts. In their highly referred article, they state that there is no hegemonic masculinity at the cost of resorting to coercion, but rather, certain masculine qualities, like power and emotional control and dominance, are made to appear normal and even desirable (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2015).

The other masculinities tend to be marginalized in the media since they are depicted as feeble, deviant or pitiful. This has been observed across the entire television culture where male characters not following the hegemonic patterns are mocked or punished through the narrative (Bridges and Pascoe, 2018, *Gender and Society*). These pictures enforce rigid gender divisions and narrow the choices of different masculine roles.

In the case of patriarchal societies, the concept of masculinity is mostly integrated with honor, responsibility in the family, and social control. These ideals are both the peculiarities of culture and the universality, this is why the analysis of the negotiation of the masculinity in relation to the power and tradition is relevant in television drama.

The Pakistani Television Drama, Gender and Culture.

The Pakistani TV dramas are imbued in the cultural discourses concerning honor (izzat), moral aspects, family setups and social classes. The themes are highly gendered disposition because women are the protectors of family honor and men are the masters and decision-makers (according to scholars). Based on the analysis of the South Asian television discourse, Malik (2018) indicates that the female characters are more likely to be evaluated according to the moral strength and sacrifices in the name of supporting the traditional gender norms (Kothari, 2005) (South Asian Popular Culture).

The existing literature on the Pakistani television has shown that the television is progressive in its effort to write socially consciously in recent years, particularly with regards to dramatizing sexual violence, social disparities and marginalization. Researchers do caution though that conservative representational constructions tend to co-exist with progressive themes (Taj & Ameen, 2025). According to Ali and Raza (2020), Pakistani shows may be both hostile to some of the social issues and, at the same time, they can support the gender orders that are dictated by patriarchy through the closure of the narrative and the resolution of the characters (Iqbal et al., 2024) (Feminist Media Studies).

HUM TV dramas have come under the notice of scholars especially because of addressing social realism and gendered issues. Though the production of the movie *Udaari* has been termed as a breakthrough in the production of a taboo film, researchers find that female agency is usually constrained by cultural standards of respectability and sacrifice (Iftikhar & Aamir, 2025) (Khan, 2021, *Journal of Gender and Media*). Similarly, representations of masculinity are inclined to be weak and strong, which uproots the dilemma between the traditional and changing gender norms.

Research Gap

Despite the fact that growing amount of research is conducted on gender and Pakistani television drama, it becomes evident that there are a few gaps in research. Firstly, the absence of research, which would critically intertwine the theory of gender performativity introduced by Judith Butler with the theory of the Male Gaze, unveiled by Laura Mulvey in review of Pakistani television texts. Second, existing research is quite predisposed to the analysis of individual plays, and not to develop a comparative feminist analysis of many contemporary productions. Third, the HUM TV dramas that have been produced since 2016 have not been given much focus particularly in the context of how they can reconcile the contradiction between tradition and modernity on gender representation.

The present study as the answer to these gaps will offer a feminist critique of media (TV dramas) with the combination of textual, visual and theoretical approaches to the chosen dramas in HUM TV. Resisting the analysis of the already existing feminist theory and the current researches, this work contributes to the further interpretation of how Pakistani television drama is a cultural space where gender roles are played, manipulated, and struggled.

Theoretical Framework

The specified work is grounded in the perspective of the feminist approach that is premised on the principles of the gender performativity theory by Judith Butler and on a theory of the Male

Gaze by Laura Mulvey. It is this combination of these frameworks that makes possible the analysis of the process of construction, performance, visualization, and regulation of gender roles in Pakistani television dramas in a holistic way. Using the performance/visual representation theory, the paper examines the plot and aesthetic features in the gender portrayal of the selected HUM TV dramas.

Judith Butler, Butler Concept of Gender Performativity.

Essentialism in the concept of gender is attacked through the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler which asserts that gender is an identity that is natural or biologically determined. Instead, Butler asserts that gender comes to be created through repetitions as well as actions and performances that are governed by social and cultural forces. Gender is provisionally created over time and consists of repeating the stylized performance and, therefore, creates a false impression of the gender identity being a stable phenomenon (Butler, 2015, pp. 3334). The social standards in the society condition such performances and the rewarding and punitive mechanisms support such performances.

Gender performativity is a rather efficient prism that can be used to analyze how fictional characters enact culturally desirable masculinity and femininity. The feminist media scholars refer to the television dramas of today as useful in normalizing gender roles and the propensity to re-perform some behaviors, emotional conditions, and moral principles (Gill, 2016). The women characters are typically made to be sacrificed to femininity through giving up, submission, patience and chastity and the male characters by power and emotional control and social dominance.

Applying the model offered by Butler to the Pakistani tele plays, one can discuss the way the gendering effects are not only reflected but created through the plot that is being repeated again and again. Indeed, the characters that conform to the established gender norms tend to be rewarded either through being given narrative closure or through being socially unpopular through social disdain or by being marginalized. However, Butler goes on to mention that repetition opens up the disruption space, which enables the possibility to break the norms and rebuild gender (Butler, 2015, pp. 179181). This paper applies gender performativity in identifying the cases of characters deviating the normative roles and bargaining other gender identity types in the selected dramas.

Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory

Despite the theory of Butler being a predictive of the performance and identity, the theory of Male Gaze by Laura Mulvey is critical of the visual representation and spectatorship. In *Visual and Other Pleasures* (2016), Mulvey (2016) asserts that mainstream visual media are structured and framed in a masculine stance of watching and objectifies the female subject and centers the male subjectivity to privilege (Mulvey, 2016, pp. 1921). Women have been subjected to visual enjoyment and men as tactical agents of the gaze, leading agents of narrative progression (Mulvey).

The Male Gaze theory in the television dramas is realized by the visual means of camera angles, frame composition, lighting, focus on costumes, and focus on the narrative. Feminist researchers have stated that female characters are often under visual scrutiny where attention is given to their

appearance, emotional weakness, and moral responsibility, simultaneously, male characters are depicted as decision-making and authority-givers (Smith, 2017). These visual effects are characteristic of viewer association and reinforce gender dominance as they designate the spectatorship as male perspectives.

The Male Gaze scenario of the Pakistani TV is superimposed with the cultural modesty, respectability and morality forces. Although the explicit form of sexual objectification is typically reserved by the cultural norm, the less explicit visual regimes can be still supported through the use of moral control and frames. The gendered power structures of the media which Gill (2016) observes have been duplicated through implication and repetition but not representation. This framework constructed by Mulvey can thus be extended to the means of finding how the patriarchal power is reproduced visually even in ostensibly socially progressive narratives.

Integrating Gender Performativity and the Male Gaze

The multidimensional nature of gender representation in the Pakistani television dramas can be attained by putting together the concept of gender performativity by Butler and Male Gaze theory by Mulvey. Gender is also visual in a way it is perceived and controlled instead of being interpreted as something that is repeated by characters. All of these structures can be combined, which helps to understand how gender norms are reproduced through the prism of such concepts as appearance in the story and spectatorship.

These HUM TV dramas which were selected, i.e. Udaari (2016), Parizaad (2021), Zard Patton Ka Bann (2024), and Tann Mann Neel (2024), have gender roles created as a result of performance and gaze. The Gender norms have been replayed many times and the visual strategies are employed to ensure the audience interprets the image and arrive at moral decisions. However, in the meantime, it is possible to find the examples of resistance and misunderstanding when characters do not following the common principles of masculinity and femininity.

In the paper, both these feminist approaches have been critically employed in analyzing how the Pakistani television dramas mediated the tradition and modernity tension. The theoretical framework thus provides a modelling fashion of examining the reinforcing, contesting as well as recreating of gender roles in the modern culture of Pakistani media.

Analysis and Discussion

In this part, the author provides a thorough feminist critique of the mass media of the selected HUM TV dramas, Udaari (2016), Parizaad (2021), Zard Patton Ka Bann (2024), and Tann Mann Neel (2024) to see how the gender roles are created, performed, and performed in the context of the Pakistani society. It will be analyzed in the light of the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler and the theory of Male Gaze by Laura Mulvey to emphasize the plot, the characterization, the visuals and the theme that is common in this culture (i. e. honor, morality, family and class). These representations are discussed within the greater struggle of tradition and modernity of the Pakistani culture in the contemporary world.

Construction and Femininity Playing.

Such repetitive activity of sacrifice, endurance of feelings, obedience, moral responsibilities formed the concept of femininity in the selected dramas. The gender performativity phenomenon by Butler (2015) presents a critical perspective of the concept because of its explanations of how all these traits become not biologically predefined and inherent but through repetition and control. Women characters are constant representations as they practice femininity which is culturally acceptable and thus, upholding fantasy of gender stability (Butler, 2015, pp. 3334).

Moral resiliency and silence in the face of trauma are the specifics of femininity in *Udaari*. Although social taboos are challenged on the context of the drama where the topic of sexual abuse is concerned, the women characters are overweighted with the burden of persistence. Women are expected to just suffer without being deprived of the family honour and social respectability. This denotes the case proposed by Butler as per which the rules of gender are imposed through the means of the regulation practices that reward adherence and penalize the deviation (Butler, 2015, pp. 179181). At the same time, the cost of such normative femininity is presented through the expenses of the emotional pain, which is also reflected in the play and gives the audience a chance to be critical.

Similarly, in *Zard Patton Ka Bann* and *Tann Mann Neel*, women negotiate in restricting family and cultural orders. The opposition may be less direct and may be indicated in moral decisions, emotional claims or even silent demonstrations. Such restricted forms of agency justify the fact that the feminine resistance remains surrounded by the norms of patriarchy. The current media contributes to the emergence of strong and rather resilient women, which limit their autonomy in line with traditional gender roles (Gill 2016, pp. 4547).

Masculinity, Strength and Weakness

The masculinity of the drama selections is grouped and executed in the performances of power, unwelcoming of feeling and social power which is aligned to the hegemonic masculinity ideals. Such representations, however, are not homogenous. The paradigm that Butler applies allows viewing masculinity as performative identity, which must always be repeated in order to be valid.

Parizaad serves as an excellent subversion of conventional masculinity by using a marginalized male character as a scapegoat, downgraded due to and through his role in the world, appearance and responsiveness of his emotions. The *Parizaad* questions hegemonic manliness which views masculinity as a power and desirable. His sentimental depiction of his feelings undoubtedly exposes hegemonic masculinity as weak because it is demonstrated as social construction rather than being natural. However, the narrative concludes by endorsing masculine legitimacy through professional success and social status that suggests that other types of masculinities can only be verified when they are in line with traditional signs of success. Such an ending of the plot helps Butler substantiate her thesis that the violation of the gender norm is most often tolerated until the normative order is restored (Butler, 2015).

In *Udaari* and *Zard Patton Ka Bann*, men have retained their power within the family and social institutions to a large extent. Men tend to be put in positions of decision making and moral censure particularly over the question of woman behavior and family prestige. Despite the

availability of emotional richness of men, the domination of the male species is strong which demonstrates the existence of hegemonic masculinity in televised narratives in Pakistan.

Honor and Gendered Cultural Control

The most important processes of gendered control in all the four plays are honor (izzat) and morality. These cultural constructs do not balance and this has resulted in the amplification of more moral load on women as compared to men. According to feminist media theorists, the discourses of honor present the source of patriarchal power since it determines the bodies, choices, and the looks of women (Gill, 2016).

This is how it happened in both *Udaari* and *Tann Mann Neel* where women, once again, are held accountable to uphold the honor of the family even in the instances where the women are the ones who are unjustly treated. Moral perseverance and not individual independence give them their value in the society. The perpetrated crimes by the males on the other hand are often placed in context or even defended by power and require narrations. This disparity supports the patriarchal hierarchies and renders gender inequality, the natural state of affairs.

At the same time, the psychological and emotional consequences of the demands relating to honors are disclosed in these plays. The stories reveal the violence that is hidden in the moral control through anticipating the suffering of women, silencing and excluding them in the social life. These images respond to the statement made by Butler according to which repetitive gender expectations may demonstrate their precariness and permit a means of being criticized (Butler, 2015, pp. 179181).

Visual Representation and the Male Gaze

The theory of Male Gaze introduced by Laura Mulvey provides a crucial approach to the research of the role of visual strategies constructing the meaning-making process of genders in both of the selected dramas. Closely shot and emotionally staged plays and placement is usually defined as to subject a female character to a moral and emotional judgment. Women continue to be the objects of observation despite the absence of direct sexualization and establish themselves as the objects of judgment and domination (Mulvey, 2016, pp. 1921).

On the other hand, male characters are often depicted as active participants the perspective of which is driving the plot. The camera angle shots and composition shots tend to align the viewer with the male subjectivity in order to assert masculine power and dominance. Mulvey (2016) says that the patriarchal power lies under not only the obvious objectification but also under the alignment of the story and audience.

The Male Gaze in the context of Pakistani television environment is enclosed in the cultural aspects of modesty and respect. Even so, it can be followed in the areas of moral surveillance, narratives framing and visual emphasis on feminine emotionality. Gill (2016) views gendered power as an ordinary aspect of the media and the power is often being reproduced implicitly by hints and cycles rather than images (pp. 36). The visual aesthetics through the analysis was revealed to be very effective in aiding in the continuation of the patriarchal ideology even in the socially conscious story.

The Negotiation and Modernity Art

The resistance between the traditional and the modern in the reflections of gender is one of the themes, which repeated in the selected dramas. The traditional gender constructs which revolve around patriarchy, family and moral regulation are still in existence though emerging discourses are currently also responding to social change and gender scrutiny. It is a representative negotiation of the tensions existing in the society in Pakistan whereby there is modernization but there are good cultural values, which are embedded within the society.

The fact that even the resistance such as women striving to have some autonomy or men acknowledging that they felt weak emotionally is a sign of an awakening enlightenment on the gender inequality issue. However, these are typically wrapped up in retrogressive plot twists which restore social order. This ambivalence brings out the circumspect quality of the Pakistani TV drama as a cultural space that initiates new ideas in progressive fashion without necessarily losing the status quo.

Discussion

The outcomes of the paper point to the fact that the selected HUM TV dramas are complex cultural texts that reproduce and criticize the mainstream gender norms of the Pakistani society. These plays by using the methods of repetition of the narrative, characterization and figuration play an active role in creating the meanings of masculinity, femininity, honor, morality and social power. The gender images are perceived not as natural or determined when they are viewed through the concept of gender performativity by Judith Butler and the theory of Male Gaze by Laura Mulvey but as controlled by society through culture repetitions and disciplines of gaze. One of the key conclusions of the current analysis is that the formation of gender roles in Pakistani television series is standardized through repetition, which is very close to the statement that Butler formulated suggesting that gender is also constructed through repetition that is stylized (Butler, 2015, pp. 3334). Women in all the four plays have been associated with sacrifice, virtue, denial of emotions and family loyalty. These stereotyped images create an illusion that women have such traits and not the culture. The dramas are thus participating in the naturalization of gender process where it is believed that the social constructed norms are perceived as natural and inexplicable. At the same time, it is also revealed in the discussion that masculinity is also performative, only that there is a greater narrative latitude. Despite the fact that the profile of male behavior is increasingly represented as strong and dominating, there are scenes of emotional weakness, particularly in *Parizaad*, where hegemonic masculinity is manifested as weak. This is subjected to the fact that gender norms are not static, but they require reinforcement frequently, to preserve their strength (Butler, 2015, pp. 179181). However, the final validation of male dominance in the final by success and recognition is that Pakistani television drama remains troubled by the need to renegotiate older masculine identities, though with some lack of stability in the meantime. The other significant finding is the gendered working of honor (*izzat*) and morality which turns out to be the key mechanisms of patriarchal domination (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). As revealed in the discussion honor is evidently feminized in the selected dramas where women dominate in the roles of keeping their families and social respectability. This disparity in the ethical burden endorses patriarchal power by restricting the independence of women and justifying the power of men. Feminist media researchers argue that besides being a cultural product, such representations contribute to

reproducing the issue of gender inequality (Gill, 2016, pp. 4547). The dramas acknowledge the feminine surveillance and self-regulation by being consistently linked with the sense of femininity with the morality responsibility. It is interesting to note that the examples of resistance do not always destroy patriarchy but tend to maneuver within it. Female agency can only be permitted to write back on the permissible moral codes which comprise of endurance, self-sacrifice, or moral restraint. This tendency is indicative of the so-called two-sided entrapment of the modern media, where there is apparently progressive change on the one hand and nearly conservative gender norms on the other hand (Gill, 2016). In such a way, despite the fact that the dramas are moving in the empowerment direction, women are not provided with much freedom beyond the patriarchal approval. Visual representation of these ideological patterns is also made better. This spew of reason taking the Male Gaze theory theory of Mulvey points out that, the gendered power is not only present in the story itself, but also in spectatorship. Close-ups, emotional framing, narrative alignment provide the visual and moral control over the female characters and place the female characters in the role of observers and not actors. Mulvey (2016) states that such visual strategies is more desirable to male subjectivity and regulates the visibility of women even in places where they are not sexually objectified explicitly (pp. 19 21). This gaze is mediated into the Pakistani television drama by modesty and respectability yet it does not remove its regulatory position in the drama. Male characters, conversely, tend to be placed as narrative centres of focus whose point of views control the manner in which the audience makes interpretations (Grünenfelder, 2013). This aesthetic identification helps in propelling the power of patriarchy because the spectators are likely to identify with the masculine agency. As an analysis has revealed, thus, the Male Gaze of the Pakistani dramas is rather discrete, given that it is implemented with the help of morality, and emotional contextualization rather than overt eroticism. This observation evolves the framework developed by Mulvey since he shows how patriarchal spectatorship adapts to the cultural specific norms without a change in its ideological position. The clash of the tradition and modernity emerges as one of the typical characteristics of the selected plays. Even though the established gender patterns remain hegemonic, the contemporary narratives are opening up to social changes, gender inequality, and psychological richness. It is a negotiation which signifies larger societal disputes in Pakistan such that there is coexistence of modernization, education, and exposure to media and the value system, which is patriarchal. As it was demonstrated in the discussion, Pakistani television drama fills the mediating role whereby the presentation of progressive ideas is done with caution to avoid the cultural rupture. This is significant according to the feminist theoretical approach. Based on the framework presented by Butler, the repetitive performance has possibilities of disruption, yet they are constrained by the regulatory norms (Butler, 2015). Still on the topic, the same theory of Mulvey emphasizes the reality that the visual regimes are immune to change as they are saturated with regimes of pleasure and recognition. The selected plays refer to such a tension as something demanding and validating gender roles, therefore, indicating the ambiguity of cultural change. Generally, this discussion indicates that HUM TV dramas are not merely mirrors of the Pakistani society but they do engage in gender ideology negotiation. They reinforce the patriarchal traditions through the repetition of the performances, and visual strategies but they too demonstrate the inconsistency and cost of the traditions. The plays provide the room in which the plight of a woman, the weakness of men, and the issue of morality can be evaluated critically, but perhaps not as far as radical change. In this respect, the Pakistani TV drama is emerging as a powerful cultural place where gender roles are enacted, controlled and contested in an unending manner. These findings

demonstrate that feminist analysis of the media holds importance when it comes to the explanation of the part played by the popular culture in the creation of social realities. The study will be used to gain insight into the way gender and culture intersect with media in the contemporary Pakistani culture since it synthesizes the elements of gender performativity and the Male Gaze.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to analyze the representation of gender roles and negotiation in the selected HUM TV series *Udaari* (2016), *Parizaad* (2021), *Zard Patton Ka Bann* (2024), and *Tann Mann Neel* (2024) as one of the parts of the Pakistani cultural conflict between the traditional and modernity. According to a feminist perception of media, which is based on the concept of gender performativity by Judith Butler and the theory of Male Gaze shown by Laura Mulvey, the research explored the construction of femininity and masculinity which are the facilitating forces of narration, characterization and visuals. The findings give a picture of how the Pakistani television dramas contribute significantly towards the normalisation of the gender ideologies due to the excessive and excessive repetition of the culturally sanctioned roles. Sacrifice, moral standing, emotional control and family honor are largely attributed to femininity, and authority, control, and social legitimacy are attributes that relate to masculinity. These representations are not perceived as a natural expression of gender but as a performance through Butler that is being reproduced and governed in the culture of patriarchy over and over again. At the same time, it is revealed in the study that gender representation in contemporary Pakistani dramas is not as uniform and closed. The fact that the representatives of the selected plays resist, weaken and doubt certain standards of gender role is sometimes complied with some weakness and moral concerns. Male characters are sensitive to emotions, marginalized, yet they are challenging to the hegemonic masculinity, particularly in *Parizaad*, and they are bargaining between limited kinds of agency in limiting social structures. However, these acts of revolt are typically confined within conservative narrative resolutions which ultimately restore the order of patriarchy stating that change remains conditional and partial. Visual representation in the perpetration of gender hierarchies is also supported by the application of the Male Gaze theory as introduced by Mulvey. Whether with overt sexual objectification or absent sexual objectification, female characters are frequently the focus of moral and emotional scrutiny both in framing as well as camera focus and plot. The male characters on the other hand are put as active agents, whose perspectives are in the forefront of the audience identification. Women are suppressed by such visual practices through dominating the perception, assessment, and interpretation of gender. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that HUM TV dramas represent complex cultural spaces having the intersecting point of tradition and modernity. Despite the ever-increasing interest of the plays in the social problems and gender inequality, they operate in the deep-rooted patriarchal frameworks. The coexistence of the criticism and conformity indicates the mediating roles of the television drama in the social change in Pakistan. The gendering of the subject of performativity, as well as the Male Gaze, will make this study a contribution to the feminist media studies offering a fragile understanding of how gender roles are created, how they are maintained and even disrupted into the Pakistani television drama. The paper highlights the importance of analyzing the narrative as well as the visual components of the media text to get a complete measure of the ideological impact of a media text. Further research could also be developed as this analysis by the future research attempting to incorporate audience reception

research or comparative research across media platforms in order to dig more into the dynamic nature of the South Asian media in relation to gender representation.

Bio-Note

MUQADDAS BIBI is the English Literature scholar and interested in the academic study of the feminist theory, media studies and South Asian television narratives. Her work is dedicated to the question of media and society, ideology and cultural discourse as well as gender representation.

References

1. Ali, S., & Riaz, S. (2020). Gender, morality, and popular television narratives in Pakistan. *Feminist Media Studies*, 20(5), 678–693. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1689987>
2. Bridges, T., & Pascoe, C. J. (2018). On the elasticity of hegemonic masculinity: Why hybrid masculinities fail to undermine gender and sexual inequality. *Gender & Society*, 32(4), 547–571. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218769407>
3. Butler, J. (2015). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (Routledge Classics ed.). Routledge.
4. Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2015). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 29(6), 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243215618723>
5. Gill, R. (2016). *Gender and the media* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
6. Khan, A. (2021). Women, respectability, and resistance in Pakistani television drama. *Journal of Gender and Media Studies*, 13(2), 55–70.
7. Malik, S. (2018). Television drama and the politics of gender representation in South Asia. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 16(1), 33–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2018.1430541>
8. Mulvey, L. (2016). *Visual and other pleasures* (2nd ed.). British Film Institute.
9. Smith, A. (2017). Visual pleasure, television aesthetics, and gendered spectatorship. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(3), 315–329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2016.1214297>
10. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). *Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis*. Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
11. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
12. Gill, R. (2016). *Gender and the media* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
13. Grünenfelder, J. (2013). Discourses of gender identities and gender roles in Pakistan: Women and non-domestic work in political representations. Women's studies international forum,
14. Iftikhar, I., & Aamir, M. E. (2025). Negotiating Gender Identity in a Globalized Media Landscape: The Influence of Korean Dramas on Pakistani Viewers. *PAKISTAN JOURNAL OF LAW, ANALYSIS AND WISDOM*, 4(6), 81-98.
15. Iqbal, A., Hassan, A., & Irfan, A. (2024). The Role of Pakistani TV Dramas in Shaping Gender Perceptions and Promoting Women's Empowerment. *Policy Journal of Social Science Review*, 2(4), 671-686.

16. Kothari, S. (2005). From genre to zanaana: Urdu television drama serials and women's culture in Pakistan. *Contemporary South Asia*, 14(3), 289-305.
17. Taj, I. U., & Ameen, M. (2025). Television and aesthetics of infidelity: Gender, power and taboo in contemporary Pakistani dramas. *The Progress: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 6(2), 200-226.
18. Talbani, A., & Hasanali, P. (2000). Adolescent females between tradition and modernity: Gender role socialization in South Asian immigrant culture. *Journal of adolescence*, 23(5), 615-627.
19. Tapal, Z. M. (2023). *Suffering women in Pakistani TV dramas: can the diasporic Pakistani relate?*
20. Willard, J., Jia, X., Xu, S., Steinbach, M., & Kumar, V. (2020). Integrating physics-based modeling with machine learning: A survey. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2003.04919*, 1(1), 1-34.