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Media, Power and Biases: A Critical Analysis of Colourism and Class Inequality in Drama Serial 'Parizaad'

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the issue of colourism and class inequality in the drama serial 'Parizaad'. Agenda-setting is utilized as the theoretical framework. The study analyses the dialogues, language use, and character interaction through qualitative content analysis. The findings of the study highlight how the narrative persistently underscores the discriminatory behavior concerning skin tone and class status. Through the protagonist changing self-perception and opposition to such set standards and prejudices, the drama not only reflects the entrenched socio-cultural partiality but also critiques them through motivation, moral authority and dignity of Parizaad. The results highlight how Parizaad sets the agenda by diverting viewers' attention to such issues and raising their awareness of questioning such benchmarks. This extension of the agenda-setting theory beyond its traditional news contexts, the research underlines the significance of infotainment narratives in constructing cultural discourses and impacting public consciousness with regard to such social issues.

Keywords: Parizaad, Agenda-setting, Colourism, Class inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistani dramas serve as the cultural representation of Pakistan, mirroring and constructing societal standards in South Asia. Marking from the golden era of PTV in the late 1900s to the rise of private TV channels such as ARY, Hum TV, Geo, etc., the aired serials have impacted public discourse regarding class inequality and colourism (Qureshi *et al.*, 2023). Fair skin is recurrently portrayed as a distinguishing feature and upward mobility through religiosity or education, strengthening class hierarchies and colourism in Pakistan (Safdar, 2022). Pakistani dramas have extended their reach on the global level through platforms like YouTube, Dailymotion and digital streaming platforms. Thus, resultantly, their impact has also widened (Khalid, 2024).

Within this media-intensive framework, two underexplored problems of class hierarchies and colourism warrant attention. Although people in Pakistan often associate fair skin with a myriad of advantages and opportunities, along with education serving as a vehicle for status advancement, almost little or no work has been

done on investigating how these issues are presented in television media (Batoool & Sabar, 2024, p. 72). 'Parizaad' is a notable drama which portrays the narrative in which a rich-skinned protagonist navigates societal pressures and the transition of class. The drama counters common stereotyping by highlighting class structures that have been rooted and ingrained in the psyche of the audience. *Parizaad* is one such drama that portrays colourism and social class injustices differently, making it a highly relevant study for academia. This serial works like an infotainment narrative that not only entertains the audience but also educates them via its narrative. The serial highlights the persistent cultural norms and ultimately resists against them.

Agenda Setting Theory: Evolution:

Agenda-setting theory has undergone a significant transformation. Initially, it was applied largely to news contexts, and now its application can be widely seen in cultural and media frameworks on a large scale. McCombs and Shaw (1972) identified that the news media are able to pay attention on certain problems. This influences

public opinion-making with regard to those issues. News coverage of certain issues has shaped the public's understanding of political, economic and social issues. Recently, a notable increment in the application of this theory in media-related contexts has been seen for awareness purposes. According to Qaiser and Riaz (2020), streaming platforms guide the priorities of the viewers through curated availability of genres and narratives.

In the South Asian entertainment sphere, television dramas hold substantial influence and impact. Pakistani dramas, alongside Indian, Korean, and Turkish dramas, instill notions of class, identity, and beauty standards in viewers' minds. Neighboring industries focus on thematic and stylistic trends and patterns. However, Pakistani dramas tend to perpetuate narratives about class inequality and beauty standards. Academic research has emphasized class mobility and beauty ideals on screen without examining whether these portrayals actually alter public perceptions.

Parizaad is a unique counter-narrative, of sorts, in Pakistani television. It tells the story of a dark-skinned protagonist as he battles issues related to class hierarchy and colourism. Very few studies are available that investigate whether *Parizaad* increases public awareness of these social issues. All of them have used either a thematic analysis or Critical Discourse Analysis; there is hardly any use of agenda-setting theory to understand the influence of such dramas on viewers.

This gap is substantial. While agenda-setting has been widely applied to news media, and some research has examined representation in serials, no study has investigated how *Parizaad* might shape public attention toward class stratification and colourism. The current study aims to fill this gap by applying agenda-setting theory to examine how *Parizaad* influences viewers' perceptions of social inequality and notions of beauty, thereby highlighting the drama's role in reflecting these issues from a cultural perspective.

Research Objectives:

- To investigate how '*Parizaad*' highlights and negotiates class inequality and colourism.
- To analyze whether the depiction of these issues facilitates agenda-setting by constructing public significance of class inequality and colourism in Pakistan.

Research Questions:

- How does '*Parizaad*' represent and challenge persisting hierarchies of class and colourism?

- To what extent does this portrayal act as an agenda-setting device by being part of the way the public perceives class inequality and colourism?

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

This particular research is significant at multifarious levels. The extension of agenda-setting theory to media contexts transcends the conventional news-related framework and marks a significant shift.

The theoretical framework of this particular research underscores the adaptivity of agenda-setting theory in comprehending the cultural significance through the media. The study pinpoints how social stratification is reflected by the entertainment media, and such classifications are based on colourism in Pakistan. The current research utilizes *Parizaad* as a case study to illustrate how such narratives are generated by media and how they assist in the shaping of cultural values and norms, which in turn affect individual and group identities. The findings presented in this research have real-world application and relevance as they guide activists, regulatory bodies and producers in producing the narratives which are the manifestation of equality and all-inclusive representation.

DELIMITATION

This research is focused and well-structured. *Parizaad* drama is used as a primary source of data collection, with the research papers based on it from 2017-2025. The research entails five parts in total. Starting with the introduction, which includes the background, research objectives and questions and then the literature review section, which highlights the existing literature with regard to *Parizaad* and guides towards the gap identification. Next comes the methodology part, which examines the analytical framework and data collection. Findings and analysis section critically examines the dialogues of the drama in relevance to class inequality and colourism, incorporating agenda-setting as a theoretical lens. Lastly, the conclusion section summarizes the whole research along with the contributions and limitations of the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing studies on agenda-setting theory represent its foundational concepts and the development through the beginning. The literature indicates that theory has extended beyond traditional news settings. It is now

more relevant for studying entertainment media and wider cultural productions. Additionally, it sets the theory within the realm of the entertainment industry of South Asia. This will inquire how Pakistani dramas highlight social issues like class inequality and colourism. Through an extensive study of existing literature on the application of agenda-setting theory to drama, the research paper highlights a notable gap: the application of theory is dominant in journalism contexts but somewhat less evident in the socio-cultural impact of Pakistani dramas, especially *'Parizaad'*.

The origin of Agenda-Setting theory is marked by Walter Lippmann's notion that media constructs "the pictures in our heads" (Lippmann, 1992). The empirical demonstration of this idea was done by McCombs and Shaw (1972), who asserted that the coverage of media substantially influenced the issues which were deemed significant in the public eye. Afterwards, the theory underwent major developments categorizing into first-level agenda setting (issue salience), second-level agenda setting (attribute salience), building of agenda, policy agenda influences, intermedia agenda-setting, and network agenda setting, as of recent (Guo & McCombs, 2011; McCombs, 2004). Wanta and Alkazemi (2017) detailed this development, presenting the role of digital media in functioning as sources and measures of public salience.

While agenda-setting theory is rooted in news conventions, its application has become more popular and relevant in the entertainment industry. Dramas and Movies shape public opinion by either framing or challenging certain issues and building salience networks. Thus, the current study will fill the gap by analyzing how agenda-setting theory is applied to the Drama serial *Parizaad* by focusing on the themes of class inequality and colourism.

Role of Pakistani Infotainment Industry and its Impact

Cultural discourse in Pakistan is brought into shape by Pakistani dramas and films, which make them as influential actors mirroring and transforming society and its values. The Pakistani drama industry started from PTV, and later other private channels, including ARY, Geo TV and Hum TV, gained popularity. These challenges propagated the narratives which led to questioning of class, morality, gender and identity. Drama serials like *'Udaari'* reflected child abuse, and class inequality and gender inequality were highlighted by another drama

called *'Zindagi Gulzar Hai'*. Existing scholarship on the drama serial *'Udaari'* using a cultural feminism lens highlighted how women, when they take a stand against sexual abuse, become empowered (Saud & Iqbal, 2024). These two dramas work as cultural mirrors of Pakistan (Ali & Batool, 2021).

Building on these studies, empirical research strengthens the same ideology. University students' surveys unveiled the power of dramas to influence lifestyle choices. The viewers endorsed dresses, language and conduct patterns presented on screens (Umer, Butt, & Sohail, 2023). Other significant research explored how dramas and films have a huge impact on the cultural identities of youth, values and leisure practices (Safdar & Abbasi, 2023). Dramas also hold the power to influence conventional family norms by either strengthening them or challenging them through a westernized agenda (Khursheed *et al.*, 2025). In another pivotal study, research indicates that social class inequality and hierarchies are perpetuated by dramas through the equating of social registers to stratification mobility (Yousaf *et al.*, 2023). Finally, an exacerbated commercialization of Pakistani content was highlighted in another comparative study, which focused on foreign serials (Khan, 2024).

Although the above-mentioned body of literature validates the impact of the infotainment industry, it is more audience-centered with an emphasis on language patterns without a structured examination through an agenda-setting perspective. The limitation mentioned underscores the need for an analysis of how *Parizaad* establishes public agendas on class inequality and colourism.

Class Inequality and Colourism in Pakistani Dramas

Since dramas serve as indicators of cultural and social aspects of a country, there has been a significant amount of research on how Pakistani dramas represent class inequality and colourism through their narratives. Fairclough's three-dimensional applied to *Parizaad* in a research unveils the methods in which the language of dramas propagates stereotyping against rich skin while showing the main lead as a symbol of perseverance, struggle and ultimate success against already existing social and class hierarchies (Batool & Sabar, 2024). According to Khalid and Arshad (2024), colourism retains a lasting tradition of colonialism. Cultural practices, transitions, and media strengthen colourism. Fair skin is always idealized by the media through visual narratives, which leads to the reproduction of unrealistic beauty

standards and insecurity among women (Latif *et al.*, 2024, p.2970).

Parallel studies underscore how class inequalities are deeply integrated into Drama narratives. Religiosity and education are persistently portrayed as ways to upward mobility in Pakistani dramas, which normalize class hierarchical structures (Khan *et al.*, 2019). In an equally significant study, discursal analysis unveils how dialects, code switching and linguistic registers, and ethnic divisions with distinguished figures adopt legal and standard speech patterns while lower ones stick to regional and colloquial patterns (Ulla *et al.*, 2025, p.2701). These studies, altogether, highlight the dual role of Pakistani dramas; one in reflection of colourism and class inequality and two in reproduction of these narratives.

Although the studies provide significant findings, many of these remain text-centric or descriptive in nature. Few studies investigate whether these representations translate into shifts in public salience of class inequality and colourism. This strengthens the current study's aim to fill in the gap by using agenda-setting theory, which aligns the representation of media with audience preferences.

Agenda Setting Theory beyond News

The origins of agenda-setting theory can be traced back to the news. However, the theory has been increasingly broadened into a myriad of domains, including entertainment, public communication, education and digital streaming. The seminal work by McCombs and Shaw (1972) portrayed the role of the media. According to them, the media does not always project what the audience conceptualizes but strongly impacts what they think about. Subsequent studies elucidate how this mechanism surpasses journalism and informs the choices of viewers in multi-cultural contexts. For instance, an empirical study found that the emphasis of the media on particular academic domains structures students' academic goals. Over 60 per cent of students selected Business and Computer Science fields because of continued media visibility (Sabawo, 2024, p. 1285). Correspondingly, it has been found through meta-analysis of news production procedures that propaganda and framing are part of agenda-setting. This accentuates how journalism. Constraints of organizations and pressures related to ideology construct narratives which influence the general public's comprehension (Anzoor *et al.*, 2019). Fictional narratives, beyond news, work as agenda-setting agents. Streaming culture and binge- watching

reviews uncover that algorithmic recommendations construct cultural salience by bringing to the fore specific stories and genres, along with personalizing the entertainment content. This in turn creates new aspects of dependency of media (Ercegovac & Ercegovac, 2023). Agenda formation is done by fictional dramas and series in the entertainment context by dramatization of social issues. This is profoundly presented in South Asian television narratives.

The studies mentioned above, altogether, foreground the versatility of agenda-setting theory, but their focus remains on news or general entertainment contexts. The role of certain dramas in shaping discourse is underrepresented in these scholarly works. The absence of application of agenda-setting theory on drama serial 'Parizaad' by a focused lens on themes of class inequality and colourism constitutes a gap in existing research. The current research seeks to address the gap by investigating how 'Parizaad' not only mirrors but sets the agenda around already existing hierarchies of color and class.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research adopts a qualitative content analysis approach, grounded in an interpretivist orientation and anchored in agenda-setting theory. Qualitative analysis is best suited for uncovering symbolic meanings, persistent themes in media, whether visual or textual (Mayring, 2000). This design enables a deep understanding of how 'Parizaad' articulates class inequality and colourism while exposing the entrenched discursive structures rather than counting instances. This technique relates to the creation of meaning and understanding in context. Further, it is complementary to the interpretive end of explaining how media narratives co-construct the social sphere.

Agenda-setting theory explains how the media can play an important role in bringing certain issues and agendas into the spotlight of the audience's attention. The theoretical approach, which validates the case study, is a critical analysis of the role of media in shaping the broader cultural context of a contemporary news story.

Research Approach

This study used a case study approach, focusing specifically on the Pakistani drama "Parizaad". The play offers a unique and fascinating insight into a protagonist with a rich complexion who challenges existing class and color hierarchies. By engaging with this series it would

not only allow to provide a clearer reading of its complex storyline, its symbolic framing, and its character development.

A single case study backs academic support for heavy analyses. The method looks at what *Parizaad*’ selling about the messages of inequality and colonialism.

Data Collection

The primary data for this study were collected through the *Parizaad* drama aired on Hum TV from the year 2021-2022. Hum TV has put up episodes on its YouTube channel and the general digital platform. The episodes allowed for an analysis based on the real on-screen conversation and not on edited versions or summaries. My project will primarily focus on examining dialogues, owing to their symbolic significance relating to class inequality and colourism. Dialogues uncover the underlying ideologies, embedded values and codes of the language. The drama’s major themes will also be contextualized through trajectories of characters and arcs of narrative. However, the primary focus will be on dialogues.

The dialogues around class stratification or beauty standard issues, such as colourism, are coded in the analysis. This makes it possible to achieve a full understanding of explicit proclamation as dramatized by the character. As well as this, the dialogue will be framed through an evaluation of narrative arcs and character trajectories. Nonetheless, the interpretations will mainly revolve around dialogues and meanings behind spoken text. The paper will closely monitor the emerging dialogues, in order to precisely document how agenda-setting processes unfold in discourses in which the recurrent, the positioning and the emphasis make certain social issues salient.

Sampling

The purposive sampling strategy has been employed in this research by focusing on scenes and episodes highly complementary to class inequality and colourism. The use of purposive sampling ensures that the research remains focused, as analysis of each episode will lead to broadened findings. This will ensure that emphasis is set on areas where agenda-setting is most evident. Concentration on certain scenes ensures analytical depth and thematic precision, avoiding irrelevance. Therefore, the sampling strategy exacerbates the ability to unveil the construction of salience by the *Parizaad*’ drama and its contribution to cultural agenda formation.

Analytical Framework and Theoretical Integration

In this study, Thematic content analysis is used to

investigate how the drama serial *Parizaad*’ addresses issues of class inequality and colourism through its narrative. From dialogues and interaction of characters, the patterns are identified which facilitate the comprehension of how specific issues are marginalized or stressed. The dual lens of the first and second level agenda setting is followed. The analysis, in the first level, underlines the salience of issues, including the frequency of class stratification and colourism presence in the narrative and emphasis in the dialogues. At the second level, attributes connected to such issues are investigated. This multi-layered framework assists in documenting instances and the interpretation of symbolic meanings assigned to persistent themes, unveiling how *Parizaad*’ may empower specific concerns among the public.

In this particular research, the dialogues serve as agenda-setting devices when they recurrently underscore the color and class stratification. Findings are positioned in an agenda-setting manner to present how *Parizaad*’ may structure public salience of these matters.

Ethical Consideration

The research constitutes minimal ethical concerns since the primary data is available through Hum TV’s digital platforms, especially YouTube, to extract the relevant dialogues. No sensitive private data is used, and the data collected remains in community domains. However, the research acknowledges the cultural sensitivity because of its emphasis on colourism and class inequality, which are socially integrated matters in Pakistan. Interpretations are thus done carefully, preventing research biases. The analysis is embedded in the socio-cultural frameworks in which the drama was produced. This ensures that meanings are taken from cultural contexts rather than imposed externally.

Scope in Methodology:

The scope of this research is narrowed to *Parizaad*’ only, excluding other Pakistani dramas. The timeframe for the literature cited in the research is confined to 2017-2025, ensuring that the literature follows the current trends. Class inequality and colourism are focused excluding the other issues like family structures or gender dynamics prevalent in the serial. Through these boundaries, the research attains depth in exploring the specific agenda of *Parizaad*’.

The methodological framework concludes through these choices altogether, ensuring that the research remains rigorous, ethical and perfectly aligned with its objectives.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The themes of class inequality and colourism are prevalent throughout the drama serial *'Parizaad'*. Several dialogues of the drama are a complete embodiment of these two themes, which demonstrate their significance in the light of agenda-setting theory. The analysis of multiple dialogues sourced from the drama supports the themes.

Colourism:

Since the birth of *Parizaad*, the theme of colourism laid its foundation. Manzoor, the father of *Parizaad*, mocks his son's name in the first episode of the drama by saying to his wife:

"Lekin ghazab khuda ka baap ka naam kya hai Mansoor aur bache ka kya naam kya hona chahiye, Qadeer, Raheem, Shakoor kuch bhi rakhle lekin tune kya Rakha hai, Parizaad aur wo Parizaad jesa lage bhi to sahi wo to..."

Translation:

"But just look at this, for God's sake. The father's name is Mansoor, so the child's name should be something that matches—Qadeer, Raheem, Shakoor, anything would have worked. But what did you name him? *Parizaad*. And even if you did, at least he should look like someone with a name like that... but he..."

This dialogue strongly asserts how *Parizaad's* father framed his name as a feminine representation. Additionally, the ridicule of the name with respect to his skin tone through the indirect phrase, *'Aur wo Parizaad lage bhi to sahi...'* propagates the theme of colourism. Manzoor, as *Parizaad's* father, becomes the first one to jeer at his son. The dialogue perpetuates the stereotype of selecting a masculine and strong name for a dark-skinned infant boy. This reinforcement of stereotypical notions reveals the hidden biases associated with linking colors and appearances to names.

Nasaaz, a strong character and a great friend of *Parizaad*, also engages with the dichotomy of inner self and outer appearances.

In episode 4, Nasaaz addresses *Parizaad*, *"Shakal o Surat insan ka pehla taharuf hota. Insan ka doosra aur asal taruf uske alfaaz hote. Apna doosra taruf mukamal kardo, itna mukamal kardo k log tumhara pehla taharuf bhool jayen."*

Translation:

"A person's appearance is their first introduction. But their second—and truer—introduction lies in their words. Perfect that second introduction. Refine it so well

that people forget the first one."

This powerful statement encapsulates the power of one's words – how the depth of one's words can be deeply impactful. Nasaaz's emphasis on working on the second appearance underscores the significance of his statement. *Parizaad's 'Shakal o Surat'* (first introduction) is constantly mocked due to the conventional set beauty standard in society. The dialogue epitomizes that character comes ahead of one's physical and outward beauty, and that refining the character overcomes the prejudice associated with one's physical appearance, which too is subject to change.

Extending on the theme of *Parizaad*, Bubbly Badmash, in the same episode, scoffs at hearing the name of *Parizaad*. She goes on, *"Kya? Kya bola Parizaad? Ye to sarasar larkion wala naam hai bhai tumhara to kuch deo zaad type naam hona chahiye"*

Translation:

"What? What did you say, *Parizaad*? This is clearly a girl's name, my friend; yours should be something like monster."

Bubbly also foregrounds the same ideation in her dialogue. Her disdain of *Parizaad's* name and emphasis on a selection of a more masculine name highlight her prejudice. This is a reflection of sexism and colourism interwoven.

Episode 7 also reflects the same bias as Lubna's mother calls *Parizaad* a *misfit* while talking to her daughter about him. She asserts, *'Such a misfit, oh my God. Don't tell me you did not notice k wo misfit nhi hai.'*

Translation:

'Such a misfit, oh my God. Don't tell me you did not notice that he is not misfit.'

The use of the word 'misfit' further amplifies her derision of *Parizaad*. The framing of *Parizaad* as a misfit because of his appearance and dark color automatically sets him as an outsider. The dialogue strongly exhibits the society's opinion of people with dark complexion and demeanor as misfits and unacceptable in the elitist environment. Common people like *Parizaad* are deemed as misfits and insulted in such settings.

Parizaad, in episode 21, finally takes a stand for himself by directly addressing this prevalent behavior.

In a conversation with RJ Annie, he says, *"Mazak nahi to aur kya hai? Tamasha banana chahti ho logon k samne"*

mera? Mene tumhe logon se mukhtalif jana tha afsos tum b baakion jesi nikli. Moortiyān khoobsurat logon ki banai jati hain annie bibi aur mujhe apne shakhsyat k baare me na koi ghalat fehmi thi aur na hi hai. Afsos hua k tum jesi larki dunya k samne mera Mazak banana chahti hai."

Translation:

"Is it not a joke, then what is it? Do you want to make a spectacle of me in front of everyone? I had considered you different from others, but sadly, you turned out just like the rest. Statues are made of beautiful people, Annie Bibi, and I never had nor do I have any delusions about my own personality. It's unfortunate that a girl like you wants to make a mockery of me in front of the world."

Parizaad's rebuke of Annie's wish to make his sculpture is evident in this dialogue. His declaration that sculptures are only made for conventionally good-looking people underscores his inner frustration after years of enduring taunts by society. 'Mazak nahi to aur kya hai' is an embodiment of his aggression and outbursts. He considers his appearance as inferior and unsuitable for a sculpture as indicated in this line, 'Moortiyān khoobsurat logon ki banai jati hain annie bibi aur mujhe apne shakhsyat k baare me na koi ghalat fehmi thi aur na hi hai.'

Translation:

"Statues are made of beautiful people, Annie Bibi, and I never had nor do I have any delusions about my own personality."

Parizaad creates an unintentional dichotomy between his 'ugly self', according to him and the beautiful people. This dialogue reflects his awareness of the prejudgment that he has been a victim of over the years.

Developing this argument, Parizaad additionally states, "Kya dikhana chahti ho mera mujasma bana k? kya saabit karna chahti ho? Yehi k tum mujh jesi shakal o surat walon k murtiyan b bakhoobi bana leti ho apni ungliyon se."

Translation:

"What do you want to show by turning me into a statue? What do you want to prove? That you can skillfully create statues of people with appearances like mine with your own hands."

Parizaad's misinterpretation of Annie's sincerity is signaled through this dialogue. His pain and perseverance of many years eventually erupted through this dialogue. His helplessness is also reflected through this dialogue. His use of words like 'Mujh jesi shakal o surat walon....'

screams otherness. Furthermore, 'bakhoobi bana leti ho' also prompts how he has been mistreated and discriminated against based on his color. Thus, these combined aspects situate Parizaad within the feelings of betrayal and marginalized.

Annoyed with all these labels and tags, Parizaad schedules an appointment with a plastic surgeon in episode 27, initially intending to undergo plastic surgery. Nonetheless, the phone call makes him rethink his identity. Surgeon's words resonated with him and led him to revise his decision. Parizaad calls the surgeon and asserts, "Apne kaha thana k apne ese patients b dekhe hain jo apne beruni tabdeeli k sath sath andar se b badle hain, me andar se nhi badalna chahta."

Translation:

"You said that you have seen patients who, along with their external changes, have also transformed internally; I do not want to change from within."

Parizaad's courageous act of overcoming societal pressures and ultimately accepting the powerful and distinctive aspect of his personality is revealed through this dialogue. Eventually, he triumphs over the false and made-up conventions of society along with his inner cowardly self. Choosing authenticity over fabrication marks his character despite all the odds. This dialogue beautifully encapsulates that personal integrity must be valued and should never be sacrificed over shallow beauty standards.

The dialogues mentioned above depict how the 'colourism' theme has been presented in the drama. From Parizaad's naming dispute to his own condemnations, the theme of colourism has been prevalent throughout the narrative. The drama portrays that biases based on color are significant. Drama serial Parizaad highlights colourism as the agenda to be shown to viewers. This creates awareness among the viewers regarding the widespread prevalence of colourism in society.

Class Inequality:

The dialogues of the drama equally reinforce the theme of social class and inequality. Status and wealth are considered significant throughout the drama. Parizaad, while speaking to Lubna in episode 7, also asserts the class distinction, "Me khudko tumhari dosti k kaabil nhi samajhta. Mera thora talkh tajarba raha hai is maamle me. Aur phir tumhare aur mere darmayan class difference hai."

Translation:

"I don't consider myself worthy of your friendship. I've

had a rather bitter experience in this matter before. And besides, there is a class difference between you and me.” Parizaad considers class difference as the barrier between his and Lubna’s friendship. The deeply entrenched hierarchical structure of society makes it difficult for him to extend a hand of friendship to Lubna. His statement strengthens the pre-conservative notion of the separation or boundary between the higher class and those belonging to less privileged classes.

In the same episode, Noman, a business tycoon, also tries to cash in on Parizaad’s talent by offering him an amount in exchange for his profound words. When Parizaad rejects the offer, he says, *“Please ab khuda k liyey yeh na kehna k tumhara hunar bikau nhi hai. Dunya me har cheez bikti hai bas sai keemat wala hona chahiye. Me chahta hun k tum mere shehron ko apne andaaz me durust karlo aur beech me apni koi taaza shahiri bhi banado,, badele me tum jo keemat chaho tumhe mil jayegi.”*

Translation:

“Please, for God’s sake, don’t say again that your talent is not for sale. Everything in this world can be bought; one only needs the right price. I want you to refine my verses in your own style and add one of your fresh poems in between. In return, you will receive whatever payment you ask for.”

Noman’s treatment of Parizaad’s words as a commodity is evident in the mentioned dialogue. Artistic and poetic skills are considered transactional items by the elitist. Taking advantage of one’s lower socio-economic background by offering them a handsome amount is quite prevalent. This dialogue also intensifies the stereotypical notion of buying one’s talent and honor with money, reifying materialistic class hierarchy.

In episode 7, a toxic socio-class perspective has been expressed by Lubna’s mother. She strongly advocates, *“Mard ki surat uski shakhsyat aur uska waqar sab uske paise pe hota hai. Khudko itna ameer karo yeh jo tumhari shakhsyat k aeb hain dunya ko style lagne lag jayen.”*

Translation:

“A man’s appearance, his personality, and even his dignity all depend on his money. Make yourself wealthy enough, and the flaws people see in your personality will start looking like style to the world.”

Personal dignity has been associated with status and wealth through this dialogue. This strong remark also amplifies the stressful predicament for men – the

constant pressure of earning well to be accepted by society. *“Khudko itna ameer banao... style lagne lag jaye”* explains how money can transform the personality of an individual. All the shortcomings can be overlooked in the presence of money and a promising future. The explicit mentioning of the connection between self-regard and class is discernible through this dialogue.

She further adds in the same episode, *“Hamare haan jazbaat ki koi keemat nhi hoti larke. Acha chalo noman ki jagha 10 crore ka cheque tum mere hath me rakhdo. Me lubna ka hath tumhare hath me de doungi.”*

Translation:

“In our society, emotions have no value, boy. Fine then—place a cheque of ten crore in my hand instead of Noman. I will put Lubna’s hand in yours.”

Lubna’s mother makes use of this bold statement to reduce the beautiful relationship of marriage to monetary exchange. The use of the words *“Hamare haan jazbaat ki koi keemat nhi hoti larke”* suggests that money is the only goal that mattered to Lubna’s mother, disregarding genuine human emotions, which are fundamental in life. Her treatment of her own daughter as a commodity or an asset further creates tension in the narrative. This profound integration of class obsession juxtaposes real emotional relationships. The purpose of marriage is annihilated through this financial exchange.

The rest of the characters in the drama also showcase the theme of power inequality through their dialogues. In episode 12, Janu – Parizaad’s friend, while speaking to his wife, says, *“Mene manah kia tha parizad ko yeh agg ka khel na khele. Hum jese chote log in baron k sath na to chal sakte hain na Barabar.”*

Translation:

“I had forbidden Parizaad from playing with this fire. People like us—people of modest standing—can neither walk alongside the powerful nor stand as their equals.”

The dichotomy between ‘chote log’ and ‘bare log’ powerfully captures the intense waves of hierarchical structure. This intimation made by Janu underscores the subordinate position of lower-class individuals. Any attempt to intermix and indulge in the affairs of elite people is highly threatening. Class hierarchies are fixed and immutable. Any resistance to change leads to unfavorable outcomes.

In the later episodes, specifically in episode 20, Sir Agha

proclaims to Parizaad, *“Aur paisa dunya ki bari takat hai. Aaj jo dunya tumhe dhudkar rahi hai kal tumhe sarahe gi, tumhare agay jhuke gi bas tumhe jhukana ana chahiye.”*

Translation:

“And money is a great power in this world. The same people who look down on you today will admire you tomorrow, they will bow before you—only if you learn how to make them bow.”

Sir Agha teaches Parizaad the significance and power of money. Money is the biggest power in the world. Money commands reverence and respect. Money can redirect the status and worth of a person. ‘*Bas tumhe jhukana ana chahiye*’ also indicates that less privileged people should be kept in their status and never treated as equals.

Nonetheless, in the final episodes of the drama, Parizaad contradicts this narrative by bolstering the noteworthiness of gradual development and improvement through education and knowledge. In episode 26, while talking to a poor child, Parizaad says, *“Magar tujm boht parhna. Itna parhna k yeh Mazak uraney wale tumhari kaamyabi k baad sar jhuka k tumhe salam karen.”*

Translation:

“But you must study hard—so hard that the very people who mock you today lower their heads and salute you after your success.”

Parizaad highlights the power of education even beyond money, as it inculcates wisdom and sagacity in people. This confrontation with the entrenched hierarchical structures by signifying how education can win respect from everyone marks the evolving narrative. This dialogue educates people that value does not come with wealth but comes with education and wisdom.

In episode 26, cousin of Annie exclaims, *“Sir aapki to puri business empire hai lekin apne kabhi attitude aur rawaye se yeh ehsas hone nhi dia. Sir aap kitne humble aur down to earth hain.”*

Translation:

“Sir, you have a whole business empire, but you never showed it through your attitude and behavior. Sir, you are so humble and down to earth.”

The dialogue encapsulates Parizaad’s humble nature despite growth in wealth. Parizaad’s divergence from the conventional power structures and arrogance highlights his real success. Eventually, Parizaad’s meek comportment granted him wealth and dignity.

All the dialogues mentioned above bring to the forefront the theme of class inequality. Society is well aware of class hierarchical structures, which is also shown in the drama. The role of money in relationships, dignity and marriage underscores its value. Viewers consider class inequality as a vital issue in the drama through the lens of agenda-setting.

DISCUSSION

Drama serial *Parizaad* challenges and portrays the theme of class inequality and colourism through its narrative. The drama reflects deeply institutionalized predispositions in society. Parizaad is judged because of his deep skin color and low economic class, over his real self. The judgment starts right from his home when his father mocks the name. Afterwards, Noman and Lubna’s mother in the drama also manifests the same behavior, treating honour and relationships as commodities. They treat money above every relationship.

Parizaad’s interpretive lens, however, shifts the narrative towards the criticism of these entrenched structures. Despite facing backlash, Parizaad stays firm and resolute by maintaining his creativity and integrity alive in his personality. His simple and dedicated persona ultimately leads to his success. He leaves the idea of plastic surgery and educates the boy to get an education, no matter what. His personality charms of compassion, humility and intelligence eventually lead to his triumph. The narrative gives a powerful message of how a deep/rich-skinned individual should be respected no matter what because one’s inner values transcend one’s outer appearance.

Thus, the drama serial *Parizaad* not only represents such themes but also critiques them throughout its narrative. The depiction of these themes enables audiences to critically examine these issues. By granting dignity and depth to Parizaad, the drama fosters empathy for his character, rendering the previous prejudices as vile. Resultantly, the audience is educated regarding the class inequality and colourism as pressing concerns while raising their critique of these stereotypes.

CONCLUSION:

Parizaad is an embodiment of a narrative that not only represents the themes of class inequity and colourism but also resists such themes through its narrative. The drama portrays how such themes are embedded in our society as the protagonist faces the scrutiny right from his home and then in society. The selected dialogue represents these

narratives consistently. Drama's depiction of such issues to the highest visibility highlights the alarming nature of them. Parizaad sets the agenda by directing viewers' attention to the naturalization of such events in society. Contrarily, the drama also challenges these entrenched hierarchical structures by showing Parizaad as a protagonist whose values, persistence and dedication surpass the fabricated stratification and colourism. Artificial conformity, transactional relationships are rejected by him, and he maintains his focus on the power of education in battling against these odds and bringing light and positivity to the world. The drama raises the question amongst the viewers about such set standards. Agenda-setting theory applied to infotainment contexts demonstrates how such narratives can draw public attention by persistently foregrounding such concerns. The empathetic framing of the drama not only portrays such a narrative but also breaks through the chains of these structures by ultimately presenting how dignity and honor come with inner goodness over external beauty and status. *Parizaad* also strengthens the capacity of the Pakistani entertainment industry to impact cultural consciousness and to educate the masses about such issues.

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