

## Presence and Absence: Representation(s) of Women on Primetime television in Pakistan

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### Abstract

*Women's representations in the media have a significant impact on how people view women, perceive gender roles, and form their identities. In Pakistan, television is not only a major source of entertainment but it also plays a key role in gender role socialization by reinforcing patriarchal ideology. Primarily based on the theoretical framework of social semiotics (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006), discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), and feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005), this study seeks to deconstruct the way women are represented in primetime dramas in Pakistan. The analysis of 14 primetime dramas each of PTV Home and Geo Entertainment channel suggest that Pakistani primetime dramas are mainly focusing on domestic issues where women are positioned in a narrow range of social roles i.e. as wives, mothers, and daughters, and are rarely shown in any productive roles. As a result, women in primetime dramas are projected not to have a personal identity of their own rather they have been identified regarding their familial roles and relations. Such representations of women emphasize their domestic and reproductive roles and provide a restrictive and deleterious portrait of women which contributes to the marginalization of women in our society. The representations of women in Pakistani primetime dramas, therefore, underline patriarchal ideological practices which have strong implications regarding women's social roles and identities in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Representation, identities, women, presence, primetime

### 1. Introduction

Representations of women on media is very significant as it helps shape people's perceptions and attitudes towards women, their beliefs about gender and gender roles, and their assumptions about what is appreciated in society. However, it is found that; "media texts are not neutral as they do not demonstrate reality as it is; they intervene and mediate reality" (Lacey, 1998, p.95). Media representations is, therefore, guided and influenced by the ideology of those who are in power and have control. Consequently, media representations of minority groups particularly representations of women has been a trendy and contested area of international research and an important issue in public debate.

Representation of women on media has internationally been the subject of research for the previous few decades. Some work in this area has also been done in Pakistani context especially in print media. In countries like Pakistan where most of the population is illiterate and has no access to print media, television is the major source of entertainment and information. As the language and images shown on television are crucial and central in shaping men and women's lives and has a power to control and influence their attitude and behavior and therefore, is responsible for the construction and consumption of social knowledge and meanings on which people rely to make sense of their world and act upon their social reality. However it is noted that little research has been done on representation of women on television and especially primetime television in Pakistan. This particular study is an attempt to fix this gap as it focuses on representation(s) of women on primetime television in Pakistan.

In this research study linguistic, sociological, cultural, and media theories have been integrated to have a macro perspective of the issue under discussion. This study draws on the theoretical stance of semiotics (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006), discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), and feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005).

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

- How are women represented in the media texts and images (e.g. as passive or active and in specific roles and domains) in primetime dramas in Pakistan?
- What cultural meanings and values are embedded in representation of women in primetime dramas of Pakistan?

## 2. Literature Review

The practice of recording information, thoughts, ideas, or messages in some physical form such as language is termed as 'representation' in semiotic theory. While 'language' is applied to writing, visual images, sounds, facial expressions, gestures, dress, color, and music also (Hall, 1997). Representation is a social process that involves not only the process of representation but also the construction of different signs which stand for particular meanings. Representations are determined by certain conventions and are influenced by the dominant ideology which reflects certain socio-cultural values (Hall, 1997). The systems of representations that work to create certain socio-cultural meanings through media texts demonstrate that certain social practices and behaviors are natural (Chandler, 2002).

Barthe's (1972) studies on images recommended that meanings are produced and reproduced through the codes at work in representation(s) and that while meanings might appear to be natural and obvious; they are being produced and constructed through certain procedures and processes of signification at work in all representation(s). Media representations help to establish peoples' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding race, class, and gender, and their conjecture about what is considered important and valued in a social context.

Kress and Leeuwen's seminal work (2006) theoretically embedded in social semiotics considers representation as a socio-cultural process of developing specific signs to express meanings and are influenced by sign makers' interests. Therefore, for the researchers of visual communication, it is important to be aware of the values and interests which benefit from signs in use. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) have also presented a descriptive framework that is a quite helpful contrivance in visual analysis. They are of the view that all semiotic systems have a textual function which means that they all can form and function as texts. They further opine that visual communication has two functions based on Halliday's theoretical terms. First is the ideational function of representing world around us and the other is the interpersonal function of representing social interactions as social relations. So we not only can identify systems and manners of representation but also the ways in which the grammar of visual design enables different things we do and the relations that are produced between sign makers and receivers.

From its very inception feminism has considered ideas, language, and images as central and crucial in defining gender roles and relations (Kuhn, 1985). Feminism is usually employed as a multidisciplinary approach to social analysis which emphasizes gender as a key structuring element of power relations in society and representation of women has always been the concern and a central field of study for feminism (Zoonen, 1996) which seeks to explore how language of media texts defines and confines women (Kuhn, 1985). The progressive discourse of the media involves the process of selection which points out that patriarchy and capitalism dominate the

mass media which results in the subordination of women in society and media critics and feminist activists continue to challenge such media discourses. It is, therefore, important to explore the role of visual representation(s) of women in the media in the creation and naturalization of different roles and power relations between men and women.

Fairclough (1995) is of the view that any text is multifunctional and is simultaneously representing and setting up identities and relations. Fairclough (1995) further identifies three areas of analysis of media discourse i.e. representations, identities, and relations. This means that it is not only important to understand how the world is being represented by media, but it is also crucial to know what sort of social identities, cultural values, and social relations it helps to establish. A multimodal view of discourse has great value for a holistic feminist critique of discursive constructions of gender (Lazar, 1999; 2000). Moreover, feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) as a political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology in discourse, is equally applicable to the study of texts as well as talk, which offers a corrective to approaches that primarily favor one linguistic mode over another (Lazar, 2005, p. 5).

Over the years, different studies have been conducted to decipher the representation women on television in Pakistan. Qaiser and Jabeen (2008), for example investigated how women's issues were portrayed in Pakistani television (PTV) drama serials from 1964 to 2000 and came to the conclusion that these dramas generally portrayed women in a positive way. Iqbal and Abdar (2016) explored the career orientation and decision-making abilities of the female characters in eight Hum TV dramas of Hum TV. They discovered that the educational background and employment preferences of 70% of the female characters in these dramas were not stated. Moreover, all of the women portrayed in these dramas lack the ability to make decisions and live constrained lives.

In another study, Nasir (2017) examined gender representation in Pakistani Television commercials. The study showed that patriarchal norms are reflected in the TV commercials stereotypical portrayals of men and women. In contrast to the findings of this study, previous research studies aimed at the depiction of female characters in Pakistani dramas (e.g. Jiwani, 2013) frequently draw the conclusion that dramas are moving away from a conventional to a liberal approach when it comes to the portrayal of women characters. These findings also show that three out of the four main female characters in all of these dramas are portrayed as strong, educated women who are extremely aware of their rights.

Ashfaq and Shafiq (2018) involved qualitative content analysis of six television drama serials of three popular Pakistan entertainment television channels to demonstrate the representation of a "perfect" woman. According to the study, the lead women roles in Pakistani television drama serials are typically played by younger, ultra-slim, extra-beautiful women who wear national simple dresses with 'dupatta' and are largely middle class, humble, homebound, and submissive. It was also noted that stereotypes for side role women are typically projected to be bold, outspoken, and independent. This research, however, contrasts women's portrayals of themselves and other women in drama serials rather than addressing issues of gender equality or discrimination. The review of previous studies indicate that there is limited research conducted to highlight the representation of women on primetime television dramas of both the public and private channels, hence the need for this study.

### **3. Methodology**

The data for this study were collected from two TV channels i.e. PTV Home and Geo Entertainment. The study focused on all the episodes of fourteen primetime dramas from PTV Home and Geo Entertainment. PTV Home is selected because it is a government channel and is considered an authentic and (state) monitored narrative of the nation. Geo Entertainment is selected to collect data as it is the first private TV channel, which is popular among the public, that was established in 2002 (Khan & Rehman, 2013). This study focused on the primetime hours because primetime is the time in the evening when most people are at home to watch TV (Danesi, 2002) and the number of viewers is maximum during this peak time. In Pakistan, 08:00 pm to 09:00 pm is primetime.

Following primetime dramas shown on PTV Home and Geo Entertainment channel were taken as the sample.

Geo Entertainment	PTV Home
Adhoori Aurat	Noor-e-Nazar
Mairi Dulari	Pain Killer
Mirat-ul-Aroos	Jail
Mann Ke Moti	Anokha Ladla
Teri Berukhi	Kuch Is Tarah
Dil Mohallay Ki	Bus Way Rabba
Haveli	Kami Rah Gai
Nanhi	

Content analysis guided by the theoretical stance of feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005) and social semiotics (Kress & Van-Leeuwen, 2006) was used for the analysis of primetime dramas. Content analysis was used because it is an important technique for analyzing media texts and helps to conceptualize the content of media discourse as constructed texts which helps to generate meanings (and helps in conducting as objective as possible qualitative analysis).

In this particular research endeavor, thematic and frame analysis was used to analyse the data. In thematic analysis the coding is used based on the categories designed to capture the dominant themes present in the text and frame analysis helps in understanding how meaning is constructed by focusing on the broad images in a given text.

The basic process of conducting this content analysis involved four main stages:

- 1) Identifying and defining the sample of media to be analysed.
- 2) Establishing the variables and categories of content.
- 3) Measuring the existence and occurrence of each of the categories within the sample.
- 4) Interpreting the results.

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze the content of the dramas because the combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis provided a more complete understanding and comprehensive account of the way women are being represented in Pakistani primetime dramas. The objective and systematic counting in the quantitative content analysis technique helps to produce a detailed quantitative description of the symbolic categories in a particular text or discourse. On the other hand, qualitative content analysis is a technique that is favored mainly by feminist researchers as well as by other critics who use an interpretative



approach. Qualitative content analysis helps to investigate and then to understand and discover the content of the text differently from the ordinary way (Neuman, 1997, p. 273).

The critical and interpretive approaches look for not only how the languages and images are presented and also how these have been used in combination to achieve particular meanings. Consequently, the meanings that are embedded in the representation are discovered by not just the frequency of particular categories but also through themes that reflect a particular phenomenon.

Following thematic/analytic categories were selected to analyze the data from different angles and provided a detailed picture of the way women are represented in Pakistani primetime television dramas and helped to get answers to our research questions.

- Themes
- Presence / Absence

The quantitative content analysis of the data was done by focusing on the following points:

- Frequency of male and female characters in dramas
- Frequency of male and female characters in leading roles
- Frequency of male and female-centered dramas

Descriptive statistics were used for the quantitative content analysis of primetime dramas of two channels.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

##### **4.1 Themes**

It is considered that themes, as presented in the dramas, are very important since they tell us about the central idea and the gender roles associated with different themes, i.e. private and public life; politics, sports, entertainment, or family domain. These themes vividly reflect the dominant beliefs about who belongs where, and who does not, again pointing to dominant social roles, identities, and beliefs as reflected and represented through the use of different signs both linguistic and non-linguistic signs in television dramas (Kress & Van-Leeuwen, 2006)

The analysis of Pakistani primetime dramas shows that the majority of these dramas revolve around the theme of marriage, marital issues, and family conflicts except for two dramas i.e. 'Jail' and 'Pain Killer' shown on PTV Home deal with social injustice and professional conflicts among doctors respectively. In 'Mirat-ul-Aroos', 'Adhoori Aurat', and 'Mairi Dulari' matrimony is glamorized to the extent that it seems that the ultimate goal of a girl's life is to be married and modernism is a bane rather than a boon. These dramas also show that there is no place for a woman who is adivorced and a widow in our society. Through representation of women in these dramas, it is emphasized that women are weak and dependent on men as they need the support of their son, brother, husband and father to live and survive in the society. The analysis further reveal that women's place is home and it is the responsibility of man to work, earn and provide financial support to the entire family

Drama 'Mirat-ul-Aroos' is based on the novel Mirat-ul-Aroos by deputy Nazeer Ahmad and is one of the classics of Urdu literature. Major theme of the drama is the marriage of two sisters who have different mindset. There is a stark contrast between the circumstances of the two sisters. While the obedient sister wastes her life away reading digests, and remains busy in kitchen, the other, who is planning a life ahead, is portrayed negatively. Nazeer Ahmed's novel *mirat-ul-uroos (mirror of the Bride)*, published in 1869, was specifically written for girls/women to encourage 'correct' and socially acceptable behavior. It is a story of two sisters, Akbari and

Asghari inspired by folklore and takes the influence of Cinderella. Just like Cinderella's passivity and meekness, the leading female characters of these dramas are passive and meek and their passivity and meekness are rewarded by the arrival of a 'liberator prince'. Similarly, Cordellia from Shakespeare's King Lear is overshadowed by the strong personalities of her two elder sisters i.e. Goneril and Regan. Goneril and Regan are portrayed as 'bad' daughters and 'witches' because they take charge of their own lives and make decisions. The youngest one is the perfect example of a good and obedient woman who remains loyal to her father even after being disinherited. Women in this context are encouraged to stay out of the limelight, and that is the reason why Cordellia is appreciated and becomes the heroine. In the drama *Mirat-ul-Aroos*, Akbari is the elder sister, who is dubbed as unwanted as she is a strong-headed and opinionated person which is considered a 'bad woman' in a patriarchal society. On the other hand, Asghari, the younger sister, living in a joint family system, always tries to please others and in the process sacrifices her pleasure and eventually loses her identity but is applauded, and thus a narrative is constructed which appreciates the voiceless women. This drama, therefore, portrays the attributes of a 'good girl' or a 'good woman' and thus reinforces these attributes in society.

#### ***Drama Titles***

The titles of the seven primetime dramas of Geo are quite symbolic and suggestive as they point out that these dramas are based on woman and are very much woman oriented dramas as it is quite clear from the titles of drama *Adhoori Aurat*, *Nanhi*, *Mairi Dulari*, *Mirat-ul-Aroos*. In short, the dominant themes of all the primetime dramas shown on Geo entertainment are about home, marriage, divorce and family issues which point out that women's world is limited to four walls of home and they do not have anything else to do in society and there is no place for them in public sphere but just private sphere i.e. home, family. It also shows that in these themes the roles of men are limited and they are there to support the women characters in the drama.

The dominant themes in *Noor-e Nazar*, *Kuch Kami Rah Gai*, *Nanhi*, and *Mann ke Motti* shown on PTV Home is the struggle of survival of a woman in this male dominated society. However, drama 'Pain Killer' basically highlights the professional life of doctors that what sorts of medical cases they have to face and how they are able to handle those cases. It is important to note that in this kind of theme women are not given any dominant position and male doctors are there as central characters. This shows that woman if shown in professional roles e.g. doctors, they are not given power or authority in relation to men and they are just there to support the men in these sorts of themes. This representation of women engenders that the women belong to home and men has important role to play in public spheres of life. The story of the drama 'Jail' is about the animosity between two families having feudal background. Basically the main theme of the drama is the struggle against the unjust social system of Pakistani society, so presenting men as central character in these theme highlights that it is man's world and it reaffirms that woman's place is in home and her struggle is related to family affairs.

This shows that themes of Geo Entertainment are limited to marriage, divorce and family politics where women are there as the central characters but dramas on the PTV Home had more diverse themes but in these diverse themes men are there as central characters mostly. So these dramas again divide the roles of men and women and positioned women in the home as compared to men who are in majority in the dramas which have theme other than family e.g. struggle for social injustice as in drama 'Jail'. This is what Ingham (2007) also found in the majority of soaps which are set in a domestic situation because this is supposedly the most valued place for

women's expertise. The central characters in dramas with themes related to family issues are often female, with the goal of getting married and having children. This could support the argument that the myth of never-ending maternalness actually conceals the subordination of women. In these dramas women are given the charge of household affairs. This is what Ingham (ibid) has also pointed out that even when women are shown in a position of power, they are still viewed through a very patriarchal ideology.

The themes of primetime dramas of both Geo Entertainment and PTV Home are showing woman as feeble and emotional. Not that these are not her real traits but the stories always revolve around her getting beaten up and making wrong decisions e.g. 'Maryam' in 'Adhoori Aurat' and Fariha' in 'Mann ke Moti'. Hence, suggesting she is incompetent and a fool which is far from being true. The stories should focus on her accomplishments and displaying a warrior like spirit, which many are capable of and also on their intellectual capabilities. But women in these dramas are displayed as petty creatures, which need constant protection and those who dare to make their own decisions are nothing less than evil as 'Aleena' in 'Teri Berukhi' and these dramas show that the girl must know that the sole purpose of her existence is to get married.

#### 4.2 Presence/Absence

Media produces both presences, the visible and important ones, as well as absences, those who are displaced from the frame - the invisible, the unimportant. Absence signifies as much as presence, telling us how media contributes to the specific power relations and beliefs within society. In any representation it is important to decide what to include and what to exclude and what to 'foreground' and what to 'background' (Fairclough, 1995). In this case, certain details are back-grounded, suppressed, or excluded altogether and during these processes of representation(s), ideologies are at work.

##### 4.2.1 Presence/absence of women in primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment

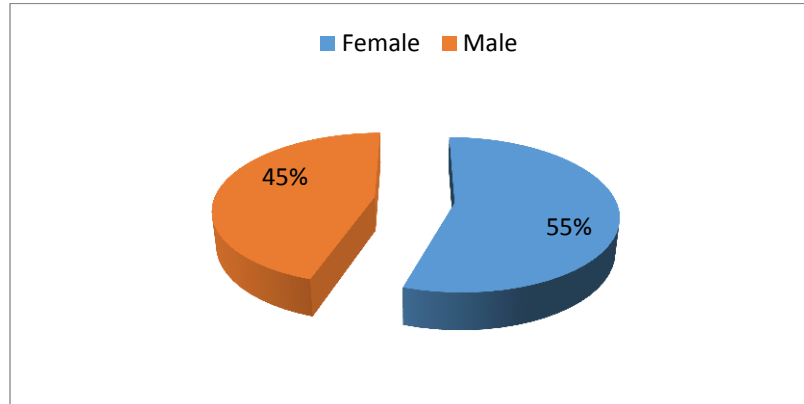
In all the primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment stories revolve around women and so women are in the leading roles in these dramas. Men are there to support them or are totally absent at times in these women oriented dramas. The titles of these dramas are also very suggestive in this regard. The titles of dramas 'Adhoori Aurat', 'Nanhi', 'Mairi Dulari' clearly point out that these dramas are based on women. It is also found that in these primetime dramas women are more in numbers than men.

Drama	Frequency of women characters	Total characters	Percentage of women
Adhoori Aurat	9	14	66%
Meri Dulari	10	19	52%
Mirat-ul-Aroos	7	13	54%
Mann Ke Moti	9	16	56%
Teri Berukhi	7	14	50%
Dil Mohallay Ki Haveli	8	15	53%
Nanhi	12	23	52%
Total	62	114	55%

**Table 4.1 Presence of women/female characters in primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment**

Table 4.1 highlights that 55% woman characters are there in primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment which is more than men. The presence of men and women on primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment is also highlighted in the form of a chart as given in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1. Presence of male and female characters in primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment**



Presence of 55% women and 45% men as shown in Figure 4.1 in these primetime dramas is quite symbolic keeping in mind the central issues and themes of these dramas. These primetime dramas affirmed a limited definition of womanhood that confined them to the home, most private of all social spaces and denied them spaces in the public sphere which was the domains of the male. This limited representation of women is a part and parcel of hegemonic process which supports women's subordination in society. It is also noted that in primetime dramas of Geo entertainment women were there as central characters or in the leading role as stories revolve around them in one way or the other.

Drama	Characters(s) in central role
Adhoori Aurat	Maryam (Female)
Meri Dulari	Aabdaar (F)
Mirat-ul-aroos	Aayza (F), Aaima (F)
Mann Ke Moti	Fariha (F)
Teri Berukhi	Shahtaaj (F)
Dil Mohallay Ki Haveli	Amman begum (F), Safiya(F), Mehrun nisa (F)
Nanhi	Nanhi (F)

**Table 4.2 Characters in the central or leading role(s) in primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment**

Table 4.2 shows that in all the primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment women were there as central characters. This inclusion of more women as central characters and back-grounding of men is quite suggestive and ideological. By presenting women as central characters in dramas having marriage and family issues as central themes and excluding women from public spheres reality is distorted and patriarchal ideology is at work in these stereotypical representation(s) of women.



**Figure 2 Presence of men and women as central characters in primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment**

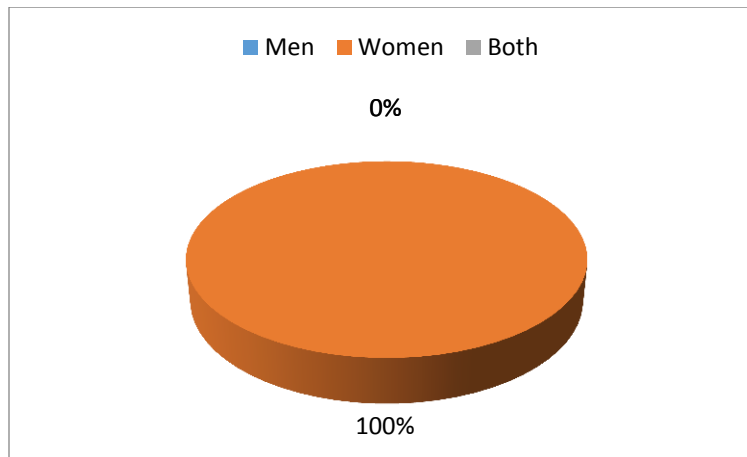


Figure 4.2 shows that all the dramas of Geo entertainment have women characters in leading roles and men either have roles to support these women or are totally absent at times. It is important to know that presence of more women as central character again is quite symbolic as themes of these dramas are very limited and are about marriage and other domestic affairs. The presence of women in the central roles in these dramas points out that the purpose of a woman's life is to get married and sort out her family issues.

Moreover, the absence of men as central characters affirms this point and depicts that men have other important things in life to do than to just think of getting married and handle the domestic issues. So at one level, the increasing space for women's programs' and women's issues on primetime dramas gives us an impression that the media has at least responded to women's demands for better representation in television programs. However, a closer look at the medium suggests that although women's movement has succeeded to some extent in pushing women's issues onto the media agenda; they are accommodated within the existing patriarchal discourse as is clear from the presence of more women only in the issues which are limited to domestic affairs and to theme of marriage and absence of women or back grounding them in the issues which deal with other social issues.

The presence of more women than the men in these seven primetime dramas of Geo Entertainment as central characters points out that marriages, women issues and family politics are women's sphere and have a little to do with men and absence of women in professional roles and in roles other than family, home and marriage points out that women's life is limited to the four walls of home. This highlights very stereotypical presence of women in home. It does not necessarily mean that in reality also women in Pakistan are confined to four walls of home and do not have anything else to do except marriage, family and home.

It depicts that television draws upon social reality but selectively picking up certain existing values, behaviors and images, while censoring the others. By highlighting only selected aspects of reality in a particular context, by projecting them as larger than life, and by continuation of repeated media images and messages, the media influences reality. It shows only one side of the construction of women's marginality in culture. It can be said that the positioning of women in the primetime dramas suggests the systematic marginalization of the female experience,

strengthening stereotypical images of women and reconstructing social power relationships and roles. Women in the primetime dramas are given the same attributes which are now considered to be feminine and which present them in their stereotypical and traditional roles.

Loving	Patient	Brave
Modest	Loyal	Beautiful
Obedient	Caring/ Nurturing	Supportive
Educated	Devoted	Dependent
Tolerant	Sacrificing	Religious
Manipulating	Helpless	Superstitious

**Table 4.3 Female attributes in Geo Entertainment dramas**

Table 4.3 shows different attributes assigned to women in dramas. These attributes give a traditional and stereotypical picture of women who are caring, dependent, devoted, helpless and supportive. Women are not shown to be more active and authoritative in these dramas.

#### 4.2.2 Presence/absence of women in primetime dramas of PTV Home

As discussed earlier there are more diverse themes in primetime dramas of PTV home than those of Geo Entertainment. However, it is also noticed that when themes of these dramas are about social issues other than family and marriage women were back-grounded or excluded altogether which again symbolizes that their world is limited to family and relationships.

Drama	Frequency of women characters	Total characters	Percentage of women
Noor-e-nazar	5	8	62%
Pain Killer	6	15	40%
Jail	9	38	24%
Anokha Ladla	13	32	40%
Kuch Is Tarah	13	39	33%
Bus Ve Rabba	17	28	61%
Kami Reh gai	12	22	55%
Total	75	182	41%

**Table 4.4. Presence of women/female characters in primetime dramas of PTV Home**

Table 4.4 shows that men are more in number than women in primetime dramas of PTV Home and just 41% of the characters in these dramas are of women. As shown in the Table above, 24% women characters are there in drama 'Jail' as the theme of this drama is about the struggle against the bitter realities and injustices prevalent in our societies. Presenting women in supporting roles in this theme is again stereotypical as it reaffirms that women's place is home and they have no role to play in the outside world i.e. public domain.

**Figure 4.3 Presence of male and female characters in primetime dramas of PTV Home**

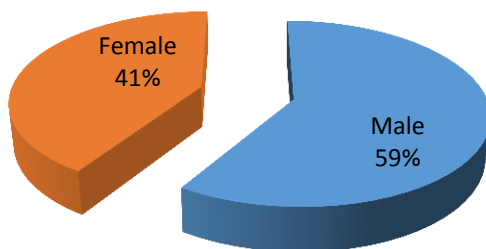


Figure 4.3 also highlights that women are 41% in primetime dramas of PTV Home as compared to men which are more in number. In dramas 'Noor-e-Nazar' and 'Bus way Rabba' women are more than men but in other primetime dramas of PTV Home male characters are in majority which is quite suggestive because these dramas highlight the issues which are not about family matters but about issues like problems faced by doctors, politics and about struggle for social justice etc.

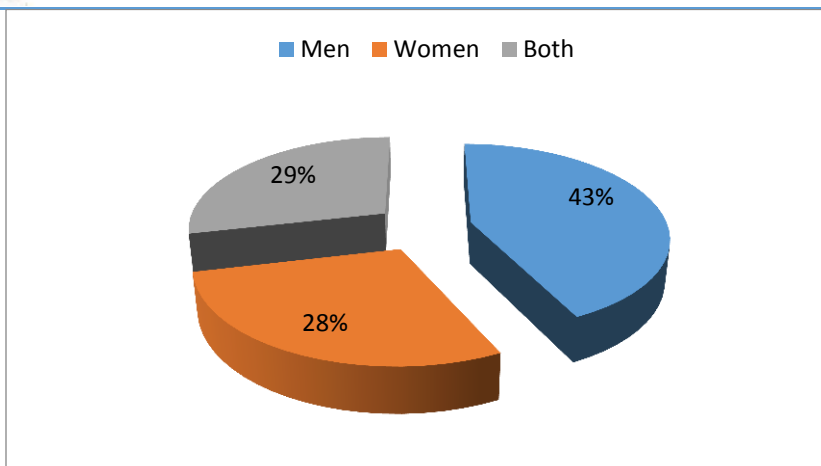
The presence of more male than female characters in these dramas is again symbolic because the themes of these dramas as discussed earlier are more diverse and not limited to home and family issues. This result points out to what media theorist Williams (2003) pointed out that media distorts the 'real' presence or prevalence of a group in a society. This can be done by one or more ways. There can be an under-representation(s) of a group in the media, the media can over represent by associating a group with one particular type of activity, the media can misrepresent by equating a group with a particular activity. So here the reality is distorted by presenting more women in the dramas having theme of marriage and family issues and also by back grounding them in the themes which are related to public spheres where men are shown to be in command performing the central roles.

Drama	Character(s) in leading role
Noor-e-nazar	Alveena (Female)
Pain Killer	Dr. Feroz (Male)
Jail	Raja (M)
Anokha Ladla	Hameedo (M)
Kuch Is Tarah	Dabeer (M), Aleezay (F)
Bus Ve Rabba	Jasmine(F), Anjuman (F), Ayesha (F), Maria (F)
Kami Reh gai	Laila (F), Waqar (M)

**Table 4.5 Characters in the leading role(s) in primetime dramas of PTV Home**

Table 4.5 shows that male centered dramas are more in numbers on PTV Home. This percentage of men and women centered dramas is given in Figure 4.4 which shows that 43% men are there in central role as compared to women who are just 28%.

**Figure 4.4 Presence of men and women as central characters in primetime dramas of PTV Home**



As shown in Figure 4.4 men are in central roles in 43% of PTV Home primetime dramas as compared to women who are in leading roles in 28% of these dramas. Moreover, women are in central role(s) in primetime dramas of PTV home where the theme was 'Jahez' (dowry), prostitution and other domestic problems which are now commonly associated with women like honor. However, the major roles are given to men when the themes are about professional expertise as in drama 'Pain Killer' where 'Dr. Feroz' is in the leading role. In drama Jail, 'Raja' is performing the major role as the theme is about the struggle for social equality and justice.

It is also noted that in primetime dramas of PTV Home women in major roles were shown to have stereotypical attributes as they are shown to be devoted and loyal as in the case of 'Jasmine Inayat', beautiful, loving and educated e.g. 'Alveena' and 'Laila'. But 'Alveena' who is in leading role in drama 'Noor-e-Nazar' is shown to be brave, independent, confident and courageous. Drama 'Noor-e-Nazar' is the only primetime drama which presents women not in typical and stereotypical roles and relations. This drama highlights that women can support their families financially and can bravely face the challenges of this society. Table 4.6 presents all these attributes which are given to women PTV Home primetime dramas.

Hard working	Patient	Brave
Modest	Loyal	Beautiful
Obedient	Caring/Loving	Supportive
Educated	Devoting	Dependent
Tolerant	Sacrificing	Confident

**Table 4.6 Female attributes in primetime dramas of PTV Home**

## 5 Discussion

By presenting women as central characters in dramas having marriage and family issues as central themes and excluding women from public spheres reality is distorted and patriarchal ideology is at work in these stereotypical representation(s) of women which suggests that the purpose of a woman's life is to get married and sort out her family issues. Moreover, the absence of men as central characters affirms this point and depicts that men have other important things in life to do than just think of getting married and handling domestic issues. So, at one level, the increasing space for women's programs and women's issues on primetime dramas give us an impression that the media has at least responded to women's demands for better



representation in television programs. However, a closer look at the medium suggests that although women's movements have succeeded to some extent in pushing women's issues onto the media agenda; they are accommodated within the existing patriarchal discourse as is clear from the absence of women in public spheres of life in these dramas.

It depicts that primetime television draws upon social reality by selectively picking up certain existing values, behaviors, and images while censoring others. It can be said that the positioning of women in these dramas suggests the systematic marginalization of the female experience, strengthening stereotypical images of women and reconstructing social power relationships and roles.

It was also found that women's achievements and their accomplishments are not represented at all in primetime dramas as the emphasis of these dramas is on the role of women as mothers or as good wives and is termed as symbolic annihilation by Tuchman et al. (1978). This is the systematic marginalization of women's achievements as successful women are altogether absent in these dramas and they are being silenced. The dramas continue to show women as feeble and emotional. These are just some of the real traits of women but the stories of primetime dramas on both these channels always revolve around women being active in household chores, depending on the men of the family and hence, suggesting she is incompetent and weak in a professional role which is far from being true. According to Gallagher (1979) the media representation of women is narrow. It is very rare that women are represented in active or decisive roles. There is usually a dichotomous pattern of representation of women in media as they are either shown as totally virtuous or evil, traditional or modern, and mother or whore. They are not assigned balanced and moderate roles.

Moreover, these dramas reinforce the old belief that a woman is supposed to forget her own comfort and keep on doing household chores without getting tired and thus reinforce the traditional stereotyped images of women as passive, dependent, and subordinate to men. In these dramas, women are also seen spending their time in appearance-related activities such as shopping and grooming which symbolize that their aim in life is to look beautiful and they are unable to handle challenging tasks. Women are most often portrayed in the context of relationships whereas men are shown to be more intellectual and career-oriented. There is not even a single woman shown in these dramas who has her own identity.

Orbach (1978) also affirms that the media recurrently represents women in one of three roles i.e. as a wife or mother, as a sex object, and as a person who is trying to look beautiful. Men, on the other hand, are most often seen in the context of careers and are seen spending their time 'on the job' far more often than women in these dramas. Women are also more likely to be motivated by the desire to have a romantic relationship. This representation of women is stereotypical and often derogatory.

The representation of women in primetime dramas is not realistic as it does not convey the complete picture of traditional and modern trends in Pakistani society and does not cover all the roles and activities that women and men in our society are performing. It only depicts women in certain stereotypical roles i.e. as wife, mother, daughter, or sister that are considered suitable for them by showing them in such limited and specific roles as norms and the rest of the roles, which are 'non-traditional' as deviation. It only presents those limited thoughts and ideologies that are considered 'accepted' and 'normal' in a male-dominated society. It sees the world from the spectacles of a patriarchal society and then filters and presents reality from those perspectives. In

this way media representation(s) play an important role in the construction and consumption of dominant notions about woman and womanhood and influence the behavior of people towards women which reaffirms that women are not born women, rather they are made (De Beavoir, 1952).

To conform to such a cultural representation of femininity in the dramas, women in Pakistan may think of themselves as being, and act as though they are, physically weak, incapable of handling responsibilities outside the home, and preoccupied with getting married and having babies. Furthermore, such constructs govern the behavior of others toward the individual in such a way as to reinforce the actuality of the image.

Women in our society and all over the world are performing a variety of roles and occupations. By restricting women to the four walls of the home these primetime dramas give a limited definition of womanhood. Moreover, the representation of women in these dramas reaffirms the ideology of romantic love whereby romance is seen as the most important element in a woman's life and where women are taken over by passionate feelings. As Itzin states that "this valuelessness is not inherent, but created; not biologically determined, but socially constructed – with the assistance of the media" (1986, p. 130).

These primetime dramas clearly cut society into two spheres i.e. private and public and allocate these two domains to women and men respectively, where one group is not seen in the other's domain. But, it is not the actual case. There is no clear-cut line between these two spheres and these are overlapping and complimenting each other. Women are actively participating in professional roles while men are equally helping in family affairs. This is the real way in which a society moves successfully towards progress, but our dramas are not projecting this reality in an appreciable manner. Media especially television should present a complete picture of women's place in our society as television is an important socializing agent through which the young viewers learn about their culture and internalize its values, belief systems, perceptions of themselves, and of 'others'.

## 6 Conclusion

It can be concluded from the above discussion that the representation(s) of women on primetime television in Pakistan reinforces and nurtures gender inequality and presents men and women in old, fixed, and homogeneous identities and relations and depict that silence, dependence, family, reproduction and entertainment belong to women and competence, production, and authority belong to men. These primetime dramas are not free from gender biases and are not sensitive to women's issues even after so many commitments and movements to remove the unequal representation(s) of men and women in mass media. The primetime dramas in Pakistan still represent and appreciate women in stereotypical roles and relations which may have a negative effect on young viewers and their progress is put at risk, especially females. It therefore also creates obstacles for both females and males who may opt for the roles in the future that are thought non-traditional and non-stereotypical.

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