



Television Entertainment

An Ethnographic Study of Islam and the Cultural Text of Everyday Life in Pakistan

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Abstract. – The article aims at presenting a brief ethnography of Pakistan's electronic media as a cultural text of everyday life. It is in the sphere of entertainment that the challenges and complications engendered by the media in the ordinary life of Pakistanis are most readily perceived and explored. Pakistan is a nation of Muslims – both in conception, and demographically. How Muslim, then, are the media? This question will be addressed through a consideration of the programmes (dramas and advertisements), and through the responses to these programmes voiced by the inhabitants of Muslim Town. [*Pakistan, Islam, Television, Entertainment, Extremism*]

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Introduction

The history of the media in Pakistan has its roots in the pre-partition years of British India, when a number of newspapers were established with a mission to disseminate the idea of Pakistan. The two principal surviving newspapers influential in Pakistan were founded as late as 1940 out of urgent perception of the eminent need for Pakistan. The Urdu language newspaper, *Nawa-e-Waqt*, which was established in 1940 by Hameed Nizami, evinced the strongest support for an independent Pakistan. The English language newspaper, *Dawn* founded by the

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and first published in 1941, was an important organ of the Muslim League.

After independence in 1947, the stress on Islam as a major pillar of national identity led to an alliance between the custodians of Islam, the religious leaders and the military, the civil bureaucracy and the intelligence services. Control of the media has certainly been a major objective of this coalition of national guardians – to defend both their political interests, and their version of national identity (International Media Support 2009: 15). Over the years, Pakistan's various military regimes have introduced specific laws for control and censor the country's media. The first step in introducing media laws in the country was taken by the military ruler Field Marshal Ayub Khan (1958–1969), who nationalized large section of the press and took control of one of Pakistan's two largest news agencies. Ayub promulgated the Press and Publication Ordinance (PPO 1962), which not only enabled the authorities to confiscate newspapers, close down news providers and detain journalists but brought Pakistan Radio and TV under the firm control of the government. During the 1980s, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq made draconian alterations to the PPO. Censorship during the Zia years (1978–1988) was direct. Following his death in 1988, a way was sought to mitigate the severity of his laws through a revision of media legislation called the Revised PPO (RPPO). Other legislative and regulatory mechanisms that directly and indirectly affect media include the Print-

ing Presses and Publication Ordinance (1988), the Freedom of Information Ordinance (2002), The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority – PEMRA (2002), The Defamation Ordinance (2002), The Press Council Ordinance (2002), The Contempt of Court Ordinance (2003), The Press – Newspapers – News Agencies and Books Registration Ordinance (2003), The Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan Ordinance (2005), and The Access to Information Ordinance (2006). Despite political pressure and attempted bans by political stakeholders, the media in Pakistan have acted with relative freedom on many occasions. The extensive media coverage of the 2007 lawyers' movement played a crucial part in the restoration of former Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. The electronic media played a significant role in the fall of military dictator Pervez Musharraf in 2008 (International Media Support 2009: 14–17). There is a general agreement that Pakistan's media are becoming prominent players in the national arena, vying for authority alongside constitutionally established institutions (Stiftung 2012: 5).

The vibrant landscape of private TV channels is playing a significant role in the construction of socio-cultural and political maps in Pakistan. The private broadcasting era in Pakistan was initiated when Network Television Marketing (NTM), formerly the Shalimar Television Network (STN), commenced broadcasting in 1990. Around the same time, Pakistanis became able to receive signals through dish antennas and receivers that facilitated access to International TV channels. Access expanded in 2000 when the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) allowed cable TV operations (Centre for Civic Education Pakistan n. d.: 6). Sometime before, in the 1980s, cable television network had been quietly introduced on a small scale in Karachi in the absence of any regulatory law. The project began in apartment buildings and was able to function without large-scale apparatus due to the close proximity of the apartments. The main attraction for subscribers was the viewing of Indian and English movies and dramas of Pakistan Television Corporation – PTV, which the operators rented from local video centres (Zia 2007: 13).

Before the mushrooming of Private TV channels in Pakistan, the entertainment and news media were controlled and owned by the Federal Government. The sole provider, PTV, commenced transmission on 26 November 1964 via a small pilot TV station in Lahore. PTV pioneered colour television in 1976 and launched its satellite transmission in 1991–92 (Mezzera and Sial: 2010). PTV's monopoly ended when in 2002 General Pervez Musharraf, having de-

ecided to open up the media market, issued licenses to the private sector for establishing television channels, his reported motive being to strengthen the national identity by countering the growing influence of Indian satellite channels (Michaelsen 2011: 36). The 1999 Kargil War between India and Pakistan is considered a crucial event in this regard. Through all that time, PTV was the only source of the news; and, because its reliability was at best minimal, Pakistan viewers resorted to Indian news channels for the latest newscasts on the Kargil crisis. Here a parallel may be drawn between PTV and Doordarshan, the news channel owned by the Government of India. Doordarshan's credibility is also considered suspect by its audiences (Gupta 1998: 30). After the Kargil conflict, General Musharraf made plans to introduce private news channels into Pakistan (Khan and Joseph 2008; International Media Support 2009), an initiative that saw the introduction of numerous entertainment and news channels.

In Pakistan the number of TV channels has grown consistently. Since 2002, more than 90 privately owned television stations have commenced broadcasting both by satellite and cable (Infoasaid 2011: 11). The number of TV channels now exceeds 100, providing a medium of expression, not only for the economically oppressed and socially mistreated, but also for growing numbers of young rock and pop vocalists, models and artists, and, at the other end of the spectrum for the *mullahs* (Khan 2007: 24). There are approximately 40 Pakistani entertainment channels offering serials, soap operas, morning shows, sitcoms, music, cooking and fashion shows. Besides the many channels acknowledged for their drama programmes (such as PTV, Hum TV, Geo, ARY Digital) and for music, lifestyle and religious programmes, there is a long list of regional TV networks. International channels of all categories are also available on cable network. Star Plus (India), Peace TV (an Indian based religious TV channel), Discovery, National Geographic, BBC, Al Jazeera, CNN, AXN, Star Movies, HBO, Ten Sports and Cartoon Network are among the most widely watched foreign TV broadcasts.

The large media network and the huge consumption of TV texts in Pakistan have converted the electronic media into what Foucault refers to as the technology of the self (Foucault 1984; 1988). The technologies of the self, according to Foucault, permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault 1988: 18). Fou-

cault emphasized that individuals are continually in the process of constituting themselves as ethical subjects through both technologies of the self and ethical self-constitution, and a notion of power that is not simply based upon repression, coercion or domination (Besley: 2005). Rather, the historical and institutional discourses also play pivotal roles in the formation of self by exercising power. The electronic media in Pakistan serve as important institutional sites of discourse formation creating the dominant text of everyday life in the country. Different TV genres are playing significant roles in the construction of performative identities of Pakistanis by informing them how to make sense of the world (Schneeberger 2009: 85). This study asks whether the Pakistani media's discursive formation of life's realities and the everyday world supports extremist ideologies and what role Islam plays in the media landscape.

Methodology

The current research is based on 1 1/2 years of my doctoral fieldwork conducted between 2011 and 2012 in Muslim Town. Muslim Town is a region of Rawalpindi city which lies on the Potohar Plateau in the north of the province of Punjab, and is (in itself) the fourth largest city in Pakistan, after Karachi, Lahore and Faisalabad. The urban region of Muslim Town is close to the Pashtun heartland of Afghanistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas – FATA, a base for Taliban and Al-Qaeda insurgents and the main target of US drone attacks. Situated part of the way between Rawalpindi and Islamabad, it is near the military headquarters and central institutions of the civilian bureaucracy. As a large urban residential area, it is far removed from the typical life of the rural Punjab. Yet, there is explanatory advantage in studying a particular region of a Pakistan city, even though the findings cannot be generalized over Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – KPK, Sindh or Baluchistan. This is a way of imparting some impression of lives actually lived, rather than a statistical overview.

This paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of this dimension by providing a focused account of media culture in one small urban region of Pakistan, Muslim Town, comprising several *maHallahs*¹ (neighbourhoods singular; *maHallah*). A *maHallah* is a social division of a city or town wherein

the residents know each other well. Typically, a *maHallah* is composed of two or three streets. There are now between 25 and 30 *maHallahs* in Muslim Town.

This study employs the classic anthropological technique of participant observation, supplemented by tape-recorded in-depth interviews in homes, hotels, mosques and gathering places frequented by inhabitant of Muslim Town to grasp a holistic picture of the role played by the media in everyday life of Muslim Town. Muslim Town has an active nightlife. There are approximately 10–15 hotels in Sadiq Abad, and in the adjacent Transformer Chowk. Many of these hotels as well as soda shops and juice corners remain open through the night or at least till midnight. These spots, besides serving food, also provide spaces for entertainment, hanging out and gupshup (chit-chat). My status of being a local assisted hugely to interact with local inhabitants in such informal setting where people, while watching TV, make running commentary on advertisement, dramas and talk shows providing insights of how TV programs are being perceived.

This is how research was conducted along the lines of “follow the people” multi-sited fieldwork (Marcus 1998) and I have participated in everyday life during an extended period of time while observing interactions and listening to conversations in order to identify religious claims and attitudes, real-world priorities, media related perceptions, lived experiences and practices. I regularly recorded events and conversation in detailed field notes.

Also, 120 respondents from of various ages, with diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds were interviewed in order to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomena. This study includes the programmes (dramas and advertisements), and the responses to these programmes voiced by the inhabitants of Muslim Town.

The Media Network in Muslim Town

In this paper preponderant – though not exclusive – attention will be focussed on television, which is part of the texture of daily living in Muslim Town. After the expansion of the cable television network and the introduction of numerous news and entertainment channels across the country, TV has become the most popular form of shared entertainment in Pakistan. It is estimated that the country's total TV viewership is 86 million. On an average day, approximately 38 million Pakistanis (above the age of 10) view cable and satellite TV (Haque and Iftikhar: 2009). In Muslim Town, between 70 and 120 local and foreign TV channels are avail-

¹ Notes on Transliteration: For the purpose of this article, I have used the Pritchett/Khaliq transliteration system for Urdu words.

able via cable for a small fee, no more than 200 or 400 rupees per month (AUD\$3-5). Approximately 90 percent of households have cable connections. If a home is without a TV set, the reason is typically, rather their moral concerns.

Tension between Islam and Modernity. Contextualizing Electronic Media in Pakistan

Tension between Islam, as normatively conceived, and the forces of modernity and globalization carried by all media insofar as these are the agents of consumerist and commercial interests, is only to be expected in Pakistan. What is of interest is the form in which such tension appears – or fails to appear. Pakistan is a country in which the Taliban and other Salafi groups, some very violent, others not violent at all, are accustomed to expressing their views in the streets and in other venues, including some mosques. No doubt the Taliban and like groups are offended by what they find in TV programmes. The Taliban are not the only ones offended. Ordinary observant Muslims, not used to mobilizing to public ends, frequently express their concerns claiming that the *beHayaa'ii* and *beGiiratii* (immodesty-shamelessness) shown on TV channels is destroying the *imaan* (faith) of Pakistanis.

I came across many instances of such objections in the course of my fieldwork in Muslim Town. Yet I learned to take notice of a recurrent distinction between two kinds of grievance: those that would be expended in grumbling and complaint – but not in action – and those that would lead to a mobilization of energies in publicly mounted protests and demonstrations. In the first case, people would grouse and grumble but would not show any further commitment to change those media programmes which they considered “immoral” or contrary to Islamic ideals. Why should this be? A possible explanation can be suggested if we consider the nature of the second kind of grievance, which leads to mobilization and concerted action on a wide scale. It would appear that Muslims – both observant and non-observant – are more easily mobilized when they perceive a direct challenge to doctrinal unity. The challenges to morality and values represented by such things as television advertisements are diffused and are not so keenly felt as what are taken as direct challenges to beliefs and doctrines. This can be illustrated by a recent example from Pakistan.

The Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, was assassinated by his own police guard in 2011 due to his opposition to Blasphemy laws in Pakistan. The Governor, as an outspoken politician had an estab-

lished secular and liberal reputation. He was seen to be fond of music, dance and the drinking of alcohol. But, this reputation in itself did not create a threat to his survival until Taseer protested against the death sentence imposed on Pakistani Christian woman Asia Bibi for alleged blasphemy. Denouncing the blasphemy law as a “black” law, Taseer said that personally he did not like this law at all (Choudary 2011).

Taseer’s murderer, Mumtaz Qadri, and many Muslims who applauded his action believed that by declaring the Blasphemy Law a black law, Taseer had reviled both Islam and the Prophet (PBUH). Taseer’s statement had offended the majority of Pakistanis, both observant and non-observant Muslims who took note of it. In effect, Taseer’s wording of this sensitive matter was so obscure that many people concluded that he was being disrespectful towards the Prophet (PBUH). Qadri, on whom the death sentence was imposed by the court, was compared by some to Ghazi Ilm Din who murdered a publisher in 1929 for publishing a book deemed offensive to the Prophet (PBUH) and was duly handed the death sentence (Baig 2011). Ilm Din was later hailed for his action of *taHaffuz:-e naamuus-e risaalat* (protection of the Prophet’s (PBUH) respect) and was afforded the title of Ghazi² Ilm Din, “Ghazi” is now used in the case “Ghazi Mumtaz Qadri”.

Liberal voices hailed the verdict as a bold decision: it would discourage people from taking the law into their own hands (Abbasi: 2011). Taseer was understood by his supporters to have defended the Christian community against misuse of the Blasphemy Law (as demanding its repeal). But, to those thousands who took to the streets, he was seen as disrespectful regarding the Prophet (PBUH) and therefore deserving of death. This case was an eventful episode in public daily life in Muslim Town. Many marches were organized in my fieldwork area, Qadri being a resident of the same locality. Qadri’s brothers and father were invited to the demonstrations and were given special protocol, such as would be given to the family of a great person.

It should be noted that the secular lifestyle, or what is perceived as moral laxity, do not in themselves become a focus of popular anger in Pakistan. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, for example, a politician who attracted one of the largest popular followings in Pakistan’s history, was notorious for his love of al-

² Ghazi a term used for different types of *mujaahidiin* (warriors). Here it refers to someone who remains alive after his death because of his great sacrifice.

cohol and parties. And he did not always seek to hide it (there were a number of such instances of his public behaviour). Although such public figures are always the target of objection from particular groups and individuals, it is suggested here that the absence of widespread concerted opposition to the challenge mounted by advertising and by media programmes in general may be an expression of the relative indifference in the wider community towards immoral behaviour, as contrasted with intentional insult to Islam. It is important to understand Pakistani Muslims make a clear distinction between those who do not follow Islam, on the one hand, and those who ridicule it on the other. People are not so offended by those undertakings which are at variance with the teachings of Islam as by those ridiculing Islam or its doctrinal principles.

A second factor becomes relevant here. This is a consideration which arises frequently in the daily life of Muslim Town. The taste for pleasure and for a hedonistic lifestyle is not restricted to politicians and other representative figures of the *ashraafiyah* (the elites) but is to be met with at all social levels. In the examples that follow, the acts of individuals or institutions are clearly against the very spirit of Islam. But there is little social pressure or intervention to shut down these acts or make of them a “religious issue”. Rather, all sectors of the population enjoy them in the name of “culture”, “entertainment” or “hot news”.

A prominent example is the tradition of the Punjabi stage drama. As recently as 1990, Punjabi stage drama was considered a family entertainment; but, today, performances are notorious for their vulgar and semi-nude dances (*mujraa*), and for their seductive Punjabi songs and humour based on immoral and vulgar scripts. Regardless of its content, stage drama in Pakistan, particularly in Punjab province, is one of the most popular forms of entertainment. Although the government has on occasion taken action against certain actresses and theatres for promoting indecency and featuring obscene dances, these dramas continue to flourish day by day. CDs of stage dramas and *mujraas* are among the best selling items in video shops. The vulgar dialogues of stage dramas are no longer confined to stage dramas but have also become a part of public humour. Some people use these dialogues to embarrass their friends and close ones, a cultural practice known as “*jugat baazii*”. A trend towards *mujraa* and private dance parties is also prevalent in society. Female dancers are invited to perform at marriage ceremonies, and the consumption of alcohol has become an integral part of these ceremonies. People then upload videos of these parties on YouTube. Hundreds

of videos of *mujraas* are available online. Private dance parties have become also a trend in Pakistan today, revealing a secret side of Pakistan, a Muslim nation often described by the West as a land of Islamic hardmen and repressed veiled women. Every weekend, people from different walks of life gather at house parties in the cities of Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore, engaging in activities that would annoy the advocates of a stricter brand of Islam. Young men and women mix freely, dancing, talking or drinking while some clasped together in quiet areas (Reuters: 2012).

The majority does not like to criticize cultural activities on a religious basis. Singing, dancing, the performance of the *mehndii* ritual (the henna ceremony, which typically takes place one or two days prior to the main wedding observance) at Pakistani marriages, or music as a necessary part of everyday life are justified on cultural grounds, the argument being that “*yeh hamara culture hai*” (its our culture). There are many examples where people indulge in un-Islamic acts but make all efforts to keep them secret from their families and respective communities. Nowadays, alcohol, for example, is one of the popular forms of enjoyment. In Rawalpindi, I observed a regular business of the sale of alcohol: many hotels and individuals sell alcohol to their trustworthy customers. Although, under the Hudood Laws the sale and consumption of alcohol is both prohibited and a punishable crime, different types of liquor are readily available in luxury hotels in Pakistan. Visitors to these hotels enjoy this luxury; an officially denied but publicly well-known fact.

A similar denial persists at the national level. The Pakistani State has never recognized the existence and practise of certain acts which are deemed far from Islamic and considered a threat to the Islamic character of Pakistan. Widespread prostitution in Pakistan is one such example. Increasingly, young women across the country are joining the flesh markets (Rana 2009; Orne 2010; Lodhi 2012), selling their bodies either as call girls or at brothels. I was able to verify this during the course of my fieldwork. In the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, the rates of female and gay prostitution have grown substantially; similar to other cities, e.g., Lahore and Karachi, where prostitution has embraced a form of organized industry. It is common in the evenings to find customers in their cars, on motorbikes, or on foot finalizing their deals with prostitutes standing along the roadsides. The police and those walking on the footpath enjoy this bargaining as spectators. It has become such a part of civic life in Rawalpindi and Islamabad that people no longer view it seriously.

There is a long list of Pakistani celebrities who in their individual capacities are seen to be publicly acting against Islamic moral norms: Veena Malik, a popular Pakistani actress and model, has remained often in news for such actions as kissing, cuddling and hugging Ashmit Patel, an Indian actor, and for sharing the same bed with him in the Indian reality show “Big Boss”. In 2011, she became enmeshed in scandal following her nude photo shoot for Indian magazine FMH although she insisted that the photos had been morphed (Gayle 2011). The weakly mounted protest against her actions which mainly appeared on social media, claimed that she had besmirched both Pakistan and Islam. Malik appeared on many Pakistani TV channels, arguing with Muslim scholars (*‘ulamaa’*) that she was a good Muslim and only answerable to Allah for her deeds. She did not need to learn from them what is right and wrong. This category of widespread TV exposure is unusual. The work of Meera, another Pakistani actress, who performed in a bold Indian film titled *naz:ar* (“Glare”) did not generate any religious debate. Mathira, a famous TV host and actress considered controversial due to her vulgar dress and indecent facial expressions that characterize her live calls session, is in fact a source of pleasure for the larger sections of society. Gay values are also given media time on rare occasion. Ali Saleem, for example, who variously declared himself to be gay, bisexual and transsexual, is a popular TV host. His show “Begum Nawazish Ali”, in which he played the cross-dresser, made him popular across the country.

Although the general public acknowledge that these acts conflict with the Islamic spirit, the majority of Pakistanis enjoys them as *caskaa* (seductive, entertaining) news and programs. I have quoted only a few of the many instances where people’s actions are clearly repugnant to Islamic ideals; yet, resistance is limited to transient verbal criticism from some religious authorities and spokesmen. It has never been translated into strong social resistance. Society considers those who commit “un-Islamic acts” as part of the same “in group” to which they themselves belong – both as Pakistanis and Muslims. It is a different matter, however, when a non-Muslim or an outsider make fun of their religion. In such cases, the ridiculers are relegated into the category of non-Muslims and *dushman* (enemies) of Pakistan and Islam. Public reaction can become violent. Protests may snowball; take, for example, the aftermath of the caricature controversy in 2005, the burning of the Qur’an by Terry Jones on numerous occasions, the murder of Governor Salman Taseer (viewed here as an outsider because of his professed liberal views) and the protests against the

US film “Innocence of Muslims”, which Muslims consider as an insult to both the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and their religion.

In the following discussion, the texts of different forms of advertisements and dramas, broadcast on widely viewed TV channels (such as PTV, Hum TV, ARY Digital and Geo TV) are considered in the framework of Muslim Town. The contextualization of entertainment media as a cultural production and as a text of the nation has been undertaken in India by Mankekar (1993), whose writing include the TV series based on the Ramayana³. But, here the objective is somewhat different. It is to bring the content of these programmes into confrontation with the values and attitudes of those who watch them.

Controversial TV Advertising, Embarrassment or a Social Change?

In the pre-Musharraf era, the censorship board was very active in editing advertisements to be played on Pakistani TV channels. And, perhaps more controversially, the new entertainment includes bold presentation and amalgamation of both Pakistan and Indian cultures, a phenomenon once regarded as impossible. The strict media regulations of Zia’s Islamization programme, implemented during the 1980s, no longer exist. As recently as twenty-five years ago, no physical contact was allowed on the television screen between males and females. Even brothers and sisters and mothers and sons did not embrace. It was not permissible to show married couples sharing a bed in a TV drama series, female singers were allowed to make only minimal physical movement, and males with long hair wearing jeans and females wearing western clothing were not allowed to perform on TV. Television ads were only allowed to display female models for a stipulated 30% of the total time of a given commercial. The chewing of bubble gum and licking of an ice-cream cone were not permitted even in advertisements (Wired: 2005). With the reversal of this situation, however, all of the above taboos have been rescinded. Their breaching now lies at the core of Pakistan’s media culture. The bombardment of viewing time by private media channels, and the growing use of cable, dish antennas and the Internet, taken with the liberal media policies of the Musharraf years, have ushered Pakistan into a new world of media entertainment very rapidly.

As in other countries where TV advertising plays

³ See also Armbrust 1996; Mahon 2000; Abu-Lughod 2005; Hobart 2006.

a large (and increasing) role, in Pakistan advertisements focus on aspects of lifestyles that can be regarded as commoditized: dress, recreational activities, food and drink, female hygiene and beauty products, and other elements of everyday life. It is significant that in the Pakistani context, advertising content that may appear trivial elsewhere has in fact taken on an educative role, sometimes to beneficial effect. Controversial topics – which were not discussed in the presence of adolescents and were regarded as symptoms of *basharmii* (shamelessness) in the public arena governed by cultural and religious norms – appear on television, not only in dramas but in advertisements as well.

Matters appertaining to biological and sexual development are still poorly understood in Pakistan. For girls, mothers, along with other female family members such as an older sister or sister-in-law have traditionally been the most common source of information about menses. Boys, on the other hand, picked up sexual information relatively easily due to their greater social exposure and mobility. Boys' sources of information included friends and family members, religious sources, *Hakims* (practitioners of the Unani and Ayurvedic systems of medicine), and the media. Friends were the most common source of information about puberty, especially regarding acne, bodily hair growth, wet dreams, masturbation, and girls' physical development. However, there was no guarantee, neither for males nor females, that the information they received was reliable and correct (Hennink, et al. 2004: 10–32). The boom in the numbers of private TV channels, and the arrival of women professionals in Pakistan's media sphere, have combined to create a notable change in some respects (Malik and Kiani 2012). Menstrual hygiene, for example – once a difficult issue for daughters to discuss – even with their mothers – has become a theme in television advertising. A widely viewed clip advertizing Always Sanitary Napkins, openly addresses menstrual difficulties, a recurring problem in the women's everyday lived reality. Outside Pakistan, such ads may be seen as intrusive, because of their triviality. But, in Pakistan where illiteracy, poverty, poor health facilities and negligence regarding psychological health have proven to be major hurdles in menstrual hygiene management (Israr and Nasir 2012: 6), the mere presence on the TV screen of an ad promoting the use of sanitary napkins is not simply a distraction. It is instructive, and, by extension, may show young women how to manage their everyday hygiene.

More explicit is the challenge it represents to the prevailing public silence on such matters is the ad for Touch Condoms, which openly promotes fam-

ily planning, formerly a very controversial issue in Pakistan. The '*ulamaa*' together with the national religious authorities in Pakistan, have traditionally opposed family planning deeming it un-Islamic. This alone became a major reason for not practising contraception. But in recent times, many local religious authorities have become supportive of family planning efforts. In villages and communities where service providers are generally unwelcome, family planning workers have initiated discussions about birth control with religious leaders as a means of improving the health of mothers and children (Boonstra 2001: 6). During the course of my fieldwork, I witnessed people debating and rationalizing family planning as a social and economic strategy, rather than debating or wondering whether family planning is *jaa'iz* (permissible) or *naa-jaa'iz* (forbidden) in Islam.

The ad in question promotes the use of condoms as a means of controlling Pakistan's population explosion which has made it the sixth most populous country in the world (Population Reference Bureau: 2012). Pakistan, one of the first countries in South Asia to adopt an explicit Population Policy, initiated a family planning programme in Pakistan's First Five Year Plan (1955–1960) (Sathar and Casterline: 1998). However, very little was done to implement it. The country's fertility rate of 3.6 is still high in the region compared to India (2.6), China (1.5) Bangladesh (2.4) and Nepal (2.9) (Population Council 2012).

Another reason for promoting the use of condoms is the high risk of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in Pakistan. According to the FPAP (Family Planning Association of Pakistan – FPAP 2012) although the current rate is negligible (an estimated 0.1 percent), the country is highly vulnerable due to significant risk factors that could see AIDS become a widespread epidemic.

Pakistan's TV channels do not directly promote the use of condoms by men visiting prostitutes: nor do they suggest their usage for extra-marital sexual affairs, given that such acts are considered un-Islamic. But, the use of condoms for purposes other than family planning has become widespread, contributing to the perception by critics of increasing vulgarity and indulgence in unethical acts (*Giir ixlaaq-ii sargarmiyaaN*). Until very recent times, a major factor restraining girls from involvement in sexual affairs was their fear of becoming pregnant. Nowadays, condoms and emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs), which are very cheap and readily available in most parts of the country, make it easy for them to become involved in sexual affairs. This perceived increase in sexual encounters has given new life to a

traditional concern of males choosing brides: is the girl a virgin or not? Men, in most cases, are not accountable for losing their virginity.

Defenders of the promotion and availability of easy contraception regard it as an important step towards saving people from incurable damage. They argue the reality that many people engage in extra-marital sex, and that it is not wise to let them contract and transfer AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs). Along with advertisements, dramas such as *janjaal puraa* (Crowded Town), *aahat* (An Approaching Sound), *nijaat* (Exculpation) and *anguurii* (Grape Coloured) have also aimed at improving knowledge about family planning.

Pakistani society is divided over the broadcast of these advertisements. Rauf said somewhat unhappily that whereas in the past elders used to instruct their children in such matters, now media have assumed this responsibility:

It is embarrassing for us and for the women of our family to watch these advertisements together.

This division of response is not explicitly founded on religion. It is not a dispute between religious and non-religious people. The foundation of this argument is largely cultural. It turns on the question of whether such broadcasts are appropriate according to cultural codes? The relationship between culture and religion is so complex in Pakistani society that it is challenging to delineate the points where religion and culture meet and diverge. It may not always be possible to distinguish whether debates on certain matters are religious, cultural or a mix of both.

Concern regarding the above ads is based on the anxiety that the family and social values of *sharam-o Hayaa'* (modesty) are being destroyed by these screenings. There is a widespread disquiet that children's premature curiosity and interest in sexual matters is polluting their minds (*dimaag gande ho rahe hiiN*) and that they are losing their innocence at a very early age. A large number of people, both observant and non-observant Muslims, told me that they always keep the remote control in their hands while watching TV with their families. This enables them to change the channel immediately so as to avoid embarrassment when such bold ads or intimate scenes appear on TV. Conversely, such ads are appreciated by some sections of society given that they create an awareness of important topics in an individual's life that were once considered taboo. People supporting these ads view them as a source of educating youth and constructing a mindful society.

Awareness Campaign via Advertisements

Pakistan media are playing an important role in encouraging social change, for example, in the context of women empowerment. The ad of Tapal Danedar Tea can be taken as an example. In this advertisement, a girl is shown seeking her father's permission to take a job. Her father refuses, saying:

BiiTaa, hamaare xaandaan miiN laRkiyaaN ghar se baahir nahiiN nikaltiiN
 ("Girls, in our family, do not go out to take a job")

The daughter goes to the kitchen and makes a cup of tea for her father. As soon as her father drinks his tea, he graciously allows her to undertake work. In recent times, attitude towards women's employment have been changing. This ad, although focused on selling tea, is a reflection of this social change. In another tea ad, one for Vital Tea, the concept of *jahiiz* (dowry) is discussed. Dowry, despite being considered an integral part of a wedding, may constitute a great economic burden for the family of the bride. The dowry system dates back to the ancient Greek city states (800 to 300 BCE) and to the Romans around 200 BCE (Anderson 2007: 153). However, the Dowry system was not known to Muslim societies, nor had it any place in the Islamic Sharia or Sunnah (Ashraf 1997: 3310). Pakistan inherited the practice of dowry from United India; and, it is often perceived to be a cultural practice peculiar to upper-caste Hindus (Rozario 2004; cited in Ambrus, et al. 2010: 1357).

In Pakistan, dowry has now become an integral part of marriage traditions across socio-cultural and economic boundaries. Families consider this tradition important for the future security and happiness of their daughters. Those girls whose families cannot manage good *jahiiz* may face severe criticism and sarcasm from their in-laws, who will say *tumhaare maaN baap ne tumhiiN diyaa kyaa hai?* ("What have your parents given you in the form of dowry?"). The ad for Vital Tea which aims to discourage the *jahiiz* practice, shows a conversation between the parents of the bride and groom. The father of the groom refuses to accept dowry from the parents of the bride, saying that he considers their daughter more precious than any dowry. The advertisement ends with the statement:

Badlo xud ko
 ("Change yourself")

Of course the principle that shapes advertisements is not public enlightenment. But in Pakistan, where the notion of public enlightenment is a new

and dynamic idea, many TV advertisements are infected with this idea as well.

Commander Safeguard, an animated Urdu language cartoon series, promotes the idea of cleanliness and hand-washing habits among children in Pakistan. In the series, the germs were presented as enemies: the cleanliness strategies that were employed successfully nullified the force of these monsters. Cleanliness and purity are important elements in the value system of Islam – both spiritually and physically. But, the general attitude towards cleanliness has yet to acquire a public dimension in Pakistan. Dumping garbage in the streets, roads or parks is common practice. Dustbins are rarely found in public places, and even if they are installed, people do not use them properly. Another habit commonly practiced is spitting in public (Musofer: 2012). Television and other media include programmes seeking to mould people's attitudes towards matters of public and personal hygiene and related subjects. The ads discussed in this paper are enrolled in this campaign.

Advertising Beauty Products. Emerging Sexual Liberalism in Pakistani Media

Beauty products are boldly advertised on TV channels. My respondents, whether religious or not, all voiced the opinion that what they called liberal and advanced TV presentations are posing a serious threat to society's moral codes. For this reason, their contents should be regulated. TV channels, according to Naeem, now encourage nothing but *be-Hayaa'ii* (immodesty). A *Giiratmand aadmii* (an honourable person) would never think of watching ads featuring bleaching creams, body washes, and other such vulgar commercials while sitting with his family. A recent example of such concerns was highlighted when a bold TV commercial of Veet a hair-removing product, featuring the Indian Actress Katrina Kaif met severe criticism and disapproval across Pakistani society. The ad went missing after PEMRA, the body primarily responsible for regulating broadcast media, became involved in the matter (Ahmed 2012). The billboards, which are placed all over the country, were showing Katrina's legs, with the effect of polluting minds and arousing un-called-for desires in the view of Hussain (Hasnain 2012). Criticism of Katrina's ad reveals a general cultural intolerance of the open preaching of body exhibitionism.

Yet little objection is raised to the exercise of individual dress choice: provocative female dress is not alien to Pakistani society. Besides individu-

al choice, which has always been a factor, brothers, parents, husbands, the family's religious orientation and economic class play an important role in determining what is appropriate dress for the women of the family. Pakistani women wear different styles of dresses in response to this variety of factors. Outfits which seem novel today include sleeveless and backless shirts, tight trousers, and capris. While some women opt not to wear a *DuupaTah* or *caadar*, others, who are more traditional wear either a *caadar* or a *DuupaTah* as a form of head cover. Those who observe a strict dress code cover their faces and heads, often wearing the '*abaa'yah*' which conceals the whole body.

During my group discussion with female students about beauty ads, one of the students said:

It is important to promote beauty products and I do not find any issue regarding media's presentation of such products. When you want to fit in, you need to present yourself as beautiful and cool, or you are worth nothing.

I found a sharp difference in perception between the old and new generation regarding TV commercials. Zafar in his fifties, when asked about the content of advertisements said:

Now vulgarity has been prevailed all over in media and people started to appreciate it, by calling it beautiful.

As I have argued more generally, people offer no practical resistance to the proliferation of these ads. The idea does not occur to them that there is anything they can do about them.

All About Romance and Dance

Romance and dance have become important ingredients in advertisements. Khadim Hussain, one of my respondents, sarcastically remarked that TV channels have made it *farZ* (obligatory) to show boys and girls dancing together in ads. It is for this reason that nowadays a culture of *gaanaa-bajaanaa* (singing and dancing) has become prevalent in Pakistan. In the Q Mobile ad, for example, a party scene is depicted wherein young boys and girls are dancing together. They ask a young, famous Pakistani pop singer named "Atif Aslam" to sing for them. The singer takes out his mobile phone, clicks his song on, and starts dancing with a girl who is wearing revealing clothes. In addition to completely mirroring western culture, the advertisement encourages the notion that possession of an expensive mobile phone is an important ingredient in sexual and romantic attraction. Showing these activities on media indeed reflects the behavioural norms of what until

very recently was an elite class, but at the same time normalizes those patterns of behaviour in the eyes of the wider society. Sheikh, in his late twenties, who has recently started his own business, remarked smilingly of what is shown in advertisements:

We are a romantic nation. Why do you mention the media only? Romance is everywhere in Pakistan. What is wrong in it?

Other television advertisements featuring romance as their main vehicle of content include: Shehzaan Twist, Tapal Danedar Tea, Q Mobile, Omore's Ice Cream, Close up Mouth Fresh, LG KG195 cell phone, Coca Cola, PEL Refrigerator, Pepsi Twist, Jazz, Jazz Aur Sunao, Cadbury's Dairy Milk and Sooper Biscuit.

With regard to advertising campaign, from an Islamic point of view, it is not permissible to use sex appeal, romantic language, females wearing short skirts and young models simply to please the viewers and to increase the market share (Akhter, et al. 2011: 444). The exposure of different body parts, bold depictions of sexual and romantic attraction, and representations of couples as girlfriend and boyfriend in TV ads clearly negate the Islamic principles of *Hayaa'* (modesty), *satar* (parts of the body that must be covered with appropriate clothing) and Islamic precepts that recommend that sexuality be kept out of the public domain (Rangoonwala, et al. 2011: 233). Qur'an maintains that "women should not show off their adornment except the one that is apparent⁴...." (The Qur'an 24:31). But scholars have interpreted this differently: most refer to the Sunnah and understand the verse to mean that women may display only their hands and face to men outside of their immediate family sphere. A stricter understanding is that women should be entirely veiled (Rice and Al-Mossawi 2002: 9). A third group of commentators totally rejects the validity of Islamic recommendation of *Hijab* in the current age (War and Koningsveld 2005: 35).

TV Dramas: Spotting the Trend

In Pakistan, TV drama, which has a rich history as a popular form of entertainment, remains a strong agent of socialization, constructing and reconstructing the cultural and social outlook of Pakistanis. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, which were said to be the golden era of PTV dramas, soap operas were very popular and well-produced and even had

a loyal following in India (Ali and Gunaratne 2000). The stories of the dramas were a subject of everyday conversations. So as not to miss an episode, males rushed home in the evenings after work and females organized their home chores so that they would be completed well before the start of the drama. A tradition was established in those days which is still to be found (though not to the same degree) with present-day TV serials. Many serials of the 1980s were rooted in the events and trends of everyday life and targeted social wrongs, not once in a while but consistently. The list of classic serials is a large one. Only a few can be mentioned here. *Jhuuk siyaal* ("Siyyal's Place") and *xudaa kii bastii* ("Colony of God"; first production 1969, second – 1974) directed the attention of audiences to poverty, economic disparity and the abuse of the poor by the rich. *DiivariiN* ("The Walls") was praised for its honest depiction of the problems of the poor and illiterate people living in the villages. *Andhiiraa ujaalaa* ("The Darkness and the Light," 1984) set out to uncover different crimes happening in society and brought to light the corruption and misuse of power in the Police Department. Another serial – perhaps the most popular of PTV – was *Vaaris*: ("The Inheritor," 1979) which explored the feudal web and the struggle against dishonesty and intrigue. A number of these serials were concerned with women's issues, which now number among the prime topics of contemporary dramas. In *Pyaas* ("Thirst"), the *pardah*-observing heroine persists in receiving education, despite the series of obstacles she has to confront. In *Amaavas* ("New Moon Night"), a poor, salaried man is providing education to his daughters. His wife, however, is against it: she thinks his hard-earned money is being wasted. But, the man remains resolute and never gives up (Zuberi 1991: 2–9). *Tanhaa'iyaaN* ("The Loneliness," 1985) was focused on the plight of two sisters, who struggle to buy back their home after the early deaths of their parents. The emotional twists and turns, and the importance of relations and love were the defining features of this play.

Not all the dramas had a grave theme. *Sonaa caandii* ("Gold and Silver") was a classical comedy drama about an innocent couple (*sonaa* – "husband" and *caandii* – "wife") who decided to leave their village to pay off their parents' debt. They migrated to the city where they worked in several private homes. During their stay, they changed the lives of the people around them in very funny but inspirational ways. *Aangan TiiRhaa* ("Winding Patch") a satirical drama series was recognized for its indirect criticism of martial law and the county's unrepresentative electoral system. The story line of *Ankahii*

4 For example, palms of hands, eyes to see the way, or outer dress like the veil, gloves and head-cover.

(Unsaid, 1982) revolved around a girl who longed to be rich. A successful combination of love and humour were among the top reasons for the popularity of this drama. *Sunahre din* (“Golden Days,” 1990), which was telecast with the help of Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR, division of Public relations in Pakistan Army), portrayed the lives of military cadets in the Pakistan Military Academy – PMA. It was a mixture of humor and tragic events, embellished by romantic themes. Alpha Bravo Charlie (1998), the sequel to *sunahre din* mingled romance and comedy with the operational activities of the Pakistan Army in demanding areas such as the Siachen Glacier. *Tinak vaalaa jin* (“Giant with Glasses,” 1993), a children’s fantasy series, earned huge popularity in Pakistan due to its humor, magical characters and supernatural and fairy themes. Many other comedy shows with an accompanying message are worthy mentioning here.⁵

As indicated earlier, television drama, like TV commercials, has experienced a transformation in themes, concepts and in overall presentation. The Musharraf government, aiming to dissociate Islam from terrorism and extremism, eagerly emphasized the concept of “enlightened- moderation”. To achieve this policy aim, in the wake of US pressure exerted on the government after September 1, 2001, censorship policy was relaxed for dramas as well as for the other genres of media. Yet this policy shift has not necessarily resulted in better dramas. A critical look at previous TV dramas reveals a wide reflection of Pakistani society at that time in character, locality and situation. Dramas today are more fixated on dress, jewellery, luxurious cars, big bungalows, lush lifestyles and wealth. Displays of intimate scenes, dating, romance, physical interaction between girlfriend-boyfriend, liberal dress codes and the use of bold romantic language constitute the core culture of today’s dramas. Many respondents expressed their concern that drama is no longer a family entertainment because they cannot watch intimate scenes with their families. Junaid who works for a private firm, expressed his disapproval of TV dramas as follows:

Dramas are showing romance and love stories in a way that it seems that it is the only purpose and problem of Pakistani society.

5 “Fifty Fifty” and *Alif nuu* were the most popular satirical comedy series in the history of Pakistan Television. The series were focused on highlighting bad social practices such as deception and, corruption in society in a very humorous way and a hidden message to transform bad attitudes into good. *Studio Dhaa’ii* (Studio 2: 30) and *Studio pone tiin* (Studio 2: 45), two other popular comedy shows, aimed to expose social issues and widespread corruption in a comical manner.

Women are popularly believed to represent the largest percentages of viewership. Muhammad Abdullah, a local tailor in his fifties, explained his experience in this regard:

Ladies show the designs copied from some dramas and ask me to stitch the same dress. Many women also ask to see a particular drama for getting an idea about the design.

Many tailors’ shops in Muslim Town displayed posters containing the following wording:

We stitch clothes on designs shown in dramas.

Jalal, a man in his fifties, appraising current dress trends said that women’s undergarments have become visible since they began following the *be-huudah* (ridiculous) dress forms that media have been promoting. The *burqa’* is presented as a symbol of illiteracy, backwardness and as representative of the uncivilized culture of the poor, whereas, sleeveless and backless shirts, and the shorts and jeans are presented on TV as symbols of high status. There was a growing concern amongst my respondents that media are providing children with premature awareness. Some elders (both male and female) who watch Pakistani or Indian dramas allow their children to sit and watch with them, seemingly unaware of the possible impact of adult themes. There is no concept of audience discretion in electronic media. All programs including those which contain adult themes, coarse language, sexual references or scenes containing violence are released for general exhibition, which means that all ages may watch this program.

The influence of Indian media is evident in the comedy drama serial Ladies Park (Geo TV) in which girls and boys present a scene from an Indian movie, dancing to an Indian song at a wedding. Top models from Pakistan’s fashion industry constitute the cast of this drama serial, rendering it more of a fashion advertisement than a drama. In *Bulbulay* (“Bubbles”) (ARY Digital), the most watched sitcom, the husband refers to his wife as *Jaanu* (sweetheart), which used to be an expression of love in a private space.

Although love stories have become an integral part of Pakistani dramas, some still address important social issues. Religious conservatism and identity issues, women empowerment, poverty, education, family disputes, and modernisation are some of the main subjects of contemporary dramas.

Freedom to choose a marriage partner is a vital subject in Pakistani society. The range of views regarding this issue were well reflected in the drama serial *paalkii* (Palanquin) (Hum TV), which focused on families in which little liberty was provided to

children to marry by choice. Compared to the past, when most marriages were arranged by parents and relatives independent of the wishes of the children, families of both boys and girls now prefer to know their choices saying that *zamaanah badal gaya hai* (times have changed). The increasing trend towards love marriages can be taken as evidence of this change of attitude. However, many families in the rural and urban areas continue to resist this trend.

Female empowerment has become a popular theme in TV dramas. *Xuushbo kaa ghar* (“The Home of Fragrance” – ARY Digital) emphasized the need to empower women since life does not always run smoothly. The possible advantages of educating, empowering and giving confidence to women are illustrated in this series, as well as in *LarkiyaaN maHalle kii* (“Girls of the Neighbourhood” – Hum TV).

The drama, *Akbari Asghari* (Hum TV) supplies a critique of eastern hypocrisy, and a rejection of the conspiracy theory that every thing that has to do with the West is wrong and bad. This drama which emphasizes the importance of women’s education, is a modern comedy remake of *Miraat-ul-Aroos* (“Bride’s Mirror”), a drama series telecasted on PTV and based on a novel written in 1860 by Deputy Nazir Ahmed.

Topics have been emerging, then in media programmes which were once considered unmentionable in a public forum in Pakistan. Such sensitive issues as child abuse, the raping of girls, and the importance of sex education are the focus of the drama serials *Ruug* (“Permanent Grief” – ARY TV) and *Paanii jiisaa pyaar* (“Love like Water” – Hum TV). These dramas highlighted how such incidents influence a girl’s life, and the humiliation that her family has to face as a consequence of such tragedies. Other examples of dramas in which taboo topics were chosen include *Umrao Jan Ada* (Geo TV) based on Mirza Ruswa’s famous novel which portrays the life of an 18th century sex worker, and *Shaa’id ke ba-haar aa’e* (“Hoping for the Spring to Come” – Hum TV), which deals with the life of a liberal woman lawyer, who is raped but fights back and emerges as a survivor (Ahmed and Haroon 2003).

Pakistanis have long felt trapped between two ideological extremes: the religious extreme of fundamentalism which was promulgated in the Zia years and received widespread exposure after 2001, and the policy of enlightened-moderation introduced during the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf. Intense social and religious confusion inhibits an appropriate definition of a true Muslim and Pakistani. The drama serial titled *MiiN Abdul Qadir huuN* (“I am Abdul Qadir” – Hum TV) is one

of a number, which have sought to depict this puzzlement. *FaSiil-e jaaN se aage* (Beyond the Call of Duty)⁶ aimed to condemn terrorism in the name of Islam and to portray the army’s conception of terrorism, was broadcast on PTV with the assistance of Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR). It sought to expose terrorists who are exploiting poor and innocent people in the name of *jihad*. The drama was based on the stories of brave Pakistanis who made huge sacrifices during the recent uprising in Swat⁷ northern district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and who showed great conviction to weed out terrorism in the country (Pakistan Army: 2011). Its main aim was to gain public support for the war against terrorism, and to educate the people about the heinous crimes committed by militants and the Pakistani Taliban against the state and its people. The play drew mixed feedback from the public, some calling it military propaganda (Dempsey 2011). But, notwithstanding, the drama may have helped to change the people’s perception of war.

Conclusion

The presentations of Pakistani TV channels and their huge following are illustrative of new forms of cultural supremacy and negate the impression that extremist ideologies rule over the country. In Muslim Town, discourses of entertainment media have proven influential in determining people’s lifestyles and worldviews. The content of TV dramas is part of everyday conversation in Muslim Town. The leaning towards sexual liberalism, body exhibitionism, bold romanticism, and glamour is apparent in many TV dramas and advertisements. The media partly fulfil an educative role. Sensitive issues, which were once even considered impossible to discuss within the family, have become part of media content. These issues include family planning, female hygiene, women’s rape and sexual harassment, and child abuse. The media are disseminating awareness on such topics as women’s empowerment, girls’ education, cleanliness, and the rejection of extremist thoughts in the name of religion. The subject matter of drama programmes and their eager consumption by Pakistanis do not match the stereotype of an isolated society wherein extremist thought and life-

⁶ Translated by BBC News, South Asia.

⁷ Between 2007 and 2009, Mullah Fazlullah, the chief of *Tehreek Nifaz-e-Shariat Mohammadi* (Movement for Enforcement of Islamic Laws) takeover Swat and adjacent district and imposed his own version of Islam. The Pakistan Army launched “Operation Rah-e-Rast” for control of the Swat district in May 2009.

styles are practiced and disseminated without challenge. Although a majority of residents (both observant and non-observant Muslims) in Muslim Town consider the content of many these broadcasts as “foreign” and un-Islamic, they respond to them as channels of modernization. Media perspectives of the material, mental and social worlds are far from the versions of Islamic or extremist ideologies. Taken together, the role models, stories, and the characters that appear in advertisements and TV plays tend to represent a non-extremist version of social discourse, and favour the constitution of the individual self as “non-extremist.”

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