

THE EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC VALUES AND FAMILY DYNAMICS IN PAKISTANI TELEVISION DRAMAS: A COMPARATIVE MULTI-MODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES

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Abstract

This study investigates the change in depiction of values in Pakistani television dramas. It shows the transition from the established Islamic and cultural themes to modern sensationalization and liberal ideologies. This research compares and contrasts the narratives of family, marital relationships, the concept of the veil, sisterhood and feminism through a multi modal discourse analysis of traditional and modern dramas. There is an evident shift in the values which influence the societal perceptions and shows cultural change on a broader level. In this research, dialogues and images have been analyzed which helps to understand these shifts and their impact on Pakistani society. The findings of the research paper questions the representation of modern women, family and marital relationships and moral values of the contemporary dramas. This highlights a tension between traditional and moral values. This study contributes to the understanding of the role of media in shaping societal norms and values. It examines the complex interplay between culture, religion, and television content. The research shows a visible shift in values which has influenced the perception of society and reflects a change in culture on a broader level

Introduction

The Pakistani television drama industry has undergone a significant change since its reception. Traditional Pakistani television dramas have long served as cultural indicators, reflecting and moulding societal norms, values, and beliefs. Typically, these dramas stick to topics that correspond with Islamic beliefs, moral precepts, and cultural conventions, reflecting the collective spirit of Pakistani culture. However there is a prominent shift in the themes of contemporary Pakistani dramas with the passage of time which do not correspond with our societal norms and Islamic believes. They explore complex and controversial themes which challenge the norms of the society and sparks critical discourse. The significant shift is affecting the mindsets of the viewers which redefines the cultural identity of the viewer and it reshapes the moral compass of the nation. The emergence of private television channels and the sharp increase in the production of digital media have further accelerated the change. The shift in themes is not only artistic but also shows an extensive change in society where old values are being amended and redefined. The most famous traditional dramas which are the part of this research are Khuda Aur Muhabbat 1, Zindagi Gulzar Hai and Humsafar. These dramas have

embodied moral virtues and family values. They show the resilience of Pakistani culture. On the other hand, the contemporary dramas include, *Khuda Aur Muhabbat 3*, *Jalan* and *Tere bin*. These dramas have ventured into bold ideas. They show uncommon story lines hence pushing the boundaries of social acceptance. These dramas were aired on HUM TV and GEO TV. All of these dramas have millions of views.

Problem Statement

Pakistani television dramas have traditionally reflected and fortified Islamic values, cultural norms and moral lessons, serving as a substantial medium for shaping gender roles, ethics and societal expectations around family. However, in recent years there has been an apparent shift in the content of dramas with contemporary narratives increasingly encouraging sensationalism and liberal ideologies that diverge from traditional values. This shift raises concerns about the evolving portrayal of societal norms and the potential impact on the audience's perceptions of the key concepts such as family dynamics, marital relationships and the role of veil, sisterhood and feminism. By juxtaposing the classic and contemporary dramas, this study aims to critically explore how these evolving narratives influence societal values and contribute to broader cultural transformations, thereby reshaping the social fabric of Pakistani society.

Research Objectives

- 1) To perform a comparative analysis of old and modern Pakistani dramas, focusing on their representation of Islamic principles and cultural standards.
- 2) To examine the changing portrayal of societal values in modern Pakistani dramas, with a major focus on family, marriage relationships, the veil, sisterhood, and feminism.
- 3) To examine the impact of the change in the themes of contemporary Pakistani dramas on Pakistani society, exploring its influence on societal norms and values.

Research Questions

- 1) How have the depiction of family and marital relationships changed over time in Pakistani dramas?
- 2) How have the notions of the veil, sisterhood, and feminism been portrayed in Pakistani dramas, and how have they evolved over time?
- 3) What are the impacts of the changing narratives in Pakistani dramas on the norms and values of Pakistani society?

Literature review:

Substantial scholarly concern have been sparked due to the depiction of cultural values, gender roles, and societal ideologies in Pakistani television dramas, notably within the lens of media reflecting and shaping the cultural norms. Television dramas being among the illustrious form of entertainment proffer rich pretext for evaluating the impact of traditional vs contemporary values, emerging gender dynamics and the involvement of media in reinforcing or challenging prevailing ideologies, thereby serving as both mirrors and constructors of the realities of society. The existing literature specify insights about the illustration of cultural and gender identity in media with a focus on Indian and Western television content. However, we find a notable gap in the analysis of Pakistani dramas that how they speculate the tension between modernity and tradition. By employing a multi modal discourse analysis, this literature review attempt to bridge this gap by providing insights about the progression of values in Pakistani dramas by centering on portrayal of gender relationships, family structures and symbols like the veil. This review will evaluate how different forms of communication, verbal, visual and gestural-offers meaning-

making in media texts and the propagation of specific values by these elements to audiences by comparing old and contemporary dramas. The study's objective is not only to encapsulate the existing literature but to provide a more extensive understanding of how television dramas act as cultural artifacts to discuss the intricacies of modernity, identity and tradition in Pakistani society.

Multi modal discourse analysis offers a comprehensive structure for the understanding of different forms of communication inclusive of visual, gestural, verbal contributing to meaning-making in media texts. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) argue in their seminal work *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* that "multi modality is an inherent property of all communication." According to them, the procedure of meaning-making in media refer to multiple modes-language, gestures, sounds, and images relating concurrently. This approach provides us with deeper insights of how values are conveyed and challenged in media representations. For example, in television dramas, multi modal elements like dialogues, character expressions, camera angles and color schemes work in collaboration to propagate elaborate emotional responses, cultural values and ideologies to the audience. By investigating these components, researchers can impart the deeper cultural narratives and ideologies that may not be immediately obvious.

Norman Fairclough (1995), in *Media Discourse*, further suggests that media discourse is not simply a passive reflection of society but an active agent that creates and recreates social reality. According to Fairclough, media texts are a potent form of social practice regulating public perceptiveness and norms. He initiated "critical discourse analysis" (CDA), a method which reiterated the correlation between discourse and power, specifically how media reinforces and opposes established structures within society. Employing CDA, Fairclough uncovers how circumstantial language structures, representational practices and narrative structures in television dramas can validate some ideologies and dismiss others. In the framework of Pakistani dramas, the depiction of gender roles, veil and family structures can function as a contemplation of wider societal discussions about cultural identity, modernity and tradition.

Various studies provide insights on the role of media in shaping cultural values and norms. Gerbner et al. (2002) argue in their theory of Cultivation Analysis that "television as a cultural arm of society not only reflects but perpetuates dominant ideologies." According to this theory, protracted and durable exposure to television content can corroborate existing cultural values and norms and determine viewer's perceptions of reality. Gerbner's findings advocate that television dramas can configure specific worldviews by consistently presenting audiences with specific character archetypes, narratives and themes that oftentimes reflect predominant social ideologies. For instance, the contemporary Pakistani dramas promoting individualistic characters and narratives challenge the immutable norms of piety, honor and familial duty, while old Pakistani dramas by repeatedly integrating these themes confirm cultural expectations and customary gender roles.

Television is displayed as a dynamic cultural medium that forms and reflects societal norms in *Television Culture* by John Fiske (1987). Fiske's theory of "popular culture" and "cultural codes" substantiates how these media function as tools for both perpetuating and questioning traditional values, therefore is especially useful for examining Pakistani dramas. Fiske implies that audiences demonstrate the culturally shared codes on the foundations of television functions

which authorizes popular narratives to either affirm or object dominant ideologies. In Pakistani dramas, these cultural codes can be conformed in how contemporary Pakistani dramas challenge social and Islamic values and exaggerate them, while old Pakistani dramas aligned with these norms. According to Fiske, the multifaceted meanings encapsulated in television content are noteworthy for understanding how media both reflects societal shifts and ardently contributes to shaping them.

In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Stuart Hall (1997) proclaims how media is a bottom-line arena for ideological encounter in which numerous groups compete for and conciliate meanings. Hall's theory of "encoding/decoding" contends that media texts are encoded with distinct ideologies and intended meanings by their producers, but these texts are decoded and interpreted in diversified ways by the audiences based on their personal experiences and cultural background. According to Hall, media representations including television dramas assist in a reflection of specific outlooks and interests often substantiating powerful social groups and therefore are never objective. Hall's framework can be applied to Pakistani television dramas in order to examine how different dramas encode notions of gender, cultural identity and family and how audiences decodes these notions in various ways, either defying or affirming the premeditated meanings.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault (1972) by offering a critical lens inspects how discourse functions as a mechanism of power determining and establishing social realities. According to Foucault's concept of "discursive formations," certain knowledge and truths are generated and proclaimed through language and practices, including media representations. Discourses about gender, morality and family in television dramas are not just exhibited but are created as "truths" prompting societal demeanor s and conducts. For example, the illustration of veil as a symbol of piety and modesty in Pakistani dramas can be viewed as part of broader cultural rituals that endorses particular gender ethos as religiously and culturally legitimate.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler (1990) challenging the conventional notions of gender as a definite binary classification insists that gender identity is a practice that is periodically being created and re-created. Butler's theory is significant for enumerating media depictions of gender indicating that television dramas through their ways of the portraiture of character's behaviors, actions and collaborations can support or dismiss customary gender roles. For instance, female characters in Pakistani dramas embodying attributes like modesty, obedience, or rebellion are not just representations but are diligently constituting particular gender principles that either align with or subvert societal anticipations.

The depiction of women in media has been assessed by Ann Kaplan (1983), in *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* in which she highlights the ideological frameworks that contribute to these depictions. Pakistani dramas often mirrors broader cultural debates cautioning gender participation s particularly the representation of women. Kaplan's examination of female characters as objects of both the "male gaze" and societal expectations is especially pertinent for the study of Pakistani dramas. Female characters possesses the traits of sacrifice, modesty and familial duty and are depicted within the realms of traditional gender customs in the older dramas. Kaplan's work allows us to assess how contemporary dramas portray more complex, multi-dimensional female characters defying these traditional roles showing a shift towards autonomy and individualism. Kaplan's theory enables researchers to evaluate how these shift of

portrayals either support or challenge existing ideologies within the arena of power, identity and gender in Pakistani society.

According to Raewyn Connell (2005), in *Masculinities*, the representations of media construct various forms of masculinity, often encouraging dominant masculinity while discouraging alternative forms. Connell's theory affirms that media plays a central role in conserving gender ranking by constantly presenting men as powerful, authoritative figures and women as weak and submissive ones. By applying this perspective, we can examine Pakistani dramas and view how male characters bolster up conventional patriarchal structures by their depiction as the protectors, decision-makers or aggressors. Female characters, on the other hand may be depicted as either compliant or as threats to these structures.

The symbolism of the veil in Pakistani dramas is another significant arena for cultural discourse. Joan Wallach Scott (2007), in *The Politics of the Veil*, and Leila Ahmed (2011), in *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*, delve into how the veil works as an intricate symbol of religious and cultural identification. According to Scott, relying on the context in which veil is portrayed it can hold countless meanings constituting both authorization and subjugation. Ahmed asserts that the revival of the veil serves as a symbol of exquisite opposition against Western cultural dominance, while also supporting religious piety and cultural authenticity. Pakistani dramas often use the veil as a symbol of both cultural uprightness and religious identity. By examining how the veil is depicted, we can get an understanding of how these dramas maneuver the tension between modernity and tradition.

In *Critical Discourse Analysis*, Van Dijk (2001) asserts that the discourse of media is a compelling instrument for the “manufacture of consent” by preferring specific point of views of what is socially preferable and acceptable thereby affecting public belief system. Van Dijk's work offers a lens through which we can examine how media texts, such as television dramas present with the creation and preservation of societal norms, particularly in regard to cultural identity, power and gender. In Pakistani dramas, researchers can uncover how these texts regularize specific values and ideologies through an analysis of the narrative structures and language used in them.

In *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*, James Paul Gee (2011) uphold that it is significant to understand the sociocultural frameworks in which discourse is formulated and admitted. According to Gee, discourse analysis focuses on how language represented cultural norms and social practices. In the framework of Pakistani television dramas, Gee's study can be used to assess how fundamental cultural tensions and social discordance are reflected by narrative choices, dialogues and character interactions, particularly in a rapidly updating society where traditional and contemporary values often conflict.

Siddique, Bhatti, and Ali (2023) review about depiction of women in Pakistani dramas precedes to the discovery that cultural and societal values are supported by predominant depiction of women in passive and domestic roles. They write, “ARY dramas tend to focus on women's materialistic desires, framing them within the boundaries of their households, while HUM dramas, though showing professional women, still objectify and dehumanize them.” This shows the persistence of stereotypical gender roles in conventional as well as contemporary milieus. The importance of women is lessened to objectification and beauty rather than societal contributions when it comes to representation of women in professional roles showing constraints of characterizations. This refers to the idea that even contemporary dramas are

impotent to move beyond the customary gender stereotypes (Siddique et al., 2023). The effect of media on the insights of gender roles shape presumptions of women and societal norms and is significant to recognize.

In Pakistani dramas, the impression of Western cultural influences on the representation of women has been inspected by Badar, Noureen, and Ahmad (2023). Their findings suggest that female characters often continue to be confined in traditional gender roles notwithstanding the existence of Western notions of independence and empowerment eventually causing struggle to even personal independence with societal assurance. They write, “Women in contemporary dramas are shown navigating between their traditional familial duties and aspirations for personal empowerment.” This sheds lights on the developing gender roles and the cultural values which creates tension in the representation of media. With a shift in gender roles, the portrayals of media reinforce or challenge long-held stereotypes referring to the fact that it still have profound impact on society (Badar et al., 2023).

Dattoo (2010), in the same vein come up with insights of the Pakistani youth which is effected by global media and that the youth’s viewpoints of gender and identity are constructed on the basis of exposure to Indian dramas and Western cultural narratives. He argues, “Youth often find themselves navigating between traditional religious values and the more liberal representations they see in media.” This employs a reflection of how global media contributes to a moderate but observable change in societal expectations of women thereby effecting the local gender values. The study asserts that exposure to media plays a crucial role in reshaping gender identities even though the conventional norms remain dominant creating an intricate dynamic between local and global impacts (Dattoo, 2010).

Theoretical framework:

This research employs Multi modal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to examine how various semantic modes-language, visuals, gestures and narrative structures that convey values and messages in Pakistani television dramas. Developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), MDA accentuate that communication in media is not limited to verbal discourse but includes the interaction of multiple modes to produce meaning. This framework will be crucial for analyzing how these modes portrays and shapes societal values related to family, gender roles and cultural norms.

MDA will aid in comparing traditional and contemporary dramas, uncovering how multi model aspects such as dialogue, body language and visual design influence the shifting representation of gender, morality and cultural expressions.

The framework permit for an analysis of both explicit and implicit messages, offering insights into how media content both shapes and reflects societal changes.

Multi modality research plays a pivotal role in the collection and analysis of digital data.

Findings and Discussions:

**Family Relationships in *Khuda Aur Mohabbat 1* and *Tere Bin*
Screenshot#1 of the Drama**



Figure : 1
Comparison of Family Relationships:

Elements for Analysis	In <i>Khuda Aur Mohabbat 1</i>	Signifier	Signified	In <i>Tere Bin</i>	Signifier	Signified
Sacrifice for Family	Iman sacrifices her love and life to maintain her family's honor.	Iman died in front of whole family shows her sacrifice	Upholds traditional values of family respect, where personal desires are secondary to familial obligations.	Escape from nikkah, Meerub abandons her responsibilities and leaves her family and in-laws.	Rejection of Family Expectations, Autonomy	Meerub prioritizes her own freedom over family honor, disregarding traditional family roles and expectations.
Relationship with Parents	Iman respects her father's wishes and fulfills his expectations even at the cost of her own happiness.	Obedience, Respect	Represents the traditional expectation of unconditional respect for parental authority, even in matters of personal sacrifice.	Meerub shows disregard for her adoptive and biological fathers, not valuing their emotional investment in her.	Disobedience, Individualism	Reflects a modern, self-centered attitude where personal emotions and desires override familial loyalty.

Analysis:

In *Khuda Aur Mohabbat 1*, Iman sacrifices her love for Hamad to maintain her family's honor, reflecting traditional values of duty and obedience. She respects her father's wishes and prioritizes family over personal happiness, showing a broad commitment to maintain her family's reputation.

In contrast, *Tere Bin's* Meerub values her independence over family obligations. She contempt both her biological and adoptive fathers and distances herself from her in-laws, eventually leaving her marital home. Her actions reflect a modern approach where personal freedom and emotions take precedence over family or societal expectations.

This comparison highlights the shift in Pakistani dramas, where traditional values like obedience, sacrifice, and family honor (as seen in *Khuda Aur Mohabbat 1*) are juxtaposed with modern ideals of autonomy, rebellion, and self-expression (as seen in *Tere Bin*). While Iman embodies the selflessness expected of women in traditional family structures, Meerub represents a shift toward prioritizing individual freedom over collective family responsibility.

Marital Relationships

Screenshot#2 of the Drama



Figure:2

Elements for Analysis in Humsafar			Elements for Analysis in Tere Bin		
	Signifier	Signified		Signifier	Signified
Khiraad's role as a traditional wife	Loyalty, Dedication, Love	Traditional marital harmony, Selflessness	Meerub's contract before marriage	Lack of emotional connection, Boundaries	Modern individualism, Emotional detachment
Khiraad's household responsibilities	Domestic Duties	Stability, Role fulfillment	Meerub's friendship with Rohail post-marriage	Defiance, Rebellion	Breaking traditional loyalty, Personal autonomy

Elements for Analysis in Humsafar	Signifier	Signified	Elements for Analysis in Tere Bin	Signifier	Signified
Khirad’s respect for Ashar	Respect, Emotional Investment	Sacredness of marital bond, Cultural expectations	Lack of respect for Murtasim	Disrespect, Distance	Challenge to patriarchal norms, Questioning authority

Analysis

In *Humsafar*, Khirad embodies the traditional wife—loyal, dutiful, and respectful. Her commitment to Ashar and her role in managing household duties reflect the deeply ingrained cultural expectations of a woman maintaining harmony in marriage through selflessness. Her love and respect for Ashar underline the sacredness of the marital bond in traditional Pakistani society.

In contrast, *Tere Bin*'s Meerub breaks these norms by entering a contract marriage, indicating emotional detachment and lack of acceptance of her husband, Murtasim. Her ongoing friendship with Rohail post-marriage defies traditional expectations of loyalty and reflects her prioritization of personal boundaries over marital responsibilities. This shift signals a move toward modern, individualistic approaches in marital relationships where emotional autonomy and personal freedom challenge traditional gender roles and obligations.

Through this comparison, it is evident that the portrayal of marital relationships in Pakistani dramas has evolved from reinforcing the ideal of a submissive, dutiful wife to highlighting women’s autonomy and resistance to patriarchal expectations.

Veil

Screenshot#03 of the Drama



Figure 3 : Khuda Aur Muhabbat 1(left) And Khuda Aur Muhabbat 3(right)

Elements for Analysis In the screenshot of Khuda Aur	Signifier	Signified	Elements for Analysis In the screenshot of Khuda Aur	Signifier	Signified

Muhabbat 1(left)			Muhabbat 3(right)		
	Veil	Modesty, Piety, Obedience		Open Hair	Freedom, Modernity, Rebellion
	Covered Face	Shame, Protection		Designer Dress	Worldliness, Status.
	Downcast Eyes	Humility, Fear		No Veil	Autonomy, Self-Expression, Rejection of Patriarchy

Table 3: Comparison of Veil In Both Dramas

In the drama serial Khuda aur Muhabbat 1, Hamad, a young boy from the upper class family falls in love with Iman who is the daughter of an Islamic scholar. Iman strictly follows the Islamic practice of veil in order to cover herself from the non-mehram men (who are not related by blood or marriage). Iman's obedience to veil represents her religious identity, modesty and piety which shows her emphasis on family values and islamic principles. It also represents the boundary between herself and non-mehram men. On the other hand, in khuda aur Muhabbat 3, Mahi's character shows the hypocrisy regarding her practice of veil. At her friend's wedding, she wears modern clothes, leaves her hair open and does not cover her face. While at home, she wears veil to maintain the traditional image of a Syed family. This shows that Mahi wears veil out of obligation. This shows that societal pressure compels woman to live dual lives where they prioritize family honor over personal freedom.

Sisterhood

Screenshot#04



Figure 4 : Zindagi Gulzar Hai(left) And Jalan (right)

Elements for Analysis In the screenshot of Zindagi Gulzar Hai	Signifier	Signified	Elements for Analysis In the screenshot of Jalan(right)	Signifier	Signified

(left)					
	Sidra standing beside Kashaf	Sisterly Love and Support		Intense gaze	conflict, confrontation
	Sidra listening to Kashaf	Care and Understanding		contrasting outfit	Distinct personalities, differing social statuses and roles
	Sidra's gentle face	Kindness and Compassion		Body language and facial expression	Tension and Aggression

Table 4: Comparison of sisterhood

In old Pakistani drama like *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*, Kashaf and her sister Sidra share a strong bond. They find solace in each other despite their numerous challenges and hardships. They share their traumas and support each other through thick and thin. For Kashaf, Sidra proves to be the best listener. Their sisterhood demonstrates a healthy relationship between siblings. On the other hand, In modern Pakistani drama serial *Jalan* shows the complex relationship between two sisters Misha and Nisha. Nisha obsession for wealth and status develops jealousy for her sister. The show highlights that family dynamics can fuel up sisters against each other which leads to betrayal and rivalry. Nisha ends up marrying Misha's husband. Through this story, the show encourages viewers to reflect on mutual support and communication in order to maintain a healthy sibling bond.

Feminism

Screenshot#5 of the Drama



Figure 5: Zindagi Gulzar Hai (left) And Tere Bin(right)

Elements for Analysis In The ScreenShot of Zindagi Gulzar Hai	Signifier	Signified	Elements for Analysis In the screenshot of Tere Bin(left)	Signifier	Signified
	White Scarf	Modesty, purity		Red Dress	Aggression
	Serious expression	Resilience		Crossed arms	Rebellious
	Library background	Knowledge, education		Pensive expression	Internal conflict

Table 5: Comparison of Feminist characters

In traditional Pakistani drama, *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*, Kashaf shows positive feminism and represents traditional values. She maintains her honor and nobility by challenging the societal expectations. Her character represents an ideal feminist. She becomes a successful person through her hardwork which showcases her strength and resilience. She stays true to herself and balance personal aspirations with other responsibilities. She proves to be an ideal feminist for the rest of the women.

On the other hand, in modern Pakistani drama, *Tere Bin*, the protagonist, Meerub represents a bold yet flawed version of modern feminist. Meerub shows a complete disregard for her husband and the social values of the society. She visits her friend's apartment without her husband's permission. This act shows a reckless disregard for marital boundaries. She does not obey her husband and prefers to do whatever she wants. This shows negative and individualistic feminism. This portray unchecked ego. In modern feminism, there must be a balance between personal freedom and relational responsibilities.

Conclusion:

The evolution of values in Pakistani television dramas is portrayed by this study employing multimodal discourse analysis revealing a stark contrast between traditional and contemporary narratives. Classical dramas such as *Humsafar*, *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* and *Khuda Aur Mohabbat 1*

emphasize themes like moral integrity, family honor and sacrifice upholding Islamic principles and cultural values. The societal expectations of modesty, piety, duty and respect are reflected by these shows particularly regarding gender roles and family dynamics. Contemporary dramas like *Jalan*, *Khuda or Muhabbat*,³ and *Tere Bin*, on the other hand, shows a shift towards individualistic and liberal ideologies portraying characters who prioritize personal desires over familial obligations, rebel against patriarchal norms, and question established moral structures. The tensions between preserving traditional values and embracing modern ideologies is highlighted by the findings indicating a broader cultural transformation in Pakistani society. The research illustrates how contemporary dramas contribute to reshaping societal perceptions of family, marital relationships, and gender roles by analyzing language, visuals, gestures, and narrative structures. While these dramas push the boundaries of social acceptance, they also raise important questions about the impact of sensationalism on cultural identity. Overall, this study emphasizes the significant role of media in reflecting and influencing societal norms, showcasing the ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity in the portrayal of values within Pakistani dramas.

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