

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MEDIA: IMPACT OF FEMALE PROTAGONIST (KASHAF'S) DIARY DIALOGUES IN "ZINDAGI GULZAR HAI"

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of diary dialogues written by the female protagonist, Kashaf, in the well-known Pakistani drama "Zindagi Gulzar Hai." Using a qualitative research methodology, the study focuses on thematic analysis and extracts meaning from interviews with 10 individuals, five of whom are female and five of whom are male. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with GCWUS, NUST, and USKT participants. The main goals are to find recurrent themes and insights expressed in retrospective views and investigate how her diary entries impact viewers' perceptions and knowledge of Kashaf. There is a significant research gap on the subtle effects of diary dialogues in Pakistani television dramas, especially when it comes to character-driven storytelling. This study fills this space by examining the emotional and thematic significance of Kashaf's diary entries through in-depth viewer interviews. The results of this study show that viewers' emotional attachment to Kashaf's persona is greatly influenced by her diary talks. Additionally, the thematic analysis clarifies the recurrent topics that her diaristic expressions convey—such as gender dynamics, empowerment, and societal challenges.

Keywords: *women empowerment, female protagonist diary dialogues, thematic analysis, viewer perception.*

INTRODUCTION

Dramas or Pakistani serials are the names given to television series that are produced in Pakistan. While Sindhi, Balochi, and Punjabi are also used in the dramas, Urdu is the most frequently employed language (Safdar & Khan, 2020a). Even South Asian nations like India watch these Pakistani serials. They draw large audiences from all over the world, including Bangladesh and Nepal. We know that television is practically a fixture in every Pakistani home (Safdar & Khan, 2020b) (Safdar et al., 2015). Many Pakistani serial dramas revolve around women and are about them. Women play a vital role in society. It depicts their roles as spouses, mothers, and sisters. Some serials contain gender-sensitive and progressive themes; most of them uphold patriarchal

ideals and criticize conventional wisdom. The general audience becomes confused and finds it difficult to understand when presented with such contradicting messages and mixed content (Safdar & Khan, 2018). Our society's values are influenced by the TV shows we watch (Wear & Skillicorn, 2009). Television has recently drawn more scholarly attention as one of the most significant elements of the sociocultural or informal curriculum (Cortes, 1979). According to one survey, teenagers in America watch television for an average of 28 hours every week (UNESCO, 2000). Men and women are viewed as the same cart's wheels in the modern day. However, women's representations are never equal. Men are shown as dominating, and women are

constantly criticized. The growing number of divorce cases—in which people get divorced fast even when they have not committed any sins or mistakes—is the most significant theme emphasized in the dramas. While it is obvious that women are making greater social progress in today's world, having a daughter is still viewed as a sin. They are divorced due to being held accountable for having a daughter. In dramas, women's rights are portrayed as completely disregarded; for instance, when they express a desire for a love marriage (Shabir et al., 2015).

The presentation of nuanced and likable characters and how plotlines develop give television dramas their storytelling strength. With its deep character development and thought-provoking stories, "Zindagi Gulzar Hai" is a shining example of this storytelling talent in Pakistani television. The female protagonist Kashaf, whose life story is a fascinating examination of cultural conventions, individual goals, and the complexities of human emotions, is at the center of the series. One of the greatest TV shows on the Pakistani network HUM TV was Zindagi Gulzar Hai. It was inspired by the life of Kashaf, a middle-class girl who aspired to be a CSP officer (Mishra, 2014). The protagonist of the narrative "Zindagi Gulzar Hai" (life is productive) is not very attractive, but she is powerful and independent. She also has a high sense of self-respect and little interest in men. She appeals to people because of these attributes. This novel aims to challenge the traditional perception of women by presenting several unique themes, such as a lady's quest for independence, honor, and distinction in her life and decision-making.

The unique way Kashaf in "Zindagi Gulzar Hai" enhances her character is by employing her diary as a storytelling device. Through her diary entries, Kashaf offers a unique glimpse into her inner world, sharing her deepest feelings, ideas, and philosophical musings. This study aims to investigate how viewers' perceptions are affected by Kashaf's diary dialogue. It investigates how these diaries affect audiences' understanding of her character and the drama's more general themes. With literary devices, Kashaf's journal entries help readers relate to her character more deeply. They humanize her in the eyes of the spectator by shedding light on her inner struggles, uncertainties, and epiphanies. This investigation dives into the intricacies of Kashaf's experiences and

the influence her diary has on the emotional investment of viewers, above mere character development. Moreover, Kashaf's journal entries encourage readers to identify with her persona. As readers learn about her struggles, social constraints, and philosophical musings, they frequently find themselves experiencing her emotional journey together with her. The viewer and Kashaf have a stronger bond because of this empathy, which influences how they view her as a character. These diary entries also help people reflect on common issues, including existential concerns, social constraints, and the search for purpose in life. Viewers are urged to interact with these subjects through Kashaf's perspective, which could result in a deeper comprehension of the human condition and possibly change their perspectives on life's difficulties.

This article addresses questions about the impact of Kashaf's diary entries on viewers' perceptions, as well as an examination of the recurrent themes and insights these entries offer. The results of a qualitative thematic analysis have offered insightful information about how diary entries enhance viewers' experiences and perceptions of female protagonists in Pakistani television.

Literature Review

The mass media plays a major role in the everyday lives of people of all ages and genders, including boys, girls, men, women, and the elderly. Books, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and films are the most often utilized media; nevertheless, people are increasingly affected by electronic media since it is more glamorous and thrilling (Shahid, 1999). The skillful impact of the media notably shapes our opinions of men and women and their societal roles. In addition to providing information, entertainment, and raising awareness, mass media also aim to expose societal norms, values, and beliefs. Women are portrayed as inferior, subservient, and outranked entities composed of few, low-value jobs associated with their sexuality and domesticity, which is an indication of gender inequality in and of itself. Feminism seeks to transform and establish gender parity. It opposes the devaluation of women based on their gender and calls for breaking the taboo around unequal relationships between men and women. Stereotypical

gender scripts should not bind men or women, according to feminists, who vehemently denounce the chains of gender injustice (Turtle, 1987). According to Raja (2000), "the image of women conveyed via media intends to reinforce the traditional attitudes and often presents a degrading and humiliating picture of women".

The storytelling and episodic format known as "soap opera" originated in US radio in the 1920s and became television in the late 1940s. Above all, the open plot structure best characterizes soap opera plots because of its ability to handle story intricacies and believable continuity across several years of planning. This body of literature highlights certain recurring patterns and inclinations in academics' choices of drama serials. For instance, nearly all writers address plays written by female authors Hasina Moin and a few others, even as they rate the substance and caliber of the dramas from the 1980s and, to a lesser extent, the 1990s. Dramas by Moin include "Than Haiyan," which was directed by Shahzad Khalil and shown on Pakistan PTV in 1986, and "Dhoop Kinaray," which was written by Haseena Moin and directed by Sahira Kazmi, aired on PTV in 1987. However, two of the most studied dramas from the satellite age from 2002 are "Humsafar," written by Farhat Ishtiaq and directed by Sarmad Sultan Khoosat, and "Zindagi Gulzar hai" (ZGH), written by Umera Ahmad and directed by Siddiqui. HUM TV broadcast both serials in 2011 and 2013, respectively. Both dramas have been extremely well-liked abroad, even in non-Urdu-speaking nations where local language dubbing has been made. Despite criticism for its stereotyped portrayal of good and evil women, Humsafar's popularity was mostly attributed to its lead male and female protagonists (Khan, 2021). However, ZGH mostly hailed the arrival of a self-sufficient "new heroine" who personifies Eastern culture (Manzoor et al., 2018)). Urdu dramas have played a significant role in Pakistani television programming, initially airing on public television before moving on to cable and satellite television (C&S TV) with the liberalization of television broadcasting in 2002 (Désoulières, 1999) (Kothari, 2005) (Dutoya, 2018).

In their 2015 study, Rameez ul Huda and Amber examined how women are often portrayed in print and audio-visual media, viewing it as a vehicle for societal change (Huda & Ali, 2015). They concluded

that women are objectified and portrayed stereotypically, and they labeled this representation of women as "morally corrupt." The series, directed by Sultana Siddiqui, is based on the same-titled novel by Umera Ahmed. It tells the tale of Kashaf, a girl from the lower middle class, and Zarun, a wealthy upper-class guy. Encompassing roughly twenty-five episodes, some contemporary dramas in Pakistan openly tackle "women's issues," including child marriage, polygamy, violence, the right to an education, and the desire to have boys. Three well-known Pakistani TV networks (Geo, ARY, and HUM) produced six TV drama serials that were the subject of content analysis by Ashfaq and Shafiq (2018). They concluded that virtuous women follow patriarchal customs in dramas, while brave and professional women are portrayed as negative. Iqbal and Abdar (2016) examined the female characters in eight Hum TV programs and discovered that 70% of the female characters lacked a clear professional career or certification. Qaisar and Jabin (2008) discuss the Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV) production of Gul-e-Lala in 1993, which featured many patriarchal and misogynistic themes (Qaiser & Jabeen, 2008). A similar patriarch is depicted in Zindagi Gulzar Hai (2012), who believes that educated and working women cannot make decent brides. Zubair (2016) examines how serials like Uraan (2010) show an independent working woman who uses her freedom and autonomy to make decisions, clearly rejecting the patriarchal system while offering ambiguous or conflicting discourse about femininity. Regarding the way Pakistani women are constructed, TV dramas classify women as "good women", "bad women", "perfect women", and "imperfect women" (Ashfaq & Shafiq, 2018).

A noticeable study gap exists in the literature on character development and Pakistani television dramas regarding diary dialogues' function, significance, and impact, especially those involving a female protagonist such as Kashaf in "Zindagi Gulzar Hai." Few studies have examined the subtle and personal portrayal of a character's inner thoughts and experiences through diary entries, even though previous research has examined character-driven storylines, gender relations, and societal concerns in Pakistani plays. A notable research gap is highlighted by the paucity of studies on the effect of Kashaf's diary entries on viewers' impressions. It is still

mostly unknown how these diary entries affect how viewers perceive the characters, how sympathetic they are to the challenges and goals they portray, and how much of a social commentary they make. A fruitful line of inquiry is the thematic analysis of recurrent themes and insights expressed in Kashaf's diary entries in Pakistani culture. Although studies look at gender dynamics and themes in Pakistani television dramas, there is little research on how diary dialogues function as a narrative technique and how they help communicate these issues. As a result, this study aims to close the gap by thoroughly examining the various implications and thematic relevance of Kashaf's diary dialogues in "Zindagi Gulzar Hai." By doing this, the study hopes to improve comprehension of gender representation, character-driven stories, and social discourse in Pakistani television dramas.

Statement of problem:

Viewers' impression of Kashaf is greatly influenced by her diary dialogues, which provide personal glimpses into her ideas and experiences. Even if previous studies have investigated a variety of components of Pakistani television dramas, there is still a great deal to learn about the precise effects of well-known diary dialogues on viewers' comprehension and sense of emotional attachment to the characters. The issue of the underappreciated significance of significant and influential diary exchanges in "Zindagi Gulzar Hai" and their effect on the viewer is addressed in this study. This issue highlights the need for a qualitative investigation into key diary entries' emotional and thematic value in fostering viewers' affinity for the character and the larger societal problems explored in the show.

Objectives:

The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify recurring themes, motifs, and insights conveyed through Kashaf's diary entries.
- To analyze how the diary entries facilitate a deeper connection between the audience and Kashaf's character, allowing viewers to empathize with the experiences and struggles.

Research Questions:

- What recurring themes and insights are conveyed through Kashaf's diary entries?
- What impact do Kashaf's diary entries have on viewers' perceptions?

Methodology

The study uses a qualitative thematic analysis approach to explore the themes and impact of Kashaf's diary entries. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with ten male and female participants to gather in-depth insights into their perceptions of Kashaf's diary entries and their impact on the overall narrative. Open-ended questions encourage participants to discuss their emotional responses, interpretations, and thoughts about diary entries. Participants from different universities, including GCWUS, NUST, and USKT, have been selected for the semi-structured interview. The most influential diary entries have been selected from Kashaf's diary and analysed according to the thematic approach of the study.

Analysis

Dialogue 1:

"Today my CSS result is out. I am in the 18th position. I have once again beaten Zaroon and somehow repaid the pain he gave me."

Female perception:

Achievement and performance: Kashaf's academic performance is highlighted in the discourse as she ranks 18th in the CSS scores. This demonstrates her tenacity and diligence and presents women as smart, capable people who can succeed in their chosen industries.

Empowerment via Academic Excellence: Kashaf's accomplishment shows that she can succeed despite obstacles and failures, which gives her a sense of empowerment. This feature inspires women to aim high and follow their dreams despite whatever barriers they may face.

Overcoming Adversity: Kashaf's statement that Zaroon has exceeded her implies that she has overcome her previous struggles and potential social expectations. This demonstrates tenacity and resolve, presenting women as strong, resilient people who can overcome hardship and come out stronger.

Male perception:

Acknowledgment of Female Achievement: Kashaf is ranked 18th in the CSS results due to the dialogue's recognition of her academic accomplishments. This acknowledgment emphasizes how crucial it is to recognize and honor women's accomplishments in society.

Dispelling Gender preconceptions: Kashaf's accomplishments and her admission that she outperformed Zaroon dispel gender preconceptions by demonstrating that women can compete and thrive in fields that have historically been dominated by men, like academia and the workplace.

Impact of competitiveness: The mention of defeating Zaroon suggests a spirit of rivalry and competitiveness, which is good since it inspires people to push themselves to the maximum and pursue greatness in all endeavors, regardless of gender.

Dialogue 2:

“Mom I will not be blackmailed just because I am going to be a mother what will happen to my children. I want to keep my relationship with Zaroon based on self-respect, equality, and loyalty, definitely not because of forced, blackmail and children.”

Female perception:

Assertion of Autonomy: The female protagonist makes an assertion of her agency and autonomy in the dialogue, especially when it comes to her relationship with Zaroon and becoming a mother. This emphasizes how crucial it is for women to oversee their own lives and decisions.

Rejecting Society Pressure: Kashaf's defiance of conventional gender roles and societal pressures is highlighted by her reluctance to give in to blackmail and societal expectations around parenting. In this, women are portrayed as unique people who can oppose and defy repressive standards.

Stress on Self-Respect and Equality: In her relationship with Zaroon, Kashaf places a high value on self-respect, equality, and loyalty. She also highlights the significance of equal partnership and respect for one another in relationships. This emphasizes how important it is for women to demand equality and respect in their personal lives.

Male perception:

Respect for Female Autonomy: The exchange shows how the male character values Kashaf's independence and her ability to make judgments regarding her parenting and relationships. This presents a positive image of males who accept and encourage the autonomy and choices made by women.

Acknowledgment of Gender Equality: Kashaf emphasises self-respect, equality, and loyalty, which speaks to men's perspectives and emphasises the value of equality and mutual respect in partnerships. This implies an understanding of the necessity of gender-equitable partnerships.

Challenging established Gender norms: By rejecting the idea that women are blackmailed or forced into marriage or motherhood, the discussion challenges established gender norms. This is consistent with the male viewpoint that advocates for women's agency and empowerment in decision-making processes.

Dialogue 3:

“Mom, there is no greater jewel than education for a woman.”

Female perception:

Empowerment via Education: The discussion places a strong emphasis on the value of education for women, pointing out that it is a crucial instrument for their self-actualization and empowerment. This illustrates the belief that education empowers women to achieve their goals, become self-sufficient, and make significant contributions to society.

Breaking Societal Norms: The discussion questions conventional gender norms and expectations that can restrict women's access to the school by emphasising education as an asset for women. It emphasises the idea that, despite social restrictions, women have the right to pursue knowledge and intellectual development.

Encouraging Gender Equality: By promoting equal opportunities in education, positioning education as the greatest asset for women helps to advance gender equality. It emphasizes how crucial it is to provide women the same access to school as men so they can realize their full potential and succeed.

Male perception:

Encouragement of Women's Empowerment: The conversation conveys the male character's

encouragement of women's empowerment via education. Recognizing the importance of education for women is consistent with the view that funding women's education is essential to the advancement and development of society.

Realizing Women's Capacity: The conversation acknowledges and celebrates women's capacity to succeed academically, professionally, and personally by highlighting education as a critical resource for women. It represents the idea that, with the right educational opportunities, women can make meaningful contributions to a variety of areas of life.

Promoting Gender Equality: By supporting equitable access to education for women, the discussion advances gender equality. It emphasises how crucial it is to take down obstacles that prevent women from obtaining an education and to make sure that they have equal access to chances for learning and knowledge acquisition as males.

Dialogue 4:

“Life is a collection of many strange things, strange things, coincidences, miracles. Sometimes I don't understand if it must be defined in one sentence, Life is beautiful as Zarun calls it”.

Female perception:

Emotional Richness: Female participants understand the conversation as recognising life's emotional complexities and depth. They centre on the notion that life comprises a variety of odd and lovely experiences that arouse various feelings.

Synchronicity and Connection: Women investigate that oddities and coincidences point to a more profound relationship between people and things. Some interpret these components as omens of serendipity or fate.

Resilience and Miracles: Some women talk about how miracles are instances of hope and resiliency in life. They highlight how people can still find beauty and purpose amid difficult situations.

Personal Relationships: Women associate the idea of beauty in life with, as mentioned by Zarun, personal relationships. It emphasizes the power of love and connection in enriching life.

Male perception:

Philosophical Investigation: Men approach the discussion more philosophically, delving into the

underlying significance of oddities and coincidences. These components have been discussed as facets of existence that inspire philosophical thought.

Skepticism and Rationality: Male participants argue the existence of miracles by debating scientific or reasonable explanations for odd occurrences and coincidences. Men who are contemplating life's beauty find it to be a subjective and existential experience. They might explore individual views and perspectives on what makes life beautiful.

Adventure and Discovery: Male participants regard the dialogue as an encouragement to embrace the unexpected and the unknown, seeking beauty in novelty and discovery. They also see life as an adventure.

The diary writings of Kashaf offer a singular window into her character's deepest feelings, insecurities, and thoughts. This helps viewers comprehend her as a more nuanced and realistic figure. Viewers are privy to her inner struggles, uncertainties, and epiphanies as they read her diary. She becomes more relevant to the spectator because of this glimpse into her character development, elevating her from a fictional character to a real person with genuine experiences. This, in turn, creates a closer bond between viewers and Kashaf, which significantly affects their viewpoint. The journal entries also encourage viewers to feel empathy for one another. Upon reading about Kashaf's life, struggles, and philosophical reflections, readers frequently feel themselves traveling along on her emotional trip. They may start to experience the highs and lows of her life with her as they grow to understand her weaknesses. Her audience's emotional connection to her persona is evidence of her diary entries' influence on their view. It makes viewers want to root for her and emotionally invest in her narrative. In the end, the way that viewers see Kashaf's journal entries is transformed. They generate empathy and emotional involvement, strengthen the bond between the viewer and her character, and promote reflection on universal issues. This enhances the viewing experience and makes a lasting imprint on the audience, influencing how they view Kashaf, the drama's larger issues, and possibly even the outside world.

Findings

The findings reveal important information about the viewers' emotional relationship to Kashaf's persona and the thematic importance of her diary entries through semi-structured interviews and theme analysis. Because of the difficulties and goals Kashaf describes in her diary, viewers show a strong emotional attachment to her. The thematic analysis highlights recurrent themes in Kashaf's reflections, including gender dynamics, empowerment, and societal concerns. By highlighting autonomy, agency, and the rejection of conventional gender roles, Kashaf's portrayal encourages viewers to stand up for their principles and defy social standards. Kashaf encourages self-respect, education, and gender equality through her journal discussions, giving viewers the confidence and fortitude to face life head-on. All things considered, the results highlight how media may affect people's perspectives and motivate societal change, especially by supporting empowerment.

Limitations:

The article contains various limitations, mainly its restricted focus on a small number of the character Kashaf's diary dialogues. The lack of a thorough examination of her character's growth and experiences throughout the play could lead to an oversimplification of her complexity. The article's reach is limited, providing a scant comprehension of the drama's characters and topics.

Conclusion

In "Zindagi Gulzar Hai," the journal entries of Kashaf, the lead female character, greatly influence the audience's opinions. They give the audience a closer understanding of her character by providing a window into her innermost feelings and thoughts. Viewers learn about the complexity of Kashaf's character, her philosophical musings, and her range of emotions through her journal entries. These submissions enhance empathy and comprehension, building a deeper bond between the audience and the character.

The thematic analysis also uncovered recurrent themes and ideas expressed in Kashaf's diary entries. These encompass philosophical and existential contemplations, emotional intricacy, familial and cultural constraints, and the shared human encounter

of attempting to make sense of life's obstacles and enigmas. These themes are explored through the journal entries, which serve as a narrative tool. These issues are relatable to a wide audience and cut beyond stereotypes related to gender.

In summary, Kashaf's journal entries in "Zindagi Gulzar Hai" significantly influence how viewers interpret the character and the drama's larger issues. Through these entries, viewers can have a more intimate insight into Kashaf's inner life and problems, enabling them to relate to her personally. A wide range of viewers can relate to the character and the drama because of her diary entries' recurrent themes and insights, which emphasize the universality of human experiences and emotions.

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