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EXAMINING THE REPRESENTATION AND RESISTANCE OF FEMINISM IN PAKISTANI TELEVISION DRAMAS

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of feminism in Pakistani media, with particular focus on how it is both resisted and accepted in television dramas. Historically, Pakistani media has reinforced traditional gender roles, frequently portraying women as confined to household responsibilities, subjected to domestic violence, and vulnerable to sexual harassment, while emphasizing male dominance as the central source of authority within the family. Dramas such as *Cheekh*, *Udaari*, *Pinjra*, and *Ruswai* have reflected these themes, depicting women primarily as passive figures lacking awareness of their rights. However, recent years have witnessed a gradual shift, with approximately 40 percent of contemporary media content highlighting women's independence and agency. Despite this progress, societal attitudes remain largely conservative and resistant to change. This study highlights how media representations portray both resistance to and acceptance of women's rights within a patriarchal society, illustrating the struggles of women against societal pressures and familial constraints, as well as the varying degrees of support or opposition they encounter.

Keywords: *Feminism, Feminist Media Theory, Female Violence, Male Dominance, Pakistani Dramas, Patriarchal Society, Women's Rights*

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1.Introduction

This research paper offers a study of a deeply rooted problem and also an encouraging concept of how female figures are endorsed and degraded in a specifically male-dominated patriarchal system. We shall examine numerous Pakistani TV Dramas which provide us with an opportunity to critically analyze the gender norms, female oppression, lack of justice and resistance to feminism. Not only in our vicinity, but also in television dramas, females are normally depicted as submissive and obedient characters who are obliged to follow the traditional norms of patriarchal society. In this research paper, we shall go through both the positive and negative conditions of feminine life depicted through Pakistani Dramas, showcasing the representation and resistance of feminism. It is very well said that what we show on our television dramas and media is a reflection of our society. If our TV dramas are portraying female characters as being controlled either by males or social structures, it means this is how females are being treated in our vicinity. Also, media and TV serials can contribute positively to the empowerment of females, because the media has both a conscious and an unconscious role in our lives. This study will help in the exploration of the role of Pakistani Media and Television Dramas in the promotion and degradation of feminism. This research paper will offer you an in-depth insight into the patriarchal structures of our modern and well-known literary era, where we provide you with an amazing opportunity to learn about the feminist approach of modern literature by critically analyzing diverse Pakistani dramas. Here, we will analyze Pakistani TV dramas that manifest female autonomy, child abuse, struggle for justice in a male-dominated society, domestic abuse, and female choice of forgiveness rather than seeking justice even after bearing a massive level of violence. Both electronic and print media play crucial roles in this regard, but social media has emerged as an especially powerful force in shaping youth behavior, as it provides an immediate platform where audiences instantly respond to issues such as patriarchal norms, female representation, and broader social concerns. (Kashif, Nadeem, & Khan, 2025)

1.1. Research Questions

1. Do Pakistani Television Dramas contribute to the promotion and resistance of feminism?
2. How the society play its role in the resistance to female independence?
3. To what extent are females satisfied with their limited or submissive role in society?
4. Do males always interfere negatively in females' liberty and equal rights?

2. Literature Review

The media is a powerful platform for showcasing a wide range of things. Some people argue that all the content in the media is fictional, but indirectly, it impacts people's lives. In his article on narrative control, Khan (2023) argued that popular emotion is augmented by media outlets. Consumers adapt things in their daily life based on what they see in the media and relate it to real life. In Pakistani media, feminism is shown in many different roles. In many dramas, they show that feminism is promoted, and on the other side, they show how males resist it in a patriarchal society. In this, many Pakistani media channels like ARY Digital, HUM TV, and GEO Entertainment play their role to send information to people and influence them through dramas (Hashmi, 2022, p. 27).

Men are often portrayed as dominant characters, as if they hold sway over the household and family. Still, on the other hand, Women are victims of violence, like physical and mental torture, child marriages, sexual harassment, and stoning and acid burn, as identified commonly in many areas of the country (Niaz, 2003).

Media shows that the economic power of males is more than that of females, which is why males resist feminism due to the fear of losing their status, which makes them dominant. Stereotypes of submissiveness and oppression in relation to representation of women persist till date. (Khan, Khan, & Zargar, 2023) If a woman wants to escape from this prison, they doesn't because they also fears losing their pride, dignity, and is also afraid to break the silly conservative cultural rules of society. Media also shows us the battle on religion that in Islam, females only belong to the household and are not allowed to work outside the home. In many cases, the media shows us that if a man wants to break all the limits and support his wife to work outside and give her freedom, then society and his family start calling him a "Zan Mureed".

In Pakistani dramas, this also portrays good women (who wear a dupatta and do not go outside the house) and bad women (who wear western and independent); on the other hand, males are just playing the role of dominance. Not only males but also their family and society do not allow them to work because, in their opinion, females, when independent they do not have a good character and they never tolerate that they are standing with their son/brother and beating him in their profession (Huda & Ali, 2015, p. 15).

Many scholars study feminism because it's a very important topic not only for our society but also for the nation. So all scholars show that media, especially Pakistani TV dramas, is one of the best ways to influence people and change their minds about feminism.

Studies show that from time to time, there has been an evolution in Pakistani media, and they have started to show women as independent women. They start to understand how the media impacts Pakistani society, especially through Pakistani TV dramas. They start to show that study is also important for women; they have a right to get an education like men, not only for the sake of a job but also to manage their house, live a great life, educate their children, and teach them good manners.

In TV dramas, they also displayed women's rights of marriage, work, household obligations, childbirth, sex, and not allowed violence.

Over time, feminism stands for women's rights. This feminist theory portrays how gender role identities and power dynamics in Pakistani TV dramas reflect the infiltration of Western cultural values (Badar, Noureen, & Ahmad, 2023). They also portray how males adapted to women's independence and understand they all have the right to live their lives on their own. Pakistani media also projects women's role in science, technology, and production, highlighting the close gender gap because women are also very talented and work in every aspect of life (Butt, Abbas, Ashiq, & Sarfaraz, 2021, p. 604).

This research aims to examine how Pakistani media, especially TV dramas, portray feminism and how it is adapted or resisted by males. How Pakistani TV dramas show that females are weak and have no status, and men play a dominant role. On the other hand, how the media portrays women as strong and having a status, and how men support them in every aspect of life, no matter what, maybe it is independence, household obligations, childbirth, and many more.

3.1. Theoretical Framework:

This research paper uses Feminist Media Theory, which plays a remarkable role in offering an exclusive insight into the role media or Pakistani TV Dramas play in the reinforcement or resistance of Feminism. This theory highlights how media is limited not only to the positive representation of females but also to the negative portrayal of female figures.

For instance, in some Pakistani dramas like “Gul-e-Rana," the protagonist, Gul-e-Rana, was entrapped in a forced marriage where she was struggling for her autonomy and freedom. The whole drama manifests how females who get married under societal pressure struggle throughout their entire lives. Her husband, Adeel, the antagonist, was a self-centered person who tried to take control over his wife, following the cultural and societal norms of a patriarchal society. Due to family pressure and a lot of societal expectations placed upon her, Gul-e-Rana was enabled to act decisively and was forced to bear the domestic violence inflicted by her husband, Adeel. At the end, Adeel was found guilty of

his actions, and Gul-e-Rana, instead of protesting candidly, chose to forgive Adeel. She just lived her life on her terms afterwards, and started teaching children at school. This drama provides a message about how media or Pakistani TV Dramas can contribute directly to the resistance of feminism, promoting male authority over females, and the norms of patriarchal society.

This research signifies the representation of feminism and how females are being allowed to take an active part in education, business, social work and more through the depiction of females in Pakistani TV Dramas. Pakistani TV Dramas are based on reality. Most dramas show what is happening in our vicinity. The media is a reflection of society.

For example, "Udaari," a Pakistani drama, is a vital component of promoting feminism through media. This drama shows the narrative of child abuse in which a 9 or 10-year-old girl, named Zaibo, was sexually abused by her stepfather, Imtiaz, whom her mother, Sajjo, married after her biological father's death because of societal pressure and Imtiaz's love confession to her. On the other hand, the main female lead, Meera, who was a "merassi or domni", became a popular singer after her debut with a band. Later on, Meera, with the help of her male friend Harsh, who was a prominent lawyer working in an international firm, fought against Imtiaz and got justice for Zaibo. The drama provides a deep message about the power of women, how women could achieve anything if they persist. This narrative contributes actively to the promotion and representation of feminism through the media.

Thus, to put it in a nutshell, we can say that Feminist Media Theory helps us analyze both the passive and active part media plays in the representation and resistance of feminism through different dramas and narratives.

3. Methodology

This section includes all data information on how it is collected through media sources like many websites, articles, Pakistani channels like GEO Entertainment, HUMTV, ARY Digital, etc. My research partner and I were collecting data by analyzing many dramas, reading many articles, and observing people's opinions. A qualitative method was employed to collect data on the representation of feminism in the media.

3.1. Research Design

This study is conducted on a qualitative content analysis. This research examines how media, especially TV dramas, portray women's acceptance or resistance from men in a patriarchal society. This research highlights how the media shows not only the positive but also the negative side of our society. This research was basically designed on a case study of feminist media theory.

3.2. Sample Collection

This research data was collected through many sources, like websites, dramas of many channels like ARY Digital, HUM TV, GEO Entertainment. For drama analysis, a sample was collected from these dramas: "Gul-e-Rana", "Cheekh", "Udaari", "Ruswai", "Dobara", "Akhir Kab Tak", "Kaisi Teri Khudgarzi", and "Pinjra". These sources are a part of the media, and the media have great experience over many years. This research collects data and analyzes almost 8 dramas in which feminism is shown through the media. These dramas show how patriarchal society is against feminism, or some support it. And how women are not trying to get their rights and fight against violence.

3.3. Research Setting

This research employs a qualitative method. This search was conducted through various social media platforms, including blogs, websites, and TV shows, where data is collected through characters and through people's reactions, and relates it to real life. The study was conducted at home during the July 2025 semester break, during working hours.

3.4. Data Collection Tools

The case study data was collected through many digital platforms where characters are analysed through plays, dramas, websites, research papers, and also observed offline attitudes towards feminism, how they accept it or resist it, and the reasons behind it. And also observed many dramas like "Gul-e-Rana", "Udaari", "Cheekh", "Ruswai", and many more that portray women's rights, social and family pressure on them, and their fight against violence. This study also analyzes how the media impacts people's minds because 80% of Pakistani dramas are reality-based stories. People watch and compare it with their daily life and act like characters.

3.5. Tool Development and Adaptation

This data was collected by researchers from many platforms, like analyzing 15 to 20 articles, watching Pakistani dramas to analyze the characters, and observing people's opinions towards women's independence in a patriarchal society. After much research and observation, researchers finalize it and ensure that their data is clear, relevant, and effective.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the research validity, the data collection tools were evaluated by two professors of the University of Okara who are not a part of this research. And for reliability, the data was examined by a professor who is also not a part of this research. And after they

reviewed the data, they made changes on the basis of corrections and ensured that all the data was clear and correct.

3.7. Data Collection Procedure

Firstly, all students discuss with a university professor about research work, and then the professor guides us. Then the professor makes a research society and then makes groups of students for research work. Then, my partner and I were assigned a specific research project within a limited time duration. And then we do our job, collect data, and then submit it on time. During this research, we collect data from many sources and read many articles, and also make notes about our data collection. And after the submission of our work, the professor checks it, and one more professor checks it to ensure that the data is correct and clear, and then if any mistakes are found, the professor guides us, and then the students correct them.

3.8. Ethical Consideration

This research is conducted through a qualitative method. While collecting data through social media platforms, all the research participants give their opinions on the research topic. No one is pressured to change his/her opinion, and verbal consent is taken. And also instructed about their freedom, whenever they want to change their opinion, they can; if they want to leave, they can.

4. Data Analysis

Data was collected after many efforts, like watching many Pakistani TV dramas (like Gul-e-Rana, Cheekh, Ruswai, Dobara, Akhir Kab Tak, and many more) and reading 15 to 20 articles related to the topic.

All the data was written down after analyzing all dramas, articles, blogs, etc., and then making a pattern of research through these analyses. Then the data is examined continuously to ensure the information is clear, correct, and properly delivered. And cut all the information that seems to be unimportant and repeated. And the main focus is on the representation of feminism through the media, especially Pakistani dramas.

4.1. Limitations

The media shows 70% male authority and a rejection of feminism. Females do not know their rights, and if they do, then they can't fight against males because of societal and family pressure, and they are told to forgive them.

4.2. Summary Line

This method was very useful for collecting data about the representation of feminism in a patriarchal society through the media.

5. Results/Findings

The data collected using qualitative content analysis for exploration of how feminism is resisted or supported in numerous Pakistani TV dramas reflects that women are depicted as both independent and submissive based on the situation, setting, and environment in which they are living. It is found that different people have different perceptions about feminism after exploring the reviews of multiple people whose suggestions have been taken regarding their view on how female agency and freedom are neglected and motivated in Pakistani TV serials. Some people provided positive reviews about the support of female independence, while others provided a negative remark, saying that most of the Pakistani TV serials resist feminism and support male authority and ownership. About asking people how these Pakistani dramas, such as "Cheekh," "Udaari," "Akhir Kab Tak," "Kaisi Teri Khudgarzi," "Pinjra," "Gul-e-Rana," "Ruswai," and "Dubara," play their role in the promotion or degradation of female leads or agency in our vicinity. Actually, Pakistani TV dramas are mostly reality-based. What is shown in the media is mostly the depiction of our own society. So, if TV dramas portray females struggling for their autonomy and freedom in a male-dominated patriarchal society, it is what is actually happening in our surroundings. The results are based on the data collected through qualitative content analysis and after receiving views of 15 to 20 people who are acquainted with any of these Pakistani dramas so that they may provide their genuine review based on what they had really seen or felt about the drama's main theme. Different articles available on multiple sites have also been explored in order to get authentic and validated information. It is true that somehow women are facing resistance regarding their freedom, independence, and their search for autonomy, but it is also a fact that, on the other hand, they are also supported and encouraged by the males.

6. Discussion

The results of the data collected through qualitative content analysis, after receiving reviews and suggestions from people and along with examining numerous articles available on different websites, reveal that although Pakistani TV dramas mostly show the female lead struggling for their agency and freedom against the dominant male authority, there are also those serials that represent females as independent and decisive figures who have authority and work fearlessly. Though if we go back in time around the start of the 21st century, we would realize that at that time most of the Pakistani dramas reflect women as either submissive and obedient to the family or cultural norms of patriarchal society or victims of violence inflicted upon them by males. But today, there are also such dramas like "Udaari", "Dubara," "Cheekh," "Ruswai," "Akhir Kab Tak," and "Pinjra," which support feminism rather than just accepting the norms portrayed by the patriarchal structures.

For instance, in the "Udaari" drama, the female lead is represented as independent and optimistic despite being threatened and intimidated by the specified character, who fights for their legal and moral rights and eventually succeeds by the end of the serial.

So, we get to know that there are both positive and negative aspects of media; if, on one hand, Pakistani TV dramas are playing positively in the promotion and representation of feminism, then, on the other hand, they are contributing negatively in producing resistance to the way of feminism.No doubt, media has a direct influence on our minds, so we should select wisely which type of dramas we must watch so that they might help in our own personal development andhelp in the improvement of society.

7. Conclusion

This research primarily aimed to highlight the two sides of the media, where one side portrays women's independence as restricted, while the other side accepts women's independence. Pakistani media shows women are restricted from going out and wearing a dupatta, and also shows that some men support their housewives to go out and work. Still, they also face societal and family pressure to ensure that they don't support women's independence. They want to show male dominance, and they think that men are the only rulers of their house. Hence, they do things like media shows that women face domestic violence, acid burning, are not given equal rights, are in a birth machine, sexual harassment, only do house chores, do not go outside the house, and obey their husbands no matter what, even if they are wrong, etc. And this study also shows that 70% of media is showing those stories that are reality-based, that happen in our society, and women face all this stuff. There is always a favorable side to every unfavorable side. As time passes, the media shows women working in every field of life, like the industrial-level economic system in technology and medicine, etc. They are handling everything, like going out to do a job, taking care of their children, helping their family clean their homes, and cooking. In simple words, they are multitaskers.

7.1. Recommendations

Although media plays a significant role in the promotion and resistance of feminism through Pakistani TV serials, it is also crucial to note that some of the Pakistani Urdu dramas promote feminism strongly, which is a good thing, while others vigorously condemn and criticize feminist ideas, giving women limited authority in a patriarchal system.

It is found that although Pakistani media and society have progressed much in the contemporary industry, their works regarding feminism are not as well-suited and open-minded as they should be. Our media needs to focus mainly on the promotion of

independent and female autonomy, which can be well-portrayed through framing free and decisive women in TV dramas.

This research focuses on both the promotion and negligence faced by feminism in Pakistani TV serials, but it limits the reasons why most Pakistani Urdu dramas don't support feminism.

Future researchers need to focus more on the gender discourse, allowing them to dig more deeply into why women are marginalized in their society.

Media should pay keen attention to the positive depiction of females in dramas because, according to the "Hypodermic Needle Theory," media has a direct influence on the perception of its audience.

With the application of all these recommendations, Pakistani TV dramas and writers can play a remarkable role in the development of an equitable society and can also contribute positively to the empowerment of females in Pakistani society.

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