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Beyond the Drama—
Developing Entertainment-Education Television Serials in Pakistan

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Beyond the Drama—
Developing Entertainment-Education Television Serials in Pakistan

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2021

Dedication

To my father, Zahid Chaudhary, without whose encouragement and support over the years I never would have gotten this far.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Whenever we set out on our individual journeys—professional or personal—we ultimately make it to the other end because others assist us along the way. Some of this help comes from people we know, and some from strangers in the most unexpected ways. It is impossible to thank everyone who played a part in helping me conceptualize and carry out this project because so much of the support I have gotten over the years has been behind the scenes, so to speak.

Before all else, I am grateful to God for making paths appear, for creating ease, and for guiding me along the way. A big thank you to my advisor, Karin Wilkins—I could not have done this without your encouragement, inspiration, and input. By reading your work and taking your class, I found a space for my work and was reminded that it mattered. Thank you for continuing to work with me long distance, even after you moved away. To my co-supervisor, Shanti Kumar, for your helpfulness, for discussing great ideas about South Asian entertainment media with me, and for always being so encouraging. My committee members, Joseph Straubhaar and Syed Akbar Hyder, for great feedback and insight always and for helping overcome all kinds of administrative and funding obstacles. Professor Hyder, my conversations with you helped me find inspiration and kept me moving forward. A special thank you to Jennifer McClearen for agreeing to jump on to my committee at a much later stage and being so supportive. I chose my committee members not just for their expertise in their respective fields, but also because I knew each of them for their kindness and their focus on having a human connection, not just a scholarly one. I could be myself around them and express my views and concerns without fear of judgement, which allowed me to explore more ideas and produce better work.

All the people I interviewed, heartfelt thank yous: To Samiya Mumtaz for her support and for opening up crucial channels of further networking. To Salman Danish,

Zainab Saeed, and Imran Aslam for taking the time and being so gracious with providing such great information and resources. To Bushra Ansari, Munawar Saeed, and Ahmer Khan for their time and insight. To Faisal Khalil for a great, honest inside look into the workings of CCP projects.

My gratitude to Kamran Asdar Ali and Elizabeth Bolton for showing enthusiasm for my work, for encouraging me onwards, and for helping me connect with interviewees that I probably would not have been able to reach on my own. To Numan Nabi Ahmed and Syeda Quratulain Masood for connecting me with relevant people.

Gratitude to all my teachers and mentors over the years who have helped hone my skills and supported my growth—beginning right from Montessori up to the present moment. A special mention to Shabnam Zafar and Mohsin Shirazi for honing my interest in theatre and dramatics, and for providing mentorship that helped me far beyond the classroom. My gratitude to Priti Ramamurthy, Sudhir Mahadevan, and Jameel Ahmad for providing great mentorship and getting me kickstarted on studying South Asian media.

Thank you to Maria Skouras, Ramna Walia, Briana Barner, Kate Zyskowski, and so many others for being such great colleagues, friends, and each an inspiration in their own way. My parents and grandparents for their encouragement and support through the years. And my sister, Zeenat, for bearing my whining and complaining about my academic life year after year.

And finally, thank you to my husband, Aniq, and my daughter, Aamna, for spending lots of time together early mornings, and over the weekends, so I could finish writing! Your support was crucial for my journey. You keep me sane and I love you so very much.

Abstract

Beyond the Drama—
Developing Entertainment-Education Television Serials in Pakistan

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2021

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This project explores Entertainment-Education based strategic interventions in Pakistan, specifically focusing on commercial television serials drawing from the Entertainment-Education model. It considers these serials in terms of production, text, and their reception in the media to ask (i) how Entertainment-Education based television serials in Pakistan are being made, (ii) how messaging in specific texts plays out within the broader media environment, and (iii) what potential impact these serials may be having on conversations about sensitive social issues in the country, especially with regard to women? Using two female centered television serials, *Udaari* (2016) and *Sammi* (2017), as central case studies, the project analyzes their role and social significance within the local media industry, and in public discourse. A triangulated methodology of research includes extensive interviews with the people making these serials and close text analysis of the serials themselves, along with content analysis of articles in the local press discussing (often taboo) issues highlighted by these serials. Themes addressed include issues of child sexual abuse, women's financial independence,

the illegal cultural custom of *Vani*, maternal health, and gender discrimination at birth. Long-term questions behind this project think through (i) potential policy implications of Entertainment-Education projects, (ii) long-term impacts of opening up of spaces of discourse for controversial issues, and (iii) implications for the Pakistani television drama industry in terms of how stories about women are told. Exploring these interventions is crucial for mapping out future possibilities and interventions that can have a major impact on the socio-political-legal conversations surrounding women's rights in Pakistan as well as helping shape women's own conceptions and understanding of their own rights and the resources available to them.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Setting the Stage

In a 2017 television interview, late veteran actor Qazi Wajid gave an example of the extent to which certain Pakistani television serials gained popularity. Speaking about the classic drama serial *Khuda Ki Basti* (*God's Colony*, 1969), Wajid described how wedding invites used to specify that there were television viewing arrangements at the venue—"Tv *ka intezam hai*…."—if on that day *Khuda Ki Basti* was playing. Viewing arrangements had not been made at one wedding he attended, which resulted in people leaving the wedding canopy to go into neighboring houses to watch the episode playing that day (Barakat-E-Ramzan 2017). The way these television serials are made, their content and style of production, their funding sources, and how they are broadcast, has changed immensely from the time of Wajid's story to the present day. However, they have retained a significant amount of popularity, both in Pakistan and abroad. Although popularity varies among contemporary television drama series in Pakistan, their appeal and impact remain significant.

At different moments in time, locally-produced serials have faced competition from imported content, such as Indian soap operas and Turkish dramas, but have still managed to retain prominence in popular culture. The Pakistani television serial offers a distinct illustration of a dramatic program, not easily classified as soap operas, telenovelas, or other such categories that are often used to categorize television dramas. Stemming from a rich history of Urdu literature and theatre, Pakistani television dramas do not go on endlessly like a soap opera but end after a limited number of episodes. Maybe a lot more so in past decades than now, there has been a focus on realism (in terms of costume, appearance, story, and overall presentation) as opposed to melodrama.

Though Pakistani audiences—both local and in the diaspora—are the main consumers of these shows, their reach extends beyond Pakistan. Closer to home, across the border in India, pirated versions of serials like *Dhoop Kinare* and *Ankahi* were eagerly consumed by audiences in the 80's.[1] In more recent times, the Indian channel Zindagi has played numerous Pakistani serials (first on television, then on its online channel) with great success. The immensely popular *Humsafar* (*Companion*, 2011) was dubbed in Arabic and broadcast by MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Center) in the Middle East in 2013, followed by other serials. Pakistani television actors have gained enough popularity to appear in leading roles in mainstream Bollywood films (Fawad Khan in *Kapoor and Sons*, and Mahira Khan in *Raees* are just two recent examples).

Thus, the appeal of Pakistani serials goes beyond television, in a way, given the intersections between television and film actors and professionals. Pakistan's own film industry has, in recent years, seen a lot of overlap with the television industry as actors, writers, directors, and producers move back and forth between the small screen and the big screen. A few years ago, a production house known for its television serials even ended up making a film, *Bin Roye* (*Without Crying*, MD Films 2015), which was simultaneously shot as a seventeen-episode television serial with additional scenes and an extended storyline. All the actors in it were primarily television actors. Though many Pakistani actors appear on both television and film in their home country, abroad they are often recognized more for the television drama serials in which they have appeared.

Tracing its beginnings to radio and the influence of theatre, the Pakistani drama serial historically emerged from a vision of providing entertainment with educational value to the

[1] In 2011, *Dhoop Kinare* was even remade in India by Sony TV as *Kuch to Log Kahenge*

public. Many of these serials have long had prosocial messaging embedded in them but, in recent times, we often see less of such messaging and more focus on commercial elements—including glamor and sensationalism—guided by the demands of the advertising industry. On a comparative level, perhaps, the Pakistani television serial looks very different from, say, neighboring India's soap operas. The Indian press and media scholars have sometimes pointed out these differences, amongst other things commenting on how Pakistani dramas are less focused on producing consumers, as well as having storylines that are not obsessed with stereotypical female family politics (Bhattacharyaa and Nag, 2016). To some extent this is true, but the role of consumerism is very much present within many present day Pakistani serials, as is a focus on repetitive themes of conniving female family members. Some serials still do retain their educational messaging in more informal ways while others can be officially classified as Entertainment-Education—a strategic approach within development communication that, as the name suggests, aims to provide education through entertainment. The jump from discussing drama serials to discussing development initiatives may seem strange to some people but the two fields are much more connected and relevant to each other than we often think. The next section explains why fictional narratives are also important for development purposes, and how the media and development rhetoric can impact each other in both good and bad ways.

Role of Media & Fiction in Development

The phrase "Development Communication" may seem straightforward enough but is not always easy to explain since it often ends up being an umbrella term for a variety of methods, goals, approaches, and assumptions. Within the field lie various ambiguous terms, including the conception of "development" itself, as well as instances where the same term can hold different

(or constantly shifting meanings) and multiple terms can end up meaning more or less the same thing. Thus, in certain instances, terms like "development communication," "communication for development" (c4d), "communication for social change" (CFSC), and "global social change" (GSC) are used interchangeably, while at other times they may represent different schools of thought/methodology, which can be confusing. The way development communication is addressed throughout most of this project is in terms of "communication for development" (c4d), described by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) (2016) as: "a tool for social and political transformation," which "promotes participation and social change using the methods and instruments of interpersonal communication, community media and modern information technologies" (SDC 2016, 10). Its key features are to "facilitate access to information," "stimulate participation," "empower people," and "influence public policies" (SDC 2016, 10).

There are deep nuances involved at every stage of the development communication process, which will differ from place to place and it is absolutely critical that those engaged with development practice remain ever cognizant of this fact. Both micro and macro level causes and effects need to be taken into more serious consideration when assessing short and long-term impacts of discourse and decisions. In *Popular Representations of Development: Insights from novels, films, television and social media,* David Lewis et al. (2014) mention how policy debates often fall short of fully understanding individual experiences and of explaining situations beyond economic rationales. Perhaps one way of exploring and emphasizing nuances—which has not received enough attention—is by considering the ability of fiction to fill gaps in knowledge, reach, and awareness that traditional development narratives fail to address adequately. Fiction is important for understanding development narratives, shaping development agendas, and giving

voice to multiple voices and complex histories of those affected by development initiatives as well as those implementing them (Lewis et al. 2014).

It is essential to remember the role of entertainment media within development communication and the structuring of societal values and infrastructures. As Julie Cupples (2015) points out in "Development Communication, Popular Pleasure and Media Convergence," change through media can come about via both immanent (unintentional) and intentional development. Mainstream, profit-based entertainment media can, at times, be as useful for development purposes as community/alternative/grassroots/NGO led media. Similarly, focus on digital access for development should not result in sidelining "old" media like radio and television, which are just as important (Cupples 2015). Storytelling through mainstream, commercial television serials is an important platform to consider, in terms of both reach and impact.

In general, the media play a vital role in determining agendas and courses of action within the field of development, as well as representing outcomes of development work. Media can help provide information for (and about) development, can act as a mobilizer, can influence policymaking and agendas on institutional and national levels, and can influence attitudes towards development issues amongst national and international publics. However, in the process, media can also misinform, miscommunicate, and be manipulated for political purposes as well as by corporations seeking profit even if it comes at the expense of exploitation. Within development discourse, media have often been considered a powerful means of reaching out to communities and tackling issues of concern. Martin Scott (2014) has emphasized the need to understand that media are just one part of a broader, more complex process, not a solution in itself, and are definitely not apolitical. Media alone cannot bring about development, without

other parallel interventions. In many cases, representations of development initiatives can be staged as magic bullet solutions, via the media, without consideration given to actual complexities involved in implementation and effectiveness. Media have the potential to both help and harm communities through development initiatives, which is why we need to think even more critically about development actors, procedures, and goals (Scott 2014).

On the flip side, development rhetoric has the potential to impact media structures and procedures in major ways. A key example considers the history of broadcasting in many countries starting out under state control, as a tightly regulated public resource until neo-liberal policies (within development discourses as well as outside of it) began a push for "deregulation," with rhetoric concerning government control as limiting freedom of expression and individual choice. In reality, as David Hesmondhalgh (2012) pertinently describes, when government control over broadcasting is lifted, it can result in limited viewing options as the concept of broadcasting as a public service begins to disintegrate. Corporations, that care about profit above all else, are allowed more and more of a free hand and the "marketization" of broadcasting eventually results in industries and programming that prioritizes serving advertisers over citizens (Hesmondhalgh 2012; Ò Siochrù 2005). It has been seen in various cases that, by pushing for "liberalized media" as a homogenous need for enlightening and empowering people across the world, Media for Development (M4D) projects can actually "end up harming local media industries and exacerbating inequalities" (Scott 2014, 32).

Funding, for one, can become a major challenge for developing more quality content, more diverse and responsible representation of issues and communities, more risk taking, and moving beyond formulaic productions. This can be true for both regular commercial projects as

well as for communication for development initiatives. In general, funding objectives and distribution affect projects in very substantial ways, both at an individual level, as well as by setting certain trends within the field which come to be seen as the norm. A focus on short-term goals, expectations of quick and tangible results, and other such demands of those providing funding can become an obstacle in measuring actual effectiveness of projects (Waisbord, 2001). Impact of many media endeavors is often long-term and not easily measured in strictly quantifiable terms. Within the larger field of development, it is vital to keep questioning hegemonic ideas of what "development" entails, what "progress" may look like, and how "impact" is defined and measured (Dutta 2015; Waisbord 2015). Often, power structures and the global elite benefit from development narratives at the expense of subaltern communities who are negatively impacted by development projects and have alternate stories of rationality to contribute to the way we perceive and communicate development (Dutta 2015). There are other valid ways of "being" in the world that need to be recognized and accepted instead of being ignored or swept aside by dominant development discourses (Manyozo 2017). One way these realizations can be facilitated is via other kinds of media and different kinds of stories than the ones we normally associate with development communication.

This project aims to delve into how these broader discourses around development and media play out in specific local contexts both in terms of industry operations and educational initiatives. I choose to use Entertainment-Education as a central focus to discuss significant social issues. Although the broader approach to educating the public via stories is not limited to television, for the purposes of this project I focus on television dramatic serials, produced within the local Pakistani entertainment television industry. Lastly, the projects under discussion have

been broadcast on commercial television channels as opposed to state owned ones, which has historically not been a very common practice for Entertainment-Education work.

Significance

Where research on Entertainment-Education is concerned, according to Hernandez and Organista, "the questions of how and why tailored interventions work effectively with specific populations continue to be understudied;" my project addresses this gap through intensive study of these tailored interventions in the case of Pakistan (Hernandez & Organista 2013). Earlier literature has pointed out how Entertainment-Education has faced strong resistance by commercial broadcasters, and following the trajectory of why, or why not, such resistance may have changed by now is also important (Singhal et al, 2004). This is especially crucial for the context of my project, which specifically looks at television serials that have been co-produced with commercial television channels and are considered successful both commercially as well as in terms of the educational aspect they were aiming to achieve.

Moreover, within research and literature on Entertainment-Education, there is a strong emphasis on projects addressing health-related matters—whether it is HIV awareness campaigns, maternal health issues, or even some studies on mental health issues—even though Entertainment-Education projects go beyond these themes. The larger focus of studies so far has been leaning more strongly towards psychological aspects of reception as opposed to broader sociological concerns and assessment. This is an area where my project tries to make connections that tie in to larger developmental and structural considerations. Some of the major, detailed contributions to our knowledge of Entertainment-Education were written fifteen to twenty years ago. For a field this diverse and spread out both geographically and

methodologically, I think much more work is needed, not only to update current literature in terms of content (and challenge it to some extent in terms of assessment and analysis), but also to connect text, context, and broader societal concerns together in more nuanced detail.

Methodology

Using two Entertainment-Education television serials broadcast on commercial television channels—*Udaari* (*To Fly*, HUM TV 2016) & *Sammi* (HUM TV 2017)—as my central case studies, I analyze their production, text, and reception to consider their social significance within the local Pakistani media industry and in public discourse. These three broad categories correspond to analyses of production through interviews, texts through textual analysis, and reception through content analysis (details below).

I choose these two cases for their close links to commercial television in the country, for their contemporary relevance, and their social significance. Out of these two serials, one is a local collaboration (though funded by Canadian grants) with Kashf Foundation, while the other is co-produced by MD Productions and Johns Hopkins University's Center for Communications Program (JHP-CCP). I believe the variation in production—local collaborations versus local-international collaborations—is also a variable that needs to be taken into consideration. Both shows were broadcast on the same channel—HUM TV—within about a year of each other, and HUM was also the network under which both serials were co-produced.

Through an exploratory model of research, I collected and analyzed data via a triangulated method that included extensive interviews with the people making these television serials and close textual analysis of the serials themselves, supplemented by a content analysis of newspaper articles and conversations revolving around these serials and the issues addressed in them. These

three main data sources helped me understand the process of production, the role of certain texts within the local media industry, and their significance in facilitating conversation around specific social issues within public discourse.

Following the journey of these serials—starting from the intentions of the producers, to the messages of these texts, on to the context in which it is received, and being acted upon—can lead to a better understanding of what Entertainment-Education is able to accomplish in a Pakistani context. These findings can be viewed within both global and local contexts to gauge similarities and differences in approach and understanding, and contribute to future discussions about best practices.

Before turning to key conceptualizations, I offer some reflection on research limitations. The biggest limitation of this project is perhaps not having enough inside knowledge regarding the commercial aspect of production in the cases of *Udaari* and *Sammi*. Due to time constraints and difficulty in correspondence with people at HUM TV, I was unable to talk directly to the HUM based production teams for the serials. Publicly available information, as well as input from the CCP and Kashf teams and the actors helped fill in most of the gaps, but other perspectives from those involved in the production might have informed this analysis differently. Similarly, for the content analysis, my search was limited to English language newspapers as these were more readily available, and much simpler to sift through, online. If I had had the time and resources to also cover some of the nation's leading Urdu newspapers, I might have come across different kinds of perspective to take into account.

In terms of my positionality—I grew up in urban Pakistan, moving to the US midway through college and continuing to regularly go back for both work and family. I speak fluent

English and Urdu, which enabled me to get the most out of my interviews, which were conducted in a mix of the two languages—a common way of speaking in Pakistan. I grew up watching Pakistani television serials from a very young age, first along with my grandmother and then on my own. At that time, state run PTV (Pakistan Television) was the only channel available, soon followed by the semi-private STN (Shalimar Recording and Broadcasting Company). I was a teenager when the media industry was liberalized and new channels began to emerge, so I was able to see multiple distinct stages of the Pakistani television industry firsthand.

Roadmap

Next, I explain the order and arguments of the chapters following this introduction. Throughout the following chapters, I have used the terms "drama," "drama serial," and "serial" interchangeably because these are all common terms used to refer to these television serials in Pakistan. Sometimes even the word "play" is used to discuss them—linking back to the influence of theatre from which these serials initially emerged. However, I ended up not using "play" to avoid confusion. Any direct quotes in Urdu have been translated by me, with the translation appearing next to the original.

The next chapter provides historical context about Entertainment-Education practices, and about the Pakistani television industry. It traces the evolution of Entertainment-Education, through its adaptations in being implemented all over the world, and its potentials and limitations. The chapter then describes the history and practice of Entertainment-Education in Pakistan, in light of the country's television industry. The President of one of the country's largest television networks, and the CEO of Pakistan's main television ratings agency provide important information about the workings of the industry and the changes that have come about

due to the rising control of advertisers. Partially due to this undue influence, more carefully constructed and socially conscious television serials have given way to a wave of subpar shows that often end up looking like mass produced commodities. The chapter explores how media privatization has both opened up new opportunities for diverse representation of issues but has also created an environment that limits diversity of representation.

Chapter three consists of an in-depth textual analysis of the two television serials being used as case studies—*Udaari* and *Sammi*. I look at the different educational topics addressed by the serials, discussing the ways in which they have been handled and, at times, comparing and contrasting the approach each serial takes towards similar themes. There is a strong focus on issues of women's empowerment in both serials, which is a key area I cover. Other topics of note—beside the main subjects of child sexual abuse and *Vani*—include the representation of motherhood, maternal health and reproductive rights, caste, music, and transgenders.[2] On the surface, the two serials might seem to share many similarities but, upon a closer look, it becomes clear that their approach, towards how they choose to educate their audiences, differs. Amongst other things, while one chooses to retain a focus on one central storyline within which educational messaging is carefully weaved, the other opts to address multiple storylines at the same time and takes on a more didactic tone. This chapter, and the next, address how such differences in approach impact messaging, reach, and popularity.

Chapter four delves into the production process behind the making of the two serials analyzed in the previous chapter. Interviews I conducted with people involved in the production of these serials (as well as with those acting in them) form a large portion of the source material

[2] *Vani* is an illegal feudal custom that involves having a woman marry someone from the victim's family as a punishment and compensation for crimes (often murder) committed by her male relatives.

for information about the production process. Being Entertainment-Education projects, the way these serials have been made is a little different from the standard production procedure other television serials in the industry go through. We can look at it as a two-part process—the groundwork and review done by the non-mainstream media related organizations (Kashf and CCP), and then the actual filming and post-production process by HUM. Representatives of Kashf and CCP provided me with in-depth information on how these serials were conceived, made, and assessed. Actors from *Udaari* provided input on both production and reception, while project and assessment reports filled in further gaps about the behind-the-scenes process from start to end. The chapter also considers how success of these serials was gauged by the creators themselves, and how the final media products were affected by ratings, advertising, and funding considerations. The value, of having solution oriented narratives, more flexible funding requirements, and more on the ground local involvement by non-commercial entities in the production process, is highlighted.

Chapter five switches from the producers' perspective to an audience perspective, in the shape of broader media discourse about the serials and how they were received. Through analyses of newspaper articles and blog posts about the serials, as well as through keyword searches of the social issues raised in the serials, I try and assess how the shows and their subjects have been brought up in public discourse. By analyzing topic trends in the news before, during, and after each broadcast, I consider whether these serials led to an increase in discussion around certain issues within the (print) news. Results indicate that increased discussion around issues raised by a serial happens mostly when the serial itself is under discussion; any substantial quantitative correlation—between the shows and the discussion of their themes in the press

separately—is hard to prove. What is easier to witness is the effect a serial can have on the opening up of spaces of discourse surrounding taboo topics.

I conclude by integrating these analyses, considering industry trends that followed *Udaari* and *Sammi*, where things stand today after five years of their initial broadcast, and how the overall workings of the television industry—including a gradual move into the digital sphere—may affect the kinds of conversations being had within, and around, these kinds of texts. I also provide recommendations, based on my findings, for future Entertainment-Education endeavors and for changes in approach the television industry needs in general. For now, in the next chapter, we begin following the journey of these television serials by laying out the context within which this project studies them.

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Chapter 2: Where Things Stand: Context

This chapter delves into the history and practice of Entertainment-Education in a global as well as Pakistan-specific perspective. It also traces a brief history of the Pakistani television industry, highlighting political, commercial, and social factors that have, over time, led to shifts in the ways programming has been conceived and produced to help readers put case studies in the following chapters into perspective. The chapter ends by considering how present-day entertainment television in the country operates, especially in terms of a significant rise in ratings-driven programming.

ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION

Historical Context

Storytelling as a method of imparting lessons and influencing behavior goes far back in history in both oral and written forms. Entertainment-Education as an official, recognized, intentional model of intervention is a relatively recent phenomenon (approximately half a century old) whereby educational messages are strategically placed within entertainment content in diverse and varied ways. As a "strategic tool with a diversity of agendas," broadly speaking, it aims to create awareness, impart knowledge and influence behaviors in order to bring about positive social change—change at the individual, societal, community, and institutional levels (Singhal 2013; Tufte 2005, 690). Though the idea behind the concept is much older, it was not until the early 1970's that an accidental implementation of (what would go on to be known as) an Entertainment-Education strategy began to draw attention to this specific method of educating the public via stories that are entertaining and non-didactic (Singhal & Rogers 1999; Singhal 2013). A telenovela from Peru—*Simplemente María*—led to a boom in sewing machines sales as

well as sharp increases in women enrolling in adult literacy and sewing classes in the country because they were inspired by the protagonist and found in her an accessible role model for upward mobility (Singhal & Rogers 1999; Singhal 2013). Mexican broadcasting professional Miguel Sabido pioneered conscious, planned Entertainment-Education in the form of a *telenovela* in the 1970's—from 1975 to 1982, he had created seven popular Entertainment-Education soap operas in Mexico, which his research institute evaluated. Sabido communicated with Albert Bandura to learn more about social learning theory and how it applied to Entertainment-Education, eventually forming a theoretical framework and a practical model for the production of effective Entertainment-Education soap operas (Singhal & Rogers 1999).

Outside of Mexico, the first Entertainment-Education soap opera was created and broadcast in India by the name of *Hum Log* in 1984 (Singhal & Rogers 1999; Singhal et al, 2004). The serial's themes included family planning, status of women, family harmony and national integration, with some viewers sending in regular feedback via letters—feedback that was incorporated into subsequent storylines and episodes. Letters also contained viewers' concerns and opinions about the social issues highlighted in *Hum Log* and the serial was important in terms of furthering evaluation research on Entertainment-Education programs. Since then, the model has been applied in numerous countries, via various media including—but not limited to—television, radio, theatre, and music. It has by now also broadened its focus to include media like digital games that allow audiences not just to view role models, but also to actively "role-take" themselves (Singhal 2013). Along with being "a field with topical, and geographic, conceptual, technological and methodological diversity," Entertainment-Education is now also a transmedia model (Singhal 2013).

Tufte (2005) claims that Entertainment-Education reaches beyond dichotomies within development and communication theories, bringing together a mixture of top-down and bottom-up approaches, and seeking to bridge gaps between diffusion and participatory models of development. The participatory aspect has always been present in many of the diverse Entertainment-Education strategies, like participatory theatre or community radio projects for example. Radio and television serials have often also been supplemented with additional dialogue with communities to further emphasize the messaging within the main text—*Hum Log* had film actor Ashok Kumar commenting on the day's narrative and themes at the end of every episode, the radio serial *Taru* (also in India) was accompanied by listening groups encouraged to discuss the themes in the serial and to relate them to their personal circumstances, and the South African television soap, Soul City, was supplemented with free education booklets and other material to help audience members talk to each other (Singhal & Rogers 1999; Singhal et al. 2004).

The roots of Entertainment-Education can also be traced back to BBC radio programs like *The Archers* in the 1950's, an agricultural show that provided farmers with useful information. Since the goal of BBC was to serve the public interest—to "inform, educate, and entertain"—it made sense for at least some of their programming to have elements of both education and entertainment (Singhal et al. 2004, 258). Some Entertainment-Education projects work at a national level, and some involve methods and interventions that can be duplicated in other countries and settings. However, many are also very much localized and tailored to the needs and ways of specific communities, sometimes with a reach as small as a few hundred people (Singhal et al 2004). However, according to Hernandez and Organista (2013), "the questions of how and why tailored interventions work effectively with specific populations

continue to be understudied" (233). Emily Moyer-Guse´ (2008) recommends paying more attention to viewing contexts in order to understand how a group viewing setting may be helping or hindering people's acceptance of, or resistance, to messaging and their level of involvement in the programming.

Discussion and analysis have tended to revolve more around health-related campaigns and projects ranging from an oral rehydration therapy campaign in Egypt, to family planning campaigns in India, Turkey, Pakistan, and Tanzania, from cartoons and comic books addressing gender inequality in South Asia to *fotonovelas* addressing depression stigmas in Latin American communities in the US, and HIV awareness campaigns in Africa (Singhal et al 2004; Hernandez & Organista 2013). In some places, like the Netherlands for example, national health organizations were initially not willing to have serious health messages communicated via popular print or broadcast media as they felt it to be inappropriate both for the messaging itself and for the image of the organization. Eventually, though, they realized that emotionally appealing messaging through popular culture may have a strong impact on people in many cases as opposed to relying just on the rationality of a health message (Singhal et al. 2004).

The majority of Entertainment-Education messaging has taken place outside of the US, but strategies using prosocial messages embedded within entertainment programming have a history within the US too. Such messaging can be implemented within entertainment programming for a variety of reasons—it could be intentional and planned with input from advocacy groups, for example, in order to influence behavior, or it could just be an unintended byproduct of the storyline (but still end up influencing audience behavior) (Moyer-Guse´ 2008; Singhal et al. 2004). Much of the work within Entertainment-Education is focused on purely

health related matters (family planning, HIV awareness, hygiene), but there have been numerous projects that tackle other social issues including, but not limited to, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, sex trafficking, problems of street children, corruption and exhortation. There is a need for more literature to be available on these works, as opposed to them being considered by products of health-related issues or simply being left out of written academic narratives (Singhal 2015; Singhal et al 2004).

In practice

Singhal & Rogers (1999) believe that there is a "needless dichotomy," which says that programs have to be either educational or entertaining. Entertainment-Education projects, obviously, try to overcome such understandings of mass media. Purely educational broadcasts often end up requiring heavy investment and are not very popular with either audiences or commercial advertisers in many instances. In a world where development problems are manifold, and the resources to tackle them scarce, by creating media that is entertaining, with responsibly researched and incorporated educational messaging within it, governments and organizations have an opportunity to have "an instructional message…pay for itself and fulfill commercial and social interests" (9).

Entertainment-Education strategies include a vast and diverse range of media as well as approaches, but many involve the incorporation of fictional (and non-fictional) "positive, negative and transitional characters that serve as role models to provide educational information to audiences" (Riley et al. 2017, 63). A popular framework is the positive deviant approach, which highlights how individuals successfully deal with complex issues within their communities, ranging from things like finding innovative ways to avoid being pressurized into

having more children, to combating malnutrition while keeping within limited resources (Singhal & Rogers 1999; Singhal 2013; 2014). The positive deviance approach leans towards finding simple answers through practical problem solving by everyday individuals in communities who come up with creative and exceptional solutions to problems that other people are also facing. It propagates focusing on the exceptional as opposed to the normal; identifying unique behaviors by individuals that can then be proliferated throughout their communities by using them as role models and practical examples (Singhal 2014; 2015).

Weaving positive deviants—whether actual or fictional—into storylines and then studying the effects of these characters on audiences has been carried out in multiple studies dealing with different media. *Fotonovelas* with a positive deviant protagonist, for example, have been used as health literacy tools and considered effective in changing community attitudes and help seeking behaviors (Hernandez & Organista 2013). One advantage a television or radio serial may have over a tool like a *fotonovela*, is that the audience does not have to be literate in order to understand the messages. This is not to say that the latter cannot be imparted to a non-literate audience via activities like reading out loud and having group discussions. In either case, additional learning activities can be used both to supplement the message of the main text and to help assess its impact on audiences.

The way educational messaging is incorporated into entertainment products is very important in order for it to reach and impact audiences. In a health messaging television serial, for instance, collaborations between health professionals and scriptwriters should ensure that there is a balance between the entertaining elements and the educative. There have been cases of shows that lost the audience's interest either because they were too didactic or because obvious

messaging began to be visible before the show had fully captured people's interest through its entertainment element. In other instances, health professionals may have only been consulted for parts of a storyline, with there being exaggerated, stereotyped and incorrect health information presented in other segments (Singhal et al. 2004).

The possibilities and limitations of Entertainment-Education have been repeatedly questioned and debated. Critiques have included the claim that effectiveness of Entertainment-Education projects like soap operas is hard to measure because popularity is one thing and influencing behavioral change is another. Furthermore, it is not possible to completely isolate the effects of a television show, for example, from other simultaneous possible influential factors operating in society at that given moment (Tufte 2005). There is also the problem of "insider bias," when those involved in the creation of Entertainment-Education material are also the ones assessing its impact. However, on the other hand, inside knowledge of the project may allow for better control over, and understanding of, the communication interventions taking place (Singhal & Rogers 1999).

Local participation, if done right, can actually help reduce the biases and confusion that outside "experts" may potentially bring into project implementation and/or evaluation. With advanced communication technologies, now local researchers can send certain kinds of data instantly, which can reduce problems associated with time lags between, say, a television serial being broadcast and an evaluator being able to gather audience responses for example (Riley et al. 2017). Audience research and involvement, not just after a project is implemented, but also before it is formed are important components of many Entertainment-Education initiatives. Riley et al. (2017) raise the importance of considering the role of youth and children, because they

often form a significant part of the populations being addressed. They also encourage the continuation of triangulating research for more reliable evaluation of projects and the mixing of traditional and participatory methods. The idea behind Entertainment-Education has evolved to incorporate the realization that a lack of information is not necessarily the main cause of many societal problems. One also needs to consider "power imbalance, structural inequality and deeper social problems" (Tufte 2005, 694).

There exist significant gaps in the literature on Entertainment-Education, both in terms of depth and breadth. Much of the literature on Entertainment-Education is authored by a handful of the same people, who have done a very good job of providing thorough information but there is only so much that they can have the capacity to cover. Not only does more updated information about specific Entertainment-Education projects need to be added to the pool, but a broader, more varied perspective is also required for further constructive discussion. For more specific case studies outlining different methods and strategies within Entertainment-Education, publications often seem to focus very little on the text they are describing as an intervention. They talk more about the effects on the audience and the quantitative data gathered, which are important factors. However, a better understanding requires a deeper exploration and explanation of the texts themselves and a closer reading of what exactly is in these individual narratives that help make them effective or not effective.

The next sections discuss the application of Entertainment-Education in a country specific context. I provide an overview of Entertainment-Education in Pakistan, its historical progress in the country, and background on the Pakistani television industry itself, in order for

readers to better understand the contexts within which present day Entertainment-Education television serials are broadcast, including the two case studies in the next chapter.

ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

One of the major institutions involved with Entertainment-Education is Johns Hopkins University's (JHU) Center for Communications Program (CCP), which has assisted and funded numerous Entertainment-Education projects around the world (Singhal 1999; 2013). The early 1990's saw a few television serials broadcast in Pakistan, which had also been created with JHCCP assistance. The JHCCP assisted Entertainment-Education drama series *Aahat* (*An Approaching Sound*, 1991) was said to have been rather popular, contributing somewhat towards audience approval for family planning (Singhal et al. 2004). *Aahat* was broadcast on state-run Pakistan Television (PTV) at a time when there were no private television channels in the country, and was later followed by a similar JHU project *Nijaat* (*Deliverance*, 1993).[3] Both of these series focused on the issue of birth-spacing and the importance of husband-wife communication, with minor storylines in the latter relating to early marriage of girls and other issues. In recent years, from approximately the late 2000's, we are beginning to see Entertainment-Education based television serials in Pakistan that have greater involvement from local non-profits and are broadcast on commercial television channels as opposed to the earlier ones that played on state run television.[4] JHCCP assisted projects also continue (now on commercial television channels), with the latest being *Sammi* (2017), which addresses the illegal

[3] *Aahat* had support from USAID and *Nijaat* from IDRC (International Development Research Center), Canada.

[4] There are multiple reasons, pros, and cons for this shift in platform. See Chapter 4 for more details.

cultural custom of *Vani* whereby a girl is married off as part of the punishment for crimes committed by her male relatives (Khokhar 2017).

Some of the more popular Entertainment-Education based television serials in recent times have been co-produced by a local microfinance institution, Kashf Foundation and commercial television channels. These include the television serials *Rehai* (*Release*, 2013) and *Udaari* (*To fly*, 2016), which tackle issues of child marriage and child sexual abuse respectively, as well as a seven-part mini-series, *Aakhri Station* (*The Last Station*, 2018) revolving around multiple women's issues including mental health and forced prostitution. A common theme surrounding most Entertainment-Education programming in Pakistan has been a focus on women's issues and struggles, which is also a theme prevalent in Pakistani television serials in general, even those that are not Entertainment-Education based.

On one hand, such television shows are inspired by global models of Entertainment-Education. However, they are also drawing from historical local culture of mainstream television serials, many of which have had prosocial messaging within them from the time television was introduced in the country. This was especially true for serials broadcast on PTV, the national channel that dominated the screen for decades before the media industry was liberalized and a plethora of private channels was introduced. In fact, it was PTV that broadcast the first Entertainment-Education program in Pakistan, *Aahat*, in collaboration with JHCCP.

Aahat ("An Approaching Sound")—the beginning of Entertainment-Education in Pakistan

Broadcast on PTV and viewed by an estimated 17-20 million people in the early 90's, *Aahat* is often held up as one of the finest examples of a successful behavioral change television serial in the country. The six-episode drama serial was part of a multi-pronged family planning

campaign by the Pakistan Ministry of Population and JHP, with USAID support. It revolved around the life of a young couple and the social pressure of having children, especially a son. Themes addressed included family planning, birth spacing, gender discrimination, and the importance of husband-wife communication. Though contraceptives could not be directly mentioned within the serial or in the supporting spot advertisement, due to fear of conservative backlash, viewers were indirectly encouraged to visit family planning clinics to discuss the options available to them (Lozare et al. 1993).

Directed by renowned television director Sahira Kazmi and written by one of the country's most popular playwrights, Haseena Moin, *Aahat* was very positively received by audiences and widely discussed in the national press. One report says that the first episode was so well received that Lever Brothers Pakistan (now Unilever) offered to sponsor the remaining five episodes! (AAHAT Assessment Report). In an interview with me, Faisal Khalil (2019) (former Social and Behaviour Change Communication Specialist for the Health Communication Component of the USAID-funded Maternal and Child Health Program) claims that *Aahat* is, to date, the only real example of proper collaboration between technical and creative teams making an Entertainment-Education television serial in Pakistan. He points out how they had in-depth discussion and debate over the dialogues in the drama, and Haseena Moin worked sentence to sentence to make the script come across as natural and non-didactic while still retaining intended campaign messages. This resonates with JHCCP's assessment report, which states about *Aahat* that "The drama's messages are not in any way external to the story: they are imbedded in the conflicts, the events and the character interactions" (Lozare et al. 1993, 5).

Evaluation of the family planning communication campaign (both before and after the serial was broadcast) was carried out in the urban cities of Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad/Rawalpindi and included interviews, surveys, studies and focus groups. These cities were chosen due to the availability of family planning clinics and services as well as high media reach. The findings reported significant increases in awareness of family planning and positive attitudes towards it. Family planning increased as did viewers' strong approval of birth spacing. Nine percent of viewers also reported visiting a family planning clinic after watching the drama, indicating behavioral change as a result of watching the serial. There were also increases reported in people acting to improve communication about family planning with their spouses. The report attributes part of this increase to the distinct method of Entertainment-Education based programming, stating:

> Witnessing the experiences of a couple on screen and hearing what they say to one another in the intimacy of their bedroom alters the boundaries of what is thinkable, the limits of what is speakable. New words and ideas and strategies for negotiation enter family discourse, or husband-wife communication. (Lozare et al. 1993, 9)

JHP, then, has been around as an important player in Pakistan's health communication and Entertainment-Education efforts for a number of decades, in one way or another. They have initiated projects, partnered on projects, and helped set up local teams and entities that work on social and behavioral change communication. One such organization is the Center for Communication Programs, Pakistan.

CCP Pakistan

CCP Pakistan (Center for Communication Programs, Pakistan)—not to be confused with the main Johns Hopkins University's Center for Communication Programs, even though both fall under the JHP umbrella—was officially registered and established around 2011 as a nonprofit nongovernmental organization, though teams had been working on Entertainment-Education projects in the country since as early as 1991.[5] The organization came about out of logistical necessity as initially JHP wanted to register locally themselves but legal obstacles resulted in having to establish an independent local organization, which has access and propriety rights to JHP tools, resources, expertise, and sometimes funding as needed on a project by project basis (Khalil 2019). The Center's website describes its overall mission as follows:

> Center's mission is to save lives, ensure basic human rights and improve overall wellbeing, especially of disenfranchised, disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of population, through social and behavior change communication, research, advocacy and capacity strengthening. (CCP website)

In terms of their work with broadcast media and Entertainment-Education, aside from drama serials they have worked on music videos, radio and television talk shows, feature films, children's programming, and more. They have also, in recent years, come up with a curriculum for Entertainment-Education for some higher-education academic institutions in Pakistan. The 2004 multifaceted, six-year long Pakistan Initiative for Mothers and Newborns (PAIMAN) project was a major turning point in terms of CCP's background in Entertainment-Education work. PAIMAN was a consortium of national and international partners (including JHCCP)

[5] Today, depending on individual contracts or projects, CCP Pakistan is classified sometimes as a Pvt Company Ltd and sometimes as an NGO (Khalil 2019)

which aimed to "reduce maternal, newborn, and child mortality in Pakistan, through viable and demonstrable initiatives and capacity building of existing programs and structures within health systems and communities…" (Atwood et al. 2010, viii). After the conclusion of this project the Center officially came into being in 2011.

Apart from purposes of historical contextualization, the Center's immediate relevance for this dissertation is that one of the case studies under consideration, *Sammi*, was co-produced by them in 2017. Before going into more detail about such contemporary Entertainment-Education projects in Pakistan, it would be useful to take a step back to understand the history and workings of the Pakistani television industry and the significance of its somewhat unique drama serial genre of programming.

THE HISTORY & DYNAMICS OF THE PAKISTANI TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Though Pakistani entertainment industries including film and broadcasting initially emerged from the same space as the much more well-known Indian entertainment industries within the South Asian region, the way the former progressed and evolved in terms of style, genre, and programming is very different from the more globally known Bollywood or Indian soap opera industry. Going back to pre-partition broadcasting, when India and Pakistan were one country, we see that these industries emerged from similar origins.

Broadcasting in Colonial Times

Initially, in colonial India, the government did not play a large role in control of broadcasting. A logic of the market approach was in place, with radio development falling more under provincial governments. It was later that public and British pressure made the government

step in and ultimately shift control to the center. In 1921 the first experimental radio broadcast took place, by 1934 the government's policies had changed with the building of a national network of stations put into motion, and by 1940 this network was in place in eight major cities. The shift in the government's take on radio had to do with persuasion on the British end where there was recognition of the potential danger of radio being used as a tool for inter-provincial rivalry, or against the central government, or for anti-imperial purposes, if left in the hands of provincial governments (Page & Crawley 2000).

At partition, three radio stations went to Pakistan (Lahore, Peshawar, Dhaka) and five to India (Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Lucknow, Trichinopoly), with Radio Pakistan's first broadcast taking place in 1947 announcing the creation of the country. Over the next few years, in both countries, tighter control by the respective governments meant that radio, in essence, became an arm of the government. Administrative issues stemmed from bureaucratic obstacles including the fact that radio staff were interchangeable with other government departments and not necessarily properly trained for the specific purpose of radio management (Page & Crawley 2000). Thus far the trajectory of broadcasting for India and Pakistan seems to have been quite similar for the most part.

The beginning of television broadcasting in India is dated back to 1959 and in Pakistan, to 1964 (Gupta 1998; PTV Guide 1977). It was from here that paths initially diverged in a few key ways. Firstly, entertainment seems to have officially factored in from the very beginning as far as PTV programming was concerned (Page & Crawley 2000). Though purely educational content was also provided by PTV, the broader vision seems to have been one more in line with education through entertainment, as can be seen from the following quote from a PTV Guide:

> PTV has earnestly endeavoured to fulfill the broad objectives of informing and educating the people through wholesome entertainment and to inculcate in them a greater awareness of their own history, heritage, current problems and developments as well as a knowledge of the world at large. (6)

Secondly, unlike India, Pakistan made a conscious decision not to have TV under radio because management expertise and potential in the visual medium were lacking amongst radio personnel (Page & Crawley 2000). The Japanese Nippon Electric Company (NEC) was asked to set up two experimental stations and they gave program responsibility in Lahore to Aslam Azhar, who came from a theatre background and later went on to become director general of PTV (Page & Crawley 2000; Thomas 2005). This influence of theatre was to be a significant decision which, in the long run, impacted the progression of Pakistan's television drama industry, which would go on to be known for producing quality narratives.

Television in Pakistan

Television in Pakistan began with one state-run television channel, PTV, which started as a joint venture with NEC Japan in 1964 (Thomas 2005). By 1974, stations were established at Islamabad, Quetta, Lahore, Karachi, and Peshawar. Satellite television was introduced in the 1990's as was a new local semi-private channel, Shalimar Recording and Broadcasting Company (STN), which broadcast both foreign content and provided air-time to the local Network Television Marketing (NTM), for entertainment programming (Barraclough 2011; Jabbar 2017; Khan and Joseph 2008; Page & Crawley 2000;). The coming of satellite in the 1990's resulted in the popularity of Indian soap operas beginning to take root amongst the Pakistani audience, acting both as competition for local plays and later, influencing their themes and style to some extent (Barraclough 2011). Under the military regime of Pervez Musharraf, media industries

were liberalized in 2002, and by 2008 Pakistan had more than forty TV channels and fifty FM radio stations, and by 2013 there were more than 80 private TV channels (around 40 of these today are news channels) (Dutoya 2018; Jabbar 2017; Khan and Joseph 2008). The process of media liberalization began soon after 9/11 when, to further his stated mission of "enlightened moderation" for Pakistan and to sustain his international "liberal" image, Musharraf set out to provide freedom to the media.

The role of the state in early years varied with different governments. Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship, for one, has been repeatedly described as one of the worst times for journalists in the country, as well as being a moment of strict media censorship, when numerous restrictions were put on what could and could not be seen on screen, including the establishment of a specific dress code for women on television. His policies had a lasting impact and even today, decades later, a "liberated" media references these policies when talking about how different things are now. One example of his lasting legacy was with regard to the changing dress codes. Where before Zia's regime women on television were occasionally seen in sleeveless tops and bell bottoms, during and after his time, for many years, such images were not even seen in reruns (Kothari 2005). Thus, though he was not the first ruler to closely control the media, his policies left a long-term impact that continued to influence and restrict later governments. In 1992, Nawaz Sharif went on to impose the highly ridiculed "*dupatta* policy" whereby women could not appear on television without having a *dupatta* covering their head—even in scenes where a character was shown drowning, the actress's *dupatta* was fixed firmly in place (Kothari 2005; *Kiran aur George*).

In terms of the quality of programming and diversity of national representation, the early PTV years are often regarded as golden years of television in Pakistan. Jabbar (2017) describes the first 10 years as having a "dynamic mobilisation of a wide range of talent, imparting training and skill development to hundreds, introducing innovative programmes, presenting for the first time a vivid daily portrait of the country's varied and vibrant people" (para. 6). The lure of privatized media in the 2000's was framed as a move away from state-control and propaganda as well as more choice for viewers. Some positive effects of this move were perhaps most visible in news programming and political talk shows, which are some of the most popular sources of entertainment as well as "education" for television audiences in the country. Though channels are able to be much more critical of the state and politicians now than they could in days of PTV monopoly, the state's control has not completely vanished and can show up in different forms from time to time. Moreover, other political actors and those with power hold significant sway in what news channels discuss or do not discuss, as well as the kind of stance they take on certain issues. Mobina Hashmi (2012) emphasizes how, a few years into media liberalization (2005-2007), a program like the *Late Night Show with Begum Nawazish Ali* on *Aaj* TV enabled more public discussions of social and political topics which had previously been consigned to private living room discussion. However, the complete dependence upon advertising revenue combined with very little accountability or transparency regarding the finances or ownership of private channels has created an environment where channels are guided by various self-interests and are, at times, downright irresponsible in their discussion and representation of political and social issues (Jabbar 2017). In many ways PTV was looked upon as a more responsible channel, with a wider outreach, especially since most people who worked there were considered quality artists and professionals who were trained in their trade as opposed to just being pretty faces from the

modelling world or social media stars more talented in Instagramming and Snapchatting their personal lives as opposed to actually acting well—a grievance voiced about many current drama serial actors prominent on screen today.

Almost since the very beginning of television in Pakistan, Urdu drama serials have been extremely popular amongst audiences and have been one of (if not the) most widely watched programs on television, especially before satellite and cable were introduced (Kothari 2005; PTV Guide 1977). It is said that, in the 1980's/early 1990's, on the days when a popular play was on air, the city roads used to be clear at 8:00 p.m.—a phenomenon that Gupta (1998) claims applies to many countries when popular programmes are being broadcast, the *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana* being examples closer to home in India (Zakariya 2012). This drama serial form of programming originated from the influence of theatre (early PTV management and recruits came from a theatre background as mentioned above) and, according to Dutoya (2018), pre-television radio plays began to become TV dramas.[6]

Even from the time when they were exclusive to radio, these dramas were "conceived as having an educational dimension" (Dutoya 2018, 77). Television serials included original scripts as well as adaptations from both Urdu and foreign literature (PTV Guide 1977). Over the years, there has been some overall attempt to maintain social messaging within many of the drama serials broadcast on both state and private television channels. However, there has been considerable fluctuation in both the approach and aims of those making and broadcasting these dramas. For the most part, the educational aspect remained present in a more unofficial way, dependent upon individual writers and producers, with some scattered official Entertainment-

[6] It is interesting to note how, in 2017, an Entertainment-Education modelled commercial television serial on child marriage (*Rehai*) was then made into a radio serial for wider access and impact.

Education based projects on PTV (as outlined in sections above) focused on educating audiences on various issues including family planning, domestic violence, child marriage, and women's rights. Continuing this history of more "official" Entertainment-Education serials are Kashf Foundation's *Udaari*, and CCP's *Sammi*, both of which will be discussed in-depth in the next few chapters.

In terms of structure and formatting, originally Pakistani television serials usually had 13 episodes within which the story concluded; this is one way in which they were different from many other similar serial formats around the world, including Indian serials which often continue for years. Over time, as the hold of advertisers increased, and serials became more and more dependent on ratings and advertising revenue, the standard number of episodes for serials was increased partially due to pressure from advertisers as well as a general why not make more money attitude. To some extent, the localized genre and episodic structure of Pakistani serials is still retained, but now around 25 episodes or more are the norm. In some ways then, this local structure has been influenced by global corporate forces over time.

Today there are many drama serials (and their variations, including sitcoms, shorter serials, and soaps), running simultaneously on multiple channels. There are whole channels dedicated to showing one serial after another 24/7 and the same actors can often be seen appearing in multiple serials playing at the same time. Caught in a competitive race of ratings, production houses churn out serial after serial, many of which begin to come across as mass-produced commodities that could easily be interchanged halfway through their run, without much difference in stories, themes, cast or style.

Privatization, Ratings, & Advertisers

It can be argued that privatization of television in Pakistan led to the addition of a large chunk of sensational, irresponsible programming (especially television serials) more focused on portraying glamor and conspicuous consumption than on developing creative and responsible narratives. This falls in line with certain worldwide concerns about the marketization of broadcasting in general. Historically, broadcasting in many countries started out under state control, as a tightly regulated public resource understood to hold significant power. From about the 1970's onward, neo-liberal policies resulted in a push for "deregulation" (also described as "liberalization"), with the rhetoric that government control curtails freedom of expression and limits choice (Hesmondhalgh 2012). However, as Hesmondhalgh (2012) aptly points out, loss of government control over broadcasting can actually limit the variety of programing and opinions available to citizens by allowing more and more liberties to profit chasing corporations who are least concerned about the idea of broadcasting as a public service. This "marketization" of broadcasting—originating in the US and then slowly spreading around the world—eventually resulted in cases of broadcasting privatization, sharp decreases of restrictions on content and ownership, reductions of subsidies to non-profit and public-sector cultural institutions, and a lot of leeway for advertisers (Hesmondhalgh 2012; Ò Siochrù 2005). [7]

The trajectory of television in Pakistan has not been drastically different. In an interview with me, president of Geo Network (one of the largest television networks in the country), veteran journalist and media personality, Imran Aslam (2017) describes how state controlled PTV had a sense of social responsibility ingrained within the institution from the very beginning

[7] There are, obviously, distinctions in how different countries handle broadcasting restrictions as well as varying combinations of public-private ownership and control.

and operated as a public broadcast system. It could also take certain risks in the ways it represented issues because it was not beholden to ratings, claims Aslam. At that time, he elaborates, they knew for example that, they could not get away with portraying women only as objects or as perpetual subjects of oppression. There had to be an element of resistance. Over time, with the advancement of the ratings race, Aslam says, "I feel that we lost that element of social relevance somewhere." Renowned actress, singer, and writer, Bushra Ansari (2019), who has been working in the industry since early PTV days, feels a vicious cycle has formed between media and society with each influencing the other to revel more and more in sensationalization and crudeness.[8] Using the example of news channels in Pakistan, she says that audiences do not want to watch straightforward, responsibly presented stories anymore but instead enjoy sensationalized, vulgar, and violent representation of events. She feels both broadcast and social media have, in a way, helped train audience's minds and preferences by showing them such material and, in turn, now that is what people want to see. Comparing today's television industry to PTV days, she adds to Aslam's comments by pointing out that a certain self-censorship was in place and actors had to be very careful and responsible about what kind of words or actions they might be using on screen, and the ways in which they depicted sensitive issues such as domestic or gender-based violence for example.

Censorship for entertainment programming may be at an all-time low now in Pakistan, but this does not mean that media programming is completely free from restraint. Actress Samiya Mumtaz (2019) also spoke to me about how advertisers have significant influence over the content produced on television (through the channels and production houses). They do not want to get into very controversial issues that may divide clientele for their products, she points

[8] Ansari is also a key cast member of one of the serials under discussion, *Udaari*.

out. They prefer generic themes that have more agreement within the audience, with issues such as self-sacrificing motherhood, or patriotism, as "safe" ideas to sell. On the other hand, they will, for example, avoid stories that deal with Shia and Sunni themes or Hindu and Muslim themes, says Mumtaz. Aslam agrees that one aspect of the shift from more socially relevant and responsible programming to sensationalized and repetitive themes is a push from advertisers. The growth of the industry has led to higher salaries for actors and writers, more expenses in terms of things like locations, makeup, and clothes; overall, higher budgets and limited sources of revenue. "The only source of revenue we have is advertising," he points out and that definitely leads to certain dictates from advertisers about what kind of serial should be made (Aslam 2017). What these advertisers look at, in order to make decisions about which serials to sponsor, is ratings data.

In order to understand how the ratings system in Pakistan actually works, I spoke to Salman Danish (2019), the CEO of Medialogic, which is the main television ratings agency in the country. Operating since 2007, as of 2019, Medialogic covers 2050 households across 28 cities (all of urban Pakistan). Though there are have been other ratings providers in the country, a recent change in the regulatory environment that requires TV ratings agencies to be licensed by, and come under the ambit of, PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulating Authority) has resulted in Medialogic and MediaVoir to be the main ones operating as of 2019.

Danish (2019) explains that Medialogic's main clients are advertisers, who use ratings to buy media, and broadcasters, who use ratings to sell media. The TV ratings system they operate is as good as the ones in any developed country in terms of hardware and software used and in the frequency of data gathered, claims Danish. Where they can be said to lag behind is perhaps in

a holistic sense as they only measure television and are still in the process of potentially moving from TAM (TV audience measurement) to VAM (Video Audience Measurement). He mentions some challenges associated with collecting data in Pakistan in particular including technical obstacles (unreliable networks, speed issues, reception issues), confidentiality issues (channels finding out which households contain meters and offering them incentives to watch their particular channel), and security and privacy issues (often women at home alone reluctant to let technicians into home, fear of bomb threats or fear of being recorded by state agencies in certain cities). However, Danish (2019) claims that their ratings system has built in checks and balances to account for such issues. Medialogic reports include both total audience measurement—which includes both antenna and cable households—as well as cable only measurement. PTV is still the major channel for antenna only households.

CONCLUSION

This, then, is the general environment in which present day Pakistani television serials are produced, including those that are considered Entertainment-Education. The journey from more socially conscious to more sensationalized serials, and a focus on quantity over quality, has come about partially due to the hold advertisers have over production. Having many new channels does not seem to have led to massive strides in producing diverse content. Though in some ways, media privatization may have allowed for a more diverse range of issues and topics to be raised, it has also created other kinds of limitations that impact diversity of representation. For example, PTV stations in different regions used to create popular drama serials for a national audience that highlighted regional lifestyles and issues. Now, even though some new private regional channels are present, almost every mainstream drama serial is a Karachi production for

the most part. At a given time, most of the serials running on television seem to have common themes—second wives, evil in-laws, and helpless women being some common ones— and overlapping actors.

This is not to say that the art of carefully constructed, more socially conscious serials has been entirely lost or that there is never any serial with a different theme on air these days. There are always attempts to portray social issues that need attention and awareness, and Entertainment-Education serials are just one way of doing this. Plenty of shows that are not classified as Entertainment-Education also tend to have some educational element (whether intentional or accidental), and the television industry has not completely broken away from its roots of educating through entertainment.

The following chapter includes an in-depth textual analysis of two contemporary Entertainment-Education television serials in the country, keeping in mind the need for more qualitative analysis and more focus on individual texts in order to better understand the Entertainment-Education process, especially in a local context.

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Chapter 3: The Stories That Were Told: Production Texts

Entertainment-Education products do not stem from a standard, one-size fits all, mold. Amongst other factors, localized context can affect conception, production, presentation, and reception of a media product. Tailored interventions in localized contexts tend to be understudied when considering the broader effectiveness of Entertainment-Education as a development strategy (Hernandez and Organista 2013). Similarly, in research on Entertainment-Education, texts themselves are often bypassed in favor of audience reception and quantitative approaches to data. Looking closely at localized texts is an important aspect of thinking through the Entertainment-Education approach.

This chapter contains a textual analysis of two relatively recent Pakistani Entertainment-Education television serials *Udaari* (*To Fly*, HUM TV 2016) and *Sammi* (HUM TV 2017). *Udaari* tackles the highly taboo subject of child sexual abuse and came about as a response to the Kasur child sexual abuse case of 2015.[9] It is based on a true story, played during the prime-time slot, and became very popular with audiences. The core purpose of the serial is to educate the public about child sexual abuse, to counter myths about it, and to create awareness about resources available for both preventing and dealing with the horrific crime. The serial is not directly referred to as Entertainment-Education—the term Edutainment is used more frequently to describe it—but is very much so in terms of intent and content. The later serial, *Sammi*, has an official title of Entertainment-Education attached to it and addresses the topic of *Vani* as its main plot point. This serial was conceptualized as being a means for educating the public about women's rights, especially with regard to financial independence. Operational requirements led

[9] See Chapter 4 for more detail.

to the highlighted plot point being the illegal custom of *Vani*. However, there are various other issues present in the story intended for education.

I had watched both serials during their initial run, mostly on YouTube and Dailymotion. I re-watched all of *Sammi* in chronological order more recently for the purpose of this project, and re-watched *Udaari* episodes in a more non-sequential manner. From the time these were initially uploaded by HUM TV on YouTube, there seem to have been changes to the channel's policies regarding online content. Sometimes scenes were muted, apparently because of copyright issues regarding the background music. In such instances I would often refer back to the episode on Dailymotion where sound edits had not been made and I could view the episode without any audio cuts.

I now lay out the basic plot summaries for reference. Each serial has numerous characters and multiple, intersecting storylines, which may appear complex for readers unfamiliar with the texts. In the case of *Sammi*, especially, there are a lot of parallel story arcs worth understanding in order to comprehend the larger discussion. I start with the plot summaries, followed by a discussion of the overarching common theme present in both serials—the empowerment of women. I then proceed to talk about the major issue highlighted in each serial—*Vani* for *Sammi*, and child abuse for *Udaari*, and conclude the chapter by discussing more broadly the educational subjects addressed.

Plot Summary: *Udaari*

Udaari's story revolves around two neighboring families in a village—a widow, Sajida/Sajjo (Samiya Mumtaz) who lives with her ten-year old daughter Zebo (Areesha

Ahsan/Hina Altaf) and her close friend Sheedan's (Bushra Ansari) family who are *Mirasi*s.[10] Sheedan's daughter Meera (Urwa Hocane) is ashamed of her family's profession. Imtiaz (Ahsan Khan), a friend of Sajida's deceased husband, takes care of her and Zebo after she is widowed, and ultimately proposes marriage to her which she reluctantly accepts. Slowly the kindhearted character of Imtiaz is revealed to be a farce as he is seen trying to molest Meera, which leads to a confrontation and rift between the two families. Imtiaz begins targeting Zebo and she becomes withdrawn and terrified, silent because he threatens to kill her mother if she complains about him. Meanwhile, having fallen on hard times, Sheedan and her family move to the city (Lahore) when Meera is offered a chance to sing with a band of young college students—Milli (Malika Zafar), Haris (Adnan Saeed), and Arsh (Farhan Saeed)—who are competing in a high profile national singing competition. At first ridiculed and rejected by some of the band members for her rural accent and mannerisms, Meera is ultimately accepted, becomes good friends with them and goes on to become a lauded professional singer, which vastly improves her family's financial position. Sajida discovers that Imtiaz has raped Zebo and confronts him, which leads him to lock her up in a room while he rapes the child again. Stabbing Imtiaz to death that night, Sajida flees with Zebo to Lahore where she reconnects with Sheedan's family who help her construct a new identity and start a new life in the city. As years pass, a grownup Zebo is still traumatized by the events of her childhood, when Imtiaz, who managed to survive the stabbing, appears in Lahore bent on revenge. He has established powerful political connections and has the police arrest Sajida for attempted murder. Arsh, now a lawyer and in love with Meera, takes up Sajida's case but keeps facing dead ends as the family keeps the rape hushed up. When he finally gets the

[10] *Mirasi* is the name of a caste/profession with a musical heritage. Historically often singers and/or dancers, over time the word has managed to develop negative connotations associated with music and entertainment of a lowly kind.

whole story, he and Meera, with the help of Kashf Foundation, piece together evidence against all odds and convince Zebo to finally break her silence and testify in court against her mother's will. Imtiaz is finally found guilty after a sudden witness to his crime appears who, upon encountering personal disasters, felt that he had been punished for keeping quiet about what he had seen so many years ago.

Other characters include Sheedan's husband Majid (Rehan Sheikh) who meets with an unexpected accident and dies within the first few episodes, her son Ejaz (Ins-e-Yazdan) who supports Zebo, and her brother Iqbal/Bala (Aqeel Abbass), a transgender and a valued member of the family who assists Sajida with her business endeavors. Milli's mother Muneera (Laila Zuberi), who is shown to work for Kashf Foundation, plays an important role in helping Sajida get back on her feet and in getting justice for Zebo. Arsh's mother Afrooz (Ambar Wajid), who is initially very much against her son marrying Meera because of her caste and social background, is eventually convinced by her husband (Arjumand Hussain) that what matters is a person's character, values and good qualities, not their lineage and caste. Farwa's (Maryam Fatima) parents who are dead against her interest in music and send her away to a different city to live with her uncle in order to prevent her from singing, which is what paves the path for Meera to become the lead singer of the band instead. Sajida's middle-class, rude, arrogant sister (Aliya Jamshed) and her son, Ilyas (Haris Waheed), who is Meera's initial love interest take every opportunity to humiliate Meera and her family. Ilyas tells her she must never sing as it is disgraceful and indicative of her low caste. Once she becomes a rich and famous singer, however, he tries for years to (unsuccessfully) get back together with her.

The cast of *Udaari* is a mix of some veteran, and some relatively new actors, some popular glamorous stars (including the real-life celebrity couple of Saeed and Hocane) and some actors more known for their acting skills rather than their looks or Instagram followers. A few smaller characters are played by actors who go on to play significant roles in *Sammi*, including Sheikh and Waheed, while Hocane's younger sister plays the main role in the later serial. This may seem like an insignificant detail but is important because her casting may not be entirely coincidental—a certain kind of publicity and hype can be achieved by linking an upcoming serial to a previously successful project whether directly or indirectly. She mentions in *Sammi* related interviews how she is happy to follow in her sister's footsteps by working on a social cause drama serial, and press coverage of the serial itself links it to *Udaari*. Both serials, however, are very different in terms of their plot, presentation, and the approach taken for them to be Entertainment-Education. Fun fact: the director of *Sammi* also acted in *Udaari*, playing the role of a powerful politician for whom Imtiaz works.

Plot Summary: *Sammi*

Sammi is the name of the lead character (Mawra Hocane), a young girl living in a village near Rahim Yar Khan with her parents and brother Waqas (Haris Waheed) whom she loves dearly. The drama serial opens with *Sammi*'s wedding celebrations—she is getting married to her brother's friend Pervaiz (Zain Mirza Baig). On the day of her wedding, Sammi's father (Irfan Khoosat) pushes her brother to suddenly demand a large amount of money for her *Haq Mehar* (a religious requirement—a monetary gift given by the groom to the bride). An argument breaks out, which results in Waqas pushing, and accidentally killing, Pervaiz. Though the victim's father, Fazal (Noor Hassan), wants to hand Waqas over to the police, his nephew Chaudhry Rab

Nawaz (Rehan Sheikh) wants matters to stay in the hands of the village *jirga* (tribal council) because it is a matter of pride and ego for him as the village head. Waqas's parents are distraught—they agree to Rab Nawaz's demand that they offer their daughter as *Vani* in return for their son's life and freedom.[11] Despite the victim's father's repeated refusal for such an exchange, Rab Nawaz insists, ultimately taking Sammi as his own son's *Vani* when Fazal refuses to make her his own *Vani*. This exchange is the premise of the serial and the main issue around which other storylines are woven.

Rashid Chand (Adnan Siddiqui) is Rab Nawaz's milk-brother, his right-hand man and the father of five daughters. His mother Zarina (Seemi Raheel) is obsessed with loyally serving the Chaudhrys and with having her daughter-in-law, Salima (Saman Ansari), produce a son for Rashid. In the process, Salima has compromised her mental and physical health, giving birth year after year to daughters even though her husband loves her and does not demand a son. Both husband and wife are somewhat educated but have been unable to find a better means of earning a livelihood than serving the Chaudhry.

On Rab Nawaz's wife Chaudhrayan Zulekha's (MadihaRizvi) orders, Rashid helps Sammi escape, sending her to Karachi to an old flame of his, Chandni (Sania Saeed).[12] She is a harsh but seemingly kind-hearted woman deep down. She gives Sammi room and board in exchange for working in her beauty salon. She trains her and tries to make the girl gain some self -confidence and independence. A problem arises when her son Salaar (Ahad Raza Mir) starts caring for Sammi, raising red flags for his mother who ultimately proceeds to turn Sammi out of

[11] *Vani* is an illegal feudal custom that involves having a woman marry someone from the victim's family as a punishment and compensation for crimes (often murder) committed by her male relatives.

[12] Zulekha is hereafter referred to by her title Chaudhrayan (wife of Chaudhry).

the house. When Salaar follows her and, it seems like he might marry her, Chandni sends news to Sammi's brother who comes and drags his sister back to the village and attempts to burn her alive in public. While trying to follow them, Salaar gets into an accident and dies. Later, a guilt ridden Chandni goes to Rahim Yar Khan in an attempt to save Sammi.

Salaar's friend Aaliyan (Bilal Khan) is the nephew of an orphaned nurse, Naheed (Nadia Afgan), who lives with her greedy brother (Malik Raza) and sister-in-law (Beena Chaudhry). Her nephew is the only one who stands up for her rights and tries to inculcate in her a sense of independence and knowledge of her rights. She secretly marries her love interest Ghulam Rasool (Nazar Ul Hassan) who is a social outcast on behalf of being an illegitimate child. At the same time Zareena tries to have Naheed become Rashid's second wife by taking a marriage proposal to Naheed's brother without her son's consent. When news of her secret marriage comes out, her brother takes drastic measures to try and break off the marriage and get rid of her unborn child. She ultimately manages to save both with the help of Aaliyan and also files a case against her brother for illegally retaining her share in the family property.

Aaliyan ends up tutoring Rab Nawaz's son at the haveli, which is how he discovers that Sammi is a prisoner there. After a twist and turn of events, Sammi is eventually freed when an even higher district personality intervenes and overrides Rab Nazwaz's decisions. She is married to Aaliyan and Chandni hands over her new beauty salon to her as a wedding gift; as a means of becoming financially independent and self-sufficient. On her way back to Karachi, Chandni dies while sitting and waiting for her train at the train station.

Even a short glance at this plot summary shows that there are numerous issues within the storyline that the serial intends to educate the audience about—women's financial independence,

issues of *Haq Mehar* and marriage preference, *Vani*, maternal health, son preference, inheritance rights, illegitimate children being socially ostracized, weak legal channels, and the hold of tribal authority. A number of these issues fall under the overarching umbrella of women's rights and crimes committed against them. This broad theme also encompasses many of the issues addressed in *Udaari* and so I start my discussion of the two texts by exploring their treatment of women's issues.

Empowered Women

The major theme common between these two serials is the idea of empowering women, both financially as well as psychologically. The importance of being financially self-sufficient is stressed in both stories with regard to multiple characters. In *Udaari*, Sajida initially works to support herself and her daughter and later starts her own small business. Sheedan and Meera support their family through singing, especially after their husband/father dies and, as Sheeba Khan (2016) puts it, Sheedan is "fiercely unapologetic for and proud of" her "*mehnat ki kamai*" (earnings gotten through honest, hard work). Milli's mother, Muneera, is a working woman who is able to help and enable many other women through her work—she is the one who encourages Sajida to look into starting a small home business, even though Sheedan insists that there is no need for Sajida to earn as they are well provided for. Muneera emphasizes that wanting to work and stand on your own feet is a commendable desire and gives Sajida some ideas on the kinds of food businesses women can run from their homes. She guides her to go to Kashf Foundation to discuss options for starting capital. Later, when Sajida calls to thank her, she points out that Sajida has earned the Kashf loan through her own credibility and talent, without Muneera needing to put in a word for her. In these interactions there is a wealth of information provided to

women in the audience who may also be wanting to take some initiative to become financially self-sufficient. Zebo studies hard hoping to do similar work as Muneera in the future where she can help survivors of abuse get back on their feet.

In *Sammi*, Chandni is the most independent woman we see, running her own beauty salon and training other women to earn an honest living. She is also the only character who dies, that too, rather needlessly and without any explanation. A woman like the Chaudhrayan is wealthy, powerful, and educated but still tied to and dependent on men, whereas Salima is educated but unable to make use of her education to earn a living. Nurse Naheed falls in a somewhat in-between category—she goes out and earns a living but most of her earnings are taken away by her brother, who also refuses to give her a rightful share in their deceased parents' house. She does finally gather the courage to file a legal case against her brother for her share in the property but is able to do so only with the urging and backing of her nephew. Sammi herself is bequeathed a beauty salon business by Chandni but that seems to be a minor part of her happily ever after. Her security and happiness are still shown to ultimately lie with the man she marries, Aaliyan. The serial opens with a scene from her first (almost) wedding and finally closes with a similar scene where her wedding is being celebrated. *Udaari*'s ending shows Zebo studying hard for college even though previously Ejaz has revealed a romantic interest in her. That is kept as a very minor part of the story and the focus is on her completing her education and making a career for herself. Similarly, we see Meera's struggles as she works hard to hone her talent and ends up earning both fame and fortune. Her relationship with Arsh is a central part of the story but there is much more to her character and her story's arc. We witness her tremendous growth throughout the serial—in terms of career, self-confidence, maturity, and in her ability to deal with all kinds of people and the challenges life throws at her. From a young, vulnerable girl

ashamed of her family's roots and profession, she becomes a capable young woman who fully embraces her identity as a *Mirasi* and uses that very identity to build her career and support her family.

The characters in *Sammi* talk a lot about women's rights and independence but not a single female character gains true independence by the end of the show—either financial or social (other than Chandni who simply dies). In the very first episode of *Sammi*, the matter of *mehar* is brought up, which is legally and religiously the bride's right, not her family's.[13] In Sammi's case her father and brother are the ones discussing *mehar* negotiations—even though it is her right to demand whatever amount she wants, she is completely clueless about what is going on (and probably disinterested as well). This is a common issue in contemporary Pakistani society where many girls are either unaware of their rights regarding *mehar* or do not exercise those rights due to various socio-cultural pressures. *Sammi* portrays another common problem related to *mehar* -—writing down an amount due on the *Nikahanama* (marriage contract), but never actually paying it. Sammi's father wants to put down an exorbitant amount of *mehar* on paper, to make himself look important socially, acknowledging that the groom does not actually have to pay it to Sammi. Sammi's whole world turns upside down because of this one issue but, at that moment, she is blissfully unaware of the negotiations taking place on her behalf as she plays the part of a beautiful young bride. It is symbolic of her journey through most of the serial, where she is mostly tied to the idea that her brother and her father have the right to make decisions for, and expect sacrifices from, her. When the men in the story talk about their so-called ownership of their daughters/wives/sisters, it is an overt portrayal of their deep-rooted

[13] *Mehar*: Legal obligation for Islamic marriages; a gift from the groom to the bride in the form of money or possessions, the amount of which is specified in the marriage contract.

patriarchal ideology. Sammi's words and actions, however, show how such ideology is internalized even by those who become a victim of it. She is desperate to save her brother, and even after he repeatedly inflicts gross injustice on her she is still obsessed with thoughts of, and concern for, "*Mera Veer*" (my brother). She needs to be repeatedly told—by Chandni, by Salaar, by Aaliyan—that she is a person in her own right who needs to look out for, and speak up for, herself. She, more often than not, has a defeatist attitude—"*Mujh jaisi larki nahi bach sakti*" (a girl like me cannot escape) she says at one point (*Sammi* Episode 13). Towards the end of the serial, she tries filing a police report and starts making bolder statements—"*Mai apne maamlaat khud sanbhaal sakti hun*" (I can manage my affairs on my own), "*Koi mujh se Nikah nahi kare ga jab tak main nahi chahun gee*" (no one can marry me without my consent (*Sammi* Episode 21)—but it all sounds hollow because she is still helpless in reality. Her situation does stress the fact that the first step towards empowering oneself is to learn to say no but it does not show much beyond that. Things fall into place too simplistically and unrealistically for her towards the end of the serial and everyone who has been unfair to her suddenly has a change of heart and conscience—Waqas, her mother, Rab Nawaz, Zareena. She is finally saved in the end due to other people's efforts—her own role in saving herself is extremely limited.

Udaari, on the other hand, gives us some very strong female characters who make their way forward in the world, overcoming financial and social obstacles without depending solely on men. However, the serial is careful to maintain a reality check by not making them melodramatically heroic. The problems these women face are very relevant to women in contemporary Pakistan. We are repeatedly reminded of ever-present dangers—both via a "behind the scenes" look at the widespread institutional corruption and societal mindset that works in the rapist's favor, and in the clear-cut warnings that both Sajida and Sheedan give Zebo on how to

conduct herself for her own safety. The dangers Sajida and Sheedan warn Zebo about are also real; Imtiaz can use the police, pistol, or kidnapping to harm Zebo points out Sheedan accurately in Episode 20. When Zebo begs Meera to take her to visit her mother in jail Meera relents. However, Sajida is furious upon seeing her daughter, and despite Zebo's pleading, the *only* conversation she has with her is to tell her that she is crazy to have come to the jail as girls from respectable families do not occupy such spaces. Sheedan had made a similar statement earlier reminding us that though she is used to standing up against unreasonable societal customs and practices, some deep-rooted social-institutional norms are beyond even her resistance. Zebo needs to stay away from the "*gandi nazren"* (dirty stares) of onlookers, Sajida emphasizes. Here, the body of the young girl standing in a prison becomes the signifier of her (imagined) immorality in the eyes of society. Sajida scolds Meera's uncle for accompanying the girl and instructs him to now keep Zebo hidden inside the house till court proceedings are completed in order to protect her from danger, the extent of which Zebo cannot judge for herself (*Udaari* Episode 20). These women's responses have more to do with them being very aware of the seriously flawed legal and social systems rather than their having completely internalized a patriarchal ideology that holds women completely responsible for safeguarding their own bodies and "honor." Not once do either of them ever blame Zebo or hold her responsible in any way for the violence committed against her. When, in an earlier episode, Imtiaz accuses Meera of trying to seduce him, Sheedan does not believe him for a second and defends her daughter fiercely. When Sajida is reluctant to marry Imtiaz because she is a widow and older than him, Sheedan encourages her to look beyond narrow societal mindsets, that deem such a match inappropriate (Chaudhary 2018).

This is not to say that there is no internalization of hegemonic patriarchal values at all. When Arsh, as Sajida's lawyer, tries to find out from her what happened on the day of the murder, she is tightlipped and insists she does not remember. She is quick to try and paint Zebo out of the picture altogether saying that the child was not even at home at that time. She does not want anyone to know what has happened to her daughter. The shame and social ostracization associated with rape can make a girl's life a living nightmare in more ways than one and Sajida's fears for her daughter's future are not unfounded or exaggerated. Overall, *Udaari* negotiates different understandings of women's strength and agency in specific public spheres in order to ultimately come up with a realistic portrayal of a child victim of sexual abuse taking a stand against her rapist. It never downplays or sensationalizes either the years of fear and trauma she faces or the multiple institutional and societal barriers she has to overcome to receive even basic justice and to begin her healing process (Chaudhary 2018).

The young girls in both serials are going through a time of crisis; a time at which they need all the support they can get. Zebo has her mother who looks out for her as a primary source of support whereas Sammi's mother is the one who has landed her in trouble in the first place. There are a number of other mothers of girls we see in *Udaari* but in *Sammi*, all the other major female characters (Salima, Chandni, Chaudhrayan, Naheed) have missing mothers—either dead or assumed dead—leaving us with only Sammi's mother to witness as an example.

Mothers and Friends

The representation of motherhood is starkly different in the two serials with *Udaari* portraying strong mothers who stand up for their daughters, and *Sammi* highlighting mothers who are either all too eager to sacrifice their daughters to save their sons (Sammi's mother) or

end up harming their children in other ways (Rashid's mother, Chandni). Chaudhrayan wants her son to get a good education and not get caught up in patriarchal conceptions of power; she is very much against her husband's decision of bringing Sammi into the house as her son's *Vani* (he is just a child) but her hands are tied. All her protests fall on deaf ears; her husband says things like a child belongs to his mother when it is in her stomach and to the father once it is out (*Sammi* Episode 5), and he laughs and scoffs at her ambitions to educate their son. Chaudhrayan has to act indirectly and discreetly in order to protect her son from his father's ignorant ideas—she has to have Sammi sneaked out and sent away in the middle of the night. Later, when her role in Sammi's disappearance is discovered, her husband decides to punish her by marrying Sammi himself. When she appeals to her father and brother for help, they tell her no respectable woman leaves her husband's house before death and that her husband's decision is justified. Thus, despite all her wealth, powerful position in the community, and strong family background, she is ultimately helpless when it comes to defending her own rights or watching out for her child. Even when it comes to educating her son about basic social ideas about right versus wrong, the young male tutor, Aaliyan, has more success in ultimately coming through to the young boy than his own mother does.

Salima is perhaps the only sympathetic mother in *Sammi* and though she tries to defend her daughters, she is rather helpless physically, financially, and socially and is also caught up in the desire for a son (even if it is more for her husband's sake than her own wish). Her frustration—with carrying child after child and not being able to live the life she and Rashid had envisioned for themselves (a house in the city, two kids, good schools, quality time together) — is valid and understandable. The stereotypical dialogues repeatedly used to portray this frustration, however, take away from the severity of the problem as she starts coming across as

someone who is constantly whining. Her complaint, that she has been made into a childbearing machine for the sake of fulfilling the desire to have a son, is a harsh, relatable reality for many young women but is it really necessary to repeat the same dialogue again and again throughout the serial? Similarly, Zareena's constant rants of "*puttar chahiye*" (want a son), and threats of getting her son a second wife lose their impact and get almost comical after a while.

Sheedan in *Udaari* looks out for both her son and daughter, taking care of them financially and otherwise, even after her husband passes away. She protects and trusts her daughter—not for a minute doubting Meera when the girl accuses Imtiaz of trying to molest her—and raises a son who knows how to respect women. "She is a complete contrast to the '*log kiya kaheinge*' mother that Pakistani dramas seem to churn out by the masses," Sheeba Khan (2016) rightfully claims while reviewing the serial.[14] Sajida is another widow who fights for and defends her daughter against all odds. Perhaps a part of their strength comes from the strong female support networks they have formed that cut across caste, class, and other social groupings. *Udaari* stresses the idea of strong female friendships while *Sammi* boasts of none. Nurse Naheed gives Salima a few reassuring words here and there, Chaudhrayan and Chandni briefly join hands to help Sammi in the end, and Sammi and Rashid's daughter are shown to be childhood friends. However, the kind of close female friendship and support that is needed, to push forward in a patriarchal world full of grave challenges, is missing.

Most of the main female characters in *Sammi* do have some form of comfort and companionship—whether temporary or long-term—that comes from different men they come across—husbands (Rashid and Ghulamoo), nephew (Aaliyan), acquaintances (Salaar and

[14] *Log kiya kaheinge* = what will people say

Aaliyan), or sons (Salaar and the young boy Shahzeb). These men are (mostly) shown as positive foils to the more aggressive, misogynistic males we see in the story. The importance of early education for young boys, to question and counter social injustice, is highlighted well in *Sammi* through the track of Rab Nawaz's son, Shahzeb, and his tutor Aaliyan. Initially ridiculed and disrespected by his tutee, over time the tutor gains not just the young boy's respect and friendship but manages to instill some sense of ethics and justice in him. Though the boy's mother had been attempting to do the same, it is Aaliyan who finally gets across to Shahzeb, providing relief for his mother who could not expect help in this matter from any of her own family members. In some ways, even after birthing a son, she was as helpless as Salima who birthed none. Her attempts to save her son from his father's ignorant ideas resulted in her husband deciding to punish her by taking another wife, just as Rashid's mother kept trying to make her son take a second wife because Salima was not giving him a son.

Maternal Health & Reproductive Rights

Exploring the pressures and consequences of societal preference for sons, and its effects on maternal health, is a key component of *Sammi*'s educational messaging. Zareena is the main voice of societal importance given to sons and the desperation of families to have them. She is on a constant rant (about her daughter-in-law being useless because she cannot have a son) and mission to get a male heir for her son. Sammi's situation, as well as comments (about how unlucky those without sons are) here and there by other characters add direct references to the issue, while the women characters' helplessness in general, perhaps, makes indirect references to how widespread the social consequences of not having a son are, and the value accorded to sons over daughters. When Sammi's mother finally apologizes to her daughter for giving her away to

save Waqas, she justifies her behavior by saying that mothers become blind in their love for their sons (*Sammi*, Episode 16). The audience sees how miserable Salima's life is as she struggles physically and mentally to take care of herself, and her five daughters while constantly being berated and insulted by her mother-in-law for not producing a son. It is all the more frustrating because it is obvious that Salima and Rashid have a good marital bond otherwise and, though both would like a son, neither is desperate for one for their own sake. They are both educated, in love, and might be content otherwise if the pressure to have a son was not always hanging over their heads.

At one point, Naheed tells them to think seriously about a temporary or permanent form of contraception, explaining that this is also a cure for women's health—"*Yeh bhi aurat ki sehat ke liye aik ilaj hai*" (*Sammi* Episode 4). She tells them that before contraception existed, women died giving birth and reminds them that the concern is not just for women but also for the children they have who need proper care. The doctor Salima goes to repeatedly chides her and her husband for continuing to get pregnant when they have been repeatedly warned that Salima's health and body are not in a position to carry yet another child. We are shown how Salima's existing children, especially her eldest daughter, is forced to grow up before her time and is burdened with taking care of her younger siblings when she is herself a child. Other important messaging the audience hears through the nurse and doctor is about how a child's gender is determined by the father, not the mother, and how a woman's body needs time to recover and heal before getting pregnant again. Though at times Nurse Naheed sounds almost like the voice of health campaigns with long monologues on maternal health issues, these are all important topics raised by the serial. Weaving them into the story helps make them relatable but some of

the messaging in the serial (whether about maternal health or other issues) abruptly starts sounding somewhat monotonous and didactic, which could defeat the purpose of having this messaging conveyed through Entertainment-Education.

Sammi raises important concerns about the stigma surrounding not just conversations about contraception and reproductive rights, but also female health work workers themselves. Naheed's brother, for example, is ashamed of his sister's profession because she works with OBGYNs (obstetrics and gynecology), which he refers to as filth. He tells her that this is why no marriage proposals come for her. Further highlighting the prevalent ignorance and insensitivity towards women's reproductive health, in the same episode Chaudhry Rab Nawaz tells Rashid that giving birth and miscarriages are women's weapons to use against men. "What is the big deal in birthing a child," he asks. "Even animals do it." (*Sammi* Episode 5). This is his general attitude to everything related to women. In the case of *Vani*, he is the one least affected directly by Pervaiz's murder or Waqas's punishment, but he is the one most adamant to have Sammi be a *Vani* to stoke his own ego. The fact that an innocent girl's life is being ruined means nothing to him and, at one point, he brazenly declares, "*Do takay ka Nikah hee to hai*" (It is just a cheap, valueless marriage contract) (*Sammi* Episode 2). The section below delves further into how *Vani* is portrayed in the serial as its main plot point, followed by *Udaari*'s handling of its primary theme, child sexual abuse.

Primary topics: *Vani* & Child Abuse

Vani may not be the main theme of *Sammi* in essence, but it is the central subject around which the plot revolves. For *Udaari*, child sexual abuse is the main focus, with all other themes being secondary. Both serials cover horrendous crimes; dire realities that many victims have to

face. Whereas one topic is clearly taboo, the other does not elicit much discussion. *Vani* is an illegal feudal custom that involves having a woman marry someone from the victim's family as a punishment and compensation for crimes (often murder) committed by her male relatives. The marriage takes place more for the sake of officializing ownership of the woman who often ends up providing a life of servitude to the family into which she is married. The topic has been explored in mainstream entertainment media in the past, though not in great detail and sometimes, arguably, in a manner that may not represent the true hideousness of the crime. The 2013 drama serial *Numm* (*Moisture*, Geo TV) for example, almost tended to romanticize the custom to some extent when the protagonists—a young man and his much older *Vani*—are shown to have a forbidden emotional attachment that cannot be translated into actual companionship because she is his *Vani* and the role of his wife is supposed to be played by someone more socially appropriate for him. *Sammi* shows how grave the issue of *Vani* is, how hard it is to escape, and how different social actors help perpetuate this unjust system.

Sammi's own mother is less concerned about the terrible fate she has willingly thrown her daughter into and more troubled about how her poor son is not used to eating "*daal roti*" (lentils and bread) or sleeping on the floor. The response of most bystanders in the village is casual while people like Salaar, who is from the city, do not even know what *Vani* means. Zareena comments that it does not make much of a difference whether Sammi marries Pervaiz (who was her groom to be) or his father. The victim's family wants to go to the police; they are not in favor of taking *Sammi* as *Vani*, but their cries go disregarded in front of Rab Nawaz's ego and Sammi's parents' own willingness to sacrifice their daughter to save their son from the police. Rab Nawaz tries to justify the act by partially tying it into religion saying that they are all Muslims and this is the decision of the clan. All this is refuted at the end when a higher authority

uses religious references to argue against *Vani* and orders that Sammi be freed as Rab Nawaz squirms sheepishly in his seat.

The narrative does a fairly decent job of reminding the audience that patriarchal values are not implemented by men alone, and that women play an equally important part in creating and maintaining unfair systems and values that work against them. Zareena, Sammi's mother, and Naheed's sister-in-law are prime examples of women who aid and abet men in crimes committed against other women, without even thinking that they are doing something wrong. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on showing that not all men are misogynistic, even if they grow up in households that promote gender discrimination. Sammi's own brother sets out to kill her when she escapes from her situation as a *Vani*, calling her dishonorable and a disgrace but other men along the way help her and try to empower her—Rashid, Salaar, Aaliyan. Young Shahzeb starts out by repeating his father's ignorant ideas—about male "pride," "honor," and ownership of women—but is made to ultimately understand that what is happening to Sammi is seriously wrong, not fun and games (as he initially thought) or an act that can be justified in any other way. He loves his father and does not want him handed over to the police, but he also wants to help not just Sammi but other people who have been meted out unfair treatment by Rab Nawaz. He also states that he wants to grow up and help make a change in the unfair social and legal systems that allow for such treatment to take place.

The serial flips back and forth between showing *Vani* as a horrible fate and then being more casual about it, eventually coming up with what seem like very simplistic, quick solutions to the protagonist's problems. The broader issue is not really addressed sufficiently in terms of educating the public, beyond maybe having them understand what *Vani* is. What to do moving

forward, or how potential victims can seek help is not something the serial focuses on other than pointing out the importance of speaking up and saying no, which sounds great in theory but, for a crime like *Vani*, most victims will actually be helpless and saying no will not save them. The portrayal of Sammi's captivity is also far from realistic. Reviewing the last episode, Sadaf Haider (2017) says, "…Sammi, who has had ample opportunity to escape (including regular visitors and 'outings' from her supposed prison), sits and waits to be rescued or married, depending on which comes first," pointing out that the problem with the savior angle is that in reality they do not really show up.

Moreover, Mawra Hocane's (mostly) glamorous and polished look takes away from the severity of her situation. It is ironic that even in a scene where Chaudhrayan is telling her how poorly she is looking, she still manages to look like a well-kept doll. The actress is known for often playing a pretty, victimized girl—for her Bollywood debut film she was apparently told by the director that they were looking for a girl "who could cry and look pretty," which is why her name was suggested as a good fit for the character (Isani 2016). She is amongst the top five most followed Pakistani celebrities on Instagram with (currently) over six million followers, and a large part of her popularity comes from her social media presence, not just from her acting projects. Her being cast in the role of Sammi is a complicated choice. Her ability to play the victim, and the publicity the serial would get from her popularity and relationship to one of *Udaari*'s main actors make her a logical choice for the commercial aspect of the project. However, the way she is presented does not really help the main cause of the project, which is meant to be Entertainment-Education.

Her sister Urwa Hocane's look in *Udaari* is better thought out. Her character travels from village to city and from poverty to fame and fortune as she becomes a singer and a national celebrity. Her look changes in the process but never so much that it becomes unrealistic. Her rural accent is retained though over time she gets tutored in Urdu and English, getting better at both understanding and speaking these languages. Having left the village behind almost a decade ago, she still says many words with a pronounced Punjabi accent—"ReCARDing," (recording), "Arder" (order), "La" (Law) and so on. She no longer wears a *dupatta* on her head, and the style and cuts of her outfits change a little, but her overall look retains its traditional, regional touch with her ethnic jewelry, her colorful clothes, her braided hair, and her Punjabi accent. There are references to how she still hates sushi, which is associated with the upper class, sophisticated tastes, and urban living. She is now able to financially afford any of the latest fashions or a drastic makeover, but she chooses not to completely change her look (Chaudhary 2018). In fact, even the very first time her fellow band members take her shopping for new outfits, Arsh can see she is visibly uncomfortable wearing jeans and so he suggests they get her a more stylish *shalwar kameez* instead. The focus is not on changing her but on having her not stand out like a sore thumb, while maintaining her self-confidence and her own unique personality. The serial is careful to maintain a good balance between its educational and entertainment value and makes sure there are elements that more easily appeal to a general public as well as make the serial more commercially viable. However, glamor or good looks are not seen being used as a selling point.

Meera and Arsh's love story is an element meant to draw in the audiences and add a lighter note to the otherwise dark theme of the story but, even here, the script does not lose sight of its intended purpose. In the last episode of *Udaari* Meera brings a ring herself and proposes to

Arsh, whom she had previously rejected due to society and his mother's initial disapproval regarding their match. She is now more sure of herself and Arsh is not her only hope and option, but a man she chooses to be with because she respects and cares for him. When earlier she had rejected his proposal, he had responded by telling her that she has the right to refuse him even though he loves her and wants to marry her. Though visibly upset at her refusal, he did not get angry (or violent) or cut off all connection with her as is often seen in such scenarios in television dramas. They remained friends and he did not needlessly persist against her wishes. Meera had been attacked by two different men during the course of the serial with one trying to force himself on her physically and the other belittling and shaming her for her lineage while claiming to love her. Arsh's voicing out of one particular line without any hidden meanings or emotional blackmail—"*Inkaar karna tumhara right hai*" (It is your right to refuse)—is important. It sums up the narrative's larger message about a woman's agency and her right to say no (*Udaari* Episode 20; Chaudhary 2018).

Child Sexual Abuse

The way *Udaari* chooses to educate audiences about child sexual abuse is through both watching the characters' story unfold and through direct, clearly spelled out, information provided in some scenes. For instance, there is a scene when a speaker speaks at a conference on child abuse, and another one at a press conference—both of these contain more formal, informative messaging. The serial does not restrain characters from saying the word "rape" out loud directly, instead of hinting at it, and the audience is made to witness the whole long-term process of a victim's ensnarement, the violence committed against them, and the many short—and long-term effects and consequences of what has happened to them. Before the rape, we see the build-up to the act—how the rapist is a respected member of the community who appears

very kind and magnanimous on the surface, how he is a part of the victim's family (her step-father), how he buys the victim toys and candy and how she is very fond of him initially, how he slowly begins acting inappropriately with her and she, being a child does not understand what is happening, how he encourages her to keep their interactions secret from her mother. The first time he rapes her, we see how the child is beginning to feel uncomfortable and when she protests, he threatens her to stay silent. The rape itself is not portrayed directly as the scene cuts to Sajida in her employer's kitchen. The second time, we hear the child scream and witness her torn sleeve and disheveled appearance afterward. The act is not sensationalized in any way, as is often seen in other films or television shows. The intent is to make the audience feel disgust at, and loathing against the rapist with no room left for sympathy, excuses, or victim blaming.

Soon after the first rape, Zebo develops a fever, starts waking up terrified at night, refuses to go to school, and clings to her mother. Her mother is shown to comment on changes in her daughter's behavior multiple times. "*Pata nahi kiya hogaya hai isko*" (I don't know what has happened to her), she keeps saying. A little before this the audience has been informed of multiple signs to watch for in children who may have become victims of abuse. Muneera is shown to represent Kashf at a three-day conference on child abuse where she tries to create awareness about the issue (*Udaari* Episode 10). The focus on change in the child's behavior is stressed in the conference scene and then we see it play out in Zebo's case. The threats to stay silent continue with Imtiaz repeatedly telling Zebo how he will slit her and her mother's throat with the sharp knife in the kitchen if she tells anyone what happened, or how he will burn her mother.

The audience is made to witness the short-term after-effects of the rape, as well as the long-term struggle even after they have escaped from Imtiaz —the nightmares that persist even after years, the constant overhanging fear, Zebo not mingling with other children at school and getting scared of being left alone with any man (be it her tutor, or Iqbal who lives with them), the obstacles and challenges of getting justice through the law, and so on. The emphasis is not just on providing information but on making it accessible, relatable, and easy to recall. Weaving the information in small chunks into different characters' storyline makes it more effective than presenting long didactic monologues the way *Sammi* does.

When the time for legal proceedings comes, the serial does not shy away from reminding the audience that it is not easy to get a rapist convicted in court and there are countless socio-cultural-legal obstacles that can and will arise whenever a victim of rape tries to seek justice. Moreover, often every attempt is made to malign and blame the victim in such cases. For the most part, the obstacles portrayed and the way Zebo, her friends and family, and her lawyers, overcome them are presented realistically and the story does not include silver bullet solutions. For example, the medical report from years ago—which is a crucial piece of evidence—does not magically appear out of nowhere. There is a believable narrative that has been weaved around it. The audience had seen in a much earlier episode that Meera had, against Sajida's wishes, secretly taken Zebo to the neighborhood doctor's clinic the day she had arrived in Lahore with a high fever. In Episode 21, Arsh asks Meera a series of questions about whether and how Zebo was taken to the doctor, emphasizing how valuable a medical report would be for their case. Was she taken within 24 hours of the rape? Was there a medico-legal doctor who examined her? Were any forms filled out? The audience now finds out that the doctor at the clinic had realized what had happened to Zebo and had a lady doctor explain to them that it was important to take the

child to the hospital for an examination even if they did not want the police informed. Meera mentions how she herself was really young at the time and did not understand a lot of what was going on. She followed the instructions and took Zebo to the hospital where a form was filled out that was supposed to go to the police surgeon. Upon hearing mention of the police, Meera got scared and left the hospital with Zebo without completing the proceedings. Arsh now begins tracking down that doctor and form to use as evidence in the case against Imtiaz. Overall, there is a very carefully, and responsibly, constructed narrative around the issues presented with minute attention to detail and to various aspects of the situation—psychological, legal, social, physical.

When Zebo agrees to testify in court, we see how Arsh initially prepares her by encouraging her to think of herself as a survivor, not a victim. He makes her verbally repeat this out loud along with saying that she will make sure her culprit gets punished and that he should be the one feeling shame for his heinous acts, not her (*Udaari* Episode 21). Muneera also briefly mentions in one scene how Zebo is being provided therapy/counselling, which will help prepare her to give her difficult testimony in court (*Udaari* Episode 22). These act as reminders that it is not a simple or easy process for a rape victim to relay what has happened to them in public, and especially under the kind of pressure that comes in a court room. It is also a way of conveying information to victims of abuse about the kind of resources they can seek out to help themselves. Pointing out resources and solutions is something *Udaari* does consistently, not just for victims of abuse but also for others (like women looking to start small home businesses). The focus is on not just presenting the problem but also on providing concrete solutions—both preventive and otherwise. The responsible way in which such a tricky topic is covered by *Udaari* was a much needed intervention in a television industry where portrayal of rape is often sensationalized and/or leads to victim blaming. Even in instances where it is not, the fact that there are so many

myths, stigmas, and misconceptions surrounding the act in general, makes it an especially sensitive topic.

In 2013 a telefilm, *Behadd* (*Boundless*, HUM TV), came out with the immensely popular Fawad Khan playing a character who is falsely accused of molesting his fiancé's young daughter. The telefilm was not focused on this issue, but it was a key plot element that drove the story forward. The story addressed controversial issues like an older widow marrying a younger man, and children's psychological dependence on parents in a refreshing, responsible, and sophisticated manner. On its own, the telefilm's portrayal of a false sexual abuse accusation was not problematic. However, when viewed in the broader media environment where such issues had rarely ever been addressed in a responsible manner, it could be seen as one more piece of arsenal for those who tend to victim blame or deny the prevalence of abuse altogether. Furthermore, the fact that the accused character was played by a national heartthrob, symbolizing your average "good" kind of guy as opposed to a "villainous" type, adds to stereotypical misconceptions and expectations about what an abuser might look like. Thus, when *Udaari* has a typically chocolate hero, the good looking Ahsan Khan play an evil rapist, it helps break myths and stereotypes of "ugly" people as bad. It also encourages other actors who typically only want to play good boy characters, to take on similar roles which further helps the cause. Paired together, a telefilm like *Behadd*, and a serial like *Udaari*, could be great teaching tools for creating awareness about the many dimensions of child sexual abuse. When underrepresented topics begin being addressed responsibly, in larger numbers, there is more room for also portraying aspects that might otherwise add to dangerous generalizations, myths, and misconceptions about certain issues. The section below briefly highlights some other topics of

note that are often overburdened by the myths surrounding them and need the kind of intervention a serial like *Udaari* offers to counter common misconceptions and biases.

Other issues: Music, Caste, and Transgenders

The majority of issues *Sammi* aims to educate audiences about fall under the larger women's empowerment umbrella and have been discussed above. Before concluding this chapter, I would like to highlight some important issues that *Udaari* raises which are not necessarily tied to women—music, caste, and transgenders. *Udaari* presents different kinds of musicians—the lower class *Mirasis* who need to earn a living through their music, and the upper class, Western influenced pop singing kids who sing (mostly) for fun. In a country that has a rich musical heritage going back decades, which had a thriving pop music scene around the 90's, and where songs are very common at celebrations and events, it is fascinating to see Pakistan's strange love-hate relationship with music. With some people denouncing it as un-Islamic, others associating it with a lineage of courtesans and dancers, and many appreciating and applauding it, society's relationship with music is complex.

Music is a central instrument in *Udaari*'s storyline and reactions to it are shown to be divided along class lines. As Sadaf Haider (2016) puts it, "That fascinating contradiction of Pakistani society that values pop stars aping Western singers but holds our own musical heritage and traditions in contempt is also explored." Meera faces contempt first at the hands of Ilyas and his mother, and later from Arsh's mother, all of whom consider her to be of a lowly caste and class and beneath them. Arsh calls his mother, Afrooz, out for her double standards by pointing out that she has no issues with her own son pursuing music, she even congratulated Milli and Haris's mother on their acceptance to a music school in London but when it comes to Meera's

musical roots, it suddenly becomes a problem. She responds that there is no comparison because he comes from an "*Aala khandaan*" (grand family background) while Meera is from a "*Mirasi khandaan*" (Mirasi family background) and no matter how much fame and fortune she earns, nothing will change that (*Udaari* Episode 16).

Cultural associations of a word like *Mirasi* come into play throughout the serial to highlight socially accepted myths about this caste/profession that deems them to be intrinsically lowly and immoral. In order to understand this phenomenon, we can turn to Roland Barthe's (2012) explanation of how a myth is constructed by human actors, functions by continuing to repeat itself till it seems completely natural, and contributes to the creation of certain ideologies that then feed back into the myth and further strengthen it. Afrooz, for example, has nothing personal against Meera or her family—or any indication of "immorality" from them—but it is hard for her to get past her, and her society's biases, because the imagined negative associations of *Mirasis* have been repeated so often in history that they are unquestioned and accepted as fact within the dominant culture. Similarly, she associates images of the US and the World Bank with intelligence, wealth (thus refinement), and inherent worth—qualities that she sees in the US returned potential bride she begins describing to her son in Episode 20, whose father works for the World Bank.

If differences of caste can lead to people facing such unfair contempt, just imagine the kind of discrimination toward which more visible anomalies may lead. The character of Iqbal is another important intervention; though this is not the first time a transgender is seen in a television program, it is rare to see one represented in a respectful way while subtly showing how some individuals in society mock people like him. The focus is on him being Sheedan's

brother first and transgender second. His body language may subtly signify his difference, but it does not mark him as a victim, a fool, or any other trope associated with transgenders in mainstream media. He does his share of work for the family and household, helps Sajida with her bakery business, and is present at all the court proceedings to support Zebo and Sajida. *Udaari* does all it can to normalize his presence in the story, while acknowledging the discrimination people like him can face, without shouting it from the rooftops.

Conclusion

By considering these two localized, tailored Entertainment-Education products in terms of their actual texts, it is interesting to see how even two seemingly similar serials can differ in the ways in which they choose to educate their audience. *Udaari* chooses to remain clearly focused on its central storyline, while using even seemingly inconsequential dialogues to send across well thought out messages. *Sammi* takes a somewhat more didactic approach, at times, and follows multiple storylines as it tries to address numerous issues of concern all together. Part (but not all) of the problem has to do with funding demands, restrictions, and limitations. These are described in the next chapter, which explores the conception and production of each of these two Entertainment-Education television serials, discusses their background and limitations, and considers how successful they may have been in their mission, as determined by the people who made them.

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Chapter 4: Behind the Scenes: Production

Although Pakistani television serials have never shied away from portraying complex social issues, there have been certain themes that have been previously either avoided or presented indirectly. In more recent times, a number of television serials on highly taboo social issues, including rape and child abuse, have appeared—emerging toward a trend. Part of this phenomenon has to do with rising public awareness and outcry over heinous crimes committed and highlighted in the media in recent years. Whether it be acts like the abduction, rape and murder of seven year-old little Zainab Ansari, the beating to death of eight year-old Zohra Shah for mistakenly releasing her employer's parrots from their cage, or the crimes committed by the infamous Kasur child porn ring, people are angry, more aware than ever, and demanding justice (Khan 2015; Entertainment Desk 2020; Sullivan 2018). Though many may still want to turn a blind eye to, or hush up, such atrocities, there are plenty of people who have had enough of society, and the law, tiptoeing around such problems. The rise in the number of television serials on taboo issues perhaps also has to do with the massive (and somewhat unexpected) success of a play like *Udaari* (To Fly, 2016).

Whereas the commercial success and acceptability of a serial like this has opened up more opportunities for those genuinely wanting to address critical social issues, it has also paved the way for those who see the popular appeal and commercial success of issue-based serials as a way to accrue profit. Both categories run the risk of not portraying important social issues in responsible ways, which can have far reaching, long-term negative consequences. Such projects can end up reinforcing stereotypes or false myths, encouraging victim blaming, and over dramatizing and sensationalizing sensitive issues like rape or acid attacks, for instance. Some

cases go so far as to romanticize abuse of various sorts. Hansa Malhotra (2016) points out, for example, how the 2015 drama serial, *Sangat* "manages to weave a web of defence for the rapist, portraying him with a hero-like desirability" (Malhotra 2016). Similarly, veteran actor and writer Bushra Ansari (2019) criticizes the way issues like domestic violence or acid attacks are sometimes tackled, with more emphasis on visually showing gruesome acts being carried out as opposed to focusing on the root causes and consequences of these acts. In an interview with me, she says, "It's almost as if you're showing audiences how to carry out such acts," Having herself been trained by PTV in early years of television in Pakistan, she understands how every visual and choice of words matters (Ansari 2019). Since those times of carefully crafted programming seem to be long gone, in today's media environment, this is where Entertainment-Education projects developed by local and foreign organizations come into the picture.

This chapter describes how the television serials *Udaari* (*To Fly,* 2016) and *Sammi* (name of protagonist, 2017) were conceived and made by Kashf Foundation and the Center for Communication Pakistan (CCP) respectively. It explores the process of production of these particular serials, from the time of conception up until production, broadcast, and assessment. It considers whether these specific texts were successful in sending across the messages intended, and how success was gauged by the production team. Moreover, it focuses on how ratings, advertising, and funding considerations affect the final products.

The primary sources of information for this chapter are interviews I conducted with people associated with the making of *Udaari* and *Sammi*. These were conducted over the course of two and a half years (2017-2019), some including a follow up interview for more recent updates and clarifications. A number of the interviews were in-person and some were via the

phone or Skype.[15] I initially started interviewing with more of a snowball sampling approach, whereby informants and other interviewees connected me with further people to talk to, and I spoke to anyone connected to the television industry whom I could get access to while I was physically present in Pakistan. For CCP I reached out via email to the main Johns Hopkins University's Center for Communications Program (JHP-CCP) and was connected to the relevant Pakistan representative who had worked on *Sammi*. Once I had made initial contacts and had finalized my project, I narrowed down the interviewing process to include mostly people who were specifically linked to the two television serials I had chosen to focus on. Most of the previous interviews I had conducted (the ones not directly related to *Udaari* and *Sammi*), ended up being used as sources for various other sections of this dissertation. All of my interviews were conducted in a mix of English and Urdu; no interview was exclusively in either one or the other language. I also made use of various reports, discussions, and material available on the Kashf and CCP websites to further supplement the information my interviewees provided.

I begin with some background on Kashf Foundation and detailing the process of making *Udaari,* followed by describing the process of making *Sammi* (background on CCP has already been covered in previous chapters), and ending by outlining the outcomes of both serials, as well as considering best practices for future projects.

Kashf the Organization & their Television Shows

Kashf Foundation, established in 1996, was the first specialized microfinance company for women in Pakistan. Initially registered as a non-governmental organization (NGO), they went

[15] In-person interviews: Zainab Saeed (2017, 2019), Samiya Mumtaz (2019).
Phone & Skype: Faisal Khalil (2019), Bushra Ansari (2019).

on to be classified as a not-for-profit agency, and are now officially a non-banking microfinance company.[16] Their mandate revolves around transforming the lives of women through multiple interventions including providing financial services (microfinance and credit), capacity building, advocacy, and insurance. In a series of interviews with me, Zainab Saeed (Head of Research and Development at Kashf) says that initially, people in their target market did not really know what microfinance was. They were interested and curious to know more, but also wary and somewhat suspicious. At that point Kashf began using participatory street theatre for mobilization; to help people understand their services and work. Their first street theatre performance was called "*Kashf Mera Beli*" (*Kashf my friend*) and that is where the idea of Edutainment began for the organization. Around 2009, they began to think about how mainstream media could be utilized to further their causes. At that time representation of women in mainstream television shows was very black and white, says Saeed. Kashf wanted to counter these images—for example those of working women being shown as bad wives and mothers. Till date, Kashf has co-produced two Entertainment-Education television serials and one television mini-series as part of this initiative.

Saeed describes how an unsolicited proposal was put in by Kashf Foundation to the Canadian government under a gender and equity initiative. Part of a broader, multi-dimensional grant with a result-based management framework, the project was expected to have different levels of outcome (immediate, intermediate, ultimate), with the ultimate outcome being creating an enabling environment for women. A media campaign was just one aspect of the larger project, and initially only one television serial was proposed. Other components of the project included financial education, business development trainings, gender sensitization trainings (with women,

[16] When the television serials under discussion were made, Kashf was officially classified as a non-profit section 42 company.

men, and young boys), and social theatre performances. Kashf knew that for the media campaign they wanted to work with the issue of early marriage. A significant percentage of girls under fifteen in the country are often married off, including many of Kashf's clients, Saeed points out. "This was something that impacts women's development very majorly because…it means that this child is not going to go to school, it means that she is not going to have control or decision making because she's so young…Just delaying the marriage actually creates empowerment for girls" (Saeed 2019).

Thus, the first television serial made under the Canadian government grant was *Rehai* (*Release*, 2013). Centered around the problem of child marriage and the importance of women's financial independence, the serial was telecast on HUM TV. According to Saeed (who was Kashf's Manager for Internal & External Engagement when *Rehai* was made) Kashf opted to go with MD Productions (founded by Momina Duraid and Duraid Qureshi of HUM TV), because they were interested in the topic. HUM was the leading channel at that time, and MD Productions was trying to do new, interesting stuff with some level of women's issues. It was a hard topic that people did not want to discuss, so it was very important for Kashf to be on the same page with the people involved in production. Kashf fully owned the show and gave it to HUM for free in return for a promise of prime time and no content interference.

Later, Kashf wanted to rerun *Rehai* on PTV as it would have been accessible to a much larger (terrestrial, non-cable) audience, but PTV's strict censorship laws (including not being able to show violence against women) and constant management changes prevented that from happening. They did however, run it on ATV (the only semi-privately operated terrestrial television network in Pakistan), and in 2017 made it into a radio serial broadcast on Radio Pakistan. The serial was also transformed into a 90-minute film shown on tour and online. The

goal behind the radio and film versions was to make the content accessible to more people.[17] *Rehai* (the television version) was not a huge commercial success but it did reasonably well in terms of Television Rating Points (TRP) ratings.

Udaari (*To fly*, 2016) was the second, and perhaps the most commercially successful, television show produced by Kashf Foundation to date. The concept for this project was triggered by, and developed soon after, the Kasur child sexual abuse case surfaced. In August 2015, it was discovered that in Hussain Khanwala, a village in the Kasur district in Punjab, almost 300 children had been victims of sexual abuse and forced child pornography, with families being blackmailed for money in order to prevent hundreds of videos of their children from being made public. An organized gang of pornographers had been operating since 2006, raping children, forcing children to have sex with one another, recording videos, selling these videos on DVD's and on the internet, and extorting money from families. The issue was taken up by the government and authorities when some of the parents began to speak up and protest, and the media began highlighting the horrific story (Ajaz 2015; Ashraf 2015; Khan 2015).

When justice was demanded for victims, a number of systemic and institutional issues and shortcomings began to unravel. These included (but were not limited to) there being no relevant law in place that dealt with child sexual abuse as a distinct crime, attempts by powerful people in politics and the police to cover up the scandal and release the perpetrators, rampant myths around what child sexual abuse entailed, and there not even being an accurate, descriptive word for child sexual abuse in Urdu (Ajaz 2015; Ashraf 2015; Khan 2015; Saeed 2017). Saeed, who was by now Senior Manager for Strategic Communication at Kashf, states that, as far as she

[17] Since there are no TRP ratings for radio, it is hard to have official numbers on how many people the show reached in this version (Saeed 2019)

knows, *Udaari* was one of the first television shows to delve into the theme of child sexual abuse, including nuances of myths around child sexual abuse and the process of victim priming. Other television shows followed *Udaari* but were not necessarily very responsible in their representation of the issue (Saeed 2017).

The next television show co-produced by Kashf (with Khoosat Films) was a seven-episode mini-series, *Aakhri Station* (The Last Station) in 2018. The narrative revolved around the stories of seven women who meet each other in a train and share their experiences ranging from struggles of mental health, forced prostitution, and domestic violence, to drug abuse and life with HIV. Like the previous two television shows, it had a top-notch cast and crew; unlike the other two shows it was broadcast on the channel ARY instead of on HUM TV. For the purposes of this project my focus on *Aakhri Station* is limited for a number of reasons including the fact that it is a mini-series (and not a serial), and it came out at a later period than the other plays under discussion. It is worthwhile noting that, after the long-distance process of producing the first two television serials that were filmed mainly in Karachi, Kashf asked for *Aakhri Station* to be filmed in Lahore, making it possible for even greater involvement from their end. The next part of this chapter looks in detail at Kashf's process of making its first two television serials, particularly *Udaari*.

Udaari: Kashf's Process

Though dramatized, both television serials are based on true stories; *Rehai* is the story of one of Kashf's clients while *Udaari* is the story of one of their staff member's. The way the pre-production and research process works is perhaps different from most purely commercial serials.

Kashf starts with carrying out focus group discussions with their clients to select issues for focus. The next step is to have one-on-one case study accounts with people's real stories out of which one is chosen (or two to three different ones are merged). Creative collaboration sessions are then held to create "one-liners," which in reality are more like six-page documents that provide the story of a character. These are then given to the scriptwriter who develops the television serials from these one-liners.

In the case of *Udaari*, Kashf researched and sent in (to MD Productions) case studies, details about the idea of priming victims and how it happens, and character sketches of actual, known pedophiles in order to make sure that the story and representations were accurate and responsible. They investigated common myths about child sexual abuse and incorporated and addressed them in the story. For example, one myth is that abuse only happens outside the house, another one is that it is strangers who abuse, not someone known. Both these myths were countered and shown as false within the story of the serial as the victim is shown to be abused by a family member and within the physical limits of her own house. Kashf also wanted to debunk any myths about how child sexual abuse can be consensual, which is why they made sure the character of the victim was a pre-puberty child and not older.

Apart from researching facts around the main theme, they also tried to represent other story elements in realistic ways. For instance, they looked at people in Pakistan who moved from rural to urban areas, noting that they do not suddenly or completely change in terms of their accents, habits and so on (Saeed 2017). This can be seen implemented in the characters of Meera (Urwa Hocane) and Sheedan (Bushra Ansari) at different levels within the serial. For example, though Meera shows signs of slight grooming based on her entry into mainstream media (improved English, no longer covers her head with a *dupatta*, somewhat different cuts and styles

of her outfits), her overall look does not lose its traditional, regional touch whether it is her ethnic style jewelry, her brightly colored clothes, her braided hair, or her accent. Years after having moved away from the village and her life there, she still pronounces many words with a pronounced Punjabi accent.[18] It is small details like these that help to break subtly away from stereotypes and unrealistic narratives, making the characters and their experiences more human and relatable.

Since Kashf is based in Lahore it was a bit difficult for their team to be physically present on set throughout, but they did approve of the set locations. Most of the daily filming of *Udaari* took place in Karachi and though the Kashf team visited the sets a few times, they were not regularly present on ground as such. They were, however, fully involved in the final decisions on the script, writer, and all actors, after consultations and discussion with MD Productions. Kashf reviewed the screenplay, and then each episode individually before it aired, for content as well as production technique and quality. Feedback was given to HUM/MD productions and required changes were made before each episode was broadcast on television. One specific example of a requested change in script that Saeed remembered was from *Rehai*, and not *Udaari*, but it gives a good sense of the reviewing practices being followed. In order to try and become financially independent, the central female characters in *Rehai* decide to set up a sewing business making school uniforms. The writer had initially penned this down as being a burka making business but Kashf asked for that to be changed (Saeed 2017). Though it may seem like a trivial issue, the connotations and associations school uniforms and *burkas* may come with are both important to consider. Where one might, in some situations, symbolize the right and ability of girls to go out of their houses, get an education, and be independent, the other might reference a more "women

[18] See Chapter 3 for more detail and examples.

belong at home" approach, whereby business acumen and financial independence are justified only when carrying out certain kinds of religious and cultural symbolic tasks—like making and selling *burkas*. In the process of conveying a specific message (whether with regard to child marriage or child abuse), it was important not to lose sight of other secondary, potentially harmful, messaging that might be going out to audiences unintentionally.

The primary aim of making these television serials was not commercial success but increased awareness. Saeed points out that the commercial success of *Udaari* has mostly been a pleasant surprise, but that does not mean that some effort was not consciously put into the production process in order to make the serial a bit more geared towards the popular element as well. "We did learn some lessons from Rehai," she admits. "*Rehai* was more dark and bleak (visually as well as in terms of the storyline), with no romance or 'fun' elements." In contrast, the music aspect within *Udaari*'s storyline, the Meera and Arsh (Farhan Saeed) romance angle, the urban/rural divide angle, and Bushra Ansari's somewhat slapstick character were all factors added to increase popular appeal and to ensure the serial did not just remain in the realm of critically acclaimed work.[19] "If it's too sad, people are not going to watch it," emphasizes Saeed. There is a need to make such programming engaging and entertaining to make it more effective.

Udaari had all the elements of the usual commercial, popular serials with which audiences were familiar, but it also incorporated a discussion of a taboo social evil, providing information and resources on how to address this (and other) issue/s. Boundaries do need to be set to balance out the entertainment factor in such programming though. Television shows with similar themes, made by other production houses, followed *Udaari* and some of them were very

[19] See Chapter 3 for more details about storyline and visual representation.

insensitively done. Kashf wanted to be very careful in their research, exploration, and presentation of these issues, taking care to not even indirectly help confirm myths like child sexual abuse can be consensual, for instance. As mentioned above, the play is based on a true story and came about after a streamlined process that included focus group discussions, detailed research about the characteristics of actual pedophiles, and rigorous script checking by the Kashf team on an episode-by-episode basis (Saeed 2017). Psychologists, social workers, and other experts associated with Kashf had a crucial role to play in informing the script of *Udaari*, which partially explains the attention to detail in the careful and appropriate use of language even in scenes that are not directly addressing sexual violence (Mumtaz 2017).

Keeping in line with Emily Moyer-Gusé's (2008) emphasis on how successful Entertainment-Education models should not be overtly persuasive, *Udaari* too is not very "preachy," and the first few episodes, especially, focus on developing the story and characters as opposed to providing educational messaging. However, her argument that viewers should not know of the educational agenda in an entertainment program, does not apply completely to *Udaari*. In later episodes, certain issues with regard to sexual abuse had to be spelled out (in a somewhat didactic manner) in order to ensure that audiences did not misunderstand any of the more subtle messaging within the serial. There is, for example, a scene in the show where one of the characters talks in detail about how to prevent and address sexual abuse at a conference. Kashf Foundation made no attempts to hide their involvement in the serial, or to downplay the fact that it contained educational messaging. Their logo was very much visible at the start of each episode and the organization was highlighted within the storyline as a way to create awareness about all the facilities and services it has to offer. There are mentions about referral to legal teams that work pro bono on behalf of low-income women who cannot afford lawyers, and

about Kashf's own microfinance service that provides long term loans to women looking to start or expand small businesses. This form of transparency around *Udaari*, and restrained use of direct spelling out of messages, differs from *Sammi* in significant ways that I will discuss below. The year after *Udaari* was on air, *Sammi* was broadcast on HUM TV. It was the channel's third time working on an Entertainment-Education serial, and this time they partnered with a different organization, Johns Hopkins-Center for Communication Change Pakistan (JHP-CCP). The way *Sammi* was developed and assessed was quite different from *Udaari*'s production process and is described in the next section.

***Sammi*: The Process**

The initial idea for *Sammi* emerged from workshops in collaboration with the National College of Arts (NCA) where, after a capacity needs assessment, multiple production houses, university representatives, and artists were invited to participate. Most of the representatives were creative writers; participants included famed Pakistani drama writers Hasina Moin, and Asghar Nadeem Syed, as well as JHP's Peter Roberts, and Andrew Whaley, a writer and journalist who has worked with public health initiatives across Africa. Everyone worked on developing different proposals and concepts as part of this workshop (Khalil 2019b).

Speaking with me, Faisal Khalil (former Social and Behaviour Change Communication Specialist at CCP) points out that making drama serials is not financially feasible for an organization like CCP acting alone; it is not a cheap process. *Sammi* was part of a larger health communication based JHP/ USAID initiative and was also co-funded by the United Kingdom's DFID (Department for International Development) under Palladium Pakistan's Empowerment, Voice and Accountability for Better Health and Nutrition (EVA-BHN) project (Khalil 2019a;

Desmon 2017; RCA 2017; CCP Press Conference) . Ultimately the funds for the two separate projects were pooled. In addition, CCP collaborated with HUM TV, with HUM putting in most of the money for *Sammi'*s broadcast, and some money for the production, according to Khalil. This kind of a television serial based project tends to be part of a larger package, he emphasizes. Funds and grants are provided for broader initiatives that are expected to consist of multiple activities and media products, with Entertainment-Education being just one component.

Khalil explains how the concept of *Sammi* was initially structured more around the beauty parlor storyline in the play; a part that was retained to some extent in the final product. This revolved around the idea of financial independence of women and is especially visible in a scene where Sammi is hesitant to take a monetary tip from a customer to whom she has given a pedicure. The work she does in the beauty salon is in exchange for her room and board with Chandni (Sania Saeed); the idea of earning actual money for herself has probably not even crossed her mind. Upon seeing her hesitation, Chandni encourages her to take the tip, saying "Well done. Take it. This is the reward of your work" (*Sammi*, Episode 6). The other elements of the serial were added through workshopping. Some were operational requirements, included to satisfy funding requirements, including the *Vani* scenario which ended up being the main plotline. The central, overarching theme of *Sammi* was women's right of choice, whether in terms of marriage, choosing to have children or not, how many children to have, owning property, and so on. The three sub-themes that ultimately played out in different storylines within the serial were (i) family planning & son preference, (ii) forced marriage & violence against women, particularly the custom of *Vani*, and (iii) legal inheritance of women. The story of Rashid (Adnan Siddiqui) and Salima (Saman Ansari) fulfilled the other major theme requirement of mother and child health (a common factor between the Empowerment, Voice and

Accountability Project and the Health Communication Component) (Khalil 2019a). They are shown to be a married couple with five daughters, pressured by Rashid's mother (and societal expectations) into trying again and again to have a son, severely compromising Salima's health in the process. The third sub-theme is portrayed through the story of orphaned Nurse Naheed (Nadia Afgan). She lives with her brother and sister-in-law who have not only taken over her rightful share of inheritance from their parents' property, claiming that daughters do not get a share, but also keep most of Naheed's hard earned salary for themselves.

CCP hired, and were the ones paying, drama writer Noor-ul-Huda Shah to pen the script of *Sammi*. They were closely involved in the process of finalizing a creative brief and in initial development of the script. After that, according to Khalil, HUM was given quite a bit of independence on what they wanted to do production wise and CCP maintained more of a hands-off approach. They did look over episodes and send in some revisions but, overall, it was the concept that was more co-developed than the script itself. He feels that such fragmented technical and creative collaboration results in ineffective Entertainment-Education products. Khalil agrees with me that often dialogues in *Sammi* take on a very overtly didactic tone and style which, in essence, goes against the central idea of Entertainment-Education. Similarly, inserting too many storylines with multiple messages hitting the audience over the head is problematic. In the case of *Sammi*, for instance, numerous issues were brought up including, but not limited to, *Vani* and gender-based violence, maternal health and son preference, legal inheritance of women, mistreatment and shunning of illegitimate children throughout their lives, financial independence of women, misuse of *Haq Mehar* (bridal gift from husband to wife at the time of marriage, required in Islamic marriages), problems of feudal justice systems, and the conception of women as property. This is something reviewer Sadaf Haider (May, 2017) also

points out in her article, "'Sammi' raises questions about the value of a daughter's life in Pakistan, but will it give us any answers?" She says that too many storylines make it hard to focus on the main narrative. In a panel discussion at Kinnaird College, Ehtesham Abbass (a strategic communication specialist at CCP) mentions that the main character was originally supposed to die. However, the scriptwriter was asked to rework it so that Sammi "transitions from disempowerment to empowerment" in order for the audience to believe that they too could be empowered (Panel Discussion 2017). Haider's (May, 2017) review, however, describes it differently. She says, "16 episodes down and main protagonist Sammi remains a generic victim," accepting that there are small moments where Sammi somewhat stands up for herself, only to slip "back into hopeless victim mode again."

As mentioned before, Khalil uses Pakistan's first Entertainment-Education serial, *Aahat* (An Approaching Sound, 1991), as an example of how such serials should be made in order for messaging to reach audiences effectively. In that instance, the writer, Hasina Moin, had worked with JHP's Entertainment-Education experts "sentence by sentence," he points out. [20] In the case of *Sammi*, lack of more consistent collaboration between the writer and JHP's experts resulted in inefficient programming— "unmodified insertion of messages from the creative brief into the dialogue" is how he phrases it.

The next part of this chapter provides an overview of the outcomes linked to the two drama serials, with some assessment being more streamlined and official, and some more informal, or anecdotal, and harder to cast into the "facts and figures" category. Since there was

[20] See Chapter 2 for more detail on *Aahat.*

more assessment work carried out by Kashf on *Udaari*, than by CCP on *Sammi*, I discuss outcomes for the former in more detail than the latter.

Outcomes: *Udaari*

The target audience for the television shows was firstly Kashf's own clients (Segment C, D, E in terms of socio-economic quantiles). However, "we have seen that our shows have done well in Segment A also," says Saeed. *Udaari* did well across the board but especially in Segments A, C, and D. Commercially, according to Medialogic ratings, *Udaari* had a reach percentage of 49.3 (the percentage of the TV viewing population which got exposed to this program) (Medialogic ratings). It was also nominated for, and won, multiple popular awards for acting, writing, and direction in the year of its release including Lux Style Awards, Hum Awards, and IPPA (International Pakistan Prestige Awards).

There was also a lot of anecdotal feedback about *Udaari*, Saeed points out. It gave people an appropriate descriptive word to use for a heinous act that had previously been difficult to name even in terms of finding the right language to use. Apparently some people have started using "*Udaari*" as a word to describe experiences of child sexual abuse. Saeed talks about a pediatrician's anecdote about a patient who managed to explain their experience of sexual abuse by referring to it as the "*Udaari wala* issue" (issue in *Udaari*) (Saeed 2017; 2019). One of the lead actors of *Udaari*, Samiya Mumtaz, also mentions that she has had people (both men and women) coming up to her in public places to talk about their first sexual abuse experience, telling her their stories. Many of these people thank her for being part of a television serial that has enabled them to be able to talk about these experiences for the first time. Others tell her how now they are more careful about their children's safety, and yet others are grateful for now being

able to publicly discuss such issues for which they previously did not even have the words or language to talk about (Mumtaz 2019).

Considering how taboo it is to talk about some of the issues raised in *Udaari*, and how quickly society rises to moral policing, surprisingly Kashf did not face many major challenges in terms of broadcasting. A show cause notice was issued by PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) for an "obscene" scene in Episode 5 of *Udaari*, and the producers were asked to explain why the scene was shown. A legal response was sent back and accepted by PEMRA, who had most likely initiated the notice in response to complaints they had received from some audience members. Interestingly enough, the scene under consideration was not even one of the more potentially "scandalous" ones. Multiple scenes in the serial which indicated the rape of a child, or lecherous behavior by the villain, were bypassed for a scene where a young girl (Meera) gets harassed by her older neighbor, Imtiaz (Ahsan Khan), who she refers to as *Khalu* (Uncle—maternal Aunt's husband) (Haider 2016; Saeed 2017). She comes to borrow some rice from the family and no one except Imtiaz happens to be home at the time. He closes the door of the house, creeps up on Meera, strokes her face, grabs her hand, and tries to lure her into forming an illicit relationship with him. She tells him that he should be ashamed of himself for being so disgusting and manages to run away. When she gets home and tells her mother what just happened, the mother instantly believes her and goes to confront the man, instead of telling her daughter to hush it up, or accusing her of lying (as is often the case both in Pakistani serials, and within society itself).

Meanwhile, *Udaari* received abundant press coverage in mainstream media, and many bloggers wrote about it too. Moreover, many actors came out to show their support for the serial

when the legal issue was ongoing. Saeed points out that the press and blog coverage around the controversy actually increased the popularity of the show. She feels that, in general, social media had a lot to do with the success of *Udaari*, as compared to *Rehai* which came a few years earlier when the impact of social media was not as strong. Aside from the success a serial like *Udaari* manages to achieve on its own, it also helps open up broader conversations that can be continued both in future media endeavors and in other aspects of socio-legal-cultural life.

Carving a path: The value of having such drama serials plays be commercially successful lies in making it easier to obtain funding for future projects, in having channels be more receptive to such plays, and in encouraging others in the media industry to work on similar issue-based ventures. It can also lead to actors being more willing to take on non-traditional, controversial, or negative roles. Saeed says that convincing Ahsan Khan (who plays the rapist) to take this role took quite a while as it was a very negative character and, having been more of a "chocolate hero" in the past, he did not want to be typecast as a vicious villain. When he finally went through with the role, he got great reviews and feedback, leading to other "hero" actors now being more willing to do such roles. In general, post *Udaari* there have been five to six television shows on child sexual abuse (as of summer 2017—even more now), says Saeed. "It helped create a ripple effect" (Saeed 2017).

Changes in law: Though there is no proven, direct cause and effect, it is important to note that after the Entertainment-Education serial *Rehai* was on air in 2013, on April 29, 2014 the Sindh assembly passed the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, which increased the legal age of marriage to 18 years and made child marriage a punishable offense.[21] An adult marrying a

[21] https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/pakistan/

child, the parent or guardian of the child being married, and/or the person solemnizing the marriage could now face two to three years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine (Mojiz 2016). Similarly, around the time of *Udaari*'s airing, rape and child sexual abuse were legally classified as two separate offences, making convictions easier as previously the latter was not recognized as a distinct crime (Saeed 2017, 2019). In the Kasur child pornography case, for instance, culprits were initially tried for rape or fornication as, at that time, child pornography, sexual assault of minors, and child trafficking within the country were not included as specific crimes within the legal system (AFP 2016).

Changes in Mindset: On a more formal feedback front, an impact assessment was commissioned by Kashf post-*Udaari*, the findings of which are summed up in their 2018 report "The Case for Using Mainstream Media for Social Advocacy: Impact Assessment Findings from KASHF's Media Campaign Udaari." A market research firm, Aftab Associates, carried out the assessment through a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures including focus group discussions, interviews, and a literature review of written material and comments about *Udaari* online. The report concluded that:

> Udaari left audiences with a changed view on child sexual abuse, the strength to discuss it, the knowledge to take necessary precautions and if need be the guidance required to fight back. As a result of *Udaari* people, and especially policy makers and opinion leaders, began to give precedence to the issue of child sexual abuse. (Mahmood & Saeed 2018, 4)

About 66 percent of respondents said that talking about child abuse had become easier post *Udaari*. Many said they had begun educating their children on these matters as a preventative measure, and community leaders said they would be making attempts to create awareness about

child sexual abuse as well as provide information on how to avoid and tackle it (Mahmood & Saeed 2018).

Overall, considering the variety of formal and informal tools used to measure *Udaari*'s impact, it seems like the show was a success on multiple levels. Not just because its producers consider it a success that met their targets, but because it seems to have left a lasting positive impression on civil society on multiple levels.

Outcomes: *Sammi*

The outcomes of *Sammi* are harder to establish than *Udaari*. *Sammi* had a 46.9 reach percentage (Medialogic), and, according to a talking heads trailer made by CCP, it was viewed by over 9.4 million people during its original broadcast. A lot of people watched it on television as well as via social media, claims Khalil. It played during prime time, which means it was commercially viable, he says, emphasizing that the serial made "a lot of profit" for HUM TV. A significant problem was that, in terms of its Entertainment-Education value, it was meant for rural audiences but was watched mainly by urban audiences. It was more of a Southern Punjab drama but even if you go do a basic survey and ask people in those rural areas whether they have seen it, the response will be negative, says Khalil. "It was largely a drama with premium content for people who were not even aware of it." His take is that the messaging was not targeted enough, and neither was the serial's intended reach. The combining of too many messages and storylines weakened the story and, overall, *Sammi* was not effective in terms of methodology, with development and delivery also being ineffective (Khalil 2019a). According to CCP's website, *Sammi* was later rebroadcast on regional channels in Sindhi and Saraiki (regional languages) but there is not much information on whether that increased the serial's reach or

impact in any significant way ("Empowerment, Voice and Accountability for Better Health and Nutrition").

CCP tried to do a broader reception study and evaluation of the impact of the serial on audiences but could not, mainly because they did not get a NOC (No objection certificate) from the government in time. Often red tape results in such authorization taking so much time to come through that the project is over and closed by then, with funding finished. "We did not get a chance to evaluate behavior change," says Khalil. "That requires more evaluative measures like a KAP (Knowledge, Attitude and Practices) survey and delays in authorization meant that could not happen." He says this is not a rare occurrence in Pakistan and often interventions are implemented but, eventually, evaluations or assessments are not completed, and the real impact becomes hard to assess. Moreover, evaluative tools like the KAP survey are not cheap, he points out. It can end up costing as much as it took to make the whole serial in the first place.

Instead, when the serial was on air, CCP did some local viewings with focus groups and facilitator discussions. This got them some qualitative review for the project, but not much. The brief findings from these discussions indicated somewhat higher levels of awareness about family planning, and slightly more favorable attitudes towards mother and child health and family issues. A fifteen-minute talking heads trailer was also made by CCP, summarizing and briefly analyzing the project through discussions with the lead actress, the director, and one of the Entertainment-Education experts from JHP.

Whether *Sammi* made a significant impact on audiences remains officially unassessed for now at least. Considering it in an unofficial way, one could say that its main plotline of *Vani* did not really seem to gain traction in terms of encouraging further conversations on the issue, or in inspiring other serials to address the same theme. As far as the maternal health component of the

serial is concerned, the topic is not new for Pakistani audiences and has been brought up in the past. In short, then, *Sammi* does not seem to have had the kind of broader success that *Udaari* did in terms of popularity, impact, or handling of both subject matter and in assessing outcomes.

Looking Forward

Considering these two serials in parallel raises questions of what officially counts as Entertainment-Education and who gets to decide that? Does it even matter? Is it more important to be following a set of defined rules and methods for a media product to accomplish the goals of Entertainment-Education (and have the right to be classified as such) or is it more important to focus on outcomes? If, in essence, a serial has the same intentions, and is serving the same purpose then what do we call it?

When Saeed discusses the inspiration behind Kashf's serials, she talks about work on behavior change and the Latin American model of Entertainment-Education. Referring to this aspect of Kashf's work as "mass media advocacy," she says *Udaari* is an edutainment project for sure. However, Khalil adamantly claims that *Udaari* is not Entertainment-Education. "*Udaari* is just a social drama; it was not intended as an Entertainment-Education drama," he says. "It was on a social issue (and that's a very common thing with dramas in Pakistan) but formally it was not Entertainment-Education." He believes that in Pakistan, Entertainment-Education and social dramas are not very different from each other (Khalil 2019a).

Saeed emphasizes that the idea with the television shows Kashf makes was not just to highlight certain issues, but also to bring them to a workable conclusion with a solution to the problems raised. They wanted to show that there are ways to address these issues, partially

through economic emancipation of women. As an organization, Kashf provides this part of the solution through their work with women (Saeed 2019). In *Udaari*, aside from portraying how to tackle social, psychological, and legal obstacles to reporting rape, Kashf also creates awareness about all the facilities and services it has to offer by weaving this information into the storyline itself. For example, Sajida (Samiya Mumtaz) starts her bakery business by taking a loan from Kashf and, in the process, characters explain Kashf's microfinance service that provides long term loans to women looking to start or expand small businesses.

On the other hand, in an early review of *Sammi*, a few episodes in, Sadaf Haider (Feb, 2017) points out that though *Sammi* brings up social issues like *Vani* and male child preference, it does not really address the root causes of these problems. Along similar lines, during a panel discussion about *Sammi* and Entertainment-Education, an audience member asks that though *Sammi* raises the question of the value of a daughter's life, does it accomplish the answer for such real-life scenarios? I understood this question to be addressing whether any kind of practical solution was found for the gender-based violence and discrimination issues portrayed in the serial. Aahad Raza Mir (the actor who plays Salaar) responds that half the battle is won by just placing the idea of justice in the audience's mind to get them to start thinking about these issues (Panel Discussion 2017). Though that is a fair argument to some extent, one can argue that it is not good enough to just bring up an issue this way. Mistreatment of an idea can actually cause more harm than good or, not providing some kind of realistic and practical solutions can lead to viewer's relegating these stories to the realm of fairytales and fiction instead of trying to implement behavior changes in their own lives. Secondly, it again raises the question of what, then, makes an Entertainment-Education serial different from any other television serial on air?

Despite the fact that the making of Sammi involved specialists from the field of Entertainment Education, with people even coming in from JHP, the serial seems to have accomplished little in the way of enlightening audiences or providing them with ways to tackle the kind of problems raised in their own lives and communities. On the other hand, *Udaari* may not theoretically be Entertainment-Education (a question that is still up in the air) but, in all practicality followed an approach that seems to have done justice to the essence of Entertainment-Education, both in terms of methodology as well as outcomes. Khalil says that in Pakistan, "there are many gaps in following Entertainment-Education formally and these are all learning experiences." He repeatedly emphasizes the importance of proper and sustained collaboration between the writer and creative and technical teams, in order to create an effective media product. When that does not happen, he sees it as a "failure of Entertainment-Education" (Khalil 2019a).

Another aspect to consider is whether local versus foreign involvement make a difference in terms of how Entertainment-Education media products are produced. Large scale organizations like USAID and DFID come with their own sets of rules, regulations, and requirements that need compliance. Their perceptions, executions, and goals typically differ from those of more local institutions. This holds true even when they work in partnership with local sister (or other) organizations. Moreover, Saeed points out that international organizations often do not have the same kind of face in the community that a local organization like Kashf does, and that makes a difference in both reaching out to people and in garnering their trust.

Though *Rehai* and *Udaari* also had foreign involvement, it was mostly limited to providing funds for the serials. As Saeed reminds me, these were expensive, high quality

productions so having a good funding source was an important part of their success. She feels that the Canadian government ended up being a great donor, because they kept their involvement in the content minimal, letting Kashf take more ownership of the project through an open grant. They did not want to "hijack" Kashf's agenda and did not control content. They also did not want to be part of the branding; did not want the branding to become the highlight (Saeed 2017; 2019). *Sammi*, on the other hand, seems to have had multiple requirements, with its grants being more specific in terms of content and themes. *Sammi*'s main plotline falls under a generic umbrella of stereotypical issues (honor killings, forced marriages, vulnerable women who are mainly victims and need to be saved) that often catch the interest of Western media and organizations alike when considering a country like Pakistan. Perhaps it is easier to delve into the intricacies and complexities of issues being faced by Pakistani women when work is more localized and has less restraints in terms of which themes to follow.

On the surface, *Udaari* and *Sammi* may seem like very similar projects—both appear on the same television channel with similar promotional material, both are put forward as educational projects intended to create awareness, the title songs for each are composed by the same composer, both are top of the line expensive productions with some of the same actors appearing in both, and, interestingly, the lead actress in *Sammi* (Mawra Hocane) and one of the leads in *Udaari* (Urwa Hocane) are a famous sister duo who even somewhat resemble each other! However, when their production process, reception, evaluation, and impact are considered, we begin to see significant differences between the two projects. Whereas one lives up to its intention of creating awareness and determining solutions through a story that entertains, the other ends up preaching in a rather ineffective way as it fumbles through carrying out a balancing

act between commercial entertainment and educational value, in the end accomplishing neither in a way that leaves a lasting impression in audience's minds.

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Chapter 5: Reception of Production in Public Discourse

When studying media, the three stages of production, text, and reception are important components, providing significance to the interpretation of texts. The previous two chapters provided the producers' perspectives on their respective serials, as well as my interpretation of the two television series. Chapter Three also touched upon the reception of these serials by considering what production teams had to say about reception, as well as by studying reports commissioned by them. I now move on to explore reception of these serials in terms of broader media discourse. Given research limitations, I focus on reception within this public domain, rather than speak to audiences directly. Instead, I consider how professionals creating these serials understood and evaluated success, how these programs are received in public discourse, and the extent to which these texts open up spaces for conversation surrounding significant (often taboo) social issues?

This chapter considers these questions through analyses of newspaper articles and blog posts about *Udaari* and *Sammi*, to understand how these serials, and the issues they raise, have been discussed in the media. It proceeds to explores topic trends in local news that correspond to the timelines of these two Entertainment-Education projects, to gauge whether the timing of these serials coincides with an increase in public conversations about these topics addressed. I also compare and analyze the introductory images for the serials, thinking through what implications each visual may have for how the media products come across, and are received by audiences. These images appear before the start of every episode, as well as before and after every commercial break, and are used in much of the press coverage given to the serials.

Methodology & Limitations

Focusing on the two most popular English language newspapers in the country, *Dawn* and *Express Tribune*, I looked through articles that came out roughly a year before the releases of *Udaari* and *Sammi*, during their broadcast, and a year after each went on air. These two publications are extensively available online, with search features that allow for quick sorting and sifting. Since my searches were from a period after these newspapers had already gone online, and not from further back, it is likely that most (if not all) pieces written about the serials were available online, as opposed to some being only in print form. I first searched for mentions of *Udaari* and *Sammi* themselves to see how often and in what context these serials were being discussed in the press.[22] For this initial search about the serials themselves, I also did Google (and Google Scholar) searches and included results from other newspapers and blogs, along with a couple of academic articles which discussed *Udaari*. Next I did keyword searches within a given time frame for topics like "Vani," "child abuse," "maternal health" and so forth. My aim was to note (i) how often searched topics showed up in the press before, during, and soon after, the release of the serials, (ii) in what context the topics were being discussed, and (iii) how often were the television serials specifically mentioned, or referred to, within articles discussing these topics. By further assessing these articles qualitatively, I attempted to see if these strategic interventions (the television serials) seemed to be considered in public discourse and agendas. The time range I set for keyword searches was as follows:

[22] I did not set a timeframe for these sets of articles. Results included everything up till June 2020.

Date Range	*Udaari*	*Sammi*
Before	April 2015-April 2016	January 2016—January 2017
During (broadcast dates)	10 April –25 September, 2016	29 January—25 June 2017
After	September 2016- September 2017	June 2017—June 2018

Table #1: Search range dates for issue-based keyword searches

One area where I felt limited was not being able to search through popular Urdu language newspapers, like *Jang* or Express, which might have provided a different perspective on how these serials and issues were being received in different circles. It was tough finding searchable versions of these online, and visiting physical archives became difficult due to lack of time, resources, and travel opportunities given Covid-19. I also soon gave up on trying to search for the topic key words in Google directly, as that brought in far too many results, with most either disconnected from Pakistan, or from the context in which I was considering them. "Maternal health," or "child abuse," for example, are very broad terms that span over time and geographical location. Adding "Pakistan" to the search term would bring up too many news items by international outlets and I needed to focus on local news. A word like "Vani" is more location specific but, in this case, doing a regular Google search led to numerous irrelevant articles—like those about the Bollywood actress Vani Kapoor, for instance. Some other points to clarify my search methods and limitations—sometimes an article will have an "updated" date and not an "originally published" date at the top of the page, which can be confusing. Wherever possible, I checked to see if the original date was mentioned somewhere else on the page but, there were

articles where it was not noted at all. This could mean that an article written during my search time range may have been unknowingly discarded because the only date on it (the "updated" one) was of a later time. In some instances, I made the decision to discard an article, even if it did have the key word in it, if it seemed too far off topic, or was not relevant in some other way. For example, when searching for "child abuse," I left out the very few articles about countries other than Pakistan, even if they appeared in the local Pakistani newspapers.

Starting with mentions of the two television serials themselves, the following section explores how they were received in local, English language print media. I describe how frequently each serial was addressed, what aspects of the serial were being discussed, and what implication these pieces have for affecting public discourse.

Udaari's Reception in the Media

An online search for "*Udaari*" (or "*Udaari* drama") produces numerous articles and blog posts about the serial. Even now, more than four years after the show ended, articles refer to it as a significant step forward in terms of opening up conversations around difficult topics, and in being a trend setter for other serials with similar themes that followed. Articles that discuss any actor from *Udaari* (or even the director for that matter) refer to the serial as one they are known for, even though most of them have numerous other successful projects under their belt, and *Udaari* was not their first commercially successful drama serial. I came across 35+ pieces that had *Udaari* as a main (or significant) subject, and I disregarded numerous others that referred to it very briefly in passing. For instance, an article titled, "Can Pakistani dramas move beyond domestic issues?" had the following sentence about *Udaari*: "While Udaari that focused on the issue of child sexual abuse was a huge success, none of the social dramas after this achieved the

same impact." Since, in this example, it is being used just as an example, and in a passing single sentence, I did not include it in my count. It is significant to note though, that references to *Udaari* appear within articles on various topics, and not just where child abuse is being addressed. The articles that are focused on Udaari itself also cover multiple themes and issues that I discuss below.

The Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) controversy is the subject of a number of articles. They talk about the show cause notice issued by PEMRA to the producers of *Udaari* for showing "obscene" content. Many writers, bloggers, and people from the media industry rose to *Udaari*'s defense and, as Zainab Saeed pointed out in her July 2017 interview with me, the controversy, and subsequent rise in blogs/articles about *Udaari,* ended up making the serial even more popular.[23] Even now, five years later, when a news item comes out about PEMRA's rules or notices, it often refers back to how they issued an unfair notice to the *Udaari* team.

Addressing topics within the serial, a large chunk of these articles specifically delve into the issue of child sexual abuse. They comment on how *Udaari* shows survivors of abuse that they can move forward with their lives in a positive way, and not be defined as victims forever (Haider 2016d; 2016e; Isani 2016b). They discuss the need to not hush or cover up such crimes, and how *Udaari* makes the right calls by laying out the importance of not staying silent and of actively seeking justice (Haider 2016d; Isani 2016b; Rahman 2016). They also applaud *Udaari* for sending across the message that victims of abuse have no need to feel shame as the abuse is not their fault, nor does it define them (Haider 2016d; Rahman 2016;). Reviewers comment on

[23] See Chapter 4 for more details about the PEMRA notice.

how very delicate topics have been handled carefully and sensitively, with dignity, carving a path for much needed discussion about child abuse (Azhar 2016; Haider 2016d; Khan 2016c).

Writers also point out how some parts of the story can be problematic when considering societal context. For instance, Sakina Jangbar (2019), in a review of *Udaari*, brings up how a harmful stereotype, of stepfathers as abusive, is present in the serial, and is precarious ground to tread in a society where many single mothers of daughters are already afraid of remarrying due to fear for their children's safety. The flip side of this very relevant point is that, within an already risky theme, having the rapist's character being the biological father instead of the stepfather would have almost certainly been one step too far in terms of what the audience would accept. Referring to the true story that inspired the serial, Roshaneh Zafar (Founder and Managing Director of Kashf Foundation) says in an interview, "The child who we've built Zaibo's character around was actually raped by her biological father; that would have been too much for our audience to palate" (Isani 2016b).

Finding a balance with the audience's palatability is an interesting issue. Some of the coverage includes interviews and quotes from Ahsan Khan and mentions the importance of having him, a "chocolate hero," play the role of the rapist instead of having an actor that usually plays a villain on screen (Isani, 2016a). This helps challenge myths and stereotypes about how a rapist might look a certain way, and that "nice looking" people cannot be perpetrators, especially in cases of rape because, with their good looks, they could easily get willing sexual partners and have no need to rape anyone.

Beyond the issue of sexual abuse, *Udaari* also weaves in various other social themes which many of the articles address and analyze. These include—but are not limited to—the

portrayal of class divisions, the representation of the *Mirasi* community and of transgenders, images of motherhood, strong female friendships, and women's abilities to rise above their dismal situations without a man saving them. Amongst other things, Sheeba Khan (2016a) pinpoints some interesting parallels, within the two parallel socioeconomic "worlds" portrayed in *Udaari,* in her article "Breaking new ground: there's more to Udaari than just child sexual abuse." There is a heavy influence of music in both, with each having those characters who look down upon or oppose singers—Ilyas and his family in the village, and one of the band member Farwa's parents in the city. However, at the end of the day music triumphs and is a key factor in creating opportunities for upward financial and social mobility for some characters. Haider (2016a) also aptly points out how *Udaari* addresses "That fascinating contradiction of Pakistani society that values pop stars aping Western singers but holds our own musical heritage and traditions in contempt." [24]

In general, interactions between different socio-economic classes are portrayed in realistic ways with some breaking common stereotypes (Milli, the rich girl from the city is actually very kind and respectful to Meera from the village, for example) and others honestly portraying that there will always be certain people who look down upon those from a lower economic class (Ilyas's middle class family looks at their sister and Sheeda's family with contempt) (Haider 2016a; 2016c). Similarly, Khan (2016a, 2016c) points out, the theme of good parenting and strong mothers is presented in both "worlds." Different parents have different kinds of expectations from their children, with some being more respectful of their children's' choices, and others following a more authoritative approach. The problems faced by single-parents are also addressed. The author emphasizes how it is "a smart move" to pair "a debate on

[24] See Chapter 3 for a deeper discussion on these issues

sexual abuse with commentary on parenting." Mothers from all walks of life, especially, are encouraged through the story to stand up for their daughters and not be focused on what society will say (Haider 2016a; Khan 2016a, 2016c).

Last but not least, as Haider (2016a), Isani (2016b), and Rahman (2016) mention, an important minor theme in the serial is normalizing the portrayal of transgenders through the character Iqbal/Baala, who is Sheeda's brother and Meera's Uncle. He is not shown as someone who is a source of shame (Haider 2016a) but is, in fact, well respected by his family and a source of support to them, both financially and emotionally (Isani 2016b; Rahman 2016). This subtle nod to the transgender community is an important element of *Udaari*'s social messaging, even though it was not a major plot point or requirement for the story to progress.

Many of the articles discussed above (and others) also comment on the acting and direction, summarize and review individual episodes, contain interviews with the writer or actors, and provide general feedback. Some articles are not specifically about *Udaari*, but make references to it or talk about it briefly (in more than just a sentence). Farhat Ishtiaq, the writer of *Udaari*, says in an interview with Saira Agha (2018), that *Udaari* has been her biggest achievement and her way of contributing towards helping actual abuse victims by raising awareness. Shahrezad Samiuddin's (2016) article includes *Udaari* as one of "The Top 5 Dramas of 2016." Maleeha Hamid Siddiqui and Shahrezad Samiuddin's (2016), "The business of drama" mentions *Udaari* as an example of an instance where Television Rating Points (TRP) corresponded to personal feedback being received by HUM TV channel producers, as well as an example of a successful partnership with a Non-government organization (NGO). Sophia Qureshi (2020) lists multiple *Udaari* characters as being examples of strong, empowered women

in her article, “Women’s Day 2020: Pakistani Drama Characters That Display Female Strength and Resilience.”

Amongst all the praise and accolades for *Udaari* and its cast and crew, the media and public were also quick to criticize actions from the *Udaari* team and other public figures that felt distasteful or, were perceived as sending across the wrong message. The subjects of some articles addressed problematic comments that were made in relation to *Udaari*. At an awards show, the host—actor Yasir Hussain—made an inappropriate joke. When Ahsan Khan won the award for Best Actor in a Negative Role for *Udaari*, Hussain commented, “*Itna khoobsoorat child molester, kaash main bhi bacha hota*” (such a beautiful child molester, I wish I, too, was a child).[25] Some of the articles addressing *Udaari* condemn the inappropriateness and distastefulness of this comment, stating that Hussain was undermining the work put in by the *Udaari* team to create social awareness regarding child abuse (Images 2019; Zubair 2017). Similarly, Ahsan Khan himself received criticism for sharing a meant to be funny meme about his character, which was making light of the matter of child abuse (Khan 2016b). Responding to criticism from fellow actors, he took the meme down. These are just some small examples about how public discourse begins to be shaped via responsible messaging that enables people to be able to sensibly criticize where criticism is needed, and public personalities to be more conscientious about what kind of messaging they are putting forth even in casual situations.

Udaari seems to have helped shape public discourse around child abuse (and other issues) in even more significant ways when we take into consideration anecdotal evidence, as well as review and analytical pieces written about the serial that discuss these issues in a thought

[25] My translation

provoking, non-sensationalized manner. To be clear, it is not as if child abuse had never been raised in the news. It was, and the numerous articles about the Kasur scandal in particular—which came out pre-*Udaari*—are a testament to the public nature of this concern. Going by anecdotal evidence, one of the big changes the serial seems to have inspired is moving this discussion into people's living rooms. Confronting a taboo issue within a family setting becomes more challenging than just presenting it in the news. An article in the news is more likely to be read individually by family members but when an issue is presented within a television program watched together by families, it becomes harder to avoid talking about it. In a radio BBC Asia Interview, Samiya Mumtaz says that there was some concern about the serial playing during the prime-time slot:

> …and especially it's the 8 o' clock time slot where families sit down and watch together. And there was some apprehension about it being awkward for men, women, fathers, daughters to sit in the same room and watch this but I think once they did see it for themselves, people have just gotten hooked to the story and the characters and they've had no problem, I think, watching the story unfold. (BBC Asian 2016)

In the same interview, Ahsan Khan echoes this thought—"…I was thinking…people…might not watch it, they might refuse to watch it, and they might change the channel because the kids are watching." Similarly, in an interview with Buraq Shabbir (2017), Farhat Ishtiaq says that she was nervous when penning the script for *Udaari*—"I felt that I had put my dignity at stake and I might lose all the respect I've gained in all these years as a writer. I wasn't sure how the audience was going to react to it; I didn't want to hurt the sentiments of my fans." The fact that most people did not, in fact, change the channel is, in itself, a necessary step forward towards opening up a space within family settings to create awareness about such a crucial issue.

In concluding this section, I consider two academic articles that discuss *Udaari*. These are significant because Pakistani entertainment media are understudied, and when scholars do address television serials, they have hundreds of options to pick from as subjects of study. The fact that the serial has raised not only popular, but also scholarly interest is notable. Both articles use a feminist lens to study the serial—one through gauging female audience members' reception to the serial, and the other by considering *Udaari* as an example of what the author calls "feminist edutainment" (FE).

The communication approach Entertainment-Education is explicitly considered by Qurrat-ul-Ann Malik, Aniqa Ali, and Ayesha Sadaf (2019) in their article, "Role of Entertainment-Education Drama in Awareness raising amongst Young Women in Pakistan," in which they study public reception of *Udaari*. Questions include whether the program raised awareness and promoted dialogue about child abuse and female economic empowerment. Their study used a survey of 316 participants described as mostly "female students over the age of 18 who as future homemakers and mothers will have the responsibility of looking after young children in their families as well as managing the family's finances" (223). The survey was administered a month after the last episode of *Udaari* aired on television, making it somewhat significant as the serial must have still been fresh in most respondents' minds. All of the respondents had been exposed to *Udaari*, most of them having watched all or most episodes with a small percentage who had only seen a few episodes. The authors conclude that their research findings indicate that the serial had been fairly successful in generating dialogue about child abuse and female economic empowerment. A significant number of participants said they had begun to think more about their children's safety, taking preventive measures, and the ability of women to be financially independent without counting on men to support them financially. The

study also indicated that respondents were more likely to discuss the issue of child abuse with their friends (60.4 %) as opposed to family members (40.8 %).

The results of this study correspond to what Kashf's own research report also indicated—the serial did seem to get people thinking about the applicability of these issues in their own lives, with some being encouraged to discuss it with others, including family members. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kashf's report also discusses how many people began to take preventive measures against child abuse, including talking to their children about best practices for being safe (Kashf Report 2018). Following this study on *Udaari,* another recent article uses the serial as a case study to consider how the entry of nongovernmental organizations in the arena of Urdu drama serial production has impacted the way serials are produced and received.

In "Transnational Feminist Edutainment Television in Pakistan: *Udaari* as Case Study," Aisha Malik (2020) claims that the kind of serials Kashf has produced are closer in format to standard PTV serial dramas about the domestic sphere, as opposed to Entertainment-Education models with specific strategic educational content. She argues that dramas like *Rehai* and *Udaari* have "reset the agenda for EE along feminist lines" (135) and thinks of them as part of a wave of what she calls "feminist edutainment" (FE). She differentiates feminist edutainment from Entertainment-Education as a form that focuses on issues of "gendered inequality" and "frequently uses dramatic formats known to appeal to female audiences" (135). She argues that the combination of transnational aid and local NGOs plays an important role in "the arrival of FE" (142), and the portrayal of more empowered women who have agency as opposed to being just victims

Malik's article puts forth some valid observations, but I feel it is important to be careful about not falling into the stereotypical trap of the Western savior (foreign aid and interest) helping create empowerment for women. As mentioned before, *Udaari* was funded by the Canadian government under a gender and equity initiative grant applied for by Kashf. However, Kashf was very clear in emphasizing that the Canadian government had a very hands-off approach and did not control content. Yes, the foreign aid that enabled Kashf to make serials like *Udaari* and *Rehai*, is an important factor to keep in mind but, it is not exactly a complete game changer in terms of portraying women with agency or in addressing issues of gendered inequality.

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, Pakistani drama serials have always had times where empowered female characters have been presented in ways that both made them fit in as completely "normal," yet stand out as all-time favorite popular characters who are still remembered fondly by audiences even decades later. Even previous Entertainment-Education serials like *Aahat* and *Nijaat* (that Malik also mentions) were not completely devoid of female characters who managed to take charge of their own destinies. Blanket statements that refer to serials "pre-*Udaari*" as being entirely different can be misleading. For example, at one point Malik says, "Pre-*Udaari*, public discourse always presented survivors of abuse as victims through their own fault" (139). I would not go so far as to use the word "always" so decisively. The situation is a bit more complex, and a little less as black or white than the article seems to suggest.

Malik also notably points out how Kashf recognizes that "serial dramas, while effective at creating dialogue, cannot be drivers of change on their own" (141), which is why the

organization is continuing to create other supporting programmes and products (like educational nursery rhymes on how to recognize and prevent abuse), to safeguard children. The article also briefly mentions *Sammi* when discussing the CCP's role in producing Entertainment-Education serials in Pakistan, citing the serial as a product in which the CCP "has reengaged with the EE format without slavishly reproducing it" (141). The next section explores how *Sammi* has been received in popular media—at the time of writing this chapter, to my knowledge, there have been no published academic articles about *Sammi*.

***Sammi*'s Reception in the Media**

Multiple articles concerning the series *Sammi* also mention *Udaari* as a starting point, some noting that Mawra Hocane is following in her sister Urwa Hocane's footsteps by doing a cause-based drama serial: one article is even titled, "Is Sammi the new Udaari?" (Shafiq 2017). Overall, I noted about 25 articles referencing *Sammi*, with around 85 percent having the serial's name in the title. Not all of them focus on the serial though. For example, an article titled, "Mawra Hocane signs 'Sammi,' another HUM TV serial with a cause" (Images Staff 2016) (another nod to *Udaari*) implies that the piece is about *Sammi* but, out of all the questions asked of Hocane in this interview, only one relates to *Sammi* while others are about her Bollywood projects and films.

Most of this press (over 30 %) seems to focus on Mawra Hocane, and other star power in the serial, which introduces pop singer Bilal Saeed in his first television serial acting role, debuts Ahad Raza Mir (son of veteran actor Asif Raza Mir)—who soon became a hot favorite with a string of successful serials under his belt, and has famous actor/hero Adnan Siddiqui appearing in a dark role (which is not what he usually does) (Haq 2017; HIP Desk 2017; Newsbytes 2016).

The serial, like *Udaari*, does have a strong star cast, but the difference seems to be that at least half of the conversation (if not more) around *Sammi* seems to be focused on the cast, on the brand name of "Johns Hopkins," and on the fact that it is a "social cause drama," without actually discussing the issues raised, or even the story as such.

Numerous articles I came across described the story instead of analyzing it, or offering further food for thought. The four writers who do delve deeper into this serial have a mixed take. "After a long torturous journey, writer Noor Ul Huda Shah seems unable to bring the story to a strong climax and gives Sammi a breezy happy ending, more suited to a rom-com than a serious drama" (Haider 2017c), says one review article. Haider highlights how Sammi's future is ultimately still dependent on men—the ones who treated her wrong in the first place (they suddenly come to their senses), and the one who marries her and becomes her "saviour." She feels the serial provides "a lot of easy answers for some very difficult questions." On the plus side, it shows viewers that the first step to come out of oppression is to learn to say no, and it also has a couple of positive male role models who are respectful towards women. Reviewers acknowledge that *Sammi*'s story does raise some awareness about certain gender-based issues including "women's obsession with sons, the low status of daughters in certain strata of society and women's health issues pertaining to constant child birth" (Haider 2017c; Pakistan 2017). Commenting on how "a majority of plays on TV these days are peddling a social cause…" Isani (2017) says about *Sammi*: "To be fair, there are strong willed and inspirational characters in this drama serial… But they are overshadowed by the cloud of doom and gloom." Others point out that the serial has too many storylines running in parallel, which takes away from the main

narrative, having been established as a weak point in making Entertainment-Education as an approach effective.[26]

Many of the reviews do applaud the characters and acting in the serial—the strong and seasoned cast does seem to save the day to some extent by compelling audiences to watch. Veteran actor Adnan Siddiqui receives a lot of appreciation for his nuanced portrayal of the character of Rashid—a character that many reviews seem to suggest is the most well written as well, followed closely by Sania Saeed's portrayal of Chandni. Unlike the main character, Sammi, these characters have shades of grey and are more three dimensional and realistic (Haider 2017b; 2017c; Isani 2017; Khan 2017a; 2017b). Hocane is given credit for doing what she could with her limited role, and for delivering at least some very good scenes (Badar 2017). Still, most of Hocane's interviews related to *Sammi* are more concerned with her experience working with young, good looking co-stars and how she feels about following in her sister's footsteps with a cause-based drama serial.

One of the articles about *Sammi* is titled, "First look: Mawra Hocane is a blushing bride in Sammi's teaser trailer" (Images Staff 2016), reminding us of contemporary Pakistani television serials' obsession with the portrayal of lavish weddings, glamorous brides, and designer outfits. Though this particular wedding scene is somewhat less lavish—set in a village home of a not very well-off family—it is the beginning of Hocane's often polished and pretty look, which is sustained for a large part of the serial. One of the reviews describes her performance as a "mixed bag," saying, "She does a standout job as the frightened victim but at times her polished looks and confident body language contradict her expressions" (Haider

[26] See Chapter 4

2017b). Another article points out that Hocane's acting is good but would have been more realistic if her makeup and clothes could have at least been "toned down in distressful scenes" (Zafar 2017). Hocane, who is apparently known for being able to cry beautifully on screen, does come across as very pretty and polished for much of the serial, as well as promotional material.

In the next section I analyze the introductory images for the two serials, commenting on how these images reflect upon the production vision and process. My commentary can be taken as one way in which these images, and by extension the serials, could *potentially* be received within a larger socio-political-cultural context. Since these images repeatedly show up—not only within the serial, but also in many of the articles discussed above—I felt this was an appropriate chapter for their discussion.

Introductory Images

Looking at the posters/intro images for the two television serials side by side is very interesting for thinking through the differences in content and approach.[27] The poster for *Sammi* focuses on Mawra Hocane standing to the right, partially behind a door, holding her dupatta close to her face, with a worried and vulnerable expression on her face. Next to her, in the middle, against a backdrop of green village fields is the title of the serial, surrounded by advertising sponsors. It reads: "Momina Duraid Presents سمّی in association with Center for Communication Programmes Pakistan. WRITER: NOOR UL HUDA SHAH DIRECTOR: SAIFE HASSAN." At the top is the logo for Kashmir Banaspati and Cooking Oil—"Kashmir Since 1962 COOKING OIL & BANASPATI presents." At the bottom is the logo for smartphone company

[27] These are the images that appear at the start of each episode and after ad breaks.

OPPO—"OPPO Powered by."[28] To the left stands Adnan Siddiqui's character, Rashid Chand, with his leg up on a charpoy, and a rifle in his hands. Both characters are looking straight into the camera. Alternate images (which are probably used for the YouTube version) contain less text and advertising.

Figure #1: Sammi Intro—one version of the image for *Sammi* used in some press coverage[29]

The poster for *Udaari* features an ensemble cast including Bushra Ansari, Samiya Mumtaz, Ahsan Khan, Urwa Hocane, Farhan Saeed, and child actor Areesha Ahsan, all standing tall and strong, with Ansari smiling and singing in a traditional singing pose (one hand behind head and the other palm facing outwards). The only two characters looking straight at the camera are the villain, Imtiaz, and his target, Zebo. At the bottom is the title of the serial in Urdu (اُداری), underneath which it says, "Momina Duraid Productions & Kashf Foundation Presents." An

[28] In some episodes OPPO is replaced by Q mobile

[29] Variations of this image include a cropped version with only Hocane, and a version with Hocane against a different (indoor) background.

alternate intro poster lists the writer, director, and main cast also, as well as the broadcast date and time.

Figure #2: *Udaari* Intro—the main image for *Udaari* used in much of the press coverage.

It is worthwhile to note the blatant, multiple product advertising on one image, as opposed to the other. A reflection of how the commercial element of the serial manages to somehow overpower the social messaging it contains. It seems to fit into the phase of programming with a message that became a trend. Looking at the two posters side by side, makes me think of how *Udaari* needed to be commercially successful in order to get its educational message across effectively, whereas *Sammi*'s educational messaging feels like an attempt to have the serial be commercially successful by following the trend of the day. This is not to say that this is how the production team perceived it, necessarily, but it is something that comes across from the serial in more ways than one.

Secondly, the images indicate how women are represented in each serial. Though both have an agenda of empowering women, the women in *Sammi* lean more towards the helpless

victims who need to be saved trope. Having seen the serial, this introductory image—especially when put next to *Udaari*'s introductory image—reflects how the show often ends up emphasizing the stereotypical victimized Pakistani woman.[30] Hocane's vulnerable expression, the focus on the village setting (fields, charpoy, mud houses), and the villainous looking man with a rifle in the background—all add up to a stereotyped image of Pakistan that is all too popular in Western imagination. When such an image shows up at the beginning of articles about the serial, it subconsciously prepares the reader for another damsel in distress story review. That said, it is worthwhile to note that some of the articles about Sammi chose to bypass this image and use happier looking screenshots from the serial instead.

The *Udaari* image is a bit more neutral. It shows a mix of people—young, old, some in traditional wear, some not. The older women have their heads partially covered, Hocane has a dupatta draped around her neck, and Ahsan is wearing no *dupatta*. Khan is dressed in a *shalwar kameez* while Saeed wears a sports jacket. The background has some greenery and, in one version of the image, there is no way to know if this a village or city setting. Another version has a small image in the bottom right-hand corner of Ansari pouring water from a certain type of vessel that can indicate village life. For some reason she is also surrounded by ducks. The overall focus is on an ensemble cast of characters with little indication of what their stories are, and how they fit into each other's lives. It is also hard to tell who the villain might be.

Though both serials have numerous characters and multiple intertwining storylines, the *Sammi* image is more focused and zoned in on the main plot point of a victimized, scared girl while *Udaari*'s image is a bit more open ended. In a time where endless images of victimized

[30] See Chapter 3 for more information and examples.

heroines showed up in posters of Pakistani serials, the *Sammi* image might have drawn less attention than the less tragic looking *Udaari* image. However, this is just speculation. Neither image by itself suggests anything about the serials being Entertainment-Education projects unless we include the mention of Center for Communication Programmes Pakistan on the *Sammi* image. The other stark difference, as mentioned above, is the commercial advertising on the *Sammi* image.

Having worked through media specifically about *Udaari* and *Sammi*, I now move on to analyze what the media had to say about the issues raised within the serials, outside of articles that discussed the serials themselves. The final part of this chapter discusses the results of the issue-based search conducted within a timeline revolving around the airing of the two television serials. As described above, I searched for newspaper articles a year before, a year after, and during the airing of the serials to assess quantitatively and qualitatively if there was any notable change in the discussion of certain issues in the press.

Issue Based Search

For *Udaari*, the main theme was child abuse so that was the main keyword searched for. For the secondary themes, of the Mirasi caste/profession, and microfinance as a way for women to become financially independent, I searched for "Mirasi" and "microfinance" respectively. For *Sammi*, I looked up the three key themes of "Vani," "maternal health," and women's inheritance rights. For each phrase, I searched the online versions of the English language newspapers *Dawn* and *Express Tribune*, followed by a sub-search in *Dawn*'s magazine section *Images*, to ensure the search had not left out any relevant pieces. *Express Tribune* has a modifiable search function via Google that allowed me to set the required date range for my search, whereas *Dawn*'s in-

paper search function required me to manually go through and eliminate articles that did not fall inside the specific date range. After excluding the articles that mentioned these terms because they were about *Udaari* and *Sammi*, I came up with the following results:

Word/Phrase	Before Broadcast	During Broadcast	After Broadcast	Total Articles
Child Abuse/Child Sexual Abuse	50 **(58%)**	11 **(13%)**	25 **(29%)**	86
Mirasi	6 **(50%)**	0	6 **(50%)**	12
Microfinance	9 **(36%)**	8 **(32%)**	8 **(32%)**	25

Table #2: Keyword Search for Issues Raised in *Udaari:* A year before, a year after, and during the broadcast. Percentages rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Word/Phrase	Before Broadcast	During Broadcast	After Broadcast	Total Articles
Vani	13 **(37%)**	8 **(23%)**	14 **(40%)**	35
Maternal Health	14 **(39%)**	6 **(17%)**	16 **(44%)**	36
Inheritance Rights Women	9 **(50%)**	4 **(22%)**	5 **(28%)**	18

Table #3: Keyword Search for Issues Raised in *Sammi:* A year before, a year after, and during the broadcast. Percentages rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Table 2 does not show a major change in the number of articles addressing the issues raised before and during/after the show was on air. For the keyword "child abuse," a little under half of the total pieces were informative news reports just stating facts, without much of a commentary or analysis. Examples include titles such as, "Caught in time: Cop arrested for attempted child abuse," "Two men given life sentences over role in Kasur child abuse case," and "Man arrested for sexually assaulting niece." A significant number of the total articles were about the Kasur child pornography ring case that had raised an outcry in 2015, and was a major reason why Kashf Foundation decided to address the issue of child abuse via *Udaari*.[31] The kinds of articles in the "before" and "during/after" categories are not very different—each has a similar mix of writing. There are a reasonable number of pieces addressing the problem in more detail—explaining the different socio-cultural-legal factors that enable abuse, describing the measures needed in order to curb abuse, and emphasizing the long-term effects of abuse on individuals. A number of articles also discuss people's personal narrations of how they were abused and the ways in which it impacted their lives. They call for more widespread sex education in schools and homes, stricter laws for punishing abusers, removing the taboos associated with reporting abuse, and more concrete policies to deal with the issue.

Out of all the keywords searched for, "*Mirasi*" brought back the least results within the given date range. To recap, *Mirasi* is the name given to a caste/profession with a musical heritage. Historically often singers and/or dancers, over time the word has managed to develop negative connotations associated with music and entertainment of a lowly kind. Out of the six articles in the "after" category, three have a one-word mention of "*merasi*" as a derogatory term

[31] See Chapter 4 for details.

(the articles themselves are about other issues) and three articles mention *Mirasi* as an identifying term—for instance, so and so from the *Mirasi* community. The "before" section is not much different—six articles in total with most briefly mentioning the term either to describe derogatory attitudes and/or list the caste.

The articles on microfinance are almost evenly spread out across the three categories. For the "during" and "after" categories, over 60 percent of the articles are those with either one word mentions, or those providing information about things like legal changes or opening up of microfinance facilities. Four discuss the state of microfinance in Pakistan in some detail, highlighting limitations and complaints of microfinance borrowers, the history and future of microfinance in the country, and the process through which microcredit works. The focus is on how poverty in general is affected, and not specifically on how women's lives are touched by microfinance. One article touches upon microfinance when discussing "The female economy" (Abid 2016), another briefly mentions that the microfinance sector has contributed to (amongst other things) women's empowerment and that at least 54 percent of borrowers are female (Aazim 2016). The "before" articles are also around similar lines—informing about company mergers and partnerships, setting up of the Pakistan Microfinance Investment Company, and Queen Maxima's concern for the need of more "financial inclusion of women" in Pakistan (Rana 2016). Three of the articles go into more detail and analysis of the microfinance industry in Pakistan, with one, in fact, arguing that microfinance does not lead to poverty reduction (Zakaria 2016). Only one of these pieces has significant mention of microfinance in relation to women (Ashfaq 2016).

In short, there seems to be no significant indication of an effect on the amount of news articles produced about the issues raised within *Udaari.* The numbers of articles addressing these topics before and during/after the serial remain more or less the same, and so does most of their content. The same is mostly true for *Sammi* related issues as seen in Table 3 above, and described below.

The theme of *Vani* within a television serial is not completely new, and neither is the custom itself unknown—it does make it to the newspapers once in a while. In this particular search, all the articles about *Vani* were either reports of instances of *Vani*, reports of arrests with regard to *Vani*, reports of legal attempts to curb *Vani* (and opposition to them), or one word mentions of *Vani* as one example of human rights violation. Added together, the "during" and "after" categories have slightly higher numbers than the "before" category but, considering the nature of the articles (general reporting), that rise does not seem very significant for the purposes of this study.

Out of all the keywords searched, the most notable shift is for "maternal health." Articles in the "before" category are limited in their content as compared to the ones in the "during/after" categories. Two articles discuss the use of, and access, to contraceptives with brief mentions of their importance for women and children's health, while another piece reports on a Women's Day health-related event. One reports the opening of new neonatal emergency centers in Karachi, while another discusses the problem of a particular hospital refusing to take in new patients in late-stage pregnancies. Two other pieces summarize global reports addressing and discussing maternal, infant, and neonatal mortality rates. Only one piece exclusively discusses the importance of maternal healthcare and how it is neglected in Pakistan (Ghani 2018). There is

a notable shift in the written pieces in the "during/after" categories. Different aspects of maternal health are discussed in detail in various articles—including structural challenges, shortage of good obstetric care and skilled birth attendants, the role of unqualified medics and quacks, shortcomings of the government, comparisons to other Muslim countries, the induction of clerics to raise awareness, and more. There are also a few letters to the editor, discussing issues of maternal health, as well as reporting on the government's plans, campaigns, and strategies for improving maternal healthcare and access to it. One piece also discusses a civilian "taking the Pakistan state to court for failing to provide "affordable, accessible and quality maternal health services" (Ebrahim 2017).

It is hard to establish any strong correlation between the rise of articles on the topic of maternal health, and the broadcast of *Sammi*—especially because *Sammi* was addressing more socio-cultural barriers to maternal health whereas most of the articles above address physical, economic, and structural barriers. A link could possibly be claimed for some of the articles that bring up solutions related to more social awareness, but many other factors may have also contributed to this rise in attention.

The number of articles with mention of women's inheritance rights does not change over the course of the serials. Like the *Vani* articles, a number of the "before" write ups are reports—of cases of disputed inheritance, of calls for implementing women's rights laws, of amendments and opposition to aspects of these laws. Only one piece addresses a more analytical aspect of these laws, tying the issue to the rights of women in Islam, and criticizing the poor implementation of the country's legislation relating to women (Hussain 2016). All the articles in the "during/after" category are about broader issues of women's rights with very brief mentions

of women's inheritance rights and laws. One article also discusses a law passed to safeguard the rights of transgender people, including the right to inheritance (Ashfaq 2018).

To conclude, we witness patterns over time that indicate a rise in attention to topics discussed within a serial when that serial itself is under discussion. It is hard to prove any substantial quantitative correlations between the serials and these topics discussed outside of the scope of that serial. It is important to remember that this analysis has only considered more formal media reception and does not include things like social media, which might tell a different story altogether. *Udaari* has, by far, been more extensively and more diversely discussed in the media while *Sammi* has mostly been discussed more superficially. The former seems to have been used as more of a starting point for discussion, and not an end in itself, with articles still quoting it as an example a few years down the road. Any excitement for the latter, however, seems to have fizzled out midway through the serial itself. There is strong suggestion that spaces, for discourse surrounding taboo topics and a more in-depth look into them, have been facilitated through *Udaari*, in terms of issues like child abuse being brought into the realm of family living rooms, for instance. Furthermore, the kind of analytical and detailed articles written about the multiple issues *Udaari* brought up, say something about how it sparked a conversation. As far as *Sammi* is concerned, it may have also initiated discussion within households but, it is not easy to make even an indirect correlation, let alone a direct one. Further audience reception studies may conclude otherwise but, for now, evidence seems to suggest a stark difference between how the two serials were received and discussed.

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Conclusion: The Path Ahead

The roots of this project emerged during my earlier graduate work, inspiring my interest in women's changing representation on Pakistani television, particularly given trends in media liberalization. The concept behind Entertainment-Education fascinated me because I already believed that popular culture has a huge impact on individuals and societies in terms of creating awareness, instilling values, and defining social norms. Having a more strategic approach to strengthen this process in conscientious ways seemed like a great idea. I grew up watching JHCCP (Johns Hopkins University's Center for Communications Program) projects like *Aahat* (1991) and *Nijaat* (1993) on state-run PTV (Pakistan Television), not realizing until years later that these were Entertainment-Education projects with strategic messaging. They were well-told, captivating stories in themselves, and popular serials of their time. Understanding the broader impact of these shows, in terms of the awareness they created and the follow-up actions they encouraged, made them all the more appealing as examples of non-didactic messaging used for the public good.

Through this current work I have tried to provide a researched, structured narrative about the process and practices of Entertainment-Education in Pakistan, commenting upon what seems to work, what does not, and considering the relevance of this particular form of communication for development to motivate change in society. There is a lot of scholarship concerning development communication theory, and on the translation of theory into practice, with much of it coming from academic perspectives. This work is not just an account from an academic perspective, but also emerges from practitioners' perspectives. It also demonstrates how Entertainment-Education, as a strategy, is not limited to the work of development agencies, or

non-commercial ventures. It can, and has been, implemented and practiced even without a focus on the official title of Entertainment-Education. I hope this will be a useful resource as both a historical record, and as a document to help think through long-term effects of how increased awareness about certain issues may help people better voice their concerns, make changes in their own lives and communities, and push governments and legislators to draft and implement relevant policies to safeguard their societies.

Through investigating the production process, analyzing the texts, and exploring the media conversations around two of the more recent Entertainment-Education television serials in the country, I was able to explore the different ways in which this strategy translates into actual products in a localized context. As a viewer who has also had an inside look into a part of the process of making these serials, I believe that *Udaari* is an example of how an Entertainment-Education television serial successfully tackles its messaging, while *Sammi* represents a project that could have achieved more had it not tried to do too much all together. Perhaps partially because of this, *Sammi*'s team felt the need to spell out a lot of its intended messaging in a way that almost defeats the purpose of educating while entertaining. *Udaari,* on the other hand, demonstrates more than it "says." It rarely comes across as didactic whereas there are long monologues and dialogues in *Sammi* where the whole tone of the serial seems to change to lecture mode—the merging of entertaining and educating is not as smooth, and the serial is left lacking in both departments. Moreover, unlike *Udaari,* the collaboration between CCP and HUM was limited with the former using a more hands-off approach once the concept was delivered to the latter. This kind of approach ends up letting the serial fall more in the realm of a regular commercial show and was probably treated as such for the most part. Lastly, the operational

requirements *Sammi* had, to fulfill funding requirements, was perhaps a key reason why the storytelling was not as sophisticated, or the educational aspect as effective as *Udaari*.

For development communication, how funding is determined and distributed is a major factor that affects how individual projects are conceptualized, prioritized, and implemented; it also plays a significant role in determining how operational trends in the field become normalized. Funding agencies and governments often think in terms of short-term goals, quick results, and tangible measurables; funding is often tied up with these expectations and demands (Waisbord, 2001). Measuring actual impact (especially long-term impact) and aid effectiveness often gets less attention as organizations either do not see the value in it or their resources are tied up in meeting the demands of their donors in terms of providing quick turnarounds and measurable objectives.

We can see that, in general, overall funding sources matter for most television serials also. Not having to depend on advertisers' demands (and often skewed conceptions of what audiences want) allows for significant room to experiment with style and content. Advertisers hold great sway, and most of the money—filmmaker Farjad Nabi (2017) points out how a thirty-second advertisement can easily have a full feature film budget! However, even within outside funded projects (like *Sammi*) where advertising revenue is not as vital, we can see how there can be many limitations and restrictions, depending on the agreement made between the funder and recipient, as well as how much of a hands on approach the former decides to take. Entertainment-Education projects for example, letting reliable local bodies have more of a say in the final product may be the better way to go to avoid outsider bias, agendas, misconceptions, generalizations, and pre-conceived notions of what works. This approach could admittedly, in

some cases, also backfire. Having a balance, between letting local bodies approach projects with their unique insight and international organizations supervising without imposing, seems like a reasonable approach. However, not all projects are the same and there cannot be a cookie cutter approach. but there is no denying the importance of local participation at multiple levels.

The participatory aspect was present in Kashf's productions from the very beginning—a number of their stories are based on real life stories of people they have encountered (as clients, employees and so on), and these people's input was taken to conceptualize the plots for serials. A solution-based approach meant that the serials did not only present a problem but also provided practical, tailored solutions on how to tackle the problem. Development communication scholarship has long debated the advantages and disadvantages of top-down versus bottom-up approaches, with Entertainment-Education being considered a useful blend. This case study has presented examples of how a transmission model of communication may have some value in some situations (the way Udaari conveyed some critical information on child abuse directly, for example), and can be used to complement more participatory aspects of communication for social change. Moreover, additional research and supporting programs continue to be made by Kashf to further address the issues brought up in the serials; the serials were not an end in themselves.

When thinking about the field of development, it is important to challenge mainstream ideas about development and "progress" and to question hegemonic understandings of what "impact" is as well as the tools used to assess it (Dutta 2015; Waisbord 2015). Entertainment-Education is designed as an intervention to have impact, but measuring that impact is not always a straightforward task, partially because so much of the long-term impact can be indirect. It is

hard to measure the effectiveness of communication for social change projects if we stick strictly to a quantitative analysis, or try to look for hard and fast "proof" of direct impact. My case study has demonstrated that Entertainment-Education projects can be evaluated in different multi-faceted ways to better understand the actual impact they have.

The popularity of a serial like *Udaari*, at the very least has sent across a message to media makers and advertisers that "social cause" projects can also be commercially successful and should not be written off as money losing entities. More so, it can be said to have set a broader trend to do more responsible, well researched pieces even if a show is not an Entertainment-Education project. Other serials on important, not talked about issues relating to children, that followed soon after *Udaari* included *Khuda Mera Bhi Hai* (*God is Mine Also*, ARY Digital 2016), addressing the challenges of raising an intersex child in a society where accepting the third gender as part of the family is taboo; and *Iltija* (*Appeal*, ARY Digital 2017), which raised the topic of bringing up children with quadriplegia and Downs Syndrome, including the challenges and opposition from one's own family. The latter actually cast children with Down's syndrome and quadriplegia in the serial instead of having child actors play their roles. Apparently, casting for the adult roles was not a smooth process as Fouzia Ahmad points out: "A project that doesn't focus on mainstream media content has its fair share of challenges. Word is that casting for this serial was quite a challenge as all of the big name actors refused to do a depressing serial" (Ahmad 2017). Though more and more popular actors are now willing to act in cause-based dramas, and even taking on negative roles like Ahsan Khan's in *Udaari*, there is still ample reluctance and doubts around making, and acting in, serials that seem to be less about glamor and sensationalism and more about projecting some harsh realities of life. It is

funny though, how domestic abuse, harassment, murder, men cheating on their wives, and women being mistreated by their in-laws are all elements so repetitive and normalized in television serials, that they apparently do not come across as "depressing" the way a show about Down's syndrome does.

Though serials like *Iltija* and *Khuda Mera Bhi Hai* are still few and far between, it is a refreshing change to see people being able to present complex, usually hushed up (or ignored) issues on screen with more freedom and attention to detail. It is not as if some magical change happened overnight; a show like *Udaari* might have provided a boost to ideas that already existed, and it was a trendsetter in some ways. Commercial success and star power do play an important part in influencing the ability to make taboo subjects part of the conversation. On the other hand, channel after channel still continues to churn out thoughtless, trashy content. Moreover, the popularity and commercial success of a serial like *Udaari* has also resulted in a trend of producing shows that are social cause based but many of these are ill researched (or not researched at all), poorly presented, sometimes sensationalized, and sometimes spreading misinformation. It cannot be denied, however, that a space for more open (and more aware) public discourse has been expanded, and new language has been created for people to be able to express themselves.

As I write this conclusion, Kashf Foundation has just released a new serial, *Dil Na Umeed Tou Nahi* (*The Heart is Not Without Hope*, TV One & PTV 2021), revolving around the issue of human trafficking. It is being broadcast simultaneously on a private TV channel as well as on the national broadcaster, PTV. Discussing how the show portrays sensitive issues, Roshaneh Zafar, founder and managing director of Kashf, says, "…this time we are working

with PTV so have already accounted for all possible objections as censorship policy is quite strict. That being said, we will be pushing frontiers on some of the issues to ensure that we are able to raise awareness and start a dialogue" (Zehra 2021).

PTV may seem obsolete to many, but the truth of the matter is that there are still places in the country where it is the main channel, even within urban regions, not to mention rural areas. As mentioned in earlier chapters, PTV was Kashf's first choice for their initial Entertainment-Education project, *Rehai* (which was later re-broadcast on ATV, the country's only semi-privately operated terrestrial television network). The reach terrestrial channels like PTV and ATV have is an important, often forgotten, fact to remember. PTV may have fallen on hard times but the roots of the channel are still embedded in the idea of entertainment that also educates, and there is still a difference in the way its programming is presented as compared to commercial satellite channels. In terms of exports also, it is not just private television channels and production houses who are sending their products abroad. PTV's classic drama serial *Dhoop Kinare* (*On the Edge of Sunshine*, PTV 1987) is being dubbed for Saudi Arabia and the UAE to air on their television channels, along with *Tanhaiyan* (*Loneliness*, 1986) and *Aahat* (*An Approaching Sound*, 1991) (Images 2020; Arab News 2020). The attraction of these shows, even decades after their initial run, lies partially in their quality of scriptwriting and character development.

When comparing the Pakistani serials shown on Zindagi with popular Indian serials, Spandan Bhattacharyaa and Anugyan Nag (2016) find the former to be focusing more on character development and being less about the production of consumers. Though, on a comparative level, their assessment may be correct, it is important to recognize the substantial

role of consumerism within the Pakistani drama serial as well, though it might be subtler and more complicated than its Indian counterpart. Post PTV serials *have* included vivid depictions of consumerism and aspirational lifestyles of the rich even while seemingly condemning them in some narratives. The proliferation of large houses, fancy cars, and designer clothes for women in these serials are just some examples. There are also numerous serials that focus on upward mobility of lower middle- class heroines via marrying into upper-class families. Outside of the narratives, most of the advertisements on television for various products are full of actors from these popular serials selling anything and everything. The role of consumerism and commercialism thus, is complex within the Pakistani television drama industry. Many of these changes have come about at least partially as a result of media being privatized without enough attention paid to also maintaining a strong national broadcaster.

A focus on reviving PTV and its urban viewership is, I believe, an important step to ultimately rework the whole industry. Many think of PTV as an outdated channel that no one really watches, and often forget that it still exists. Even if good programming is playing on the channel, it is missed as audiences flip from one glitzy private channel to the next. A strong national broadcaster can help keep other private channels in check by setting an example, and regulating quality to some extent. There is plenty of nostalgia about the good old PTV days, both from people in the media industry and from audiences; we see talk shows and interviews on private channels reminiscing about the quality of work and professionalism that existed when PTV was thriving. We obviously cannot go back to that exact state, but there can be better quality control, there can be a greater focus on social responsibility, and there can be accountability for irresponsible portrayals of sensitive issues—accountability that comes from a better informed audience, better regulatory bodies, and from within the media industry itself. The

ideal situation might be where the majority of, if not all, serials were well researched, and communication well thought out, beyond just profitability even if the project in question is "just for entertainment." That is obviously not a realistic expectation so, at the very least, it would be good to have some checks and balances in place along with a greater sense of social responsibility instilled in media makers.

In terms of the economic structure of the drama industry in Pakistan—I knew going in that advertisers have influence in television programming decisions, but I did not realize just how much the industry is reliant on them; to the extent that, more often than not, there are simply no other avenues of funding available for television serials. Further research about these structures, with more inside perspectives from producers and channels, can provide valuable information on how this problem may be overcome. The question of funding remains a thorn in the side of many who want to produce more quality content but cannot. Having more organizations investing in production of serials—instead of being completely reliant on advertising funds—could be one way to move forward. The army, for one, has long recognized the importance of television serials in Pakistani culture. It has repeatedly, strategically, used the popularity of these serials to its advantage, with ISPR (Inter-Services Public Relations) produced popular television serials like *Alpha Bravo Charlie* (PTV 1998) and *Ehd-e-Wafa* (*Pledge of Allegiance*, HUM TV 2019) creating PR for the army and encouraging recruitment. [32] This was not entirely different from how in the US Tom Cruises' *Top Gun* (1986), for example, worked to promote the Airforce, with support from the Department of Defense. Of course, there is always the risk of propaganda and organizations working for ulterior motives, but is commercial

[32] ISPR is the media and public relations wing of the Pakistan Armed Forces.

advertising really very much different in its aims? This is where more counter checks and balances are needed beyond the current media regulatory authority in Pakistan.

In the more recent past, as Turkish dramas have become very popular amongst Pakistani audiences, even the Prime Minister has begun to comment publicly on them and think about how they can be put to good use. *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (*Resurrection: Ertuğrul*, TRT 1 2014) is a Turkish serial, recently dubbed into Urdu, that took the Pakistani screen by storm. Kemal Tekden, the director, and his team met with Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan and actors from both Turkey and Pakistan early this year (2021). The meeting was to discuss a possible joint venture television series between the two countries. The popularity of the show, and the potential of popular television serials, is now recognized by people in government and policymakers, which can result in long-term changes for the workings of the local media industry. Initially, the popularity of Turkish drama serials created some panic within the local entertainment media industry, with many actors protesting that the local industry was being threatened by bringing in foreign content (never mind that foreign content, including Indian soaps have been available in Pakistan for decades). *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* added to this panic as a lead actor from the show, Esra Bilgiç, began to be cast in Pakistani product advertisements and was made brand ambassador for multiple leading brands. The protest and panic did not deter the public from watching, or prevent two statues of Ertuğrul being put up in Lahore after the popularity of the show (TRT World 2020). The immense popularity of Turkish shows in Pakistan is testament to the fact that audiences are not averse to change and, in fact, appreciate it. Moreover, if it has taken an imported media product for people in power to begin taking note of the importance of television serials in educating the public, so be it. It is a step in the right direction and can ultimately help the local industry change for the better, provided all parties cooperate and the goals established

are the right ones. How all these changes will play out and affect the production and reception of Entertainment-Education in the country is hard to predict, and a topic that future research on Pakistani entertainment television needs to focus on.

Further research:

There needs to be more focus on the advertisers' perspective since they seem to be the main players in the funding and ratings game. Why is it that they insist on going by a ratings system that is not the best indicator of actual audience demand? Why, in spite of so much being written about how audiences are fed up with current, repetitive themes and content, do advertisers think this is what they want to see? What role can the commercial success of non-typical serials (like *Udaari* for one) play in convincing advertisers that stories which do not follow the usual formulas can also be profitable, and that it is ok to take risks? Is the advertisers' imagined target consumer market for these serials even the actual market for their products?

Moreover, lifestyles have changed. Currently a significant section of the population watches these television serials on YouTube, Dailymotion, Netflix, and so on. The traditional 8:00 pm family viewing time does not necessarily look the same as it did twenty years ago when the whole family settled down to watch their favorite drama. Again, what does this mean from an advertising perspective? How does the exchange of television serials with other countries—both imports and exports—open up new markets and audiences and how does it affect current, local audiences? What about Pakistani Entertainment-Education products that often need to be more localized and tailored? Are they still relevant as an export product?

Another aspect to think about is how the move to digital (including online channels like Zindagi, and web series on YouTube) affects the entertainment television industry. An article on

the topic in *The Express Tribune* quotes playwright Zafar Mairaj pointing out that "due to corporations and privately owned channels, mainstream television had lost connection with its actual demographic…" (Sultan 2021). The same article also quotes actor Sarwat Gillani talking about "how liberating it was to be working on a web series, as opposed to dealing with the 'kind of limitations' imposed on television" (Sultan 2021). A Pakistani version of Netflix, "Urduflix," is also in the works, signaling that the move to digital is not limited to streaming local work on platforms outside of the country.

Though the Pakistani television industry is witnessing a slow revival of strong female characters who understand and demand their rights, the images of helpless, weeping, victimized women that began to proliferate a few years after media liberalization also continue to have significant presence on the small screen. The fact that there are so many television channels, each broadcasting innumerable shows, makes it hard to keep official track of which images are more prevalent and/or more popular, and to think about these shifting representations in a strictly linear way. Dedicated studies of these trends could prove very helpful for both academic and industry purposes, as well as for future Entertainment-Education projects.

Women's issues have been a key focus of Pakistani Entertainment-Education television serials over the years though there has been a more diverse range of issues covered in other kinds of Entertainment-Education products. CCP's (Center for Communication Programs, Pakistan) "Qasim the Nazim," for example, is a fictional character in comics, social media posts, and animation, meant to create awareness about the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and to promote local governance (CCP Website). An important question for future research to as is,

what is the scope of Entertainment-Education serials beyond narratives of women's issues, especially women who have been victims of some sort?

Looking forward, when thinking about future Entertainment-Education projects, producers must prioritize in-depth and legitimate background research about topics being raised. A project about mental illness, for example, needs input from mental health professionals, from previous research conducted about chosen illness, and from patients' varied personal experiences—it is not enough to write a script based on how the general public perceives mental illness, or based on what is considered the norm. Whatever issues are being brought up within a serial need to be understood well, with all their nuances, by professionals making the television serial, in order to provide accurate information to audiences. Moreover, producers, directors, and writers need to be very careful about presenting material in a way that does not mislead or misinform audiences, or lead to biases in the very beginning that are hard to let go of later, as the serial progresses. Every dialogue, visual, plot point, or non-verbal cue can convey important messaging, and it is imperative to be very cognizant of this fact.

A project does not have to be strictly labelled as Entertainment-Education in order to use Entertainment-Education methods successfully or to achieve the kinds of goals ascribed by Entertainment-Education. The theoretical tools and methodology Entertainment-Education literature provides us are valuable and useful but sticking too rigidly to a theoretical framework may be problematic in different local contexts where certain kinds of nuances matter. It is important to be aware of the situation on the ground in terms of local audiences, cultural contexts, production processes, and impediments to understanding the provided messaging.

Taking local perspectives into account is very important in order to improve targeted messaging and be responsive to community interests.

My project has begun to address some of the issues mentioned above, helping pave a path in the hope that others will also carry the conversation forward. There was a gap in providing detailed context, and analysis of the production, execution, and reception of Entertainment-Education television serials in Pakistan, which my work has only barely begun to fill. There is much more to be investigated, recorded, and said—both in a historical context (work on older Entertainment-Education serials), and in terms of looking forward to future endeavors.

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Vita

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