



IMPACT OF OCCUPATIONAL POWER AND SOCIAL STATUS DEPICTED IN PAKISTANI TV DRAMAS: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

This research paper is based on how our Pakistani TV dramas portray occupational power and social status through their distinctive setting. Through a sociological analysis, we explored the issue of why Pakistani TV dramas depict typical appearances and specific kinds of dressing to represent a particular social class, e.g., shalwar kameez for the poor and jeans for the rich. Even professional careers such as schoolteachers for the middle class and fashion designers for the upper class are based upon the same factors. A character's typical background and belongings are also used to show his social status, e.g., in most dramas, middle-class men wear slippers, and the rich wear branded shoes, sunglasses, and watches.

In this study, we argue that the depiction of social class is often biased and does not precisely reflect reality. This significantly impacts the viewers' minds. This visual representation is evident in Pakistani Urdu television dramas of the past ten years. Using a qualitative research design, we collected our data through in-depth interviews to evaluate the social impact of these visual representations. The paper also supports George Gerbner's Cultivation Analysis theory and its arguments, proving how TV dramas directly impact heavy viewers' minds, reflecting their behavior.

Keywords: Occupational Power, Social Class, Portraying, Effect, Depiction, TV dramas



Introduction:

Every society in the world comprises citizens from different social classes, the lower, middle, and upper classes. The lifestyles of all these groups are different in terms of where they live, what they eat, what they do, and what they wear. Even the professional roles and careers are taken up by each individual differently. Similarly, our Pakistani TV dramas also portray them very distinctively from each other when shown on the screens (Memon, 2020). They give the public a view of how differently they dress up or choose specific jobs according to the social class that they belong to. Their materialistic belongings are also explicitly shown in relevance to their social class (Seher, 2022).

However, it is not always accurate, nor gives an overall view of our culture. Instead, they often show much more religious differences than social distinctions. This is a vital subject as we have Pakistani TV Drama viewers from multiple age ranges and social classes, males and females, and Pakistanis from around the globe (Anwer, 2019). Many take inspiration from and idolize what is shown in these dramas. These typical depictions portray a wrong image of the culture and our society. As evident from the topic, this research paper describes the effect of these Pakistani Urdu TV Dramas on viewers and how it changes their mindset and thought process accordingly.

We selected this topic because we have observed women and men taking inspiration from various television dramas and making those characters their role models. They then dress up and look like them, imitating their behavior. This also births a thought in their mind that people from the elite class are supposed to have specific belongings to fit into that class; may this representation be accurate or not? For example, people from the higher class must choose careers other than tuition providers as those are mostly taken up by the middle class, as shown in TV Dramas (Waheed, 2016). Thus, fashion design jobs are more appropriate (Dawn, 2010).

Moreover, they must only wear Western clothes such as jeans, as this is how TV Dramas show the rich (Noreen, 2021). We have observed a drastic change in the dress of even university students whom various characters from other TV Dramas have inspired. Our research objective is to show how this depiction affects viewers differently.

The main problem is that lower or middle-class members are shown in modest and full-body dresses, mainly with a dupatta on the head, with occupations like schoolteachers and nurses. However, for the upper class, members are primarily shown in Western and more liberal clothing, showing religion compared to a social contract, which is not always the case in our culture. They wear branded watches, shoes, sunglasses, and overcoats as a part of their appearance and are given occupations like fashion designers and officers (Choudry, 2018).

We argue that viewers are greatly affected by these erroneous depictions of social classes, which attach a stigma to various things that are a part of our culture. These depictions impact the viewers so much that they adopt them readily (Zia, 2014). Different careers can be taken up by



anyone regardless of their social class. Similarly, no dress type or appearance is confined to a particular class or social status. Both the rich and the poor can wear shalwar kameez or jeans. These depictions inspire people to such an extent that they blindly follow and believe them to be true. We have confirmed this by interviewing different viewers of these TV Dramas.

Literature Review:

Television is one of the most basic forms of media in the world. It is the most common, oldest, and widely available means and reaches a larger audience than other forms of media (Wendy, 2020). Our country, Pakistan has a vast film and drama industry that produces many projects. Similarly, we have a huge audience that watches these dramas from all ages, areas, and genders. These dramas have different stories with varying cast members and in different situations. Some of them highlight social issues like rape and domestic violence, which are also sensitive topics. However, most of them show family drama on a day-to-day basis. No matter what the subject is, they do get the attention of quite a large number of viewers. Some of these Pakistani TV dramas have been so successful that they have even been internationally recognized.

As stated by Ayat Zaheer (2021), many of our public are influenced by these dramas and get their inspiration from them. They are inspired by people's actions, personalities, and even dresses and looks. However, these Pakistani TV dramas that show our culture and traditions sometimes also give wrong impressions that are inaccurate and biased. One of the most prominent examples is the actors' dress in these dramas. People from different social classes are shown, and their dress is very different. Often, characters from Rich backgrounds are shown in Western clothing and the poor in Eastern dress. One of the most evident examples would include the characters Miraal and Anaya from the drama serial "Sabaat" aired on HUM TV in which Miraal, belonging to a wealthy family, wears Western clothes only, and Anaya wears Eastern clothes with her head covered, as she is from a middle-class family. (Majeed, 2021)

Furthermore, there have also been depictions of girls from poor backgrounds showing them wearing a Hijab. This is even shown in one of the recent TV Dramas, "Sinf e Ahan," aired on ARY Digital, where Syeda Sidra is shown to be from a less privileged background, being a hijabi. On the other hand, Mahjabeen is wearing primarily Western attire from a wealthy family in Islamabad. This indicates that the less privileged are closer to religion than the rich. One of the typical trends shown in Pakistani TV Dramas is the character wearing a hijab before they get married or get wealthy. It then slowly goes away as they get more money. (Sidra, 2016) Even though they might not be accurate, viewers take up these depictions blindly as they consider them suitable.

Some of these Pakistani TV Dramas show the elite class as the class that always has the upper hand and rules all; the most influential class forming all the norms and values. While some viewers watch these dramas for fun, some people with lower backgrounds may feel further repressed when they see these depictions (Khan, 2019). These elite people are shown with high



careers, dressed up in suits. An example of this can be found in the drama serial “Mere Paas Tum Ho,” in which Danish is often seen wearing a shalwar kameez during their tough times as a lower-middle-class family. But as soon as he gains wealth, he is always seen dressed up in a shirt and pants. This births an idea in people’s heads that if they have to look better in terms of social status, they must also have a similar appearance and that their dress and how they present themselves must be strict.

Moreover, the careers chosen for certain characters in these TV Dramas also give out tremendous meanings as to what profession is suitable for which social class. Characters from lower classes are shown as schoolteachers, nurses, and other labor workers. At the same time, those from the upper classes are usually business owners or those going to different offices. Even people from the middle class are trying to take up those careers since these TV Dramas have attached stigmas to specific respectable jobs, labeling them as unimportant and only confined to people with low incomes. The drama serial Humsafar had Fareeda as the owner of a Non-Governmental Organization working towards the welfare of women. Ashar and his cousin Sara work in an office. However, Khirad and her mother, Maimoona, have been shown to support themselves and their daughters as teachers in a government school. Their job is considered obscure and disreputable. (Zaheer, 2020)

Another factor that comes to mind when these depictions are shown is that Western clothing means being modern, which offers wealth. These dramas have also adopted these strategies to show wealth differences under “modernism.” The Pakistani TV Industry has adopted Western lifestyles, outfits, actions, and language in the name of modernism. Pakistan is an Islamic nation and has its cultural values as a Muslim country. There is a code of conduct for people who are inspired by modernization and the Western world. (Tareen, 2021)

Kaleemullah conducted a similar study in 2016, which proved that private channels significantly impact the viewers’ minds according to different social and religious systems, deliberately bringing in foreign culture. This negatively affects the public, especially the females who follow some dramas religiously. It significantly impacts the viewers, who then tend to follow the same trends, calling it modernism. While some of these viewers come directly under its effect and blindly follow all the trends and fashion shown in TV Dramas, many others get influenced indirectly without them knowing. Over time, they find themselves adorned in the same clothing and appearance as their favorite characters shown on TV. A specific part of the population that does not intentionally want to follow these trends comes under the pressure of others following them. Since peers, family, co-workers, colleagues, etc., are advocates of “modernism” or “Westernization,” - these people have to follow them too.

This is an entirely wrong concept because it gives a clear impression that the rich most minor care about the culture and traditions and only wear western clothes such as jeans and would not seem rich if they wore Pakistani dresses. On the other hand, dressing characters in modest



clothing according to the culture and keeping a dupatta on their head would mean they belong to a lower social class. Kashaf and Khirad both wore modest Pakistani clothes, such as a shalwar kameez with a dupatta on the head, before they married and moved to a higher social class. The characters Sara in “Zindagi Gulzar Hai” and Sara in “Humsafar,” both from the upper-middle class, wore short t-shirts with jeans depicting Western dressing. (Zaheer, 2020)

According to research by Shabir et al. in 2013, women were highly influenced by the dressing sense, appearance, and style of different models, especially shown on Geo TV and Hum TV. Watching these dramas with similar get-ups repeatedly made these representations even stronger. As concluded in a study titled “Impact of satellite TV channels on people living in Lahore” by Ali in 2001, viewing TV Dramas has become one of the favorite sports of our public, and their lives are heavily influenced by it. Along with TV Dramas, even advertisements are now successfully affecting the audience in the name of entertainment. These Dramas have influenced people’s beliefs, values, lifestyles, social conduct, and thinking. They have become greedy for money and materialistic in general. Modernism attracts these people, and that is what these dramas are promoting. (Shahbaz, 2004)

This is clear evidence of how people are chasing money and being materialistic, especially under the influence of these dramas. These dramas have rooted the idea that showing off expensive material possessions is the only way to look wealthy and prosperous. Only taking up specific careers and professions is appropriate regarding your reputation and social class. As stated by Azeez in 2014, it is seen not just through fashion but also in various other things, including lifestyle, food, dressing, language, tradition, and even celebrations. The following research questions are studied in this research:

1. What effect do Pakistani TV Dramas have on people regarding wearing liberal or modest clothes according to one’s social status?
2. How are people’s career choices and occupational roles being affected due to the distinctive setting shown in Pakistani TV Dramas?

Cultivation Analysis

Cultivation Analysis was a theory introduced by George Gerbner in the 1970s. It focuses on how heavy viewers, specifically TV dramas relevant to this research, directly impact them. These depictions and portrayals have an immediate effect on the viewers' minds, and they unconsciously begin following what is shown to them. The cultivation analysis theory focuses mainly on the heavy viewers, who are influenced the most by images and programs aired on television. (Mulder, 2019) One of the topics covered in the cultivation theory is social topics, including social classes and their portrayal. Viewers tend to get influenced easily, which is then depicted in their behavior as changing lifestyles and patterns. Television tells us stories through drama, news, advertisements, and programs. These are the everyday stories that we live through.



(Gerbner et al., 1980).

Research Methodology:

Qualitative research has been implied using in-depth semi-structured interviews to get a detailed view and observe the direct and indirect effects of Pakistani TV Dramas on the viewers in relevance to the depiction of occupational power and social status. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify a diverse group of twenty participants who regularly watch Pakistani TV dramas. These participants are 18–25-year-old females. Ten of them are university students, and the rest of them are housewives.

Moreover, this research has been conducted by studying the local Pakistani dramas to deduce a conclusion. All the research and information is from our culture, society, norms, and values. 5 Pakistani TV dramas from the past ten years have been chosen. These include “Zindagi Gulzar Hai”, “Humsafar”, “Sabaat”, “Mere Paas Tum Ho” and “Sinfe Ahan”.

We used a purposive sampling technique for the selection of these dramas. We chose the TV Dramas from the large set of dramas aired on Pakistani television. These are the popular dramas with 8 out of 10 or higher IMDb rating.

The Pakistani drama "Zindagi Gulzar Hai" explores family dynamics, societal issues, and personal development. It looks at issues including gender inequality, women's emancipation, and how relationships are affected by socioeconomic status. With its gripping story and well-developed characters, it emphasizes the value of knowledge, goals, and comprehension in overcoming obstacles in life and promoting social harmony.

"Humsafar" skillfully demonstrates the disparity between the lives of the wealthy and the impoverished. It clarifies the socioeconomic gap and how it affects interpersonal relationships and societal dynamics. The drama shows how some characters lead luxurious lives while others from poorer backgrounds struggle and endure hardships. The characters' attitudes, goals, and the difficulties they face in their personal lives are greatly influenced by this stark disparity in wealth and social standing.

Drama serial "Sabaat" deftly handles the dynamics between various socioeconomic backgrounds. It explores the lives of characters from various socioeconomic backgrounds, presenting their disparate values, goals, and lifestyles. The show investigates the ways in which wealth and social standing affect goals, aspirations, and viewpoints. It illustrates the difficulties and conflicts brought about by these differences, highlighting the complexities and tensions that exist in the relationships and interactions between people from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Pakistani drama "Mere Paas Tum Ho" deftly explores relationships, social conventions, and the fallout from treachery. It centers on the lives of individuals mired in difficult emotional situations. The drama focuses on themes of romance, betrayal, and how relationships and personal



values are affected by wealth and social standing. It skillfully illustrates the challenges, goals, and tensions that people from various backgrounds face while putting an emphasis on the ethical and moral consequences of their choices.

"Sinf e Ahan" presents an engaging story about power struggles, societal hierarchies, and moral conundrums. It delves into the lives of characters from various backgrounds, highlighting their aspirations, tensions, and entwined fates. It explores issues of moral complexity, societal conventions, and the consequences of decisions made in the name of success. The play explores the complexity of human desires and the lengths people will go to in order to join the Pakistan Army.

Construction of Interview Guide and Procedure

The interview guide implemented was self-constructed. A blend of structured and unstructured questions collected data from 20 participants. These questions were primarily based on TV dramas' effects on different viewers, including topics such as clothing and appearances, other socio-economic classes, and professional roles and occupations. The central theme of all the questions was, "What is the effect that Pakistani TV dramas have on people regarding wearing liberal or modest clothes and choosing specific careers according to one's social status?" The languages used were Urdu and English combined, as it was more convenient for the participants to answer that way. One of the significant issues faced while collecting the data was that some respondents seemed hesitant to talk about clothing in terms of religion and how it is depicted in TV dramas, so they were reassured that this interview was only for research conducted regarding Pakistani TV Dramas in terms of the portrayal of social class. All the participants' identity was ensured to be kept confidential. The responses were recorded using sound recorders and were carefully comprehended to deduce results.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data collected. Two major themes were created according to the responses in the interviews (Clothing and Appearance and Occupational roles according to social statuses) regarding the effect of TV Dramas. Short summaries of each participant's responses are given below, according to which the themes were produced.

Participant 1:

We have created the criteria for different appearances and how we perceive them regarding social classes. While people may get inspired at times, but it does not entirely affect their behavior. TV Dramas are a reflection of our society and reality. People will still choose occupations like tuition teachers if they need to earn that amount to survive, even if they are taken up by the poor in dramas. Teaching is a respectable career; you can make a handsome amount from it. Likewise,



there are rich and poor teachers, doctors, engineers, etc. Our society and TV Dramas are both a reflection of one another and take inspiration from each other. Thus, they do somewhat impact the viewers, but not to a great extent.

Participant 2:

TV Dramas specifically target age groups too, and youngsters and teenagers are the ones influenced the most. Different clothing styles and appearances are developed and presented; about 70-80% of them come from what is shown in TV Dramas. For example, in older times, men would wear simple shalwar kurta, but now, as these trends have significantly changed in TV Dramas, a more fitted outfit is preferred. Media plays a massive role in setting trends; people follow them and get affected. Even inspiration for professional roles is taken from TV Dramas, for example, how the application batch for the army doubled the year a TV Drama based on the Pak Army aired.

Participant 3:

Many people, especially women, take inspiration from Pakistani TV Dramas. They influence their styles, clothing, fashion, and even haircuts. Moreover, people judge others' social classes through their dress. The rich are always shown wearing jeans and short clothes, and the poor are covered in shalwar kameez. This is independent of religious values. People take those depictions as reality and follow them unthinkingly. Roles and professions are also influenced to a certain level since society perceives them like how they are shown in dramas.

Participant 4:

TV Dramas affect how people behave and their mentality. All the stereotypes are promoted in TV Dramas. People with low incomes are always represented with fully covered, modest clothes. If you have to show the same people getting well off with time, their clothes are changed to more modern and revealing – western dressing. It gives out a wrong message to society since it should not be made exclusive like this, mainly if it also depicts one's religion. Our television industry has a broader audience, and it can promote anything. All of this entirely affects the viewers in one way or another. However, if one has strong critical thinking and can understand and not unthinkingly follow anything shown, they can make their way out.

Participant 5:

Most outfit inspiration for women these days especially comes from TV Dramas. Even the style and fashion shown in them differ for the poor and the rich. People experiencing poverty would mostly be wearing long kameez with a big dupatta and shalwar. However, if the same outfit is chosen for the rich, the kameez will be shorter, better fitted, and maybe with straight pants instead of a typical shalwar. People observe and acknowledge all of it and mainly adopt it. Moreover, earlier on, people considered the army for the lower class, but since army-related



dramas have arrived, showing even rich soldiers, people have become more inclined towards it, making it a clear indication of the effects of TV Dramas.

Participant 6:

Clothing is about how one wears it rather than being modern or liberal. You can transform any outfit into how you would like it to be. Dramas may have a specific depiction of class differences, but modest clothes may also be used for the higher class. Moreover, where the lower class has to be delivered, it is all about their limited exposure; thus, the clothing is according to that. This again depicts the reality of our society, which the viewers may pick. It may indirectly signal that you must increase your exposure to match higher levels.

Participant 7:

One of the biggest inspirations for people these days regarding how they should look and do comes from TV Dramas. People think that what is shown in them is entirely accurate and thus fall for it and join the bandwagon, may it suits them or not. When one goes after it, all the rest follow, forgetting all social, moral, and religious values. It is the same for professional roles, where people get so inspired by TV dramas that they are ready to change their occupations.

Participant 8:

A major fault in our society is that our people are constantly complex. They feel a constant urge to compete with everything that comes up. Whether these depictions are accurate, people will still follow them mindlessly. It significantly impacts the public as they fall for anything that revolves around hype. They notice even the tiniest details that a character has and copy them.

Participant 9:

What TV Dramas show comes from the culture and society. They get ideas to portray different social classes from observations and realities. Suppose a class is shown wearing Western clothing; that happens in real life. TV Dramas act as a reflection of society so that viewers can relate. The jobs are also inspired by the occupations different people from different social classes have. However, when this is widely shown on TV, the cycle only continues because it exists in reality and on the reel. This, in turn, has a more significant effect as people seek that validation through TV Dramas.

Participant 10:

In modern days, TV Dramas have been so influential over the public that their effect is increasing daily. It is common to see people often referring to dramas when you ask them about something related to how they are portraying themselves or what they are doing. Even jobs are



now chosen by watching TV Dramas. For example, people have been encouraged to join the army due to TV Dramas. Recently, a drama showed a girl from a high social class joining the military, which has changed the viewpoints of many people. The effect is there and is very much visible if you look closely.

Discussion

The discussion formed using the method of semi-structured interviews to conduct the research regarding the effects of Pakistani TV Dramas on the depiction of social status and occupational powers is as follows.

Theme 1

Dressing and Appearance According to the Social Class

Pakistani TV Dramas and our society are interrelated and a reflection of one another. What is shown in TV Dramas is taken from what happens in our community and culture. The kind of dressing that is adopted by a specific character from a high class is inspired by how the rich dress in real life and vice versa. However, it is vital to note that this only applies to some in this category. This is also important regarding religion as we tend to associate Western culture with being far from it. When a certain kind of depiction is shown in TV Dramas, viewers are often quick to notice and adapt it, whether consciously or unconsciously, assuming it to be accurate. Some viewers follow these dramas religiously, and how they portray themselves greatly revolves around them.

Theme 2

Professional Roles and Occupational Power

Professions and roles are expected to be part of Pakistani TV Dramas. Characters are often seen working in different professions. However, these occupations are dictated by the social class to that they belong. As seen in our culture, some fields are commonly chosen by a specific social class. This is precisely depicted in our dramas. Works are selected according to the character's social class before assigning them. When the viewers watch these dramas, it gives them a clear image of what kind of people go into different professions. Showing them on TV influences people to pursue them as well, mainly when they get associated with a specific social class

Conclusion

The Pakistani TV industry has been presented for decades and has evolved with time, bringing about multiple changes. It is correct to say that our TV Dramas and our society are a reflection of one another (Jan, 2022). What is shown in TV Dramas is taken from what happens in real life. People, their lifestyles, professions, occupations, roles, dress, and appearance are all



observed and then shown in dramas according to different situations.

However, many times, only a chunk of people are observed, and only their lifestyles are depicted in these TV Dramas, for example the character of “Mahjabeen Mastaan” in *Sinf e Ahan*. Most of the population may think, act, and appear different than what is shown. Dressing and appearance vary extensively when it comes to social class. The rich are primarily associated with Western culture, which is evident in their dress, whereas the poor are shown in Eastern attire, as shown in the Drama Serial “Sabaat,” where “Miraal”, belonging to the higher class, is mostly seen wearing Western attire. When people watch these TV dramas, it slowly starts affecting them. They observe the characters and, over time, start adopting their styles. There is a perception in the viewer’s mind that whatever is shown on TV is bound to be accurate since it is created for such a broad audience. People start following what is shown on TV to look a particular kind. These depictions are taken in religious terms as well, for example, “Anya Aziz” in the drama serial “Sabaat,” where she is always wearing Eastern clothes and chooses to keep her head covered. Modernism, or the Western culture adopted by the rich, is far from the Islamic religion and conveys that the rich are not often religious. Whereas- the poor wear covered and modest clothes, they are considered close to religion. For example, “Shaista Khanzada” from the Drama “*Sinf e Ahan*” is shown wearing Eastern attire only, automatically presumed to be more modest and religious. This is not a matter of faith but exposure. Those with solid morals and values stick to what they think is right and wrong, regardless of what is shown on TV. However, some viewers start following what is shown blindly. They consciously or unconsciously adopt what is displayed just to overcome feelings of inferiority and maintain a standard by choosing specific types of appearances. How they dress is inspired by their favorite TV drama characters, such as “Miraal” from “Sabaat” or “Shehwar Ahmed” from “*Mere paas tum ho*”; over time, it becomes their style. These people are affected the most as what is shown in TV Dramas is directly linked to how they present themselves.

Similar is the case with professional roles and occupations. Some careers have a stigma attached to them that they are confined to people with low incomes only. If one pursued them, it would also look like they belonged to the lower class. Whereas it doesn’t affect some people with a clear image regarding their career path, a lot of them are influenced by it. TV Dramas have such an effect on the viewers that they majorly determine this. When dramas show characters from the lower or the middle class working in certain professions, some people would not usually prefer pursuing them. On the other hand, when a profession is popular amongst many, especially the higher class, people would automatically be more inclined towards them, as demonstrated by a rise in the applications for that job.



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