



Analyzing Feminist Discourse in a Pakistani Screenplay

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the feminist discourse in a Pakistani screenplay, highlighting attitudes towards women's emancipation. Using a qualitative lens, it investigates the language of the screenplay and the linguistic features that reinforce the impression of empowered Pakistani women. The thematic analysis reveals that the prevailing patriarchal cultural narratives are challenged in the screenplay, offering a departure from the predictability of the earlier storylines. The findings also indicate that changes in the way women are viewed is strengthened by the screenplay's language choices, highlighting the acceptance of women in non-traditional roles. Defying stereotypes, through strong and capable roles, overturning the traditionally limited mindsets, the screenplay determines that women are crucial to a more inclusive society. The study concludes that in a supportive environment, with opportunities for training and development, their achievements acknowledged, and their voices heard, women thrive. There is a need for screenplays with suitable language that scaffolds an understanding for creating stories that foster a deeper comprehension of the feminine competence and abilities.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between language and identity development is deeply intertwined, and the strength of language goes beyond what is commonly acknowledged (Schwartz et al., 2020). It serves as a tool for transmitting information, establishing and maintaining authority, and even as a means of motivation. Hence, it falls upon linguists to advocate for the phatic function of language (Talosa & Malenab-Temporal, 2018). Understanding the influential role of language is vital for recognizing instances where it exerts influence over our thoughts. Currently, media have an essential role in our lives and society, and the key element which media use to connect with their audience is language, making the connection between media and language strong, with both exerting a greater influencing on the other. Women's representation in the media has been an ongoing issue of discussion for a long time. In Pakistan, too, the job of media is impacting the considerations of individuals that cannot be denied. Serials, more commonly known as dramas, are television shows produced primarily in Urdu but also featuring regional languages such as Sindhi, Balochi, and Punjabi (Safdar & Khan, 2020). These dramas have gained popularity not only within Pakistan but also in neighboring South Asian countries with a significant viewership in Bangladesh, Nepal and India. Television is pervasive in households, making these dramas accessible to a wide audience, serving as a major source of entertainment; most dramas focusing on women and their roles in society.

Media plays a significant role, and many screenplays have been created to highlight and depict opportunities for empowering women, however, most continue to show women in powerless and incompetent roles. The screenplay proclaimed a shift; with women portrayed as equal to men. A groundbreaking screenplay that was keenly watched, with the tagline, "*She doesn't need a hero, she is born to be a hero*" (Baig, 2021, November 19) supporting that women

were capable of anything if they were resolute. The tagline hints at breaking generational stereotypes for women's empowerment, justifying the identity and exposure that women need to be the lead in their own stories rather than acting as supporting characters. "Women of steel," establishes the plot for strong female protagonists from various socioeconomic origins who are attempting to overcome their desire to join the military academy. To establish the story and refrain from making it seem "out of culture," screenplay, strives to break stereotypes, by including a lot of supporting male characters highlighting the strength, determination, and diligence of women. The female-focused cast is made up of well-known, popular young actors with five women at the center of the story, who are struggling to overcome social barriers that prevent them from achieving success on their own terms. In today's contemporary society, the enhanced role of media has impacted our lives, ranging from our personal interests to social issues. Television has dominated Pakistani popular media and remains a powerful medium of choice for entertainment, news, and culture. Although women in Pakistani dramas are either described in reference to their male counterparts or as dependent characters within the binary categories of good and bad, conventional and untraditional. However, the surge in TV-plays being aired emphasizes a shift in the storyline. The purposively selected screenplay *Sinf-e-Aahan* is a move from the predictable patriarchal cultural accounts dominating the media screens in Pakistan. The screenplay highlights the non-traditional roles for women, which is a change in the typical string of screenplays focusing on female repression. The focus is on the journey of its characters from the very traditional to reverse gender roles, and the acceptance of these changes within society. The present study aims to investigate the feminist discourse in the screenplay and analyze the language (linguistic features) in Pakistani women-based screenplay.

2. Literature Review

Word 'empowerment' is an interdisciplinary social strategy that helps people achieve power over their own lives and have freedom of choice on economic, social and political grounds (Dar, 2020). While O'Hara and Clement (2018) indicate the drawbacks of employing typical definitions of empowerment that focus on over representations of action and make the case for discourse. Beyond explanatory definitions, emic concepts and regionalized person empowerment procedures should also be evaluated and better understood (Malapit et al., 2019). By incorporating discourse and region-specific approaches, we can gain a deeper understanding of empowerment that goes beyond surface-level actions and encompasses the complex dynamics of power, agency, and subjective experiences. Additionally, a woman's level of empowerment changes throughout the course of her life and is determined by her position in the home's social hierarchy. Finally, socioeconomic variables and income have a major impact on the entire picture. In order to comprehend empowering procedures for this cause, it is important to take into account the numerous diverse intersectional components (Carr & Thompson, 2014; Colfer, Sijapati Basnett, & Ihalainen, 2018). Mandal (2013) reported that in almost every society, women have unequal status and positions, and it is compulsory to empower them by giving them equal opportunities. To attain gender equality in society, putting resources into women's hands will result in substantial development (Bank, 2015). While other studies revealed that there is no effective tool for economic development other than women's empowerment, and women's skillfulness (income earned from their skill) is the main factor in empowering women (Rahman, Junankar, & Mallik, 2009). Varghese (2011) conducted a study on women empowerment in Oman. He stated that women's empowerment is multi-dimensional and problematic to evaluate. According to the survey, Sohar women make wise decisions. In Oman, women are better in households and women's perceptions are also taken about their political and legal rights. The analysis discovered that in Oman, women are very much aware of their political and legal rights.

In Pakistan, many NGOs are working in which they give loans to poor women to start their businesses and to overcome the poverty rate. Niaz (2019) researched the effect of microfinance on Pakistani women's empowerment. They reported that approach to microfinance has a substantial impact on empowering women, reducing poverty and helping change their social status. They further point out that it is pretty logical that a woman can reduce her poverty if she receives a loan. A study by Bushra and Wajiha (2015) explored the determinants that influence the socio-economic empowerment of women in Pakistan. In this study, they stated that there was a huge gender gap in the literacy rate of women and men. Education plays a positive role in women's empowerment, and women are deprived of education, which leads to inequality, a lack of awareness about their rights, and fewer job opportunities of the deprivation of education for women, it is crucial to focus on removing barriers such as gender-based discrimination, poverty, cultural norms, and lack of infrastructure. Governments, civil society organizations, and

communities should work together to guarantee equal access to quality education for all women, providing a foundation for their empowerment and the achievement of gender equality.

2.1. Pakistan and Women Empowerment

Several studies on women's financial positions reveal that a majority of poor individuals are women, even among the affluent populations (Eastin & Prakash, 2013). These women often work part-time, hold low-status jobs with unstable pay, or remain unpaid (Butterwick & Jubas, 2015). Additionally, unequal cultural customs and judicial structures hinder women's efforts to achieve equality (Eastin & Prakash, 2013). In Pakistan, women are less likely to own land compared to those in other countries (Anjum et al., 2018), with very little legal protection. Women are typically assigned to low-level administrative positions in the workplace, reinforcing ingrained gender biases (Eastin & Prakash, 2013). In 2010, Pakistan's National Assembly passed the 18th Amendment, granting provinces authority over various social issues, including women's rights legislation. This autonomy often prioritized women's freedom over broader societal concerns. Despite comprehensive legal protection, incidents persisted. The 2016 murder of social media influencer Qandeel Baloch sparked a movement against honor killings, resulting in the Anti-Honor Crime Bill (Sartorio, 2017).

2.2. Pakistani Media Role and Women Empowerment

The competence to make decisions of one's own free will is what is meant by empowerment (Akhter & Naheed, 2014). In other words, people live their lives according to their desires and take charge of their own destiny for the benefit of themselves and their families. In order to empower women in developing countries, it is crucial to improve a variety of social variables, including gender equality, access to quality healthcare, equal work opportunities, and quality education (Raj, 2014). The Media is an influential tool to make people aware of their rights and is a significant pillar of encouragement among the masses (Sharda, 2014). It has a significant role in raising the voice of sidelined segments of society to stimulate awareness among the masses about their general, constitutional and social rights. Media is also a powerful, quick, appropriate and invisible source of educating the masses to alter the behavior of people concerning the issue (Rahman, Junankar, & Mallik, 2009). It plays a multitasked role in society and is not the only source of change, but it is a means of education, information and entertainment for people (Akhter & Naheed, 2014). Moreover, media is an important pillar of public advocacy and a powerful tool for educating people about their rights (Sharda, 2014).

A study conducted by Asif (2013) revealed that social development could be quickly brought about if women had been given space to participate in social development. The media's role is crucial in women's empowerment because the media has a significant effect on every part of the social environment. According to Khan and Moin (2013), women use the internet for a variety of purposes now that they have access to it at home. It has made it possible for women to take part in the important daily activities of the state, such as homework, education, health care, and governance. In their study, Narayana and Ahamad (2016) found that the media has a lot of potential for empowering women. However, there are limitations in how frequently women use these media. Additionally, it made the case for promoting and further investigating the powerful and advantageous role that media can play in empowering women and gender equality. They also discovered how the media may improve women's participation, access, and ability to express themselves and make decisions.

2.3. Patriarchal norm and Pakistani Culture

In patriarchal societies, women are mutually misplaced from political, social, and economic positions of power; women find themselves paid less well for work of equal value; and women are more likely to experience poverty and unequal access to resources, goods, and services. The term 'patriarchy' first gained importance in feminist scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s, when feminists developed the belief of gender roles and gender relations as categories of analysis (Nash, 2020). Gendered behaviors, opportunities, practices, and roles are seen as reflective of social and cultural practices and are not biological 'givens'. The binary categories are seen as key factors in the group of social life, ordered hierarchically with women created as inferior to men, and features viewed as 'feminine' undervalued. Patriarchal values are rooted in the Pakistani society, determining the subordinate position of women. The control over women is trained through existing restrictive codes of behavior, gender isolation and the ideology which associates family honor to female virtue. These traditional practices that aim at maintaining

suppression of women, are defended and sanctified as cultural traditions and given religious approval. Gender-based violence is a serious human rights problem in Pakistan (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 1999; International, 2002). Violent behavior of men against women in Pakistan can best be understood as a part of a patriarchy that conquer women through socio-cultural values and standards of society which define and dictate the place and conduct of women (Hadi, 2019). A number of research studies have been carried out on traditional gender roles, women empowerment and patriarchal norms in Pakistani dramas, however, most focus on the traditional stereotypes. Frequently most screenplays aired on the Pakistani media role show women as victim or in negative roles. While the screenplay *Sinf-e-Aahan* fits in with the broader trends of media representation. The current research is based on the portrayal of empowered Pakistani women and their impacts on the positive image of women non-traditional roles, in keeping with the feminist's discourse on ways in which women's identities are constructed and contested in public discourse. This analysis is critical for understanding the broader implications of media representations on gender equality and women's rights in Pakistan.

2.4. Media Role and Women Empowerment

To empower women in developing countries, it is crucial to improve a variety of social variables, including gender equality, access to quality healthcare, equal work opportunities, and quality education (Raj, 2014). While Asif (2013) points out that social development could be quickly brought about if women are given space to participate in social development. The media plays a vital role in women's empowerment by shaping the social environment. With increased access to the internet, women utilize it for various purposes, including education, healthcare, and governance, thereby enhancing their participation in important daily activities (Khan & Moin, 2013).

2.5. Women Representation in Media

Determining how TV plays classify good and bad woman, Ashfaq and Shafiq (2018) identify that a "good woman" is controlled, wears a dupatta, and is youthful, while the "bad woman" is career-oriented, bold, and dressed in modern attire. Fatima (2019) found that, despite improvements in women's education, honor discourses in drama serials continue to impact and influence women's daily lives as they face challenges in religious standing, silencing victims of harassment and abuse. Pakistani culture has been focused on a patriarchal system with male sovereignty since its independence, which has had a negative effect on how women are represented (Huda & Ali, 2015). Pakistani dramas often illustrate social divisions based on wealth, status, and honour, highlighting the differences that exist within society. This theme explores the challenges faced by individuals from different social backgrounds and the impact of these divisions on their lives (Fatima, 2019; Latif, Malik, & Nadeem, 2021; Shabir et al., 2015). The importance of consistently evaluating gender depictions on television is needed as viewers might subconsciously adopt attitudes from misleading TV portrayals, thus perpetuating stereotypes about gender roles and behaviors (Khan, Ullah, & Ahmad, 2018). The authors note that men, are typically portrayed as independent and authoritative individuals in the public domain. On the other hand, women are often portrayed as submissive individuals who choose to remain in their private spheres, such as homes or schools. Portrayed as dependent on their male relatives, lacking agency even in decision-making processes. The representation of the women in television dramas and films has dominantly remained shallow (Ashfaq & Shafiq, 2018; Asif, 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2017).

While examining portrayal of gender in Pakistani dramas over the past decade in electronic media Siddique (2022) found that men are no longer the sole decision-makers in these plays. Female characters have evolved into fully developed personalities who fundamentally test their abilities. This shift has narrowed the gender gap, promoting the representation of women with authority and the ability to advocate for their rights. Ibrahim et al. (2017) argue that there is a pressing need for television dramas to continue this trend by depicting women in diverse roles and addressing women's issues more comprehensively. In their study examining presence of masculinity and femininity in Pakistani dramas in tele-dramas (Khan, Ullah, & Ahmad, 2018), found that Pakistani TV dramas frequently showed a tendency to reinforce and replicate the patriarchal framework supporting masculinity domination and the subordination of women. The feminist theory is as like the model in the surroundings of motherhood. It challenges us to comprehend the nature of gender discrimination by examining women's social roles and lived experiences (Stanley & Wise, 1983). It highlights the implication of reflexivity, situated perceptions, power differences, and openness to the type of flexibility that is suggested by

methodological self-consciousness (Hordge-Freeman, 2018). It also tries to enhance the security and health of women in all steps of society (Phillips, 2015). Feminist research implies that the origin of harassment is not personal but very much about power. In society, both men and women are victims of harassment (Peters, Jackson, & Rudge, 2008). In most cases, women have to fight against harassment, their belief and standards, and diversity (Shiva, 2016).

As with cinema, television and television also represent women differently. Directors of screenplays work reflecting these concepts are usually men, so their reflection is not a progressive character, but mostly the reflection of their surroundings with their perspective. After 1980, women, who were encouraged to work in social dimensions, began to take part more in television series and movie production. In this direction, women, such as script writers and directors, began to arrange the situations in the television series that made the excitement and narrative of women. Women choose their own heroes and detect themselves with them. For this reason, in new works, women are portrayed with respect to their personalities, nature, ability to think power, and emotions. Women's economic problems, sociocultural, conflicts, and exceptional features of women are discussed. Women with a vigorous character and determined expectations are highly valued. In movies and television series, powerful examples of women, who have apprehended society's imagination, imitate the audience profile that lived in their own period. By the 2000s, women, who economically became equal to men, became the attention of cinema and television. Likewise, *Sinf-e-Aahan* depicts women in a powerful way. This paper will attempt to show 'how' women are represented in Pakistani serial *Sinf-e-Aahan*. To what extent their roles on screen follow to the powerful honour discourses of the society and thus engage with politics of gender in Pakistan. Greater gender parity is a advantage of talking about the issue on all levels before doing something practical about it. Popular culture can become one of the most valuable arenas to kick start new conversations about women's roles in society.

2.6. Research question

The study was guided by the following questions.

1. What feminist elements are used in the screenplay to foster an understanding of women's empowerment?

3. Methodology

The study conducted a qualitative content analysis to develop a comprehensive understanding to examine the linguistic features (linguistic elements) present in the selected play. A specialized corpus was developed to provide the contextual information of language in transcript of the screenplay and to identify linguistic features and linguistic choices intersect with other factors such as class, culture, and religion in shaping representations of women's empowerment. The sample selected was screenplay *Sinf-e-Aahan* used to explore how linguistic choices may vary across different social contexts within Pakistani society and create an understanding of empowerment followed by thematic analysis. Themes establishing the linguistic features identified from transcript of the screenplay shaped the basis of the feminist theory (Mills, 2008). Transcript of the screenplay (62,189 words), a story of women struggles and breaking stereotypes, was released on November 27, 2021. It was produced by Sana Shahnawaz, directed by Nadeem Baig and written by Umera Ahmed. The screenplay transcript was transcribed before being coded for corpus development.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The study utilized Feminist Theory (Mills, 2008) to analyze "women empowerment" in the screenplay's transcript based on predominant themes including cultural manifestations, gender mainstreaming, and language and power. The theory posits that symbolic and cultural concepts of gender within specific sociocultural settings determine what it means to be male or female, integrating social systems with the symbolic responsibilities associated with sexuality. As a movement, feminism promotes gender equality through political, sociological, and intellectual theories addressing gender differences. Drawing from experiences with gender norms and relationships, the theory challenges the use of language that advocates gender inequality and stereotypes, promoting inclusivity by preferring gender-neutral terminology, culturally specific terms, and strives to combat oppressive cultural elements. Linguistic features in dialogues and the themes were identified through the Feminist theory (Mills, 2008) lens and included patriarchal mindsets, stereotypical behavior, cultural gender norms, gender inequality, gender oppression,

gender politics and sexual objectification. The Feminist theory by Hooks substances to curious discriminations and injustices along the intersectional lines of race, aptitude, class, gender and sexuality, and feminists pursue to effect change in areas where these intersectional ties produce power inequity (Okpokwasili, 2023). By providing a linguistic framework directing on equality, challenges in the current power systems, and acceptance of gender identities using vocabulary that is neutral to make language inclusive and accepting of all genders. Both theories underpin the framework used to analyze the language of play.

3.2. Specialized Corpus

A "specialized corpus" was developed for this study focusing on specific genres within a particular context (Upton, 2004) and included texts restricted to one or more subject areas, disciplines, topics. Such a corpus is utilized to study how the specialized language is employed (Almut, 2010). The distinct advantage of using specialized corpora is that it allows a much closer link between the corpus and the context in which the texts were produced. Using the screenplay transcript the corpus was created to identify the contextual information of language in screenplay and identify the linguistic features used primarily to create an understanding of empowerment. The screenplay was transcribed which consisted of sixty-two thousand, one hundred and eighty-nine words (62,189). The corpus size is important and it depends on the type of study (Ramos, 2015). Researchers emphasize that specialized corpora are extremely useful for sketching specific areas of the language phenomena (Petersen et al., 2012).

3.3. Data Analysis

The data analyzed the use of language that supports gender inequality and stereotypes is challenged by feminist theory. Underpinned by the feminist theory (Mills, 2008) intersectional perspectives were analyzed to clarify ways in which language choices contributed to women empowerment in Pakistani plays.

4. Results

To understand the intricate nature of gender inequality, gender politics, power dynamics, and sexuality, a thorough examination of a specialized corpus extracted from the script was conducted. The analysis categorized areas according to feminist theory, focusing on Cultural Manifestations, Gender Mainstreaming, and Language and Power. Within these dimensions, themes were discussed, following the defined parameters of the theoretical framework. The dialogues were intentionally kept brief, as they are translated excerpts.

4.1. Cultural Manifestations (Cultural representations)

The first dimension refers to the visible and tangible expressions of a society's beliefs, customs, traditions, and way of life (Ritzer & Murphy, 2019). These manifestations not only reflect the unique identity and diversity of a culture but also play a substantial role in determining and highlighting its values and norms (Rohmann, 2016). Cultural manifestation that capture a society's history, traditions, and beliefs were further categorized into gender in culture and socio-cultural context using the feminist theory.

4.1.1. Sociocultural context

Social and cultural factors shape individuals' behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values within communities, forming the sociocultural context. In some societies, social hierarchies based on gender, race, or socioeconomic status strongly influence life opportunities, while others prioritize equality and individual rights (Gonzalez-Murphy, 2022; Inglehart & Welzel, 2018). Dialogue from the series underscores how cultural norms shape beliefs and behaviors, such as attitudes towards marriage and hospitality. For instance, a character's reflection on female cadets highlights the transformative power of equal opportunities for personal growth (Episode 21). In another scene, a character challenges the societal expectation of marriage as the ultimate goal for women, advocating for stories that empower daughters to pursue dreams beyond societal norms (Episode 9). This illustrates how cultural norms can limit women's personal growth. Gender plays a pivotal role in culture, defining femininity and masculinity and associated expectations. The series opens with a scene challenging patriarchal assumptions, as a female voice questions the notion that certain roles are reserved for men (Episode 1). Conversely, a character's concern about his daughter's success reflects biases about women's abilities, despite celebrating her achievements (Episode 7). This highlights gender discrimination and the need for equal treatment.

4.2. Gender Mainstreaming

The second dimension of gender mainstreaming refers to the integration of gender perspectives in all policies and programs, with the aim of achieving gender equality and empowering women that goes beyond increasing women's participation facilitating equal opportunities, benefits and outcomes for both women and men. Gender mainstreaming aims to integrate the concerns and experiences of both women and men into all policies and programs, ensuring equal benefits (Organization, 2011). This dimension was categorized into gender equality and gender stereotyping using the feminist theory.

4.2.1. Gender equality

Gender equality ensures fair treatment for individuals regardless of gender. The World Economic Forum defines it as the absence of gender-based discrimination in opportunities, resources, or access to services. Early feminist movements championed gender equality as a fundamental human right (Abendroth, 2014).

During training, cadets are told, *"I have to turn you into iron women from delicate women, understand?"* (Episode 9), indicating a goal of equality by transforming women into strong, capable individuals. The term "delicate women" suggests a need to treat females equally and strengthen them. However, the comment, *"They're not that strict with girls. Boys have to work much harder, they have to fight wars"* (Episode 13), implies perceived gender inequality in training, with boys facing more demanding tasks.

Reinforcing this, a scene in Episode 4 features a character complaining, *"Sir? My nail broke,"* and another character retorts, *"What about your leg? Did it break?"* This exchange trivializes the complaint and underscores that equality means women must perform under the same conditions as men, regardless of minor issues. In Episode 6, a character states, *"I want to convey my special congratulations to you because the first ever girl has come from your area for training here,"* recognizing the girl's achievement and the significance of her participation. The "special congratulations" acknowledge the challenges she and her community faced in breaking gender norms, especially in traditionally male-dominated spaces like Baluchistan. This highlights the effort required to overcome such barriers and the importance of celebrating these milestones.

Cultural gender reflects how a particular society defines femininity and masculinity and the expectations and limitations that come with each gender identity (Yin, 2018). In some cultures, men are expected to be dominant, assertive, and the primary providers for their families, while women are expected to be submissive, nurturing, and focused on household duties (Williams, 2016). These expectations are highlighted in the very first episode where the scene focuses on a pair of hands holding a gun. The identity of the individual is deliberately kept vague and after a few shots are heard a female voice chastises the shooter. The assumption is clear that the gun will be used for killing, to which the response, *"...where is it written that this is supposed to be used by men only? When women hold it, it will become a thing used by women..."* (Episode 1) suggesting that participation of women outside of the family affairs is not the norm. Women using weapons is not a standard in the traditionally conservative rural areas of Pakistan, while the daughter's response seems to be challenging this assumption.

4.2.2. Gender stereotyping

Attributing roles and characteristics based on gender rather than abilities (Rudman & Glick, 2021) is reinforced by social and cultural norms, limiting opportunities and perpetuating inequality (Rudman & Glick, 2021). In Episode 1, a character asks, *"So now you are going to the border and fight?"* This surprise challenges gender stereotypes in combat roles. In Episode 13, the comment, *"The time you spend on makeup and brands, if you had spent even half of that energy on your saluting test, you would have passed it today,"* suggests that stereotypical interests can hinder women's perceived abilities. While In episode 8, the statement, *"Your identity shouldn't be your makeup but your personality,"* emphasizes character over appearance. Furthermore, episode 6's remark, *"I'll make sure to train them just as hard as we train our gentlemen cadets,"* highlights a commitment to overcoming gender challenges in training through professionalism and determination.

In another episode, *"The time you spend on makeup and brands, if you had spent even half of that energy on your saluting test, you would have passed it today"* (Episode 13). The

dialogue suggests that the character believes that she is spending too much time on personal grooming and material possessions. This shows the typical stereotypes which are in our society that females mostly stay at their home only doing makeup and hair styling and the female cadet challenged those typical stereotypes by proving that other than make-up females can do anything if they have goals. Moving further to another episode "I'll make sure to train them just as hard as we train our gentlemen cadets" (episode 6). The dialogue shows a commitment to gender equality and breaking gender stereotypes and a willingness to overcome any challenges associated with training female cadets. It also highlights a sense of professionalism and pride and a determination to produce the best soldiers possible, regardless of gender. In another episode, "... It isn't possible that girls would beat boys. Leader's son would win every competition" (Episode 10,) the dialogue presented above reflects a gender oppression mindset that assumes that girls cannot be equal to boys and that a leader's son would always win over a girl. This kind of thinking is based on gender discrimination, gender stereotypes and assumes that boys are inherently superior to girls.

4.3. Language and Power

The feminist theory's third dimension, language and power, explores how language is wielded to exert influence, control, and dominance. It encompasses language's role in maintaining, reinforcing, or challenging societal power dynamics (Fairclough, 2013). Language shapes social reality and influences individuals' actions, studied across linguistics, sociology, and political science (Van Dijk, 2018). This dimension, categorized under patriarchal mindsets and power relations, underscores language's role as a site of ongoing struggle and negotiation (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008).

4.3.1. Patriarchal mindsets

Patriarchy privileges men while subordinating women and non-binary individuals, perpetuating male dominance through cultural, economic, and political practices (Flood, 2020) (Smith, 2018). Feminist and women's rights awareness in Pakistan has historically been shaped in response to national and global reconfigurations of power including colonization, patriotism, dictatorship, equality and the Global War on Terror (GWOt). In 2014, the madrassa students of the Jamia Hafsa, guided by Lal Masjid in the heart of Islamabad, openly proclaimed their commitment to Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Daaish. 107 Jamia Hafsa women were shown in a video tape urging Pakistani militants to join the ranks of the Islamic state. The traditional problems that women face regarding violence, education, environmental degradation, health, legal discrimination, unfair cultural and normal practices continue, although they are now much more highlighted in the media than before, thanks to the determined efforts of women's groups. Women's groups need to develop a clear vision and logical strategies to deal with these issues as a movement rather than in a dispersed and fragmented way (Saigol, 2016).

An episode highlights patriarchal attitudes with the line, "*Wasn't there any man in the whole neighborhood that made this girl an officer?*" (Episode 5), reflecting the belief that women need men's help to achieve authority. Similarly, another episode raises gender stereotypes with, "*Will a girl do that?*" (Episode 4), underscoring the challenges women face in male-dominated fields. A mother's reluctance to challenge gender norms is evident when she questions, "*You've forgotten the traditions of our village, after too much education*" (Episode 1), highlighting the difficulty of challenging embedded gender roles. In another episode, a character's reluctance to engage in a male activity, "*So, will we have to run like boys now?*" reflects how gender stereotypes can limit behavior, suggesting the need to move beyond these limitations.

"So, will we have to run like boys now?" The character speaking is communicating some unwillingness with the task at hand, indicating that they are not confident in their ability to complete the expected distance. Dialogue indicates that running is seen as a male activity, and that they may feel that they are being asked to do something that is outside of their comfort zone or not traditionally correlated with femininity. This suggests that the character should not feel limited by gender stereotypes or expectations, and that they should feel free to handle the task in whatever way feels most comfortable or efficient for them.

4.3.2. Power relations

Power relations examine how power is exercised and shared within groups, organizations, and societies (Van Dijk, 2018). They incorporate how individuals and groups hold and utilize influence over others, whether through direct domination or boosted forms of coercion (Hearn,

2018). Understanding power relations is necessary for grasping social hierarchies and inequalities, and how they can be challenged (Fairclough, 2013; Foucault, 1977).

In an episode, a mother doubts her daughter's suitability for an academy "you won't get selected because they want something else in their candidates." (Episode 1), implying her aspirations are unrealistic. Another character questions the daughter's consistency, reflecting cultural stereotypes "*You can't do a single thing with consistency for three days, how are you going to follow her?*" (Episode 1). While a female cadet's letter "It's like your life completely changes over their discipline, punctuality, contentment, I've learnt it all from there" highlights the transformative experience within the academy (Episode 15).

In another episode, a mother's comment "If mothers and wives of martyrs start grieving, then no son of this soil would stand on the borders to sacrifice their life for the country." (Episode 23) emphasizes sacrifice and honor associated with service. A character's emphasis on "*No smiling No laughing, no talking among yourselves*" discipline and punctuality underscores obedience while a father praises "*She has bravery of Baloch in her. She will compete with everyone there by looking into their eyes*" (Episode 10) his daughter's bravery and determination.

Further dialogue stresses personal growth and resilience, reflecting "*be a better version of yourself everyday*" (Episode 8) the demands of training and life challenges. These indications shape attitudes and behaviors within Pakistani society, shaping its politics, social norms, and cultural identity.

5. Discussion

The study investigates feminist elements in the screenplay of "Sinf-e-Aahan" to comprehend women's empowerment. It found that the screenplay encourages women to overcome challenges and embrace their power and resilience. Previous literature highlights efforts to improve women's media representation, addressing issues like exchange marriages and honor killings. The play aims to inspire women by depicting their struggles and achievements, reflecting a shift towards more gender-balanced representation in media. Historically, Pakistani dramas have depicted women superficially, but "Sinf-e-Aahan" encounters these norms by depicting empowered women and fostering societal change. By breaking stereotypes and depicting men positively, the drama contributes to gender equality and promotes unity amidst diversity. Positive media representation is crucial for challenging stereotypes and empowering women, and the screenplay offers a fresh perspective that captures audience attention. Regardless of progress, the industry still has room to fully represent the diversity of Pakistani society.

The research explored the feminist elements in the screenplay of "Sinf-e-Aahan" to understand women's empowerment. The findings suggest that women can overcome any obstacle, and the screenplay encourages viewers to embrace their strengths and resilience. Previous literature indicates efforts to progress women's empowerment during Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's tenure, with dramas addressing issues like exchange marriages, honor killings, child labor, and child marriage (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019). The representation of women in television dramas and films has historically been superficial, focusing more on their appearance than their multifaceted personalities (Ashfaq & Shafiq, 2018; Asif, 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2017). Typically represented as homemakers with minimum involvement in essential domestic matters, these portrayals contrast sharply with the concept of women's empowerment (Asif, 2013). The screenplay aims to inspire women by depicting their struggles and achievements, celebrating their strength and determination. This approach challenges existing norms and promotes a more comprehensive environment for women. A 2017 UNDP study found that viewers' preferences are shifting towards gender-balanced interpretation of women, particularly regarding essential issues they face (Niaz, 2019). "Sinf-e-Aahan" reflects this shift, providing an important step towards more empowering narratives for women.

The results exhibit that the screenplay challenges damaging gender stereotypes by presenting characters who challenge conventional norms and come from distinct backgrounds. Narayana and Ahmad (2016) also highlight media's significant ability to empower women and improve gender equality. The survey results indicated that the female characters serve as powerful symbols of resilience against unfair gender norms. Their actions challenge traditional

roles and assert their independence. Unlike other television dramas, "Sinf-e-Aahan" depicts women as powerful and capable, challenging patriarchal norms that inhibit women in Pakistani society. While television screenplays are influential, societal change requires comprehensive efforts involving education, legislation, and cultural shifts. Nevertheless, the portrayal of empowered women in popular media can play an essential role in challenging patriarchal norms and promoting gender equality. The female characters are given significant and meaningful roles, not merely supporting ones. Positive representation of female characters can challenge gender stereotypes, provide nuanced understandings of women's experiences, and inspire female viewers by depicting strong, relatable role models. Moreover, it can contribute to a more comprehensive and equitable society by fostering empathy and understanding.

With technology revolutionizing the multimedia industry, Pakistani dramas show cultural norms and societal issues. Concerns have been raised about the influence of foreign cultural elements, suggesting a requirement to prioritize Pakistani culture. "Sinf-e-Aahan" explores appropriate social and cultural issues, emphasizing Pakistani unity amidst diversity. Pakistani dramas often focus on women, depicting their hardships and societal constraints (Ashfaq & Shafiq, 2018; Kothari, 2019; Roy, 2016). "Sinf-e-Aahan" breaks traditional gender roles, depicting men in supportive roles and addressing issues like gender inequality and education. Positive media representation can challenge stereotypes and empower women (Iftikhar & Islam, 2017). "Sinf-e-Aahan" challenges stereotypes, portraying women as strong and multifaceted, contributing to a more inclusive society. The Pakistani entertainment industry is diverse, offering opportunities for diverse storytelling (Khan & Naqvi, 2020). The media holds significant power in shaping societal perceptions of women's identities. The portrayal of women in TV dramas and commercials plays a fundamental role in influencing the audience's attitudes and values regarding women and their roles (Iftikhar & Islam, 2017). It suggests that through positive media representation, women can attain prominent roles and garner admiration, challenging prevailing stereotypes in underdeveloped societies. For many years, the media has been mostly dominated by male perspectives and mindsets. The male leading mind-sets have ruled over the media for many years. Hence, the present study shows that Sinf-e-Aahan is a positive initiative aimed at breaking stereotypes that portray women as victims. Promoting diverse stories that challenge stereotypes is an important step towards promoting gender equality and encouraging a balanced and precise portrayal of women in the society. It helps break down barriers, promotes compassion and understanding, and encourages a more nuanced and credible understanding of women's experiences and contributions. The screenplay of "Sinf-e-Aahan" stands out for its unique approach to screenwriting in the region, diverging from typical structures. Despite originally showcasing traditional gender roles, it successfully challenges stereotypes. This departure from the norm offers a fresh perspective on storytelling, exploring different accounts, character development, and thematic elements, captivating audiences and critics alike, approving its innovative approach.

6. Conclusion

This study explores feminist understandings into women's empowerment within the screenplay transcript of "Sinf-e-Aahan." The findings show that by challenging traditional gender roles and breaking generational stereotypes, the play significantly promotes gender equality and equity. It alters mindsets and dismantles barriers that limit women's empowerment. Empowering women benefits society, leading to social progress, economic growth, and inclusivity. The work highlights non-traditional roles for women, aiming to create stories that empower and inspire, showcasing various capabilities and potential beyond societal expectations. The study found that the language used in revealing empowered women forms positive perceptions among viewers. Notably, male viewers of "Sinf-e-Aahan" responded positively to supportive male characters, reflecting diverse male experiences and challenging the notion that men must always be obstacles to women's dreams. The screenplay's influence on culture is significant, increasing gender equality by opening roles and opportunities for women in traditionally male-dominated domains. It recognizes women's contributions to shaping societal narratives and showcases strong female characters who challenge conventional gender norms to emphasize their independence. Portraying intelligent, determined women navigating challenges with courage and strength breaks away from stereotypical portrayals, showcasing their potential and capabilities. This storytelling can contribute to a more progressive and moderate society by challenging societal norms and encouraging viewers to embrace women's agency and independence. The study was limited to one screenplay transcript. Including other screenplays could yield different

results. Future research should include a comparative analysis of earlier and recent screenplays, such as "Sinf-e-Aahan," to evaluate modern portrayals' impact on promoting gender equality.

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