



Local Drama Serial Khai-A Multilayered Storyline Portraying Revenge as Social Interaction

Nomana Masood*, Ahmad Bilal**

* PhD Scholar in Art History, College of Art and Design, PU. nomana888@gmail.com

**Director, Postgraduate Research Centre of Creative Arts, PUCAD. director.prcca@pu.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submitted 12.05.2024

Accepted 10.11.2024

Published 31.12.2024

Volume No. 11

Issue No. II

ISSN (Online) 2414-8512

ISSN (Print) 2311-293X

DOI:

Keywords: Storytelling, Multilayered, Innovative, Complex Characters, Revenge, Power, Brutality

ABSTRACT

The drama serial “Khai” depicts multidimensional script revealing diverse characterization and brutal events in a cultural scenario. The aim of the research is to investigate the influence of the OTT platforms in the art of storytelling and in the portrayal of characters. This paper highlights the psychic condition of the female lead character as an avenger, a role unacceptable in local society. A comparative analysis is created between local drama serial “Khai” and series “Game of the Thrones” demonstrating a comparable style of storytelling along with the cultural, social, and psychological aspects of revenge between the content of both serials. The outcome of the research suggests that the influence of the OTT content is not only changing the traditional style of storytelling, typical subject matters and portrayal of characters. It is also shifting the mindset of the audiences in accepting the strength, power image and diverse roles of women.



Introduction

Revenge is one of the most potent human passions as it is the result of the complex interplay of emotions such as anger, betrayal, and a desire for justice. This powerful urge to retaliate for perceived wrongs has been deeply entrenched in human behaviour and can be traced across various cultures and historical contexts (Frijda, 2014). These sentiments of revenge and relationship of the avenger and the avenger are the centre of interest of the storyline of the selected drama serials for comparison revealing the art of multidimensional storyline in diverse cultures and historical perspective. Local drama serial “Khai” represents a unique story about the ancient and discarded custom of Khaie in the Pashtun dynasties causing brutal deaths of innocents, display of power game and abusive attitude towards women. It resulted in the act of revenge to occur within social contexts, where main female lead character is represented driven by intense emotions such as anger, resentment, and a desire for retribution. The unusual representation of the female character in the local society where character of women is usually represented crying, sacrificing, and accepting their circumstances, the character of Zamda redefines the cognitive strength of women and approach towards vengeful conduct.

The comparable series “Game of Thrones” aired on HBO bears similarity in the portrayal of multilayered story engaging a variety of characters, brutal acts, misuse of power and vicious attitude towards women resulting in severe acts of revenge leading to unpredictable outcomes. The character of Daenerys Targaryen reflects that revenge has a self-continuing nature, as acts of retaliation can breed further resentment and fuel a cycle of vengeance. Every action taken by her reinforces her belief of revenge justifying the extended cycle of power play. This research aims to examine the effects of storylines depicted

on OTT (over-the-top) platforms on the art of storytelling of local dramas. The main objective is to examine the visible change in the subject matter of local drama that depicts similitude in the style of storytelling, psyche of the avengers and corrupting power to gain supremacy. Methodology employed is based on qualitative research combined with the comparative and content analysis techniques between a local drama "Khaie" and a western series "Game of Thrones" premiered on HBO, both depicting the art of telling multilayered story.

Significance of the Drama Serial "Khaie"

Drama serial "Khaie" depicts a story of survival and revenge diverging the attention of audience from the typical and ordinary Pakistani drama content representation. The cultural representation of women in Pakistani serials is often portrayed as weak and victim of their circumstances and social norms. The protagonist female character in "Khaie" is victim of kidnapping and forced marriage but refused to accept her defeat and play the game of revenge while driving the situation. The story of the "Khaie" is based on the ancient Pashtun tradition of eliminating all male members of the rival tribal family to discontinue their lineage to establish the terror and power the succeeded tribal family. Composed of brutal incidents, bloodshed and violence, the serial depicts multilayered storytelling in a unique form along with the depiction of cultural norms and traditions in beautiful valleys of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa promoting tourism. Another significant point is the twist in the perception of the characters as presented characters have their own scenario while being affected by the larger world. The serial depicts acts of brutality, rules of abuse and torture, unlawfulness and violence but constantly engages the audience in its multi-character plot of revenge and conspiracies.

Analysis of the Drama "Khaie"

Khaie is an extinct Pashtun tradition presenting the extreme side of vengeance and is against Pashtun norms and standards. It was rarely practiced in past in the few areas of Pashtun belt. This practice is not any more followed since last over a century as tribal assemblies rejected the barbarian acts of killing and rivalry (Khalil, 2024). The drama serial "Khaie" sets the stage for this ancient tradition of killing all the male members of the rival family to create the supremacy of power and fear in the society. But the storyline takes a turn and revolves around the revenge taken by the female lead who faced the abduction and forced marriage after the killing of her innocent father and brothers. The female character is representative of the vigor and mental and emotional capabilities of the Pashtun women. The drama serial is written by Saqlain Abbas, directed by Syed Wajahat Hussain, and produced by Abdullah Kadwani & Asad Qureshi under the Production House: 7th Sky Entertainment, aired from 2023- 2024. The main characters of the drama include Dur e Fishan Saleem as main female lead named Zamda and Faysal Quraishi as main male character named Chanar Khan along with the senior Pakistani drama artist Khalid Butt as Durab Khan, tribal chief (GeoTV, 2023). The vital point to note is that the production team of this drama including the writer, director and actors are non-Pashtun which raises question in the authenticity of the depiction of the Pashtun culture and traditions. Only the location chosen for the shooting is the original Khyber Pakhtunkhwa sites representing the breath holding natural beauty of these areas promoting the tourism sector of creative industry.

The multifaceted story revolves around the rivalry of two Pashtun families. Darwesh Khan's father was killed by the Durab Khan but as a responsible citizen, is seeking peace by forgiving the murder of his father and ending the tradition of Khaie. But deceived by the ruthless Durab Khan and his son Channar Khan, who demands Darwesh Khan's only daughter to be married with him in demand of peace, who is already engaged to her cousin Badal Khan. The first two episodes depict the darker and vicious side of Durab clan having an atrocious behaviour with the common people by forcing people to illegally transfer their properties to them and cutting the thumb of an old man. Following the scene, the next depiction of their unlawful use of weapons, brutality and bloodshed involving underage son of Chanar Khan in killing the father and brothers of Zamda on her marriage day along with her abduction. This results in the immense suffering for Zamda and her family who are shown peace seekers and against the revenge and innocent killings.

The innovation in the plot lies in the twist of the story enhancing the character of the Zamda from a victim to a strong female representation seeking revenge. The drama "Khaie" redefines the boundaries of the cultural representation of women in Pakistani dramas as the character of Zamda is shown planning another game of bloodshed to take revenge of the brutal murders of her family members. Zamda portrays the character of an intelligent, fearless and nation loving girl who aims to contribute to the education of children of her homeland by planning to start a school for primary education in collaboration with her future husband. But after the brutal tragedy has struck their lives, the story of the play revolves around the promise of the Zamda made to her mother who has lost her sanity, that soon she will send all the enemies to their graves. After her marriage with Chanar Khan, she tries to convince her new family through her attitude that she has

accepted her fate. It results in not invoking any caution towards her from the Durab clan in the death of son of Chanar Khan. Her intelligent and calculated plans create a frizz of terror in her rivals, and she knocks them all down like a chess game. Her emotions of hatred and revenge are overpowering her, and few scenes depict her vengeful social interaction when she visualizes the killing of Apana and Barlas and imagines slashing Pamir's throat. Although Apana and Barlas are the refreshing and positive characters in the brutal and unforgiving world of Durab clan, but their death throws light on the fact that revenge overpowers all the feelings of forgiveness and sympathy. The loss of human element is evident in the act of killing Apana as she has no hand in the murder of Zamda's family but pointing towards the psyche of avengers and how sentiments of revenge overpower them.

The return of the Badal Khan, ex-fiancé and cousin of Zamda and the meetings of both on the shrine brings new angle to the story as Badal is shown as a silent force behind the execution of her revenge plan. His death brings emotional setback for Zamda but stands firm and strong enough to fulfil her mission, representing a strong and daring side of Pashtun women, who instead of weeping on her fate, focused on her mission. She is shown murdering the sick Durab Khan with her own hands in a fearless manner while explaining him the truth behind the murders of his family. Her final target is now Chanar Khan, already broken with grief on the death of his son and father. The concluding 29th episode reveals Zamda's planning to burry Chanar Khan next to her father by digging his grave. The scene represents Zamda consoling Chanar Khan and offering him an intoxicated tea to make him feel dizzy. She takes him to the graveyard, pointing a gun towards him which make him believe that he and his family has become target of her revenge. She is shown killing Chanar Khan with shivering hands but does not kill his youngest son. Her granting the youngest son to live shows how her tale of revenge is not a barbaric and mindless decision. Rather, it is carried out to bring justice and put an end to an otherwise mindless culture. The story ends on a flash-forward note showing Chanar Khan's son as a teenager and Zamda talking to him that she has saved him to end the tradition of Khaie in this region and has moved to Karachi for his education.

Series “Game of Thrones” on HBO

The series “Game of Thrones” depict a novel form of storytelling as multiple interconnected stories are being told simultaneously. There is a constant switching back and forth between the characters like Jon Snow, Daenerys Targaryen, and Arya Stark as these individual characters are well depicted in their storyline while also serving as a part of larger narrative. Every portrayed character in the series aims towards their own goals; one character seeks energy for revenge whereas another character is shown striving for an eventual zombie catastrophe.

The main plot of the series revolves around the continent of Westeros, and the seven kingdoms included within. The honour of sitting on the Iron Throne, made from swords will be of the one who rules this continent. The series reflect the corruption of the characters to gain power, while other abusing their power and some really try hard to sit on the throne. A course of action was taken by the king which throws the world in chaos and war, occurring at the end of the first season, turning the show into a masterpiece. The show is comprised of eight seasons, aired on HBO from 2011-2019 (HBO). It portrays a multilayered storyline with an intricate plot, complex characters, intense action in battles and fights with a combination of stunning cinematography. The first season introduces the audiences with the characters and their motivations while building the world of Westeros and depicting The Starks as good guys and The Lannister are represented as a group of incestuous and eccentric people. Important characters are Jon Snow, Ned Stark, Tyrion Lannister, and Daenerys Targaryen who faced the forced marriage with Khal Drogo, a barbarian commander in exchange for an army. After her marriage, she not only tames him, but also grows as a powerful and confident Queen. Another important representation in the series is of dragons symbolizing war, having the ability to level any city in Westeros.

The representation of women in the series is intense and glamorous and are shown building kingdoms, taking revenge, and pursuing for power. These depicted scenes represent the psyche of female victim characters like Sansa feeding her rapist to his starving dogs and Daenerys attacking a Lannister convoy from dragon back and burning it to ashes. She is shown powerful, daring, fighting, burning, and crucifying slave traders. Later her character become more furious as seen burning alive Mirri Maz Duur, the midwife who betrayed her. Daenerys Targaryen's story is indeed a compelling exploration of the corrupting influence of power. Orphaned at a young age and raised in exile, she is profoundly influenced by her isolation. Bearing the weight of her family's legacy and the expectation to reclaim the Iron Throne, Daenerys feels an increasing drive for power. Her journey is full of sufferings and betrayal, as surrounded by the advisers who have their own agendas, deaths of loved ones and betrayal from those she trusted. Daenerys aim is to liberate oppressed peoples and create a better world. She starts her journey as a compassionate character, seeking justice for the downtrodden. As she ascends to power, her methods become progressively

harsher, and her once noble intentions are warped by a belief in her sole authority to dictate what's best for her disciplines. This concludes in her decision to burn King's Landing to the ground, resulting in the deaths of countless innocent civilians. Ultimately, power in the world of "Game of Thrones" is portrayed as fundamentally corrupting, regardless of one's initial noble intentions, the pursuit and acquisition of power often lead to moral compromise and ethical decay. This theme is evident not only in Daenerys' narrative but in the stories of many other characters throughout the series. This aspect of the story can be seen as a tragedy rather than success of the characters. Women portrayed in the series are not only beautiful, charismatic but are complete human beings having ugliness of conducts as the characters faced rape, domestic violence and other traumatic events transforming their psyche. "Game of Thrones" brings a new level of honesty about trauma to popular entertainment by depicting its characters struggling with abuse and the ways it affects their behaviour. Through its nuanced storytelling and complex characterizations, the series highlights the cyclical nature of violence and the lasting impact of trauma on individuals and societies.

There is an excessive depiction of violence in the "Game of Throne" in the representation of mounts of corpses, ash-choked ruins of the cities portraying the madness and misery of humankind. Similarly, dragons cannot be seen as the mere collaborator to Daenerys personal myth but an expression of war and violence. The Daenerys' decision to chain her dragons can be seen as an attempt to rule through mercy rather than force, an attempt to prevent the deaths of children. When she decides to unleash them is a definite turning away from that empathy as these dragons separate her from the rest of humanity, freeing her from proximity to the horrific outcomes of her ambitions.

Comparison between the "Khaie" and "Game of Thrones"

Both the series bear similarities in terms of art of story telling as the plots of both dramas represent multifaceted and complex storyline along with the depiction of manifold characters. Although drama serial "Khaie" is composed of twenty-nine episodes ending on a positive note, whereas "Game of Thrones" represents a more complicated storyline comprised of eight seasons, portraying multiple characters with complex psychic issues and ruthless behaviour. Throughout the series, various characters experience traumatic events, including physical and psychological abuse, torture, rape, and loss of loved ones. These experiences profoundly shape their personalities and actions. Though both the series depicts a different storyline, but cohesions occur in the representation of brutal acts, use of weapons, illicitness, acts of revenge and relationship of avenger and avenge.

The characters of Zamda in "Khaie" and Daenerys in "Game of Thrones" faced forced marriage with ferocious men which redefine their characters and psyche. Revenge serves as a means for them to assert their actions, regain a sense of control, and restore their perceived losses. It is a deeply rooted aspect of human nature that reflects the complexities of human emotion, social dynamics, and the pursuit of fairness and justice (Boon & Yoshimura, 2020). Both the characters represent the inherent female needs to feel sympathy for the men who have wronged them. As Daenerys tries to fix her barbaric husband while Zamda is shown murdering her husband with shivering hands. It might be the effort to make the acceptance of the character of Zamda in the targeted audience as the local societies still believe that institution of marriage can bring forgiveness to every abuse and social and traditional norms are above emotions.

The storyline of both the plays illustrate how trauma can perpetuate a cycle of violence. Characters who have suffered abuse are shown struggling with issues of trust, empathy, and self-worth. This continuation of violence reflects real-life dynamics, where individuals who experience abuse may struggle to break free from patterns of negative conduct. "Game of Thrones" depicts the long-term consequences of trauma. Characters suffer with addiction, depression, and other psychological issues because of their experiences. Whereas focusing on the psychological definition of the revenge, which describes it as a response to injustice and misconduct, the character of Zamda is shown being provoked causing reciprocity behaviour. She communicates a message to the wrongdoers about the relevance of her behaviour and the embedded moral values within her, tries to break the continuous cycle of revenge by leaving alive the youngest son of Chanar Khan. The serial provides a commentary on power dynamics, morality, and the human condition. Thus, both the stories explore the link between trauma and abusive behaviour and offer insights into the complexities of human psychology and societal structures. They prompt viewers to reflect on how trauma shapes individuals and influences their interactions with others.

Conclusion

The critical analysis suggest that the content of the local drama serials has now reflect the influence of the OTT platforms in complex storytelling, arranging the content and presentation of the characters in the light of the psychological investigation. Though the local societies are more connected to traditional norms and gender roles with specified obligations, although outdated but constrained with cultural standards. The multilayered story of "Khai" is comparable with the HBO series "Game of Thrones" in the style and

presentation of storytelling and viewing the actions of the characters in the light of revenge psychology. The female lead character in local drama plays the role of avenger upgrading the role of women in society and highlighting the fact that how traumas effect human beings and abusive attitude towards women can change their traditional roles in society. The success of the drama serial in masses divert attention towards the fact that OTT content not only influencing the style of local production and art of storytelling but also improving people's behaviour about the gender roles and conduct. It is also playing a vital role in observing various behaviours in the light of psychological traumas and insecurities, an issue rarely given importance in local societies.

References

Boon, S. D., & Yoshimura, S. M. (2020). Revenge as social interaction: Merging social psychological and interpersonal communication approaches to the study of vengeful behavior. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 14(9), 3.

Frijda, N. H. (2014). The lex talionis: On vengeance. In *Emotions* (pp. 277-304): Psychology Press.

GeoTV. (2023). Khaie. Retrieved from <https://harpalgeo.tv/program/Khaie>

HBO. Game of Thrones. Retrieved from <https://www.hbo.com/game-of-thrones>

Khalil, J. (2024). What is the meaning of "Khaie" in Pashto? Retrieved from <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-meaning-of-Khaie-in-Pashto-Khaie-is-a-newly-released-drama-on-Har-Pal-Geo-I-haven-t-heard-this-word-before>