

Religious Narratives in Dramas Based on Islamic Themes: A Case Study of Umera Ahmed's Dramas

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Abstract

TV drama is an effective persuasion tool due to its storytelling feature. Pakistani TV dramas are watched across the globe, and its viewers have a strong admiration for the portrayal of fundamental issues in its stories. Pakistani TV dramas have explored religion and spirituality while focusing on social issues. The present study aims to see how Islam has been represented in religious theme-based dramas and to what extent the religious content is relatable to viewers with different religious identities. In this regard, content analysis of three religious theme-based dramas of writer Umera Ahmed was conducted. The findings highlight the major religious dimensions portrayed in selected TV dramas and repeated representations of religious virtues valued in religions other than Islam, like the authority of God, the concept of heaven and hell, the importance of forgiveness, and human rights.

Keywords: TV Drama, Religious Theme, Islam and Humanity.

Introduction

TV drama recreates social reality through its stories inspired by the surrounding world (Qadri et al., 2021). It focuses on the dominant behaviors, practices, and societal problems (Naz & Mahmood, 2015). Apart from being a source of entertainment, TV drama is often used to highlight social issues by showcasing a well-knitted story and convincing performances. Television series are also effective platforms for representing stereotypes from a religious perspective to let people know, discuss the stigmatized segments of society, and feel their sufferings through these drama stories (Wilder, 2017). There has been a strong connection between drama and religion in history. The ancient Greek and Roman dramas were mainly aimed at imparting knowledge about religion (Paschini, 2019).

Literature Review

Storytelling is an innate characteristic of human beings. It effectively disseminates cultural and social trends for entertainment and education, and TV drama is an example of performance-based storytelling (Naz & Mahmood, 2015). The story not only states the protagonist's perspective of being a victim of some discrimination or injustice but also demonstrates the circumstances that resulted in an atrocity, the behavior of all segments of society, and finally, the fighting spirit of the

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protagonist for survival. Hence TV drama, through the entertainment-education process, provides the necessary knowledge to the audience and motivates them to change their mindsets, ultimately leading to behavioral change (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Tufte, 2005; Desmon, 2017).

Vermeer (2014) finds out that the church no longer remains the only place for Americans to explore religious questions, and religious scholars need to analyze other avenues, such as television, to understand various dimensions of religion. Television has a significant role in developing cultural narratives and shaping public opinion over different issues; more recently, it has started producing content on religion and the concept of God (Powell, 2012).

In today's time, the nature of dramas has changed. With the advent of technology, more believability is associated with TV drama, leaving significantly less chance for its viewers to escape from its effects. Today, drama showcases a society's cultural and religious values to a global audience. In this regard, Indian dramas are observed to be portraying religious values more often than Pakistani dramas. The coverage of their religious places and events is frequent in their dramas and even evident in the language of their characters. Pakistani dramas rarely incorporate religious depictions. The effect of Indian dramas is visible in our society as people know more about Hindu religion and language via these dramas (Qadri et al., 2021).

Pakistani dramas are primarily based on family politics or love triangles, but the current wave is setting the trend of dramas with deeper meanings and refreshing subject matter (Isani, 2020). These focus on spirituality and removing misconceptions about Islam (Sheraz, 2020). Such dramas serve a higher purpose than that of mere entertainment. Though writing dramas on religious themes is tricky, our few writers have the courage and expertise to explore this territory (Zahra, 2020).

The current research aims to analyze this rather unrevealed genre for its representation of religion. At present, information and entertainment have been merged, and changing public perception with entertainment programs is considered more effective (Frandsen, 2017). This study would explore the content of these dramas to find out how religious knowledge is incorporated in drama stories, what aspects of Islam have been focused on more, and to what extent the disseminated concepts are relatable for people with different religious identities.

The following are the research objectives:

1. To discover how Islam is being represented in religious theme-based dramas of Pakistan.
2. To explore how much the disseminated Islamic information is relatable for viewers from different religious identities.

Theoretical Framework

The narrative paradigm provides a theoretical foundation for the present research and strongly endorses the power of storytelling. Narrative Paradigm theory validates the assumption that drama is an effective means of disseminating information, as the theory states that all meaningful information is storytelling. The theory was proposed by Walter (1978), who argues that human beings "experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends" (p. 24). He proposed that a rational approach and arguments are not enough to influence human beings; instead, a narrative story merges arguments with plot, characters, and actions to stimulate peoples' beliefs and behaviors. Fisher explains that people judge the worth of a story based on its internal consistency and credibility. Humans shape narratives based on their experiences and have a specific criterion for judging the believability of each story, which is called narrative rationality. A person evaluates a tale based on coherence and narrative fidelity through narrative rationality. Coherence refers to the completeness of a story in

terms of actions, characters, and logical sequencing. At the same time, fidelity is the story's reliability or the extent to which the story is relatable to the person.

Methodology

This study aims to analyze the selected religious theme-based dramas through their drama content. For this purpose, the study will apply a qualitative approach involving content analysis of religious theme-based dramas. This approach is based on the philosophical foundations of interpretivism. Qualitative content analysis is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278).

The study is focused on analyzing the content of religious theme-based TV dramas of renowned writer *Umera Ahmed*, who is regarded as one of the contemporary Pakistani Writers who speak and express Islamic identity and Islamic values through her characters (Al-Amodi & Manqoush, 2024).

The following are the titles of the dramas selected for analysis.

1. Alif
2. Shehr-e-Zaat
3. Meri Zaat Zarra-e-Benishan

Categories for Content Analysis

The present research will conduct a qualitative content analysis of the selected dramas on religious themes. The primary purpose is to get an understanding of religious narratives being produced through this genre. The directed content analysis approach is applied, in which initial coding starts with a theory or relevant research findings. Generating concepts or variables from theory or previous studies is also beneficial for qualitative research, especially at the inception of data analysis. Once the analysis starts, the researcher, through inductive reasoning, derives themes and categories from the data through careful examination and constant comparison.

Sr. No.	Themes	Sub Themes	Operationalization of Sub Themes
	Conception of God	Attributes of Allah	1.1 All powerful 1.2 Merciful 1.3 Impeccable 1.4 Ultimate Healer 1.5 Forgiveness
		Relationship between Allah and man	2.1 central for man's existence 2.2 Source of true happiness 2.3 Only eternal love 2.4 Materialistic desires weaken the bond.
		God's Criteria of superior Human	3.1 Submission to the will of God 3.2 Good Intent of the believer 3.3 Thankfulness
	Purpose of Life	Reality of life in Islam	1.1 Life is a test. 1.2 Seeking God's love 1.3 Rewards for believers
		Guidelines on how to live life.	2.1 Distinction between Right and wrong 2.2 Refrain from Self Obsession and self-love 2.3 Concept of heaven and hell
	Religious Rituals, Virtues & moral principles	Obligatory Ibadaat in Islam	1.1 Holy Quran as a guidebook 1.2 Offering Prayer to thank Allah for His blessings.
		Means of Livelihood	2.1 Significance of Honest livelihood 2.2 Avoiding excessive materialism.
		Haqooq-ul-Ibaad	3.1 Rights of relatives 3.2 Rights of neighbors
		Importance of Forgiveness	4.1 Allah likes forgiveness. 4.2 Forgiveness for the sake of Allah is highly valued.
		Simplicity in life/prohibition from extravagance	4.3 Forgiveness is strength not weakness. 5.1 wastage of resources is prohibited in Islam. 5.2 Simplicity is legacy of Prophet (PBUH)
	Belief on Life after Death	Concept of <i>Akhirat</i>	2.1 Significance of Good deeds 2.2 Criteria of being successful in <i>Akhirat</i>
		Concept of paradise and Hell	3.1 Hell fire for sinful people

Data Analysis

Alif

The story touched upon the letter 'alif' as a reference and metaphor for connection to God. Alif is the journey of Momin and Momina, where Momin's journey is to rediscover his roots and Momina's journey is to maintain the livelihood of her family by fateful events their paths will join. Momina helps him to connect with who he really is. The negativity in his personality has put him on a path where success and glamour meet him, but he drifts away from his purpose in life.

Conception of God

Following major themes have been derived from drama serial Alif with reference to concept of God.

Attributes of God

The highlighted attributes of God in drama *Alif* shows that Allah is all powerful and everything in this world is under His strict control and only He has the ultimate authority to change things.

مومن: میرا اور آپ کا نظریاتی اختلاف ہے اور آپ زندگی کے بارے میں میرا نظریہ نہیں بدل سکتے

دادا: لیکن اللہ تو بدل سکتا ہے

“Momin: we have an ideological difference about life, and you cannot change my ideology. Grandfather: But Allah can change it (Alif, Episode: 4)”.

Allah offers His guidance to those who are willing to strive for it. One verse of holy Quran has been cited in drama for seeking Allah’s guidance.

Allah is merciful and never leaves his followers alone. When Momina gets work in Hollywood project she verbalizes this attribute of Allah.

اللہ واقعی بہت رحیم ہے

“Allah is most merciful” (Alif, Episode: 5).

Relationship Between God and Man

In drama serial *Alif*, the relationship of man and God is evident from its title. It implies that man’s connection to God is his lifeline and biggest support to lead a successful life.

اللہ اور بندے کا تعلق اللہ کے نام میں ہے؛ الف۔۔۔ جس کے ایک سرے پر بندہ اور دوسرے سرے پے اللہ اگر الف سیدھا ہو تو اللہ بہت قریب ہے

“Connection between Allah and man is hidden in Allah’s name; ALIF at one side of which is man and on the other side is Allah. If Alif is straight, then Allah is very close to the man” (Alif, Episode: 20).

The story narrates that having a strong connection with God can give a person true happiness. The worldly success and luxuries only cause restlessness and desire for more.

دادا: تم خوش ہو؟

مومن: میرا لائف اسٹائل دیکھیں گھر دیکھیں میری شہرت دیکھیں میرا اکیریز دیکھیں میرے پاس وہ سب کچھ ہے جو میری عمر کے لڑکے کا خواب

ہے تو خوش ہونا تو جتنا ہے نا

دادا: ایسے لگتے کیوں نہیں ہو؟

Momin’s grandfather: Are you happy?

Momin: Look at my lifestyle; my bungalow, cars, may fame and successful career.

I have got everything which a young boy of my age would desire of, so certainly I should be happy.

Momin’s Grandfather: But it does not look Like” (Alif, Episode:3).

God’s Criteria of superior Human

In drama serial *Alif*, a clear distinction is shown between the standards of being a superior human for Allah and standards of being a superior person in physical world, both are found at opposite poles.

دادا: میں اس جسم کی بات کر رہا ہوں جس کی تم پوجا کرتے ہو جس کی پرستش میں ساری زندگی کو داؤ پر لگا رکھا ہے اور مل گیا رہا ہے حسد- رقابت- بے عزتی- بے چینی- آسائشوں کے ساتھ

“Grandfather: I am talking about the body you worship, for which you have put all your life at stake. And look what you are getting is these luxuries but along with jealousy, hatred, insult, restlessness...” (Alif, Episode:8).

Qalb-e-Momin looks at the calligraphy of one verse of Surah Fatiha and repeats its few more verses which clearly guides the way to please Allah and seek His blessings.

یا اللہ مجھے سیدھا راستہ دکھا دے ان لوگوں کا راستہ جن سے تو راضی ہو ان لوگوں کا نہیں جن سے تو ناراض ہو یا اللہ یا اللہ اهدنا الصراط المستقیم

“Momin: Guide us along the Straight Path, the Path of those You have blessed—not those You are displeased with, or those who are astray” (Alif, Episode:14).

Purpose of Life

Every religion gives insight on the purpose behind the existence of this world. Islam teaches its followers to submit to the will of God. Following are the few themes that have been extracted from the selected dramas which are giving Islamic perspective on the purpose of life.

Reality of Life

As per teachings of Islam, Life is a test for mankind. The guidelines for passing this test have also been provided. Those who pass this test will be rewarded with big prizes.

ماسٹر ابراہیم: مومنین بے آزمائشیں آتی ہیں لیکن پھر اجر اتنا ہی بڑا ہوتا ہے اللہ نے تو وعدہ کیا ہے اپنے بندوں کو اجر دینے کا۔ اللہ اپنے وعدے رکھتا ہے۔
- زبان کا بڑا پکا ہے میرا رب -

“Believers must go through hardships in life but then their big reward awaits their way. Allah has promised of great rewards, and HE keeps His promises always” (Alif, Episode: 6).

Guidelines on how to live Life

In the drama serial Alif, the concept of right and wrong is given very effectively. The ultimate goal of life is to attain God’s love and for that purpose it is essential to discriminate between right and wrong. The attractions of the materialistic world are a delusion, and right acts strengthen and nourish one’s spirit.

دادا بتائیے کیا ہے سیدھا راستہ؟

دادا: فلاح کا

مومن: یعنی کامیابی کا۔ (اپنی شان و شوکت دکھاتے ہوئے) یہ ہوتی ہے فلاح اور کامیابی

دادا: جو تم کر رہے ہو وہ بے حیائی ہے اور اس بے حیائی میں سب ملتا ہے۔ میں نے یہ دولت نہیں کمائی مگر اللہ مجھے جانتا ہے۔ پہچانتا ہے۔ تمہیں جانتا ہے

اللہ؟

“Momin Grandfather what is the right path?

Grandfather: of salvation

Momin: means of success (showing his wealth and glory) and this is the success.

Grandfather: What you are doing is vulgarity and it will give you all material success. I have not earned this wealth, but Allah knows me; recognizes me. Does Allah know you?” (Alif, Episode: 4).

Religious Rituals, Virtues & Moral Principles

Obligatory Ibadaat in Islam

Offering prayer is shown to be a way of thanking God for His countless blessing upon mankind. Qalb-e-Momin when offers prayer, he remembers one verse of Quran that his grandfather has gifted him which says.

یہ "حقیقت ہے کہ انسان اپنے پروردگار کا احسان ناشناس ہے"

"Man is very ungrateful to His Lord" (Alif, Episode: 17).

He (Qalb-e-Momin) cries in pain that he has never thanked God for all the blessing God has bestowed upon him.

The drama Alif has highlighted multiple verses of Quran through calligraphy. The Quran is shown as a guiding book which helps mankind in knowing the true purpose of life.

(عبدالہ صاحب کے ہاتھ کا لکھا قرآن کا نسخہ ماسٹر صاحب مومنہ کو دیتے ہیں)

مومنہ: مجھے کیوں دے رہے ہیں؟

ماسٹر صاحب: بیٹا جب میں کامیابی کے چکا چوند میں راستہ بھول رہا تھا تو یہ مجھے یہاں لے آیا۔ تمہیں بھی یہ راستہ دکھائے گا۔

"Master Ibrahim (while giving Quran to Momina): when I was lost in the glittering world of material success, it brought me here. It will show you also the right path" (Alif, Episode: 13).

Means of Livelihood

The drama Alif presents the concept of honest means of earning money from the perspective of Islam. The work which involves one's hard work is the right one whereas earning money through exposing physical beauty cannot be considered as Rizq-e-Halal. When Hus-e-Jahan intends to seek Allah's blessing by following His path, she discontinues her dancing career. She wishes her son to be brought up though Rizq-e-Halal.

حسن جہاں: وہ جو بھی مومن کو سکھائے گا حسن جہاں سے بہتر ہی سکھائے گا کیونکہ وہ حلال کماتے ہیں جو میں نہیں کما سکتی۔ وہ قلب مومن کو حلال پر پالیں گے جو میں نہیں پال سکتی۔

"He (grandfather of Momin) will teach him better things about life because He earns honest livelihood which I do not. He will foster him on Halal Rizq which I cannot" (Alif, Episode: 21).

Importance of Forgiveness

The drama unfolds a very peculiar human trait of being judgmental. Human beings categorize each other through apparent standards whereas Allah always sees the intent of that person. Allah forgives the biggest mistakes of his creatures, but humans' beings do not forgive so easily because

وإِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعْفٌ كَرِيمٌ، ہم انسان معاف نہیں کرتے۔ وہ تمام گڑھے جس میں ہم موجود تھے یہ ہمارے اپنے ہی کھودے ہوئے ہیں۔

of their sheer judgements. When Husn-e-Jahan decided to live life as per Allah's teachings, nobody believed her, and she had to face its consequences all through her life. When Qalb-e-Momin asks his grandfather that what mistake did his mother make that his father was unable to forgive her and even Allah did not forgive her. His grandfather said.

“Allah always forgives but we humans do not. We all have fallen into our own engraved potholes” (Alif, Episode: 11).

Belief on Life after Death

Concept of *Akhirat*

The criteria of being successful in *Akhirat* is only good deeds, any other reference would not be working there. A Muslim hence should always be conscious about his *Akhirat* and should always seek forgiveness from God.

لیکن آپ تو سید ہیں، اللہ کے راستے پر چلنے والے سید

ماسٹر صاحب: اسی لیے تو منہ چھپاتے ہیں بیٹا، اسی لئے تو سر جھکائے ہوئے ہیں کہ کس کی آل اور کیسے اعمال۔ بس اب پردہ ہے جو پڑا ہوا ہے۔

اللہ سب کے گناہ ڈھانپ کے رکھے

“Momina (to Master Ibrahim): you are Sayyad (from Prophit’s family) and a thorough follower of Allah’s teachings.

Master Ibrahim: That is why I am over conscious and ashamed of whose legacy we belong to and what are our deeds. Thank God it’s all hidden. May Allah keep the sins of all hidden” (Alif, Episode:19).

Shehr-e-Zaat

The drama Shehr-e-Zaat unleashes the fact that one must not indulge in the extreme love for this material world. Instead, man should lead his life to please Almighty and to attain his love, which is eternal. It would give true peace of mind and would not let you get lost in love with this transitory world. Following themes have been extracted from the drama that throw light on how the concept of God/Allah has been given in this drama.

Conception of God

Attributes of Allah

The drama narrates that man can do mistakes, but Allah is impeccable. All praises are for Allah. That is why man should never be arrogant and should always make effort to correct himself.

نانی: بیٹا تعریف تو صرف اللہ کی ہے اور بے عیب بھی اسی کی ذات ہے ہم تو انسان ہیں خطا کے پتلے

“Grandmother: All the praises are for Allah only and only He is faultless, and to err is human” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:04).

Allah always listens to our prayers. Whenever his man is in trouble and raises his hand for dua, He never disappoints his believer, he is most merciful and benevolent. This quality only rests to Allah, man is selfish and inferior.

نانی: مہر النساء خدا تو رحیم ہے۔ کریم ہے۔ خدا ایسا نہیں ہے بیٹا وہ تو انسان ہے انسان ہی ایسا کر سکتا ہے، خدا کبھی بھی بے مہر نہیں ہوتا۔

“Grandmother: God is merciful, benevolent, He can never be cold hearted unlike man” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:13).

Allah loves His creatures. He forgives our abundant mistakes and teaches His men to forgive each other.

نانی: رب بھی تو ہمیں بار بار موقع دیتا ہے ہم بار بار غلطیاں کرتے ہیں بار بار معافیاں مانگتے ہیں اور وہ ہزار بار ہمیں معاف کر دیتا ہے تم پہ بھروسہ کرتا ہے

اعتبار کرتا ہے ہمیں بھی معاف کر دینا چاہیے بیٹا!

“Grandmother: God gives us chance again and again, we do mistakes repeatedly, and seek forgiveness again and again and HE forgives us a thousand time and trust us, we should also forgive” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:19).

Relationship between Allah and Man

The connection to almighty is of utmost importance for the peaceful survival of man in this world and world hereafter. As highlighted in this drama, relationship between man and God should be of Love and this bond should be prioritized than all other relationships and desires.

اللہ کی محبت کے سوا ہر محبت کو زوال ہے۔ رب سونے کی محبت کے علاوہ دنیا کی کوئی محبت سچی نہیں اور رب سونا اصلیت دکھا دیتا ہے ہر رشتے ہر محبت کی، پھر وہ سب کچھ دکھا کر آدمی سے کہتا ہے اب بتا تیرا میرے سوا کون ہے؟

“Every love except the love of God falls short. God shows the reality of every relationship and dear ones and the asks who is there for you except me?” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:16).

When man runs after fulfilling worldly desires and material benefits, he connects with Allah weakens. This race brings more greed and man destroys himself behind love of this material world.

فلک: ممی اپ جانتی ہیں مجھے اللہ کیوں نہیں ملتا میرے اور اللہ کے درمیان کی خواہشوں ایک دیوار ہے مہر النساء: ہمارے اندر پلنے والی خواہشیں اللہ ہی ہمارے اندر پیدا کرتا ہے

فلک: غلط! نہیں ممی جسے اللہ اپنی محبت دیتا ہے اسے اور کسی چیز کی خواہش نہیں ہوتی۔

“Falak: Mummy do you know why I cannot find God? Because there is a wall of desires between me and God.

Mehrunnisa: But God Himself let these desires born within us.

Falak: wrong! No mother, whosoever finds God's love does not desire for anything else” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:15).

God's Criteria of superior Human

The criterion of superiority is based on good deeds. Wealth and luxurious lifestyle carry no value for Allah.

بڑے بڑے گھروں میں رہنے والے، بڑی بڑی گاڑیوں میں گھومنے والے کہاں سے اونچے ہو گئے، اونچے وہ لوگ ہوتے ہیں بیجا جن کے اعمال اونچے ہوتے

“People living in big bungalows and traveling in luxury cars are not superior, superior humans are those who have good deeds” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:8).

اللہ کے نزدیک اس کا شکر بہت درجہ رکھتا ہے جو مسکوں اور تکلیفوں کے باوجود کیا جائے اور اللہ کا شکر ادا کرنے کے لئے کسی چیز کا ہونا ضروری تھوڑی ہوتا ہے بس بندے کو عادی ہونا چاہیے شکر ادا کرنے کا۔

“For Allah thankfulness is highly regarded and those who exhibit this trait irrespective of their circumstances are indeed superior people. Being Thankful regardless of problems and pains is highly regarded by God and It does not require having material luxuries in life instead Man should develop a habit of being thankful to God” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:17).

Purpose of Life

The purpose of life is to please the Lord by showing complete submission to His will. When Falak's mother *Mehrunnisa* tells her own mother that she has adopted a modern lifestyle to make her husband happy, her mother corrects her that the focus should have been on pleasing Allah only.

تو شیر اقلن کو سیدھا راستہ تو نے دکھانا تھا بیٹا! تو کیوں اس کے پیچھے چل پڑی۔ اپنا قبلہ درست کرنا تھا۔ شوہر کو راضی نہیں کرتے بیٹا، رب کو راضی کرتے ہیں۔

“You should have shown the right path to your husband instead of following his lifestyle. One should strive to please God and not husband” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:03).

Reality of life in Islam

Man should remember that everything in this world will come to an end, nothing is forever. The reality of this life is that it is temporary, and all attractions of this world are delusional. The only thing to remain forever is Allah's Love.

اللہ کی محبت کے سوا ہر محبت کو زوال ہے رب سونے کی محبت کے علاوہ دنیا کی کوئی محبت سچی نہیں

“Every love except the love of God falls short” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:16).

To be eligible to have Allah's love, man must quit from his desires of this world.

جسے اللہ اپنی محبت دیتا ہے اسے اور کسی چیز کی خواہش نہیں ہوتی اور جو دنیا کی خواہش کرتا ہے، اس کی خواہش بھوک بن جاتی ہے، کبھی نہ ختم ہونے والی بھوک۔

“Whosoever gets and values God's love would not desire for anything else. And those who desire this material world are lost in getting more and more” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:15).

Guidelines on How to Live Life

A self-obsessed person is unable to make a distinction between good and bad. Falak when comes to know that her husband has married another woman, she decides to burn the face of that lady with acid. When her grandmother probed her how she had managed to get such courage. She replies.

قلک: نفس نانی نفس انسان کو جانور بنا دیتا ہے۔ آپ ہی کہتی تھی نا جب انسان نفس کا غلام ہو جاتا ہے تو جانور بن جاتا ہے۔ میرے اندر اتنی برائی تھی نانی مجھے کبھی اندازہ نہیں تھا

“Falak: Egocentrism makes a man animal. I never knew I had so much negativity within me” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:18).

Religious Rituals, Virtues & moral principles

Obligatory Ibaadat in Islam

In the drama *Shehr-e-Zaat*, offering of prayer (*Namaz*) has been emphasized repeatedly. It has been regarded as basic *Ibaadat* which is compulsory to offer for every Muslim. In the beginning of

نانی: اٹھ جاؤ بیٹا فجر کا وقت ہو گیا ہے، اٹھ جانا بیٹا ورنہ فرشتے نیکی میں کیا لکھیں گے

the drama when grandmother tries to wake up Falak for offering Fajar prayer, the voice of Azan is clearly heard which means offering prayer is lot better than sleep.

“Grandmother: Wake up dear its Fajar prayer time else what angels would write in good deeds” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode 1).

Prayer is a way to thank God for all the blessings and it also brings prosperity and good fortune in the home. But it needs to be offered with complete submission as Allah only sees our intent.

اماں: اللہ نے تمہیں بے شمار نعمتوں سے نوازا ہے، اتنا خوبصورت گھر دیا ہے چیزوں سے بھرا ہوا، رزق سے بھرا ہوا لیکن اللہ کا نام لینے والا کوئی نہیں ہے
یہاں، کوئی نماز پڑھنے والا نہیں ہے

“Mother: God has bestowed upon you all the blessings, such a beautiful house but there is no one to take His name, no one to offer the prayer here” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:3).

The Holy Quran is the ultimate guiding book for mankind. When grandmother asks Falak to forgive her husband, she says my heart does not agree to forgive him, the grandmother guides her that decisions should be made in accordance with Almighty's book.

زندگی کے فیصلے دل سے نہیں کرتے جیسا کہ کتاب کی سمجھی ہوئی کتاب سے کرنی چاہیے اور کتاب کہتی ہے انسانوں کو معاف کر دینا چاہیے۔

“Decision in life should not be made from the guidance of God's book. And the book says that we should forgive others” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:19).

Haqooq-ul-Ibaad (Rights of relatives)

The drama has pointed out a very peculiar practice of society and that people prefer to avoid their relatives who belong to poor class. Islam emphasizes on fulfilling the rights of relatives and specially to take care of those relatives who need help for their survival. When *Mehrunnisa* expresses her discomfort and embarrassment on meeting a poor relative, her mother tells her that she should be careful about the rights of such relatives.

مہر النساء: جب سے آپ نے اس کو میرے گھر کا راستہ دکھایا ہے روز آجاتی ہے آپ اسے منع کر دیں میں نے کچھ دینا دانا ہو گا میں آپ کو دے دوں گی۔

نانی: اللہ سے ڈر مہر النساء اللہ سے ڈر اللہ تعالیٰ جو بھی رزق ہمیں دیتا اس میں غریب رشتہ داروں کا حصہ ہوتا ہے

“Mehrunnisa: Why do you send all poor relatives to my house. Please don't if I would have to donate anything I will give it to you.

Grandmother: Be afraid of God Whatever earnings you have, poor relatives have share in it” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:5).

Simplicity in life/prohibition from extravagance

In the drama *Shehr-e-Zaat*, religious perspective on simplicity has been highlighted. Showing off wealth and wastage of resources has been criticized. Falak's grandmother, when sees that food served on dining table is much more than required, she advises her daughter to avoid wasting food.

“Grandmother: Do you get cooked so many dishes daily? And who eats it? It is a wastage of food. Have you seen in your surroundings, there are people who are not able to earn two times of food for themselves?

Falak's Mother. Come on mother, my four dishes would not bring starvation in the

نانی: سارا کھانا روز جتا ہے پینا کھاتا کون ہے؟ یہ تو رزق کا ضیاع ہے پینا تم نے ارد گرد دیکھا ہے کبھی، لاکھوں لوگ ایسے ہیں دو وقت کی روٹی بھی نصیب نہیں

فلک کی ماں: میری چار ڈشز بنانے سے ملک میں قحط نہیں پڑ جائے گا

نانی: فرق پڑتا ہے پینا قیامت کے دن ایک ایک دانے کا حساب ہو گا

country.

Grandmother: On the Day of Resurrection, each grain will be counted” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:3).

At the time of Falak’s wedding she advises her daughter to refrain from extravagance. She also gives reference of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that Allah and His Prophet both love simplicity.

نانی: فلک کی شادی بہت اچھے طریقے سے کرنا، سادگی سے، سادگی سنت رسول ہے اور ویسے بھی بلاوجہ کا خرچ کرنا اسراف ہے اور اسراف اللہ تعالیٰ کو بالکل بھی پسند نہیں ہے مہر النساء

“Grandmother: Falak’s wedding should be done with simplicity as per the practice of our Prophet. God does not like overspending” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:8).

Importance of Forgiveness

Allah likes to forgive and teaches the same through His book.

فلک: مجھے تو اس بات سے یقین نہیں آرہا ہے کہ سلمان مجھے بھول گیا ہے

نانی: ارے بیٹا ہم جو بھول جاتے ہیں سو بنے رب کو، اس کی ساری نعمتوں کا شکر یہ ادا کرنا بھول جاتے ہیں، اس کی تعریف کرنا بھول جاتے ہیں، تو وہ ناراض نہیں ہوتا، معاف کر دیتا ہے، تو تو بھی معاف کر دے بیٹا۔

“Falak: I cannot believe that Salman has forgotten me

Grandmother: Dear we forget our Lord, disregard His blessings and don’t remember to praise Him, even then He forgives us. You should also forgive” (Shehr-e-Zaat, Episode:11).

Meri Zaat Zarra-e-Benishan

The drama serial Meri Zaat Zarra-e-Benishan (MZZBN) is the story of a woman who is punished by her loved ones on account of a false allegation. She faces all the disgust with patience and seeks solace in Allah’s Love. Following are the subthemes which explain how the concept of Allah is given in this drama.

Conception of God

Attributes of Allah

The drama highlights one attribute of Allah very prominently and that is forgiveness. Allah keeps the door of forgiveness open for His creature and whoever seeks forgiveness of Allah with pure intent, is granted absolution.

یارب ہمیں بخش دے، ہم نے بہت بڑے گناہ کیے ہیں۔ یا اللہ تو ہی معاف کرنے والا ہے، تو بخش دے۔

“O Lord forgive us, we have committed many sins. God you are the one who forgives” (MZZBN, Episode:02).

Allah is the ultimate healer. In drama MZZBN when Shakila is dragonized with last stage cancer and doctor lose hope, His husband preys to Allah who can do miracles.

عارفین کے ابا: مشکل تو ہے لیکن ایک در ایسا ہے جس کے پاس سب کا علاج ہے، وہاں تو جاسکتے ہیں، اس کی درگاہ میں جا کے نکر تو مار سکتے ہیں۔

“Arfeen’s father: There is one such holy place we can always approach who has cure for everything” (MZZBN, Episode:15).

Relationship between Allah and man

The relationship of Allah and man in pure and forever. He is the biggest support of man. All other relations and companions of the world are not reliable. When Saba's father gets to know that she is innocent and comes to take her back after many years, she denies going back and replies to him.

سہارا تو بس اللہ ہے نہ ماں باپ، نہ اولاد، نہ کوئی انسان، بس اللہ!

“One can only depend upon God not on Parents, not on one's children or any man but Only God” (Episode:18).

Allah never leaves man alone even if man is sinful, He supports him and forgives his as well.

عارفین: کون ہے صبا ایسا جو کسی گناہ گار کے ساتھ کھڑا ہو سکے؟

صبا: اللہ، اللہ ہے نہ وہ گنہگار کی سزا بھی ہے اور اس کو بخشا بھی ہے، اس کو نوازتا بھی ہے۔

“Arfeen: Who would stand in support of a sinner?”

Saba: God, its God who listens to sinner, forgives him, and blesses him as well” (MZZBN, Episode:18).

God's Criteria of superior Human

Worshipping Allah is not enough, developing an unconditional love for Allah makes a man better ranked believer. Such individuals treat other people with kindness as kindness to His creature can make a person closer to Allah.

صبا: اللہ سے محبت کرنے والے کسی کو تکلیف نہیں دے سکتے، صرف عبادت کرنے والے دے سکتے ہیں۔ میں اللہ سے محبت کرتی ہوں، صرف عبادت نہیں کرتی۔

“Those who love God can not harm anyone. I not only worship but love God” (MZZBN, Episode:19).

Purpose of Life

Reality of life in Islam

Life is temporary and delusional. Man should not be indulged in the love of this world. Man should only strive to achieve Allah's love by showing submission to His will.

صبا: آپ سے محبت ہے، آپ سے محبت رہے گی یہ اللہ نے میرے دل میں ڈالی ہے لیکن ساتھ میں اس رب کے رہوں گی جس نے مجھے تب نہیں چھوڑا

جب سارے محبت کرنے والوں نے چھوڑ دیا۔

“Saba: I love you it will last forever. But I choose to live with the God who did not leave me alone when all my loved ones did” (MZZBN, Episode:18).

Guidelines on how to live life

Distinction between right and wrong is necessary. One should stay on the right path irrespective of apparent benefit and loss. A Muslim should always care about distinguishing right from wrong as Allah has distinguished Heaven from Hell.

سارہ: لیکن میں تو معاف نہیں کروں گی اسے اگر میرے ساتھ کوئی زیادتی کرے گا میں تو بدلہ لوں گی اس کا اور جتنی تکلیف وہ مجھے پہنچائے گا اس سے زیادہ تکلیف میں اس کو دوں گی

صبا: تو پھر تم میں اور اس زیادتی کرنے والے میں کیا فرق رہے گا؟

سارہ: فرق رکھنا کیوں ضروری ہے؟

صبا: جنت اور دوزخ میں فرق تو ہوتا ہی ہے

“Sara: If anyone would do injustice to me, I will never forgive him, I will take revenge and will hurt the person more than he hurt me.

Saba: Then what will be the difference between you and him?

Sara: What is the need to keep that difference?

Saba: Because there is difference between heaven and hell” (MZZBN, Episode:20).

Religious Rituals, Virtues & moral principles

Obligatory *Ibaadat* in Islam

Prayer is offered to thank Allah for his blessings. Saba, after being engaged to Arfeen, tries to offer prayer regularly since Allah has given him a loving life partner.

صبا عارفین سے: میں نماز نہیں پڑھتی تھی آپ کی طرح باقاعدگی کے ساتھ، پر آپ کے لئے دعا کرنے لگی تھی اور اللہ نے تو کتنے آرام سے آپ کو مجھے دے دیا، ایسے جیسے آپ کو میرے لئے ہی بنایا تھا اس نے، اب تو بس میں ساری عمر عبادت کروں گی، اس کا شکر ادا کرتی رہوں گی اس کا، آپ سے زیادہ عبادت اور زیادہ شکر ادا کرتا ہے اس کا، مقبول عبادت۔

“Saba to Arfeen: I had not been offering prayers regularly unlike you. But God has made you part of my life so effortlessly as you were made only for me. For that I will continue to thank Him for the rest of my life. Will have to worship Him more and thank Him more than you” (MZZBN, Episode:05).

Haqooq-ul-Ibaad

Rights are of two types: Man’s right on other man and Man’s rights on Allah. If a man does something bad to other man, he cannot seek forgiveness from Allah for that act until the affected person forgives him.

عارفین کے ابا: میں تم سے معافی مانگنا چاہتا ہوں اگر تم نے مجھے معاف نہیں کیا تو وہ بھی نہیں کرے گا۔

“Arfeen’s Father: Please forgive me, because if you do not forgive, God will not forgive me” (MZZBN, Episode:16).

Importance of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is also a very precious virtue. The drama very beautifully depicts that forgiveness does not make you weak or inferior instead it empowers man since he has handed over his matter to Allah.

سارا: کیوں میں کیوں معاف کروں، میں کوئی کمزور تو نہیں ہوں

سبا: معاف تو طاقتور کرتا ہے کمزور نہیں

سارا: یہ ساری کتابی باتیں ہیں۔ میں نے کبھی کسی طاقتور کو معاف کرتے ہوئے نہیں دیکھا، کیا آپ نے دیکھا ہے؟

سبا: ہاں

سارا: کیا فائدہ ہوا اسے

سبا: اس کا سارا خسارہ قطع میں بدل گیا

“Sara: Why should I forgive someone I am not weak.

Saba: only a strong person can forgive not a weak one.

Sara: This is all bookish stuff. I have never seen a powerful forgiving someone.

Have you seen any?

Saba: Yes

Sara: What did he get?

Saba: All his losses turned into profit” (MZZBN, Episode:12).

Belief on Life after Death

Concept of *Akhirat*

Belief on day of judgement (*Akhirat*) compels a Muslim to refrain from wrong deeds. When Shakeela (Arfeen’s mother) is diagnosed with last stage cancer, and realizes she is soon going to meet her Lord, desperately begs pardon from everyone for her sins.

عارفین کی اماں: میں نے بہت برا کیا، میں نے ظلم کیا صبا پر، بہت بڑا ظلم کیا۔

عارفین کے ابا: تم نے اپنے ساتھ ظلم کیا شکلیہ تو نے تو اپنے آپ کو کہیں کا نہیں چھوڑا، نادنیا کا، نا آخرت کا!

“Arfeen’s Father: You did wrong to you Shakeela you spoiled your afterlife (*Akhirat*)” (MZZBN, Episode:16).

While seeking forgiveness from Saba, Shakeela requests her to pray for her eternal life.

تائی اماں صبا سے: دعا کرو بیٹا اللہ مجھے دوزخ میں نہ جلائے

“Shakeel (to Saba): Please pray for me, may Allah not punish me in hell fire” (MZZBN, Episode:17).

Discussion

This research is directed to explore the portrayal of Islam in religious theme-based dramas of Pakistan. TV dramas engage viewers through storytelling in cultural context and have strong persuasive power for dissemination of a concept. Religion is a sensitive topic, but people are generally more receptive when information is given through an entertainment program. Religious

education through Drama can be effective means of inculcating religious diversity as knowledge about others' religions may remove misconceptions and can also relate many similar beliefs as followed in their own religion (Mavroudis & Kondoyianni, 2022). In past few years TV dramas in Pakistan have explored the subject matters like religion, spirituality, and teachings of Islam (Sheraz, 2020).

In this regard three dramas of writer Umera Ahmed were selected and analyzed against their orientation of religion and content relatability with other religions like Christians and Hindus. The findings of the analysis of all four dramas have brought in focus some repeatedly presented concepts with reference to Islam.

It was found that the concept of Allah was given as an ultimate authority who has power to change anything as every single particle is under His control. This attribute of Allah directs man towards light from the darkness of disbelief. The word *Ilaha* in 2nd Kalma in Islam refers to the greatest powers of Almighty which are beyond comprehension of man and has no beginning or ending (Tijjani, 2018). In Christianity as well, the God is believed to be all powerful and divine. Similarly, this belief on God being a supreme divine authority is found in almost all religions of the world (Naik, 2020).

The second highlighted concept about God is that He loves His creature the most and forgives their sins whenever they approach Him with sincerity. Hence the concept of Allah as depicted in the selected dramas that Allah is all powerful, yet He is most merciful as well.

While exploring the relationship between man and Allah in the selected dramas, it is evident that the connection between man and Allah is innate and very essential for the peaceful existence of a person. Seeking Love of Allah should be the priority of every Muslim since He is the true support and guide for this life and the life hereafter. Love for worldly desires makes a person selfish and self-obsessed. For Allah superior humans are those who love Allah more than anything in life and submit to the will of God. This Life is a test, and great rewards are awaiting for those who remain persistent in spite of hardships. For this purpose, it is very important to have a clear distinction between right and wrong. Allah loves those who are thankful to Him in ease and non-complaining in odd. The three monotheistic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam refer to God as supreme creator of the universe and human beings are His creation and are given a well-defined code of conduct to follow to be qualified as a good believer.

The most highlighted religious moral virtue in selected dramas has been forgiveness. These dramas emphasize on importance of forgiving others in Islam and regards it as real human strength. The person who bears enough courage to forgive others just to seek God's happiness would get rid of negative sentiments like jealousy, hatred, revenge etc. The concept of forgiveness is central to the concept of Christianity as God is believed to have unconditional love towards the mankind. Seeking forgiveness is the best remedy to get rid of sins. The great virtue of forgiveness is preached in almost all religions of the world, and it is a very powerful gesture that takes a man towards a peaceful life setting him free from hatred or complaints.

The selected dramas also present the importance of *Haqooq-ul-Ibad* from Islamic perspective particularly, Rights of relatives and rights of neighbors. Any negligence in this regard would not be forgiven by Allah until the affected person forgives it. In Christian faith, an individual must focus on fulfilling his duties instead of asking for his rights and one of the greatest duties upon him is to love his neighbors (Patel, 2015).

The drama serial *Alif* throws light on the importance of having earnest means of livelihood and how it may reflect in the upbringing of a child. The other religious moral values represented in these dramas are simplicity in life, importance of patience, and charity.

It was found that concept of day of judgment and life after death is greatly pronounced in all dramas. This concept helps reminding the man that this life is temporary and then he will be either rewarded or punished as per his deeds.

The concept of heaven and hell is found in religions other than Islam. During 16th and 17th century catholic priests in Italy used to present frequently the dramas or plays set in heaven or hell to educate youth and bring people towards catholicism (Cavallaro, 2019). Hinduism believes in the concept of Karma which implies that the man will bear the consequences of his good or bad deeds in re-birth and concept of heaven and hell is also used in order to encourage man to do good deeds and strive for heaven to earn a blissful life (Nallusamy, 2015).

As far as religious rituals are concerned, all three dramas have repeatedly shown offering prayer as a way to thank Almighty for his countless blessings and also prayer is offered to seek forgiveness for the sins. Likewise, recitation of the Holy Quran is also portrayed as a means of seeking mental peace. The commonalities among religious practices in different religions include the repetitive nature of recitation, the emphasis on spiritual connection and devotion, and the use of chants or mantras as vehicles for meditation and prayer (Saxena, 2023).

Conclusion

Overall, it can be concluded, that TV dramas in Pakistan are building Islamic narrative much different from the one already established by western countries. These dramas are providing its viewers an opportunity to connect with their creator and emphasize upon the great moral virtues that are valued in almost all religions of the world. Hence the factor of relatability and involvement through story are the biggest strengths of selected dramas of writer *Umera Ahmed* that can probably serve the purpose of creating softer image of Islam among its believers as well as non-believers.

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