



KABULI PULAO: PAKISTANI TELEVISION DRAMA, PATRIARCHAL BARGAIN AND DECOLONIAL LOVE

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Abstract

In Pakistan, the patriarchal bargain is expressed in various ways due to the deeply rooted societal norms and structures that prioritize male authority and control. Women often navigate this system by making strategic choices to secure their safety, financial stability, or social acceptance within these constraints. Pakistani television dramas often reflect and sometimes challenge societal norms, including those related to gender roles and the patriarchal structure. The portrayal of the patriarchal bargain in these dramas often mirrors real-life situations where characters, especially women, navigate within the confines of societal expectations. In many dramas, female characters might be depicted making patriarchal bargains to ensure their safety, family honour, or stability. In this paper, I argue that a subaltern woman who bargains with the patriarchy can transform into someone agentic by using the theoretical framework including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of subaltern, Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of Patriarchal bargain and Frantz Fanon's decolonial love. For this purpose, I use a Pakistani Urdu drama serial Kabuli Pulao written by Zafar Mairaj. It is used as a case to depict how a subaltern character, Barbeena transforms her relationship from a patriarchal bargain to the expression of decolonial love.

Keywords: *Agentic, Decolonial Love, Pakistani Television Drama, Patriarchal Bargain, Subaltern.*

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The term "patriarchal bargain" refers to the negotiation that some individuals, particularly women, make within a patriarchal society to gain personal advantages or protection by conforming to or reinforcing existing gender norms and power structures. This term was coined by Deniz Kandiyoti in her essay *Bargaining with Patriarchy* (1988). Patriarchal bargain involves accepting and sometimes perpetuating certain aspects of the patriarchal system in exchange for limited benefits or safety within that system. For example, a woman might adhere to traditional gender roles, accept limitations on her autonomy, or downplay her capabilities in order to fit into societal expectations and gain acceptance or protection. This can be a strategic choice made in response to the limitations and biases imposed by a patriarchal society, but it often reinforces and perpetuates the very system that restricts opportunities and equality. It is a complex and sometimes controversial concept, as it involves navigating personal agency within systems of oppression and can vary greatly depending on individual circumstances and cultural contexts. For instance, women might conform to traditional gender roles and expectations, such as prioritizing marriage and family duties over personal aspirations or careers. This choice could be seen as a way to ensure security and acceptance within a society where a woman's worth is often tied to her role within the family. Furthermore, in some cases, women might accept or tolerate restrictive practices, such as limited mobility or restrictions on education, as a means of avoiding conflict or violence within their communities. These decisions are often a result of the limited options available due to societal norms and systemic inequalities.

There are ongoing efforts by activists, organizations, and individuals in Pakistan to challenge and change patriarchal norms. Many women are advocating for greater equality, access to education, economic opportunities, and legal rights, seeking to redefine societal expectations and create more equitable systems that do not require such bargains. Numerous Pakistani television dramas have addressed women's rights issues. In many dramas, female characters have been depicted making patriarchal bargains to ensure their safety, family honour, or stability. This could involve sacrificing personal aspirations, compromising on career goals, or accepting unequal treatment in relationships to maintain social harmony or gain acceptance. However, there is a shift in recent Pakistani dramas where some narratives highlight women breaking free from traditional roles. They depict women pursuing education, careers, and independence, often facing resistance but ultimately asserting their agency. *Jaisay Aapki Marzi* (As you wish) (2023), portrays the story of Alizeh, a smart, self-made and independent young woman who speaks about women empowerment at TED talk. She is shocked when she discovers that she has married into a family of abusive clinical narcissists. In order to save her marriage, she leaves her job and bears mental torture of her husband and sister-in-law. After getting to know about her husband's ex-wife who got psychological problems due to her marriage, Alizeh decides to move on from her marriage. Another drama, *Mujhay Qabool Nahin* (I do not accept) (2023) is a story about two sisters, Mashaal and Maira, who find themselves bound by their father's decision to marry their cousins, Arsalan and

Salman. Mahira was completely unhappy with the decision her father had taken in the past but she sacrifices just to save Mashaal's relationship with Arsalan. After realizing she cannot comprise more, she decides to get khula (in Islamic law, a form of divorce initiated by the wife).

Pakistani dramas generally portray social issues, family relationships, family conflicts, love, marriage, generational differences and cultural values. In contrast, *Kabuli Pulao* (2023), story of a middle-aged Pakistani man who marries a young Afghan woman, focuses on cross-cultural relationships and instead of the usual family conflicts or love triangles; it shows the experiences of refugees. It explores themes of migration, sacrifice, identity and cultural differences. It portrays human relationships in a very realistic and sensitive way and this makes the drama to stand out from typical Pakistani dramas.

1.1. Research Objectives

1. To look at the factors that contribute in Barbeena's portrayal as a subaltern.
2. To look at the ways in which transformation of Barbeena's relationship from a patriarchal bargain to decolonial love takes place.

1.2. Research questions

1. What are the elements that contribute in Barbeena's depiction as a subaltern?
2. What are the ways which portrays transformation of Barbeena's relationship from a patriarchal love to decolonial love?

2. Analysis

2.1. Kabuli Pulao

For this research, I have chosen a Pakistani drama serial *Kabuli Pulao* (2023) written by Zafar Mairaj, directed by Kashif Nisar and produced by Q&K Productions Multiverse Entertainment. The narrative of *Kabuli Pulao* revolves around Haji Mushtaq, a principled man residing in Lahore, and Barbeena, a young Afghan woman in distress. Haji Mushtaq, a 51-year-old unmarried Punjabi Muslim, maintains a simple lifestyle until his encounter with Barbeena. The drama serial delves into a range of themes like love, sacrifice, cultural disparities, and the significance of human bonds. It also highlights the obstacles individuals encounter when attempting to form connections and comprehend one another across diverse cultural backgrounds. The title of the drama is significant as it starts with the making of *Kabuli Pulao* and Haji Mushtaq asking Abdullah that why this dish is called so and Abdullah replying that it was a Shahi Pakwan which means it was only made for kings in past. The drama ends with a plate of *Kabuli Pulao* and then the process of making *Kabuli Pulao*. I use this drama as a case study to look at the factors that contribute in Barbeena's portrayal as a subaltern and to look at the ways in which transformation of Barbeena's relationship from a patriarchal bargain to decolonial love takes place. Though the drama chosen for the study is a Pakistani drama but it relates to every society where hold of patriarchy is too much that women have to bargain with it. My rationale for selecting this particular drama is based on the claim that it is rare that any Pakistani drama depicts decolonial love.

2.2. Barbeena, a subaltern

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a postcolonial theorist, introduces the term "subaltern" in a more specific context within her influential essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice* (1985). She discusses how certain groups, especially within postcolonial societies, are silenced or rendered voiceless by dominant power structures. Spivak focuses on the limitations and complexities of representation for these marginalized groups, particularly women, in colonial and postcolonial discourse. Her work questions whether these subaltern voices can be truly heard within existing power structures or if their speech and experiences are ultimately suppressed or appropriated by those in power. In the article *Burning with Shame: Desire and South Asian Patriarchy, from Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to Deepa Mehta's "Fire" (2002)*, Rahul Gairola discusses subaltern through the perspective of widow-burning (Sati) in Hinduism. She states that the subordination of women towards her breath and life is ruled by the patriarchy. If a woman's husband dies, in order to preserve his honour, she should also desire death. In this context, that woman is a 'victim' as her conscious desire would be not to die. Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* (1996) cuts against the patriarchal codes by re-appropriating them. The concept of 'Sati' explained by Spivak is a motif in this film which depicts the subaltern woman's victory over patriarchy. The drama serial *Kabuli Pulao* (2023) introduces Barbeena as a subaltern who is a female, Afghan refugee and also a widow. Her husband, Baran died in a bomb blast in Afghanistan. Barbeena migrated from Afghanistan to Pakistan along with her brothers Gulrez, Abdullah and other family members. As Abdullah introduces himself in the mosque:

میرا سمنعبداللہ ہے۔ مینشہر قندوز، افغانس۔ تنسے اپنے خاندان کے ساتھ رہا۔
جینکر آہوں۔

"Mera naam Abdullah hai. Mai shehar Kandos Afghanistan se apne khandan ke sath Mardan mai mahajir ban ke aya hoon".

"My name is Abdullah. I belong to the city of Kandos of Afghanistan and I have migrated to Mardan along with my family." (Episode 1)

In the article, *The subaltern as subaltern citizen* (2006) Gyanendra Pandey states that the representation of subaltern as subaltern citizen is not about the question of citizenship rather it is about historical agency, self-constructing as well as belonging in a society. Pandey uses the term "them" for the subalterns and "us" for citizens- the people having a history. According to Edward Said, the Other is everything that lies outside of the self. The Self is the familiar, "us", and the Other is strange, "them" (Said 1978). In Pakistan, the status of Afghan refugees is of "Other". Since 1978, Afghanistan has endured continuous conflicts comprising civil wars, insurgency, and terrorism. The Afghan Mujahedeen intensified their armed opposition following the Soviet intervention in 1979, resulting in a significant displacement of Afghan civilians. Pakistan was predominantly favored by ethnic Pashtuns, while ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras predominantly migrated to Iran (Schmeidl 2009). The United Nations approximates that around 3.7 million Afghan nationals are currently living in Pakistan, although Pakistani authorities suggest the number might be as high as 4.4 million. Since the

1980s, Pakistan has been home to the most extended ongoing displacement situation globally and the world's second-largest refugee population. Over the past 40 years, while Afghan refugees remained in Pakistan, significant global and regional political changes occurred, adversely affecting their lives. This led to deteriorating support systems in security, economy, education, and health for the refugees, resulting in socio-economic hardships. Lack of proper assistance compelled refugees in camps to self-manage essential services like food, education, health, and water supply. Following 9/11, there has been observed negligence from UNHCR, the Pakistani government, and the Afghan government towards these refugees. Since 2014, Afghan refugees faced worsening conditions and were pressured by the Pakistani government to return to Afghanistan. This was prompted by a severe terror attack on a Peshawar school, orchestrated by militants linked to TTP and some Afghan militants, not refugees. Despite this, Afghan refugees have been inaccurately viewed as a security threat by numerous Pakistanis, often blamed for ongoing terrorist attacks, bombings, and unrest (Khan 2022). In *Kabuli Pulao*, Barbeena was also accused of being a spy by Haji Mushtaq's family members and they wanted her to go back to Mardan. Gyanendra Pandey also discusses the situation of doubly subalternised such as the tribal peasant woman is different because she is tribal and again different as she is a woman. (Pandey 2006). Considering the term 'doubly subalternised' presented by Pandey, Barbeena in *Kabuli Pulao* is also doubly subalternised who is a female Afghan refugee and also a widow. Barbeena along with her remaining family settles in Mardan, Pakistan. Barbeena had come from a country which was not economically well. She tells Ayesha and Rimsha that in Afghanistan where she resided there would only be one wedding in a day as there was only one bridal dress and brides used to give that dress to the girl who is going to wed the next day. The economic condition of Barbeena and her family was also not well in Pakistan, they could not afford surgery of Gulrez (brother of Barbeena). As the family has no relatives or friends in Mardan, Abdullah announces in the mosque that he wants someone to marry his sister:

مینا یفر: سی، مسکینہ مسافر ہوں، میرا نہ کوئی قوم ہے، نہ قبیلہ، نہ کوئی دوسا اور نہ کوئی نشانہ اس لیے عزت یا محترم! آپ سے درخواست کرتی ہوں اور امید ہے کہ میرا سہمہ دار کو عزت کے ساتھ پورا کرے مینہد سفمانے۔

“Mai aik ghareeb miskeen musafir hoon, mera na koi qoum hy na qabeela, na koi dost na koi shanasa, islye azizan e muhtram ap sab se darkhusat karta hoon or umeed karta hoon ke koi banda e khuda agay barh kar hamari is zimewari ko izat se pura karne main madad farmye”.

“I am a poor traveler I do not belong to any nation or tribe neither do I have any friend nor any acquaintance. That is why my dear people I make a request to you all and I hope that a person of Allah will come and help me fulfill this responsibility of mine respectfully”. (Episode 1)

Such circumstances depict how difficult it is for the subalterns to survive. Riaz Wajid in *A Subaltern has Spoken?: Self-(Re) Orientalism in Atiq Rahimi's The Patience Stone* (2016) states that Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* (2016) gives voice to the people and culture of

Afghanistan. The protagonist in the novel, who is a woman, is a doubly marginalized Afghan woman. He is the first writer who has given voice to an Afghan woman otherwise they are depicted as marginalized, beaten, silenced or objectified. Rahimi has given voice to a subaltern and that subaltern has spoken at last (Wajid 2016). In the same way as Rahimi's protagonist is a doubly marginalized Afghan woman, the writer of *Kabuli Pulao* (Zafar Mairaj)'s female protagonist (Barbeena) is also a doubly marginalized Afghan woman and the drama depicts her journey from being a subaltern towards becoming agentic.

2.3. Patriarchal Bargain

Deniz Kandiyoti, in her essay *Bargaining with Patriarchy* (1988), explores how women in various societies negotiate and navigate their positions within patriarchal systems to gain some agency and relative autonomy. Kandiyoti argues that women often make strategic choices within the confines of patriarchal structures, using their limited agency to secure certain privileges or protections, even if it means reinforcing or perpetuating patriarchal norms. This concept sheds light on the ways women, within different cultural contexts, make calculated decisions to navigate oppressive systems to achieve personal goals or mitigate risks. For example, in the article *Marriage migration, patriarchal bargains, and wife abuse: A study of South Asian women* (2014), Soma Chaudhuri discusses the issues of wife abuse of South Asian women by using the framework of patriarchal bargain. For this purpose, she interviewed South Asian immigrant women who were abused by their husbands and the women who were never abused. Most of the women who migrated for marriage were influenced by patriarchal constraints and expectations of benefits gained through marriage. The women in non-abusive relationships in order to solve minor arguments acted in an agreeable manner and conformed to the expectations of their traditional gender roles. While the abused women just avoided their husbands to tackle situation and continue to live an abused life due to lack of financial resources and concerns for their children. I claim that a relationship whose foundation is patriarchal bargain can be a perfect relationship if there is respect, care, love and understanding. In *Kabuli Pulao*, Barbeena's relationship with Haji Mushtaq starts through patriarchal bargain. Her brother Gulrez used to play football but he stepped on a land mine in Afghanistan and due to the damage done he could not play football again. But, Barbeena did not lose hope and she wanted him to play again so she asks Abdullah to find a husband for her who can pay her two lac rupees in Haq-meher (right of bride price determined at the time of marriage). She wants this money for the treatment of Gulrez. When Haji Mushtaq visits their house and meets Gulrez on wheel-chair, Abdullah tells him about their situation:

اسے زن دینا مہر بیعت ہے اور نہ ہمت، لیکن مہر بیعت کی خواہش ہے کہ اس کا بھائی دونوں رہا ہے۔ اب اپنے نونہر کھڑا ہوا اور پھر سے فن، اکھیل سکے، رہنے
سجائی گئے۔ مہر بیعتی بھینہ بھتہ جو رکھے، بہتر نہ دھجور کیا ہے، حاجی
معلومات حاصل کی ہیں کہ اس کے دونوں بچے پھر کے لیے تقریباً دو لاکھ روپے
ما جیم مہر انہیں، بلکہ مہر بیعت کا مطالبہ ہے۔

“Is se zada na hamra haisiat hai na himat lekin hamara behan khuwahish karta hai ke uska bhai dobara apne pao pe khara ho, dobara football khelay. Hum ne maloomat kya hai is

ke chalny ke lye kam o baish itna hi qeemat lagay ga, matlab do lakh. Humko hamari behan ne bohat majboor kiya hai, bohat zada majboor kiya hai Haji Sahib. Ye hamara nahi hamara behan ka mutalba hai”.

“I neither have the capacity nor the courage to do more than that but my sister desires to see her brother stand on his feet again and he plays football again. I have inquired about it. For him to walk it would take approximately the same amount means two lacs. My sister has compelled me so much. She compelled me so much Haji Sahib. This is not my demand rather my sister’s.” (Episode 1)

When Haji Mushtaq hears all this from Abdullah, he gives this amount to Abdullah for Gulrez’ treatment and asks him to take care of Barbeena as she is his “amanat” (mandate). He says this so she does not have to marry someone without her will. Later Ghulam Sarwar tells Haji Mushtaq that he wants to marry Barbeena as Haji Mushtaq has given the money which he could not give, Haji tells him that she will not marry anyone as she was only sacrificing for her brother. When Haji Mushtaq was going to travel towards Lahore for Ayesha’s engagement, Abdullah asks him to take his ‘amanat’ with him as he cannot protect his sister from her brother-in-law who is a cruel person, married thrice and now he wants to marry Barbeena. Haji Mushtaq resists that he cannot marry her as he is 51 years old, much elder than her and he also did not think about getting married ever but Barbeena says that she will only marry him. In this way, Haji Mushtaq and Barbeena gets married and they reach Lahore.

2.4. Decolonial love

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon analyzes the challenges of inter-racial love occasioned by colonialism and discusses different spheres within which alienation and rejection of the colonial subject take place. He emphasizes on the significance of love and human connections within the framework of decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Throughout his work, Fanon suggests that the struggle for liberation involves not only political and economic aspects but also the restoration of dignity, self-respect, and authentic human connections. He hints at the idea that genuine love and solidarity among individuals within a decolonizing society play a crucial role in rebuilding a sense of identity, agency, and communal strength after the trauma of colonization. One of the themes Malgorzata Poksi discusses in her paper *Home on the border in Ana Castillo's "The Guardians": the colonial matrix of power, epistemic disobedience, and decolonial love* (2017) is ‘decolonial love’ in Ana Castillo’s *The Guardians*. The novel is about illegal crossings. It focuses on a Mexican American woman, Regina who searches for her brother along with her nephew. Her nephew Gabo is also an illegal immigrant who later become a legal citizen of America. The setting of the novel is New Mexico. Regina involves in love with an American who flirts with her and also helps her in finding her brother. The ending of the novel hints about their union. Carolyn Urena in *Loving from below: Of (de) colonial love and other demons* (2017) discusses the rational vs irrational binary in *Of Love and Other Demons*, through the exploration of alternative configurations of love and explores it through a decolonial lens. Urena proves

representation of the transgressive and border-crossing activity necessary to oppose dualist thinking and being. Urena argues that to love decolonially means to heal the wound that rejects the 'other' within, to acknowledge the "third meaning" of love that accepts the unknowability as well as ambiguity of the 'other', and to untie the transformative power of that love. In Kabuli Pulao, the love between Haji Mushtaq and Barbeena is decolonial love as Haji Mushtaq is resident of Pakistan while Barbeena is an Afghan refugee, and her status was of a subaltern.

Love between Barbeena and Haji Mushtaq emerges gradually. They are such a couple that people think that Barbeena is Haji Mushtaq's daughter. Barbeena is a young widow who lost her husband to whom she loved a lot. She has lived a difficult life in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan due to poverty. Haji Mushtaq is also a man who sacrificed a lot, when he was ten years old, he lost his father. His mother used to stitch clothes to feed her children. As Haji Mushtaq had a vast knowledge about different clothes so he started business and later distributed all property as well as business among his siblings and started his journey for 'tableegh' (preaching). He never married that is why due to embarrassment of marrying at 51, he did not introduce Barbeena to his family as a wife rather he says that she is a needy woman and can help in household chores. His family also thinks that he has brought her thinking of her as his daughter. Though in the start of their relationship there was no place for love but a lot of care and respect always existed. After coming back from Mardan, Haji Mushtaq asks his sister-in-law to give Barbeena clothes according to Lahore's climate. He also praises her Kabuli Pulao in front of his family. He slaps his nephew when he was trying to capture Barbeena's picture because she was feeling uncomfortable. He also shows her picture of Gulrez standing on his feet, saying it is a big day for her so that she can be happy.

Even after her marriage with Haji Mushtaq, Barbeena remembers her late husband Baran who was her childhood friend, later they fell in love and for marrying Barbeena he fought with his father and Barbeena's father. He also sold his land and his favourite mare to give price to marry her. The teacher of Ayesha and Rimsha (Mushtaq's nieces) sends marriage proposal for Barbeena of her brother and Ayesha tells Rimsha that she cannot think of anyone except Baran. Family members of Haji Mushtaq did not want Barbeena to live among them and accuses her of being a spy so Haji Mushtaq decides to go back to Mardan with her and tell her that he will not allow anyone to harm her. Barbeena takes full responsibility of Mushtaq and takes care of him as a devoted wife. Soon, she gets affiliated with his family too and the family also accepts her as a care-taker of Haji. She cooks her traditional food items: Kabuli Pulao and Roghni Naans for the family members. When Haji Mushtaq had severe headache and Barbeena started pressing his head, he asks her not to do it and she replies:

غیر عورت نہیں، میں۔

"Ghair orat ni mai"

"I am not a stranger". (Episode 3)

For Ayesha's wedding, Haji Mushtaq brought dresses for Barbeena which everyone admires and she also chose a yellow kurta for him to wear, matching with her dress. She

remembers her Nikkah (Islamic religious ceremony) with Haji during Ayesha's Nikkah. After Ayesha's wedding, remembering her father when Barbeena was crying, Haji comforts her. He told Shameem about his relationship with Barbeena as:

"شہیم، اُسے میرا جو رشتہ ہے، اُسکا کوئی سہنہ نہیں۔"

"Us se jo rishta hai na Shameem uska koi nam nahi hai".

"Shameem! The relationship with her has no name". (Episode 4)

Love starts from starting to understand each other. Gradually, Barbeena and Haji start to understand each other's language. When Chammo (Haji Mushtaq's sister) scolds Barbeena, Haji by looking at her face understands that something is wrong with her and tells her that he wants her to stand with him. Due to respect for Haji Mushtaq, Barbeena did not tell anyone that she is his wife. She asks Abdullah not to tell it to the family of Haji and did not agree to go with him to Afghanistan. When Ghaffar says he wants to marry Barbeena, Haji decides to go to Mardan with Barbeena but she tells him that as no one knows she is his wife, everyone will think wrong about him. So, telling him:

میں آپکا ماں تہوں۔

"Mai apki amanat"

"I am your mandate" (Episode 5)

she decides to go back to Afghanistan with Abdullah. Later, when Shameem tells everyone about their marriage, Barbeena scolds Abdullah that why he told Ilyas about her marriage with Haji Mushtaq. Haji asks Barbeena not to go with her brother saying:

"لا وار تہیں ہے۔"

"Lawaris ni hy"

"She is not unclaimed" (Episode 5).

When the family decided to arrange their reception, Haji asks Barbeena that to become a bride would be difficult for her as she must be remembering Baran. She replies that she wants to forget him but he reminds her of him. Haji further asks her that she held his feet on their first meeting so that she did not have to become a bride. She says:

اُس دن لوگوں کے سامنے میں نے تمہارے ہاتھ پکڑے تھے، آج لوگوں کے سامنے تمہارا ہاتھ پکڑ رہی ہوں۔ کل تم نے میرے پاؤں کے لیے کہا تھا، آج میں تمہارے پاؤں کے لیے کر رہی ہوں۔

"Us din logo ke agay tera pair pakra thi, aj logo ke agay tera hath pakar rhi hoon, kal tou ne meri izat ke lye kya, aj teri izat ke lye kar rha hoon".

"That day, I was holding onto your feet in front of people; today, I am holding your hand in front of people. Yesterday you did for my respect, I am doing it for your respect today" (Episode 7).

Barbeena tells Shammo that she had Baran in her life who was her love and now she is 'izat' (wife) of Haji, no third man is there in her life. When Ghaffar tells Haji that he does not want to see Barbeena as he is in love with her, Haji decides to take Barbeena to Mardan with

him and when Ghulam Sarwar physically harassed Barbeena, he decides to leave Mardan as well. In a hotel in Islamabad, while Barbeena was sleeping on floor, she was disturbed by insects, Haji Mushtaq asks her to sleep on bed saying:

مینے غیر نہیں ہوں۔

“Mai ghair nahi hoon”

“I am not a stranger” (Episode 7).

Later, Barbeena runs to beat the manager who had a fight with Haji. In episode 9, for issuance of Barbeena’s Pakistani identity card, the couple had to remarry in the court. When the magistrate asks Barbeena if she had married to Haji Mushtaq in pressure then she should tell him, he will rescue her, she tells him that Haji has given her love, respect, faced troubles and sacrificed a lot for her. As they are married again in court, Haji gifts a ring to Barbeena as her wedding gift and she asks him to put it himself on her finger. At night, she wears her wedding dress and after this court marriage, they accept each other as husband and wife. Haji Mushtaq makes breakfast for Barbeena in the next morning, telling her it is a custom that newly wedded bride does not cook and breakfast comes from her home but since no one is here so he is cooking it himself. When Haji Mushtaq got job, he put sweetmeat in Barbeena’s mouth and gives his first salary to her. Later, when he left his job, Barbeena started making Kabuli Pulao to sell it through Facebook page, she also gives her first income to Haji as he gave it to her.

Michaele L. Ferguson in her article *Choice feminism and the fear of politics* (2010) explains that Choice feminism is a form of contemporary feminism which encourages women to embrace the opportunities they obtain in their life and to see the choices they make as justified and always politically acceptable but every woman has not given choices. Linda Hirshman coined the phrase “choice feminism” to term the belief that the women’s movement has given women freedom to make their own choices about unpaid labor in home or wage work (Ferguson 2010). In the drama serial, Barbeena had choice whether to continue her work as later her husband gets insecure but they talk about it and resolve the issue. Barbeena who is depicted as a subaltern from the start of the drama gains agency through her patriarchal bargain of marrying Haji Mushtaq. Running her business and getting money to run their household makes her agentic. In many households, women are kept aside of financial matters. Lu Gram analyzed the actions used by young Nepali married women in negotiations of controlling money in extended household in *Revisiting the patriarchal bargain: The intergenerational power dynamics of household money management in rural Nepal* (2018). The research explores that sometimes junior-wives and their husbands become secret partners in seeking financial autonomy in the extended households in order to save money for a household separate from in-laws. Such financial strategies make a way for such couples to renegotiate patriarchal bargain where junior-wife has to serve her husband and mother-in-law for economic security. Gram uses the term “economic violence” (Chowbey 2017, Fawole 2008) in her discussion that includes physical violence if daughter-in-law is found in possession of money. In such circumstances, secret savings are a strategy of gaining agency. But in case of Barbeena and

Haji Mushtaq, love, care, respect and understanding are more valuable than money as Barbeena belongs to a meek background and after her second marriage she was living a prosperous life as compared to her past life while Haji Mushtaq had himself distributed all property and business among his siblings.

When Hajra invited both of them for dinner, Haji gives food to Barbeena which impresses Hajra and she says that they are a perfect couple, Haji sings two songs at dinner and Barbeena praises his singing. Haji also teases her by telling Hajra and her husband that she forced me to marry her. He also teases her by saying she has beaten me today and Barbeena says that he is telling a lie. When Hajra tells Haji that Barbeena does everything after taking permission by him, he tells her that he also does everything after asking her. After coming home, Haji asks Barbeena that did she miss Baran. Barbeena replies that she misses her mother's cat and goat, Baran's horse and her father's dog. Haji says that he wants to make her so happy that she does not miss any of them. She tells him that she invites them in her imagination and tell them that she is happy in their absence too due to the presence of Haji Sahib in her life.

Mutual respect and care for each other helped in blossoming love between the couple. In episode 6, when Barbeena was about to drink water, she saw Haji troubled and gives him that water. She tells him that she is hungry so she is going to the kitchen to bring food, Haji asks her not to go and eat biscuits instead. She replies that your stomach will ache which shows that she was concerned about Haji and she was going to bring food for him. Before going to a wedding, she asks him to trim and colour his beard and head. She captures Haji's photo when they went outside to eat something. She comforts him when he told her about his father's demise. Barbeena was in her own trauma, when at Qayoom's funeral she saw Baran alive at home as Mazdak Khan but when Haji cries saying that at his brother's death, he also needs someone, Barbeena comforts him (Episode 13).

For Haji Mushtaq, love and marriage both were unexpected. He tells Barbeena that he used to think while watching couples holding hands that he will never have a life like this but he was wrong. When Barbeena becomes famous due to her online business of delivering

Kabuli Pulao, people gathered at a public place to take pictures with Barbeena, Haji gets insecure and start thinking that she enjoys it. Barbeena tells Hajra that Haji thinks she likes it if someone calls her beautiful but it is not so, rather she put those comments in fire of stove where Kabuli Pulao is being cooked. She asks her to remove her photos and videos from Facebook page and says what can I do if people see me and their mouth waters, and does not waters at the sight of Kabuli Pulao? Hajra tells Haji Mushtaq:

بہنو! کوئی کلمہ کہیں کوئی بیروں میں شہ جہ نہیں ہے۔ اپنے پرانے شو مہ کو پہنانا نہیں کرتی، کبھی کوئی گنہگار ہے۔

“Ye tou apko koi kibra kaba koi peer o murshid samjh baithi hy, apny purany shohar ko bhi yad nahi krti ke koi gunah na hojye”

“She considers you as something holy, a guide or mentor, she does not even remember her ex-husband so that no sin is committed”. (Episode 12).

She further says that he is like Asad (her husband), both of them cannot bear the fact that their wives are earning. Hearing this, Barbeena could not resist and tells her to go. After all this misunderstanding, Haji asks Barbeena to sit and gently talks to her:

کوئی تمہیں دیکھنے نہ ہمارے بھرے تو مجھے ُ بالگنا ہے۔ تم میری بیوی ہو، میری ساتھی ہو، میری مینٹم سے بہت محبت کر
تمہو نا اور تمہاری عزت کر تن بوں پہر بتاؤ، مینہ۔ سکیسے۔ یاد، تسکروں؟

“Koi tumhy daikhay, ishara karay, bura lagta hai, biwi ho meri, sathi, bohat pyar karta hoon tumse, izat karta hoon, kesay bardasht kroon, tum batao?”

"If someone looks at you and makes a gesture, it feels bad. You are my wife; my partner. I love you a lot and respect you. How should I endure this? You tell me". (Episode 13)

She asks him not to bear it, rather he should have taken her hand and took her out from the crowd as she could not escape herself. After clearing the misunderstanding, he takes her hand and both of them decides to go to buy things for making Kabuli Pulao, he asks her not to wear gown as there is no need to cover her face.

Hajra makes a video of both of them without their consent and post it on the social media. She says in the video:

بہنو تو آسمیندو تسبیح، یوسرے کے لیے ضرور ہیں۔ انہیں دیکھ کر سہجہا تنے کبر شہدرا اصل گاہو تنے۔ اسے عمر اور حشیت کے بازو
مینہ ہینٹولا جاسکا۔ رشتے کو صرفا ی کی ضرورت تھو تھی، اور وہ کیہ جتی ہے۔ محبت جو مہجیز سے نہ لانی ہے، مہجیز سے بلندی اس میں قوم، قبیلہ، ر، سن، نسل، مذ م۔ بنہیندیکھا جا۔ تن، محبتان۔ سے اوپر ہوتی ہے۔

“Ye dono tou apas mai dost hain, zarori hain aik dosray ke lye, inko dekh ke samjh aya k rishta actually hota kia hy, isko umar o haisiat ke tarazo mai ni tol sakti rishte ko sirf aik karri ki zarort hti hai or wo karri mohabat hy, mohabat jo har cheez se balatar hai har cheez se upar hai, is mai qoum qabila rang nasal mazhab kuch bhi nahi dekha jata ye sab se upar hai”.

“These two are friends; they are necessary for each other, I understood after watching them what a relationship actually is. You cannot weigh relationship in terms of age or status. A relationship only needs one thing, and that is genuine love—the kind of love that surpasses everything, that is above everything else. In love, nationality, ethnicity, color, lineage, or religion does not matter. It is above all of these things”. (Episode 12)

Hajra explains that she wanted to make a video about them to tell people that despite differences, people can live happy like Haji Mushtaq and Barbeena.

Haji Mushtaq is not portrayed as a narrow-minded person rather he asks Barbeena to talk with Baran (Mazdak) as both of them have similar language. Loyalty is the key of a relationship. When Barbeena's ex-husband came back and told her that it was another man who died and was mistaken for him, Barbeena asks him to go back to his country as she is married now. Baran tells her that she is her life and in reply Barbeena asks him to die (Episode 14). Again, she tells him to go saying Haji is her husband now and she is now his responsibility. She wanted him to go that is why she asks Haji that why he has allowed a stranger to live at their house. Next day, she asks Baran to go at once from the house for her sake as he can only

be her dead husband. When she decides to go to Islamabad due to Ghaffar's attempt to rape her, she asks Haji to drop her instead of Baran. She tells Baran while traveling that she is someone else's wife now. Baran was also clear about it that is why he tells Ayesha and Rimsha that Barbeena cannot live without Haji. He also tells his friend that she does not look at him fearing her eyes would burn (Episode 18). Haji asks Ghaffar to take 3 lac rupees and leave the house. He tells Barbeena that she should have directly asked him to send Ghaffar from home. Before going, she asks him if he is angry at her decision but Haji tells her that there is nothing like that and respects her decision. He tells Shameem that in return of my alms and good deeds, I got Barbeena.

Sacrificing for each other is very important in love, one cannot be selfish. When Haji got to know that Mazdak is actually Baran, he cries and decides to reunite Baran and Barbeena. He knew that Barbeena wants to live with him but he wants to sacrifice. He intentionally blames her and asks her to go with her husband. She tells him that he is her husband. He does not doubt her but he wants Baran and Barbeena's journey to start from where it ended. He thinks about two ways, to be selfish while keeping silent so that he can live with Barbeena all his life or to leave her. So, he chose to reunite the lovers. He insults her as he thought she would not go otherwise and how as a husband he can ask her to go with someone else. But Barbeena tells Baran that he should have died, when Haji calls Baran her husband, she says it feels like he is cursing me (Episode 18). Barbeena also sacrifices her childhood's love (Baran) for Haji Mushtaq and tells Hajra that she would again bury Baran because she has to bury one and she cannot bury Haji Sahib (Episode 19). Hajra says if she were in place of Barbeena, she would have gone with Baran due to love, same language, same area, childhood, adolescence and old age.

When there was no clue about the whereabouts of Barbeena, Haji Mushtaq's sister decided to tell people that Barbeena has died so that they would not ask questions about her. But Haji tells Shameem that he cannot let her die when she is alive, and he himself is alive due to hope, if hope will end, he too will die. Later, he goes to Mardan and remembers how there he got married. There he tastes Kabuli Pulao and recognizes its taste, finds Barbeena and starts helping her with the customers. So, a subaltern's patriarchal bargain transformed in decolonial love resulting in a splendid relationship adorned with boundless affection, love, care, respect and understanding.

3. Conclusion

The research through the nexus of the subaltern, patriarchal bargain, and decolonial love has revealed a complex interplay of power dynamics and identity negotiation in the drama serial Kabuli Pulao. Through an analysis of the selected drama, it becomes evident that the subaltern is often subjected to the structures of patriarchy, compelling them to make bargains. Furthermore, the exploration of decolonial love as a counter-narrative unveils the potential for emancipation and empowerment. Decolonial love emerges as a transformative force, challenging hegemonic structures and fostering solidarity, empathy, and inclusivity within the

narrative. It serves as a means of reclaiming agency and identity for the subaltern. The writer, Zafar Mairaj has brilliantly portrayed Barbeena's transformation from a subaltern to gaining agency and finding love from a patriarchal bargain.

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