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## Television Drama and Women Rights in South Punjab

### Abstract

*Television drama has been a popular source of entertainment in Pakistan. Throughout its history, this medium has been focusing on society's social and human rights issues when the main attention was given to class, religion, and political problems. Among these, some dramas also focused on the rights of Pakistani women. Lahore centre, being a hub for drama production, addressed the issues of women of central Punjab. However, women living in South Punjab, which have been subject to serious human rights violations, were given lesser attention throughout history. Some of the earliest exceptions in this regard are Darya (River, 1986) and Pyas (Thirst, 1989). Both dramas were written by Asghar Nadeem Syed and aired on Pakistan Television. Despite being anti-patriarchy, both dramas gained huge popularity among the audience. The current study aims to offer a qualitative analysis of both dramas so that to explore how the women of South Punjab were presented historically and how these earliest examples of popular dramas were narrated patriarchy through their stories and characters. This study also argues that women's rights in South Punjab highlighted in the two dramas are still relevant and need to be addressed by the state and society.*

**Keywords:** State, Electronic Media, Drama, Women's Rights, South Punjab.

### Introduction

Television plays in Pakistan have been a very effective medium to influence people's lifestyles and thinking patterns. As a source of low-cost entertainment, Television drama has been more successful in creating awareness and knowledge than other types of entertainment such as films. The image of dramas as 'family entertainment on Pakistan Television gave unrestricted access to the public where all family members consumed these contents at the same time. Hence, the consumption and effects of these contents have a more substantial influence on public minds than any other medium in Pakistan. The other factors that made dramas effective include their free availability, strong human characters relatable to real life, exciting dialogues, powerful stories, and the art and craft of the TV

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playwrights, producers, and directors. Due to this family nature, most of the dramas on Pakistani Televisions gave more attention to human rights, which has been a recurrent TV play theme. A small proportion of the dramas also raised the issues of women's rights. However, most of the women characters shown in those dramas belonged to either central Punjab or from other provinces of Pakistan. What has been widely ignored is attention to the problems of women in South Punjab. These women have long been the victim of patriarchy and violence, arguably more than any other region of Punjab province. Compared to the extent of the problem, significantly less has been shown in Dramas.

Asghar Nadeem Syed, originally from South Punjab, is a nationally acknowledged poet, educationist, and TV playwright. Syed is one of those rare voices who effectively projected human rights issues of women of South Punjab. He is one of the renowned contemporary Urdu playwrights, having many successful TV plays on their credit. Some of his famous plays include *Chand Grahani*, *Riyasat*, *Khuwahish*, *Ghulam Gardish*, *Kirchiyan*, *Nijaat*, *Rohi Dhoop Jali*, *Chaiter*, *Bol Meri Machli*, *Khuda Zameen Se Gaya Nahin*, *Pyas*, and *Darya*. Through his TV plays, Syed has successfully highlighted issues of a lopsided Pakistani society. Khadija Tariq (2019) notes that "Syed has never shied away from pinpointing negativities prevalent in our society." He has used unorthodox subjects and issues to write his plays since the 1970s. Originality in his writing stems from his observation and experience of life. He explains his source of information for writing in the following words:

Every writer should have his/her signature style or something that distinguishes him or her from others. You can learn the basics of the craft by studying or reading classics or scripts. But no one can teach you how to go about the craft, which you can only polish with time and experience. You can learn how to develop stories or layout the narrative structure of a piece of writing, but originality is derived only through your individual life experiences or the cultural milieu you dwell in. The story you write or the characters you develop are inspired from [sic] your individual life experiences, and no book or person can teach you this. (Tariq, 2019)

Having such vast experience of drama writing and being brought up in Southern Punjab, Asghar Nadeem Syed's plays are unlike any other drama writers. Therefore, the study has selected his plays to understand and explore how the earliest dramas represented women of South Punjab.

This is a qualitative study that aimed to analyze Asghar Nadeem Syed's plays, *Pyas* and *Darya*. These dramas focused on human rights issues while representing the women of South Punjab. Based on his observation and experience of life in South Punjab, those two very popular plays broadcasted in the 1980s presented women issues in a localized fashion. Though a reflection of social life in South Punjab of that particular time, *Pyas* and *Darya* mirror the contemporary women issues of the area in many ways. Being family dramas, the two plays cover several versions of contemporary women in South Punjab through their household

characters, which help to understand personal, social, marital, economic, and political constraints. It was not easy in the 1980s to choose unorthodox topics highlighting human rights issues. Babar Ali, in his article published in *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1986, criticized Pakistan Television plays in the following manner:

TV plays almost always concern either feudals or big industrialists; they seldom touch the problems of the real people in the country. Lately, however, there has been a slight shift to some of the problems of the peasants in the rural areas, but the bottom line is to keep the peasants in their place and to say that Allah is responsible for their social position and only by asking his forgiveness can they hope to improve it. (Ali, 1986)

Therefore, *Pyas* and *Darya* are also significant in this regard that the writer chose to depict one of the difficult topics at that time. Both of the dramas gained huge popularity among the audience.

### Literature Review

Anita M. Weiss (2003) analyses Pakistan's response to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The author argues that it is a serious challenge for Pakistani society to transform conservative and traditional religious interpretations of women's legal rights into understandings socially acceptable while complying with the requirements of CEDAW. Siobhan Mullally (2005) argues that in Pakistan, gender equality envisaged by the constitution has generally been compromised in the pretext of nation-building based on religious identity. Subsequently, this has resulted in women being denied equal human rights. Feminists, reformists, and liberals speaking for women have been marginalized in Pakistani society. Shuchi Kothari (2005) explores how women's sphere was represented in Urdu drama serials in the 1980s and 1990s. Laws introduced in the Zia period were primarily focused on the policing of female visibility and involvement in the public sphere that affected women in social, political, and cultural terms. The Urdu drama serials present a discourse where women are marked with resistance, transgression, and negotiation with regard to their social limits in a patriarchal religious society.

Qaiser & Jabeen (2008) attempt to study the seriousness of Pakistan Television Dramas in their projection of women's issues. The study finds that female playwrights have effectively discussed women's issues. However, Amjad Ali Bukhari (2010) observes that incidents of violence against women in South Punjab include rape, burning, acid throwing, honour killings, Kala Kali or Karo Kari, watta-satta or reciprocal marriage, forced and early age marriages, and dowry. Malik & Courtney (2011) argue that higher education in Pakistan facilitates women's empowerment in terms of economic independence and better decision-making position within the family. The study found that higher education is an important factor in enabling women to resist discriminatory practices. Chaudhry, Nosheen, & Lodhi (2012) argue that Islam does not curtail women's rights. The

issues related to women's empowerment in South Punjab, such as education, access to media, health facilities, and freedom from fear of violence, are actually due to inadequate knowledge of the people. The study suggests that the people in South Punjab should be educated to know the accurate directions of Islam.

Muhammad Asif (2013) observes that women in rural areas of South Punjab are more vulnerable to violence because of their lower literacy rates. The study suggests that media by the projection of women issues can play a positive and productive role by educating women of South Punjab. Hussain, Habib, & Akhter (2014) argue that gender inequality in South Punjab is associated with stereotypes. The study finds that media has an important role in the existence of stereotypes, whereas such stereotypes restrict women's access to public sphere. The article suggests that the state of affairs can be changed by providing awareness and education to people. Sanchita Bhattacharya (2014) observes that male dominance in Pakistan has resulted in violence against women who are unable to claim their due rights from their fathers, brothers, husbands or male relatives generally in control of women. The author is of the view that forced marriages, honour killings, selling of brides, dowry deaths, marriage to Quran meaning renouncing the right to marry, acid attacks, political exclusion, and terrorism are important human rights issues related to women in Pakistan.

Zakar, Zakar, & Abbas (2015) observe that women living in rural areas have a weaker social position and are unaware of their legal rights and hence comparatively more vulnerable to violence. The study finds that psychological violence caused by a lower level of education, low income, and marriage at an early age is the most common form of violence against rural women. The study concludes that domestic violence is positively associated with poor mental and reproductive health of women. Naqvi & Ibrar (2015) are of the view that women living in rural areas of Multan has little awareness with regard to their health, education, property, and marriage rights. The study finds that women in rural areas of Multan are deprived of their human and fundamental right to education, and they lack decision-making about themselves and their children. Shehzadi Zammurad Awan (2016) concludes that the mindset of society needs to be transformed through education, mass media, and the support of civil society to understand the true value of women's education and empowerment.

Abrar-ul-haq, Jali, & Nural Islam (2017) is a quantitative study that concludes that education, socio-economic conditions of women, and family structure are important factors of women empowerment in rural areas of South Punjab. Ashraf, Abrar-ul-Haq, & Ashraf (2017) note that in District Bahawalpur, located in South Punjab, women have been subject to serious human rights violations such as sexual and domestic violence, honour killings, torture, and acid attacks. The study suggests that women's rights cannot be improved without taking appropriate legal measures coupled with a change in social customs, norms, and mentality. Authors further suggest that improving education standards, increasing employment

opportunities, and increasing social and political participation can help change the social practices.

Saleem Abbas (2018) analyses forty female characters of Urdu television dramas telecasted between 2012-2016. The study finds that Urdu television dramas project liberal, independent, bold, and modern female characters as negative, socially unacceptable, and unsuccessful women. Such negative projection supports passivity, submissiveness, and subordination of women in Pakistan while curtailing how women can have independent and progressive approaches. Saleem Abbas (2018b), through the discourse analyses of two television dramas of the 1980s, argued that dramas in President Zia's period generally projected highly conservative images of women in order to reinforce women's conformity with established norms of the society.

Ashfaq & Shafiq (2018) argue that Pakistani television dramas are based on the stereotypes of 'perfect woman,' which reinforce the patriarchal patterns in Pakistan. Most of the Pakistani dramas represent the image of a perfect woman as submissive, humble, restricted to homes, young, slim, good-looking, and wearing humble and simple national dresses. On the other hand, negative side role female characters are presented as bold, outspoken, modern, educated, and career-oriented. Momoe Makino (2019) notes that dowry is illegal, but still, the practice goes on in rural Punjab. The study finds that a higher dowry amount, especially furniture, electronics, and home appliances, increases the women's status and respect in their in-laws. Ahmed & Wahab (2019) analyze fifty-four episodes of two Pakistani dramas intending to compare female characters with male ones. The study finds that women are generally represented as submissive and exploited creatures, strengthening their constructed image of weak and inferior human beings. Ibrahim, Amin, & Rehman (2019), through a survey of 100 housewives and students, find that most female viewers wish to see women in more independent and self-sufficient roles and reject the submissive representations of women. The study suggests that drama should be written with a more balanced approach by presenting both liberal and conservative views of women.

### **Research Questions**

Q. 1 How have the Pakistani Television Dramas projected the issue of women's rights in South Punjab?

Q. 2 How did the plots and characters of the television dramas project the issues related to women's rights?

Q. 3 What were the human and fundamental rights issues highlighted by the Television Dramas?

### **Methodology**

This is a qualitative study that attempted to present an analysis of Television Dramas which addressed the rights of women of South Punjab. We selected this methodology because analysis of drama contents gives different possible interpretations that other methods such as survey do not offer. Moreover, having an understanding of the narrative, selection of characters, story and plot, would better help us understand the way women's rights are being highlighted in Pakistani Dramas. A telephonic interview was also conducted with Asghar Nadeem Syed in order to discuss the television dramas written on women issues in South Punjab.

We selected *Pyas* and *Darya*, written by Asghar Nadeem Syed, by using purposive sampling. One can argue that these are old dramas. However, we argue that these dramas of the 1980s are still very relevant to Pakistani society as they work as a lens to understand the issues and problems that southern Punjab women are facing these days if they are any different from the women of the 1980s or they are still the same?

### Analysis

In the following section, we analyze the selection of titles of dramas and the nature of characters. Afterward, the plot, story, and characters of *Pyas* and *Darya* are analyzed in the respective order to see how the writer has highlighted women's issues in South Punjab. Finally, this section discusses the writer's concept of ideal men and women and his villain characters.

Titles of Asghar Nadeem Syed's dramas point out some disadvantages, an imbalanced society, and unfulfilled desires. *Pyas* refers to the thirst of inhabitants of impoverished areas of rural and semi-rural areas of South Punjab. With both positive and negative traits, the well-crafted characters of the play having many blessings in their lives, long for their freedom and true love. The characters are chained by the traditional patterns of patriarchal rituals, where women control their fathers or husbands. Syed believes that men have become dominant not because they are born to dominate, rather because of their control of financial resources.

Seema, daughter of a feudal lord, aged 22, lives in Multan and is the play's central character who wishes to have a Master's degree in History after completing her BA as a private candidate. Being a female, she was not allowed to attend college and had to prepare and appear in exams from home as a private candidate. To qualify for the exam, her father, Qadeer Khan, reluctantly allows her to have tuition at home with the condition that her instructor Ashraf Shah will sit behind the curtain, and her mother shall remain present with her during the session. In the meantime, Qadeer Khan decides to marry Seema with his mentally abnormal nephew so that to keep his land and assets within the family. Seema, terrified by this decision and finding no way to convince her father to change his mind, runs away secretly and goes to a women's protection center named *Daar ul Amaan* in Lahore. Seema

running away from home hurts Qadeer Khan's sense of 'honour' badly that he decides to kill Seema when found. He accuses her teacher Ashraf Shah of kidnapping his daughter and gets a case registered against him at the police station. Shah gets bail from the court after being arrested on kidnapping charges. This news is published in the papers that Seema also happens to read and decides to return to her home Multan to clear her innocent teacher from the kidnapping charges. She contacts Ashraf Shah, and eventually, both have to marry to save their lives and get legal protection. Due to this continuous pressure and fear of death of her daughter, Taj Bibi loses her mind. The drama concludes with the death of Qadeer Khan, who commits suicide due to 'shame' after reading the news of his daughter's marriage with Ashraf Shah.

In the following section, we offer a brief analysis of characters in *Pyas*, which is the story of four households in which women are subject to gender-based abuse and violation of their fundamental human rights. The first family is headed by Qadeer Khan, who is a feudal lord living in Multan. This is a usual practice of well-off feudal families to live in nearby cities and drive their incomes from farming on nearby agricultural lands where they do not need to work or be present. Qadeer Khan bears the expenses of two houses having two wives.

In the first house, Qadeer Khan has a wife, Taj Bibi, daughter Seema, and a maid, Janto. Taj Bibi is the cousin wife of Qadeer Khan with whom the elders arranged marriage. Taj Bibi and Qadeer Khan never enjoy a cordial relationship throughout their lives, and we see Taj Bibi often being humiliated and scolded. Seema is also frightened of her father's strict attitude. She is not allowed to go out of the home for any purposes and is deprived of her fundamental rights such as right to education, the right to decide about her marriage, the right to move freely, and eventually denied her right to live. The third female character of the house, Janto, being a maid, is also subject to insult, torture, and violence. Though not explicit, at some places, there are some references to her being sexually abused. At one stage, she is handed over to the police for investigation and is tortured by police. This household projects the patriarchal patterns of control and domination where the male head of the family, having control of all financial resources, enjoys the ultimate decision-making power. He decides the fates of his family members and even servants working under his control.

Qadeer Khan's second wife, Shamshado, is a young and beautiful *tawaif*, a traditional female singer, who apparently has left her old profession after her marriage. Qadeer Khan has provided her a separate home in which her so-called 'aunt' who was her *Naiika* or Madame, her younger brother Sohanra her sister-in-law (Sohanra's wife) Parveen. Qadeer Khan occasionally comes to this second house to spend time with Shamshado. In sharp contrast, the decision-making power in this house is in the hands of Shamshado's aunt, who controls all the income and financial resources. Therefore, Shamshado's brother Sohanra has no say in the family decision making and nobody listens to him. In our interview with Asghar Nadeem Syed conducted particularly for this study, in the context of

Shamshado's character, he explained that in South Punjab, there had been a tradition in the people of some lower classes to offer one of their good looking daughters to some feudal lord to become his wife. In return, this girl would be a source to extend financial support to the whole family.

It appears that the actual plan of the *Naika* (Shamshado's aunt) is to get hold of all lands and assets of Qadeer Khan and then leave him. She uses Shamshado for this purpose and eventually succeeded when Qadeer Khan legally disowns his daughter and transfers all his property in Shamshado's name. In the final sequence of the drama, when Qadeer Khan finds out about his daughter's court marriage and goes to his second wife in need of emotional support. There he finds deserted Sohanra alone in the home, telling him that all three women have ditched them and gone somewhere. This breaks Qadeer Khan's heart, and he eventually commits suicide.

The third household belongs to Syed Salman Shah, a Peer (spiritual leader). Salman Shah has two sons and a daughter. His son Ashraf Shah lives with his parents, his daughter moved to Karachi after her marriage, and his second son has become a Faqeer (religious mendicant). The system in this house is different from Qadeer Khan's house as we see Salman Shah's wife being treated with respect by her son and the husband. However, the situation in this house is also not an ideal one as her third child was taken away from her, and she is not allowed to see her. The male head of the family took this decision, and as a woman, she has to accept the decision.

The fourth family is of Khairoo, a drug-addicted poor living with his young daughter Jeeran and wife. Khairoo wishes to marry Jeeran to an aged person in return for money and tortures her because of her resistance. Being an addict, Khairoo keeps torturing his wife and daughter. Jeeran falls in love with Salman Shah's faqir son Jeewna. However, Jeeran cannot decide her life partner and is forcefully married to the older man. Jeeran, in an attempt to free herself, also runs away from her husband's house and becomes a Faqeer herself.

*Darya* is the second play which also revolves around a female character Bhaagi. Her husband divorces her after four years of their marriage. Before their divorce, they live in the city of Bahawalpur. The husband Shah Mureed tortures her physically and psychologically for being unable to produce a child. One day after a routine quarrel, he divorces Bhaagi and attempts to kill her. In her self-defence, Bhaagi hits on his head and thinks that she has killed her husband. Bhaagi, being scared, runs towards Rohi, Cholistan desert. She loses her consciousness in the desert and is found by the residents of a far-flung small village of Rohi. According to local values, a stranger female cannot live in the village without marriage. Therefore, elders of the village decide to marry Bhaagi with Sanwal. Interestingly, this marriage is not forced and according to traditions, Bhaagi and Sanwal are left on a mound to determine the will of both individuals. If both of them come back to the village together, it signifies that they do not have any objection to the proposed

marriage, but if they take separate routes to return, it means either of them is not happy with the proposal. When the two individuals return together, then eventually, their marriage is arranged and celebrated by all.

According to yet another tradition, the newly married couple has to travel towards the remains of the Hakra river near Derawar Fort. The journey starts on the camel's back, and the couple has to go through a very challenging desert terrain in the scorching heat and little water. When they reach the Hakra River, Shah Mureed, already searching for Bhaagi, finds Sanwal and Bhaagi returning to their village. He follows them and camps outside Sanwal's village. Sanwal, being unaware of Bhaagi's past, becomes his good friend. Shah Mureed, who is a changed person now, regrets his behaviour with Bhaagi. When Sanwal realizes that Shah Mureed is Bhaagi's ex-husband and intends to bring her back, he feels hurt. It is also disclosed that Bhaagi is expecting Sanwal's baby. According to village customs, if a rightful 'master' such as husband, brother, or father comes to bring back a sheltered woman, she must be handed over to such a person. However, Sanwal gives a free and fair chance to Bhaagi to decide her fate. He takes her to Shah Mureed to talk to him and asks her to go with Shah Mureed if she prefers to do so or return to Sanwal at her own will. Bhaagi, after talking to Shah Mureed returns to Sanwal, and Shah Mureed leaves forever.

The plot of the two plays agrees that women are subject to domestic violence at the hands of the male members of their families. However, women in *Darya* living in Rohi having a more supportive rather equal role in generating economic resources looked more empowered and freer from violence.

Syed's ideal male is the one who respects women and their human rights. However, Syed's villain is the one who considers women as a material thing and wishes to possess and control them for their own benefit. Syed's ideal female or heroine is the one who speaks for her rights and tries to break the patriarchal patterns of society.

The above discussion has offered a description of how the women of the 1980s were being depicted in the dramas. The remaining part of this paper will compare the women of the 1980s with the depiction of contemporary women using secondary literature. The comparison is made with a purpose of seeing if the women issues highlighted in the Dramas of the late 1980s are still relevant or not.

### **Conservative Image of the Women**

The existing literature highlights that socially acceptable image in Pakistani society in general and South Punjab, in particular, is conservative in nature (For reference see Abbas, 2018a, 2018b; Ahmed & Wahab, 2019; Ashfaq & Shafiq, 2018; Awan, 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2019; Weiss, 2003). By socially acceptable conservative image, women are submissive, humble, less educated, and restricted to the home, wearing modest and simple dresses. Likewise, liberal, independent,

bold, and modern women are considered negative and socially unacceptable. The people who speak for women to change this conservative image of women are marginalised in Pakistani society. Social approval of such a submissive image creates and perpetuates the idea of women as inferior human beings.

Women characters in *Pyas* adhere to the conservative image of women. For example, Taj Bibi, Seema, Salman Shah's wife, Jantoo, and Jeeran all are submissive, humble, mostly having poor or less education, strictly restricted to the home, always wearing humble and simple dresses. Ashraf Shah, Asghar Nadeem Syed's ideal man, is a feminist and liberal person who speaks for women's rights in society, and his views are disliked by the powerful characters of Qadeer Khan and Salman Shah. So much so, Ashraf Shah is arrested and tortured by police being a suspect of Seema's abduction. Likewise, women in *Darya*, especially the central character Bhagi also live up to the criteria of the conservative image of women. Whereas Sanwal, who supports the rights of women and considers them equal human beings, has to face dislike and criticism from his fellow villagers.

### **Violence Against Women**

According to the new body of literature, women in South Punjab are subject to psychological and physical torture, sexual harassment, honour killings, forced marriages, selling of brides, and early age marriages ( See Ashraf et al., 2017; Bhattacharya, 2014; Zakar et al., 2015). Violence has serious implications as it results in women's poor mental and reproductive health (Zakar et al., 2015).

Women characters of *Pyas* face both physical and mental torture. For example, Taj Bibi is the best example of a woman subject to domestic violence suffering from poor mental and reproductive health. Taj Bibi is psychologically suppressed and tortured when Seema runs away from her home to avoid her forced marriage with her mentally disabled cousin, Qadeer Khan, her father, who wishes to find and kill her in the name of honour. Seema is the only child of Taj Bibi, although a feudal lord wants many male children, which signifies that Taj Bibi's reproductive health is not very good. After Seema disappears, Taj Bibi loses her mind. Another female character, Jeeran faces sexual harassment. She is tortured by her father, who eventually sells her to an older man for marriage. Jeeran suffers from serious psychological conditions and usually has fits that her superstitious and illiterate mother considers the effect of some evil spirit or a jin. Again, Jeeran is taken to Salman Shah for spiritual treatment, where she is beaten to be relieved from jin.

Similarly, Bhagi seems unaware of her rights and therefore continues to face violence by Shah Mureed. During four years of her wedlock with Shah Mureed, Bhagi is unable to carry a child. However, later in the presence of Sanwal, a loving and caring husband, she expects a baby soon after her marriage with Sanwal. Bhagi also seems a psychologically disturbed person as she looks frightened and remains most of the time silent, and speaks rarely.

### **Policing of Female Visibility and Involvement in Public Sphere**

Female visibility and involvement in the public sphere is policed and monitored by the male members of the society (Kothari, 2005). This perspective is evident in both dramas. For example, Seema is allowed to take tutoring from Ashraf Shah while she sits behind the curtain where Ashraf cannot see him. Seema's mother has to remain present during the teaching activity to protect Seema. In *Darya*, according to the tradition of a Rohi village, stranger women are not allowed to live in the village without marriage. Further, when a lawful guardian husband, father, or brother comes to claim a sheltered woman, that has to be handed over to the guardian, where women's consent is not required.

### **Lack of Equal Opportunities for Education and Economic Inclusion**

From the review of existing contemporary literature, women's issues in South Punjab are largely related to their lack of education. Therefore, if a society wishes to change the state of women's rights violations, it needs to educate its women in a better way (See Abrar-ul-haq et al., 2017; Awan, 2016; Naqvi & Ibrar, 2015).

Due to a compromised and limited education, women characters in *Pyas* seem to be unaware of their legal rights. Therefore, none of the female characters seeks legal help from the police or courts. Seema is not allowed to take admission into college. Her father vehemently opposes her desire to continue her education as a private candidate. Seema cannot start her tuition as a private candidate without the approval of her father. Women in *Pyas* do not have equal education opportunities. Seema's education is opposed because it is believed that women will become independent, bold, and modern, which will be socially unacceptable and unsuccessful. The overall environment does not seem conducive for women getting an education and contributing to economic activity.

In *Darya*, Bhagi also seems unaware of her rights and therefore continues to face violence by Shah Mureed. Formal education seems irrelevant in Rohi's context. However, women in Rohi learn to make handicrafts. By selling their handicrafts to agents coming from cities, they earn money, and hence they have a better say in the household decision making.

### **Conclusion**

Television drama can effectively educate people about women's rights and empowerment in South Punjab. However, there are very few television dramas produced in the last thirty years. Our selected dramas *Pyas* and *Darya* are among those few plays made on the subject. *Pyas* is a depiction of female characters as daughter, wife, beloved, and Tawaif. All women are subject to gender-based violence except the Tawaif Shamshado, who is shown as the only powerful female character who is able to maintain her independence. However, later it appears that even Shamshado was not independent, and she had to follow the instructions of

her so-called 'aunt'. Asghar Nadeem Syed's other female characters long for their fundamental human rights such as education, movement, expression, life, freedom from torture and abuse, and freedom to choose a life partner. The male characters control and dominate the females of their families. This is because they control the income and financial resources of the household.

There are certain significant women's rights issues that exist in South Punjab. For example, construction and projection of a conservative image of women, violence against women, policing of female visibility and involvement in the public sphere, and lack of equal opportunities for education. Both *Darya* and *Pyas* effectively highlighted most of these very important issues related to women's rights in South Punjab. Given the very limited dramas produced on the subject, it certainly requires doing more.

Finally, we also observed that the treatment of women in Dramas had not changed much in the last three decades. The violence against women, control and domination, and treating women as objects are some of the key examples which continue to be presented in contemporary TV dramas.

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