



A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THE PAKISTANI DRAMA SERIAL *DR. BAHU* (2026)

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Abstract

This study examines the discursive construction of gender identities, gender roles, and patriarchal ideologies in the contemporary Pakistani television drama *Dr. Bahu* (2026) through Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Employing a qualitative research design, the study analyses purposively selected dialogues from the drama to investigate how language constructs, reproduces, negotiates, and transforms gendered power relations within familial and professional contexts. The findings reveal that *Dr. Bahu* constructs professional femininity through education, competence, ethical responsibility, resilience, and agency while simultaneously portraying the challenges women face in balancing professional aspirations with traditional family expectations. The analysis further demonstrates that patriarchal authority is reproduced through everyday family discourse, cultural norms, and gendered expectations, yet these dominant ideologies are continuously negotiated through female agency, professional identity, and dialogic interaction. Moreover, the drama reconstructs masculinity by moving from hierarchical authority towards partnership, empathy, and shared responsibility, ultimately promoting more egalitarian gender relations. The study concludes that *Dr. Bahu* functions as a significant contemporary cultural text that reflects and shapes evolving perceptions of gender, power, and family relationships in Pakistani society. It also confirms the effectiveness of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model in revealing the complex relationship between discourse, ideology, and social change in media texts. The study contributes to the growing scholarship on Critical Discourse Analysis, gender representation, and Pakistani television discourse by providing a discourse-oriented examination of a recent and underexplored television drama.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Dr. Bahu (2026), Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, Female Agency, Gender Representation, Pakistani Television Drama, Patriarchy, Professional Femininity.*

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1. Introduction

Television dramas are among the most influential forms of mass media because they not only entertain audiences but also shape public perceptions of social reality, cultural values, and collective identities. Through recurring narratives, dialogues, and character representations, television dramas construct meanings about gender, family, authority, and social relationships. Rather than merely reflecting society, media discourse actively participates in the production and reproduction of dominant ideologies by legitimizing particular beliefs, behaviours, and identities. Consequently, television dramas function as significant cultural texts through which meanings are created, circulated, and negotiated within society (Hall, 1997; Butler, 1990; Fairclough, 1995).

In Pakistan, television dramas occupy a central position in everyday cultural life and are viewed by audiences across diverse social, educational, and economic backgrounds. Since the expansion of private television channels in the early 2000s, Pakistani dramas have increasingly moved beyond conventional domestic narratives to address broader social issues, including women's education, professional identity, marriage, domestic violence, inheritance, class inequality, and women's empowerment. Despite these progressive developments, many dramas continue to reproduce patriarchal assumptions by presenting women's achievements within the framework of traditional family expectations. Consequently, Pakistani television simultaneously functions as a medium of social transformation and a site where dominant gender ideologies are maintained, negotiated, and occasionally challenged.

Gender is widely understood as a social and cultural construct rather than a purely biological phenomenon. Societies assign different expectations, responsibilities, and identities to women and men through continuous processes of socialization that are reinforced by institutions such as the family, education, religion, and the media. Butler (1990) argues that gender is performative, meaning that it is continuously produced through repeated social practices rather than determined by biological sex. Similarly, Hall (1997) maintains that representation is not simply the reflection of reality but the process through which reality itself is constructed. Television dramas therefore become important discursive spaces where ideas of femininity, masculinity, family, and authority are repeatedly produced, reinforced, and transformed through language, narrative, and visual representation.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a powerful analytical framework for examining how discourse constructs social identities and legitimizes unequal power relations. According to Fairclough (1995, 2015), discourse should be understood as a form of social practice in which language is inseparable from ideology and power. CDA extends beyond the linguistic features of texts by investigating the institutional and sociocultural processes through which meanings are produced and interpreted. Likewise, van Dijk

(2008) argues that discourse contributes significantly to the reproduction of social dominance by shaping public knowledge, beliefs, and ideological structures. Through the analysis of dialogues, character interactions, and narrative organisation, CDA offers valuable insights into the ways television dramas construct and normalize gendered identities and power relations.

Building upon these perspectives, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) specifically examines how language contributes to the maintenance or contestation of patriarchal ideologies. Lazar (2005) argues that gender inequality is frequently normalized through everyday discourse, where unequal social practices become accepted as natural or culturally appropriate. Similarly, Sunderland (2004) demonstrates that media discourse often reproduces competing constructions of femininity and masculinity through recurring linguistic and narrative patterns. Within the context of Pakistani television dramas, these perspectives are particularly relevant because female characters are frequently portrayed as educated, capable, and professionally successful while simultaneously being expected to conform to traditional ideals of marriage, motherhood, obedience, and family honour. Such contradictory representations create multiple ideological positions regarding women's roles in contemporary Pakistani society.

Recent scholarship has consistently demonstrated that Pakistani television dramas play an important role in shaping public understandings of gender identities and social relationships. Although contemporary dramas increasingly portray women as educated professionals and independent decision-makers, these representations often remain embedded within patriarchal family structures and cultural expectations. Women's autonomy is frequently portrayed as acceptable only when it reinforces family cohesion, moral responsibility, and traditional social values. Consequently, Pakistani television presents gender through competing discourses that simultaneously promote women's empowerment while preserving established patriarchal norms.

Against this background, the contemporary Pakistani television drama serial *Dr. Bahu* (2026), aired on ARY Digital, offers a particularly suitable corpus for investigating the discursive construction of gender representation in present-day Pakistan. The drama centres on the experiences of a professionally qualified female doctor who attempts to balance her medical career with the expectations imposed upon her as a wife and daughter-in-law within a traditional family system. Through workplace interactions, marital relationships, family conflicts, and everyday conversations, the drama explores the intersections of gender, professional identity, authority, family hierarchy, and cultural expectations. Rather than presenting gender as a fixed social category, the narrative illustrates how gender identities and power relations are continually negotiated through discourse in both private and public spheres.

Unlike many earlier Pakistani family dramas that primarily focus on domestic conflicts, *Dr. Bahu* foregrounds contemporary issues including women's professional identity, work-life balance, marital expectations, family authority, and gender equality. These themes provide a valuable opportunity to examine how discourse simultaneously reproduces dominant patriarchal ideologies and creates spaces for resistance, negotiation, and social change. The drama therefore represents an important contemporary cultural text through which the relationship between language, ideology, gender, and power can be critically examined.

Although a substantial body of research has investigated gender representation in Pakistani television dramas, most previous studies have focused on thematic content analysis, media representation, or women's empowerment in earlier television productions. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to recently produced dramas from the perspective of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis. As a contemporary television serial, *Dr. Bahu* provides an important opportunity to explore how present-day media discourse constructs, reproduces, negotiates, and challenges gender identities, professional roles, patriarchal authority, and family relationships within the changing sociocultural context of Pakistan.

Against this backdrop, the present study employs Norman Fairclough's (1995, 2015) Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis to examine gender representation in *Dr. Bahu* (2026). By analysing selected dialogues, character interactions, and narrative structures, the study investigates how discourse constructs femininity, masculinity, professional identity, family authority, and gendered power relations while reinforcing or contesting dominant patriarchal ideologies. Drawing upon Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, and theories of representation, the study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on media discourse, feminist linguistics, and Pakistani television by providing a contemporary understanding of how television language shapes public perceptions of gender, power, and social change.

1.1. Research Objectives

- 1) To critically examine how gender identities, gender roles, and gender relationships are discursively represented in the Pakistani television drama *Dr. Bahu* (2026)
- 2) To investigate how the discursive practices in *Dr. Bahu* (2026) reproduce, negotiate, or challenge patriarchal ideologies and gendered power relations using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis.

1.2. Research Questions

- 1) How are gender identities, gender roles, and gender relationships discursively represented in the Pakistani television drama *Dr. Bahu* (2026)?

- 2) How do the discursive practices in *Dr. Bahu* (2026) reproduce, negotiate, or challenge patriarchal ideologies and gendered power relations according to Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis?

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study is important as it fits into the vast literature on gender representation, media discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the Pakistani context. The language, dialogue, characters, and storylines of the television drama *Dr. Bahu* (2026) are explored in this research to illustrate how they are used to construct, reinforce, negotiate, or contest dominant gender ideologies and patriarchal power relations in the drama using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis.

The findings will also contribute to discourse studies, media linguistics, feminist media studies, cultural studies and Pakistan's television scholarship by offering deeper understanding of the impact of one of the most popular television dramas in Pakistan on the perception of femininity, masculinity, family relationship, social class, education and authority in Pakistan. Given the gendered, class-differentiated, educational mobility, and feminist aspects of *Dr. Bahu* (2026) the study also advances the knowledge on the changing media discourses in relation to values of Pakistani society today.

Moreover, the study provides valuable information to media producers, script writers, educators, policy makers, and media researchers interested in the promotion of a more balanced and inclusive gender representation of electronic media. It also lays groundwork for a further analysis of Pakistani television dramas using the Critical Discourse Analysis and comparison with other South Asian media regarding gender construction.

1.4. Limitations of the Study

There were a few limitations in this study. First, the results of this study cannot be extrapolated to the overall media landscape of all the Pakistani television serials, as the study focussed on one Pakistani television drama, *Dr. Bahu* (2026). Secondly, the analysis is limited to the textual and visual discourse of the selected drama and does not take into account audience reception, production processes, script writers' interpretation or viewers' interpretations. Third, the meaning of discourse, in the sense of Critical Discourse Analysis, is always researcher interpretation, but it is guided systematically with the aid of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, for research credibility, consistency and analytical rigor.

1.5. Delimitations of the Study

The study is limited to the Pakistani Television drama *Dr. Bahu* (2026) It emphasises only the depiction of gender identity, gender roles, gender relations, class differences and patriarchal power relations as created in discourse. It is analyzed directly with reference to the research objectives, through selected dialogues, character interactions

and story episodes in the light of the Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Norman Fairclough. Other aspects of the drama such as cinematography, reception, commercial success, production techniques and psychological impact on the audience are not considered in this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Gender Representation and Critical Discourse Analysis

Gender representation has remained one of the most significant areas of inquiry in media and communication studies because media discourse plays a central role in constructing social realities rather than merely reflecting them. Television dramas function as influential cultural texts through which societies construct and circulate meanings about gender, family, authority, and identity. According to Hall (1997), representation is a process through which language, images, and symbols produce meanings that shape individuals' understanding of reality. Media texts therefore do not simply portray social life; rather, they actively participate in constructing social knowledge by presenting particular ideologies as natural and legitimate. Within television dramas, repeated characterisation, narrative structures, and interpersonal dialogues contribute to the normalization of specific understandings of femininity, masculinity, family relationships, and power. Consequently, media representation constitutes an important site where social identities are continuously negotiated and reproduced.

The social construction of gender has been further elaborated through Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which rejects the essentialist assumption that gender is biologically fixed. Butler argues that femininity and masculinity are repeatedly produced through everyday performances, linguistic practices, and social interactions that become accepted as natural through repetition. Gender identities therefore emerge through discourse rather than biology, making language an essential mechanism through which societies define appropriate behaviours for women and men. Television dramas contribute significantly to this performative process because they repeatedly present culturally accepted gender roles through dialogue, characterization, and narrative development. As viewers encounter similar representations across multiple media texts, these representations gradually become institutionalized as common social expectations regarding women's and men's identities.

Media scholars have consistently argued that television discourse plays a decisive role in maintaining as well as transforming patriarchal social structures. Through dialogue, characterization, visual symbolism, and narrative organization, television dramas construct meanings about authority, family hierarchy, emotional labour, and gendered responsibilities. Feminist media scholars have observed that female characters have traditionally been associated with caregiving, sacrifice, domestic responsibility, emotional

dependence, and moral virtue, whereas male characters have frequently been represented as rational decision-makers, economic providers, protectors, and authority figures (Lazar, 2005; Sunderland, 2004). Although recent television productions increasingly portray women as educated professionals and economically independent individuals, these progressive representations frequently coexist with traditional expectations concerning marriage, motherhood, obedience, and family honour. Contemporary television dramas therefore produce competing ideological discourses in which progressive and conservative understandings of gender operate simultaneously.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an appropriate theoretical framework for investigating these ideological processes because it conceptualizes language as a form of social practice closely connected with power, ideology, and inequality. Fairclough (1995, 2015) argues that discourse simultaneously reflects existing social structures and actively contributes to their production and transformation. His Three-Dimensional Model conceptualizes discourse at three interconnected levels: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Textual analysis examines linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, modality, evaluation, and interactional patterns. Discursive practice explores the production, circulation, and interpretation of discourse, while social practice situates discourse within broader institutional, cultural, political, and ideological contexts. Together, these three dimensions enable researchers to examine how linguistic choices contribute to the maintenance or contestation of dominant social relations.

The relationship between discourse and power has also been extensively examined by van Dijk (2008), who argues that discourse plays a central role in reproducing social dominance by shaping public knowledge, beliefs, and ideological structures. According to van Dijk, institutions such as the media exercise symbolic power through everyday discourse by presenting particular interpretations of reality as objective or commonsensical. Television dramas therefore constitute influential discursive sites where audiences learn socially acceptable understandings of gender, authority, family relationships, and moral values. Through recurring linguistic patterns and narrative conventions, media discourse contributes to the legitimization of existing power relations while simultaneously creating opportunities for ideological negotiation and resistance.

Building upon the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) specifically investigates the relationship between language and gender inequality. Lazar (2005) argues that patriarchal ideologies are frequently embedded within everyday discourse in subtle and often invisible ways, making unequal gender relations appear natural, inevitable, and culturally appropriate. Rather than focusing solely on explicit discrimination, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis examines the linguistic strategies through which particular gender identities are privileged while others are marginalized. Similarly, Sunderland (2004) demonstrates that media discourse

repeatedly constructs competing versions of femininity and masculinity through recurring lexical choices, conversational patterns, evaluative language, and narrative framing. Consequently, FCDA provides an analytical framework capable of uncovering the ideological assumptions embedded within seemingly ordinary media texts.

These theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant within the Pakistani sociocultural context, where television dramas frequently negotiate tensions between modernity and tradition. Contemporary Pakistani dramas increasingly depict women as educated professionals, entrepreneurs, and independent decision-makers while simultaneously emphasizing cultural values associated with marriage, family honour, motherhood, and obedience. As a result, television discourse often produces contradictory ideological positions in which female empowerment coexists with patriarchal expectations. Such ideological complexity makes Pakistani television dramas particularly suitable for Critical Discourse Analysis because they reveal how language simultaneously reproduces dominant gender norms while creating spaces for resistance, negotiation, and social transformation.

Taken together, Hall's theory of representation, Butler's theory of gender performativity, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to discourse, and Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for examining gender representation in Pakistani television dramas. These complementary perspectives conceptualize discourse as a dynamic social practice through which gender identities, family relationships, professional roles, authority, and power are continuously produced, negotiated, and transformed. Accordingly, they offer an appropriate analytical lens for investigating the discursive construction of gender in the contemporary Pakistani television drama serial *Dr. Bahu* (2026).

2.2. Gender Representation in Pakistani Television Dramas

Pakistani television dramas have become one of the most influential cultural institutions in shaping public understandings of gender, family, class, and social identity. Their widespread popularity enables them to reach diverse audiences across educational, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds, making television drama a powerful medium through which dominant cultural values are reproduced and negotiated. Over the last decade, the thematic scope of Pakistani dramas has expanded considerably, moving beyond conventional family-centred narratives to engage with contemporary issues such as women's education, professional careers, domestic violence, forced marriage, inheritance rights, workplace discrimination, and gender equality. Despite these progressive developments, research consistently indicates that patriarchal ideology continues to influence the representation of women and men within dramatic narratives.

Recent scholarship suggests that contemporary Pakistani dramas increasingly portray women as educated, professionally successful, and economically independent individuals. However, these representations rarely challenge patriarchal structures completely. Instead, female empowerment is frequently presented as acceptable only when it remains compatible with traditional expectations regarding marriage, motherhood, family honour, and obedience. Consequently, modern Pakistani television often constructs competing discourses in which progressive gender identities coexist alongside deeply embedded patriarchal values. This ideological contradiction reflects broader sociocultural transformations occurring within Pakistani society, where modernization and globalization increasingly intersect with traditional cultural norms.

Research conducted during the past several years has increasingly examined these ideological tensions through linguistic and discourse-oriented approaches. Earlier studies primarily relied on thematic or content analysis to investigate women's representation in television dramas. More recent research, however, has shifted toward analysing language, dialogue, interactional patterns, and narrative organisation as mechanisms through which gender identities and power relations are socially constructed. This methodological shift reflects the growing recognition that discourse itself functions as a site where ideology operates and where unequal social relations are reproduced or challenged.

One of the important contributions in this area is the study conducted by Chaudhry, Ali, and Aslam (2021), who employed Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to examine women's representation in Pakistani television dramas. Their findings indicate that although female protagonists are increasingly portrayed as educated, confident, and professionally competent, their identities remain embedded within traditional patriarchal frameworks. Women who question established gender norms frequently experience social disapproval or narrative punishment, whereas those who demonstrate obedience, sacrifice, and commitment to domestic responsibilities receive moral validation. The researchers conclude that contemporary Pakistani dramas construct hybrid identities in which modern female aspirations are continually negotiated within conventional patriarchal ideology rather than replacing it.

Similar conclusions have been reached by later researchers investigating women's professional representation in Pakistani media. Shahzadi (2023), using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and Social Semiotics, demonstrates that women characters increasingly occupy professional and educational roles but remain constrained by family obligations and traditional expectations. Even highly qualified female professionals are frequently portrayed as ultimately responsible for maintaining family cohesion and fulfilling domestic duties. The study argues that narrative closure often reinforces conformity to conventional gender expectations, thereby reproducing patriarchal ideology through subtle rather than explicit discursive strategies.

The relationship between discourse and patriarchal power has also received considerable scholarly attention. Noor, Khattak, and Khan (2022) analysed the Pakistani drama *O Rangreza* using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and found that patriarchal dominance is reproduced not only through explicit statements but also through conversational organisation, evaluative language, silence, interruptions, and interactional control. Their analysis demonstrates that unequal gender relations are maintained through everyday linguistic practices that normalize male authority while restricting opportunities for female resistance. Although women occasionally challenge oppressive structures, the overall discourse continues to legitimise unequal distributions of power within family and social relationships.

More recent studies suggest that contemporary Pakistani dramas increasingly represent gender as a process of negotiation rather than simple domination. Jalali and Wasif (2026), in their comparative Critical Discourse Analysis of *Aakhir Kab Tak* and *Nanhi*, argue that recent television narratives simultaneously construct feminist resistance and patriarchal control. Rather than depicting women's empowerment as a complete rejection of traditional gender norms, these dramas present empowerment as a negotiated process in which female agency develops within existing cultural frameworks. Through dialogue, characterization, and narrative organisation, the selected dramas expose structural inequalities while also illustrating the cultural limitations that continue to shape women's opportunities for autonomy. Consequently, Pakistani television increasingly disseminates multiple and sometimes contradictory constructions of femininity rather than a single dominant ideological perspective.

Comparable findings are reported by Amjad, Javed, and Farid (2025), whose Critical Discourse Analysis of *Duniyapur* and *Dil-e-Nadan* reveals persistent inequalities in conversational authority and family decision-making. Their study demonstrates that women's voices are frequently interrupted, ignored, or evaluated through gendered assumptions, reflecting broader patriarchal structures embedded within everyday discourse. At the same time, they identify emerging narratives in which female characters challenge traditional power relations through education, professional competence, emotional resilience, and moral authority. Their findings reinforce the view that Pakistani television dramas operate as contested ideological spaces where traditional and progressive gender discourses coexist.

Beyond analyses of individual dramas, scholars have also examined broader patterns of gender representation across Pakistani electronic media. Raza (2025) argues that contemporary television dramas increasingly address issues such as domestic violence, women's employment, educational inequality, and forced marriage. However, these narratives rarely advocate radical transformation of gender relations. Instead, they generally resolve conflicts by restoring family stability and cultural harmony. Feminist

discourses are therefore incorporated into television narratives in ways that remain compatible with dominant sociocultural values rather than fundamentally challenging patriarchal social structures. This tendency reflects the complex ideological position of Pakistani television, which simultaneously promotes social change while preserving cultural continuity.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that gender representation in Pakistani television has undergone significant transformation during the last decade. Female characters are no longer confined exclusively to domestic roles but increasingly appear as students, professionals, entrepreneurs, political actors, and decision-makers. Nevertheless, these representations remain deeply embedded within cultural expectations surrounding marriage, motherhood, family honour, and moral responsibility. Women's empowerment is therefore frequently portrayed as conditional rather than absolute, requiring continuous negotiation between personal aspirations and collective family obligations. Similarly, male identities are increasingly represented as dynamic rather than fixed, reflecting changing expectations concerning authority, emotional expression, and interpersonal relationships.

Overall, contemporary scholarship indicates that Pakistani television dramas should not be understood simply as instruments that reinforce patriarchal ideology or as vehicles of feminist resistance. Rather, they constitute complex discursive spaces where competing constructions of gender, power, authority, and identity are continuously produced, contested, and renegotiated. This evolving representation of gender highlights the importance of discourse-oriented approaches capable of examining how linguistic choices, narrative structures, and character interactions shape ideological meanings within contemporary Pakistani media.

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani Television Dramas

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has become one of the most influential qualitative approaches for examining how language constructs, legitimizes, and challenges unequal social relations within media discourse. Unlike traditional content analysis, which primarily focuses on identifying themes or frequencies of representation, CDA investigates the relationship between linguistic choices, institutional practices, and broader sociocultural ideologies. Fairclough (1995, 2015) argues that discourse functions simultaneously as text, discursive practice, and social practice, allowing researchers to explore not only what is represented but also how representations are produced, circulated, interpreted, and connected to wider structures of power. Consequently, CDA provides a comprehensive framework for analysing television dramas because dramatic narratives are produced through dialogue, characterization, narrative organization, and interactional patterns that both reflect and shape social ideologies.

Within media studies, CDA has increasingly been employed to investigate the ideological construction of gender identities and patriarchal power relations. Scholars

argue that television discourse does not merely communicate stories but actively constructs dominant understandings of masculinity, femininity, authority, and family relationships through linguistic and narrative choices. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model is particularly useful because it enables researchers to connect micro-level linguistic features, such as vocabulary, modality, evaluation, and conversational organization, with macro-level sociocultural structures including patriarchy, class inequality, institutional authority, and cultural values. Through this multidimensional approach, television dramas can be understood as sites where competing ideological positions are continuously produced, negotiated, and transformed.

The application of CDA within Pakistani television research has expanded considerably during recent years. Earlier studies primarily examined media texts through thematic or content-based approaches, whereas more recent scholarship has increasingly focused on discourse as the primary mechanism through which gender identities and social power are constructed. This transition reflects broader developments within discourse studies that recognise language as an active producer of ideology rather than a neutral medium of communication. Consequently, recent Pakistani researchers have adopted Fairclough's framework to investigate how everyday conversations, family interactions, and narrative structures contribute to the reproduction and negotiation of patriarchal authority.

Chaudhry, Ali, and Aslam (2021) were among the scholars who employed Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate women's representation in Pakistani television dramas. Their findings demonstrate that discourse simultaneously reproduces traditional patriarchal expectations while accommodating contemporary representations of educated and professionally successful women. Female characters frequently possess educational qualifications and professional competence, yet their identities remain evaluated according to conventional expectations concerning obedience, sacrifice, marriage, and domestic responsibility. The study therefore illustrates how discourse creates hybrid gender identities that combine modern aspirations with traditional patriarchal values.

Similarly, Noor, Khattak, and Khan (2022) employed Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis to examine gendered interactions in the Pakistani drama *O Rangreza*. Their research demonstrates that patriarchal authority is reproduced not only through explicit ideological statements but also through subtle conversational strategies such as interruptions, silence, evaluative expressions, turn-taking patterns, and interactional control. These findings support the argument that unequal gender relations are often embedded within ordinary language practices rather than overt discrimination alone. Although female characters occasionally challenge male authority, the overall discursive structure continues to privilege masculine control within family and social relationships.

Further evidence for the usefulness of CDA is provided by Amjad, Javed, and Farid (2025), whose analysis of *Duniyapur* and *Dil-e-Nadan* reveals that language functions as an important mechanism through which authority, family hierarchy, and gender inequality are maintained. Their research demonstrates that conversational dominance, evaluative language, and unequal participation in decision-making systematically position male characters as legitimate authority figures. Nevertheless, the researchers also identify emerging counter-discourses in which women employ education, professional competence, emotional resilience, and moral reasoning to negotiate greater autonomy within patriarchal family structures. These findings suggest that contemporary Pakistani television increasingly presents discourse as a site of ideological contestation rather than simple reproduction of traditional gender norms.

Recent comparative research further strengthens this perspective. Jalali and Wasif (2026) analysed *Aakhir Kab Tak* and *Nanhi* through Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model and concluded that contemporary Pakistani dramas simultaneously construct patriarchal control and feminist resistance. Their analysis indicates that discourse no longer presents empowerment as a direct rejection of cultural traditions; instead, female agency emerges through continuous negotiation with existing family structures and sociocultural expectations. Through dialogue, characterization, and narrative progression, these dramas illustrate the complexity of gender relations within contemporary Pakistani society, where social transformation occurs gradually rather than through radical ideological rupture.

Collectively, recent Critical Discourse Analysis studies demonstrate several important developments within Pakistani television scholarship. First, researchers increasingly recognise that gender inequality is reproduced through ordinary conversational practices rather than explicit ideological statements alone. Second, contemporary dramas increasingly portray women as educated professionals, decision-makers, and socially active individuals, while simultaneously maintaining cultural expectations concerning family honour, marriage, and domestic responsibility. Third, discourse is increasingly understood as a dynamic process through which gender identities, authority, and social relationships are continuously negotiated rather than permanently fixed. These developments indicate that Pakistani television dramas have become important sites for investigating how competing ideological positions coexist within contemporary media discourse.

Despite these important contributions, the existing body of Critical Discourse Analysis research remains concentrated on a relatively small number of well-known Pakistani dramas, including *O Rangreza*, *Duniyapur*, *Dil-e-Nadan*, *Aakhir Kab Tak*, *Nanhi*, *Bakhtawar*, *Sar-e-Rah*, *Sinf-e-Aahan*, and *Mere Paas Tum Ho*. Comparatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to newly produced television dramas that address the

changing relationship between women's professional identity, family authority, and patriarchal expectations within contemporary Pakistani society. As Pakistani television continues to evolve, there is a growing need to extend Critical Discourse Analysis to recent productions that reflect emerging social debates concerning gender equality, women's careers, marital relationships, and family power structures.

In this regard, the contemporary television drama *Dr. Bahu* (2026) provides an especially valuable corpus for discourse-oriented investigation. By centring on the experiences of a qualified female doctor negotiating professional responsibilities alongside traditional family expectations, the drama creates a rich discursive environment in which issues of gender, authority, professional identity, marriage, and patriarchal power are continuously constructed and contested. Applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model to this contemporary drama therefore extends existing scholarship by examining how current Pakistani television negotiates evolving gender ideologies within rapidly changing social conditions.

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3. Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that Pakistani television dramas have become an important site for examining the relationship between gender, discourse, and power. Recent studies consistently show that contemporary dramas portray women as educated, professionally competent, and socially active individuals while simultaneously positioning them within patriarchal family structures and traditional cultural expectations. Existing research has also established the usefulness of Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, in revealing how discourse constructs and negotiates gender identities and power relations.

Despite these valuable contributions, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, most discourse-based studies have focused on earlier or well-established Pakistani dramas such as *O Rangreza*, *Duniyapur*, *Dil-e-Nadan*, *Aakhir Kab Tak*, *Nanhi*, and *Mere Paas Tum Ho*. Contemporary television productions that address the changing realities of women's professional lives and family roles have received comparatively little scholarly attention. Consequently, recent dramas reflecting evolving gender dynamics remain underexplored from a discourse-analytical perspective.

Second, previous studies have generally examined women's empowerment, patriarchal oppression, or media representation as separate themes. Comparatively fewer studies have analysed how gender identities, professional identity, family authority, and patriarchal ideologies interact simultaneously within a single dramatic text. Such an integrated analysis is necessary to understand the complex ways in which contemporary Pakistani television negotiates competing discourses of tradition and modernity.

Third, although Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model has been widely acknowledged as an effective framework for analysing media discourse, relatively few studies have applied all three dimensions—text, discursive practice, and social practice—to examine the ideological construction of gender in recently produced Pakistani television dramas. Greater attention is therefore needed to explore how linguistic choices, character interactions, and narrative structures collectively reproduce, negotiate, or challenge patriarchal power relations within contemporary sociocultural contexts.

To address these gaps, the present study examines gender representation in the Pakistani television drama *Dr. Bahu* (2026) through Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis. As a recently aired drama centred on the experiences of a professional female doctor negotiating family expectations and workplace responsibilities, *Dr. Bahu* provides a contemporary and relevant corpus for investigating the discursive construction of gender identities, professional roles, patriarchal authority, and power relations. By analysing selected dialogues and character interactions, this study extends existing scholarship on Pakistani television discourse and contributes to the growing body of research on gender, media, and Critical Discourse Analysis.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the discursive construction of gender representation in the Pakistani television drama serial *Dr. Bahu* (2026). A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to explore how language, dialogue, and narrative practices construct, reproduce, negotiate, and challenge gender identities, patriarchal ideologies, and power relations. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was employed as the primary analytical approach to investigate the ideological meanings embedded in the selected dialogues and character interactions.

4.2. Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Norman Fairclough's (1995, 2015) Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which conceptualizes discourse through three interconnected dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The textual dimension examines linguistic features such as vocabulary, modality, pronouns, evaluative language, and interactional patterns. Discursive practice focuses on the production, interpretation, and circulation of discourse within the narrative, while social practice situates discourse within the broader sociocultural and ideological context. This framework provides a comprehensive basis for analysing how *Dr. Bahu* constructs and negotiates gender identities and patriarchal power relations in contemporary Pakistani society.

4.3. Data Source

The primary corpus for this study consists of the Pakistani television drama serial *Dr. Bahu* (2026), broadcast on ARY Digital. The drama was purposively selected because it foregrounds issues of women's professional identity, family relationships, marital expectations, workplace challenges, gender inequality, and patriarchal authority. These themes closely align with the objectives of the present study and provide a rich corpus for investigating gender representation through Critical Discourse Analysis.

4.4. Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed to select dialogues and scenes that directly address the research objectives. Episodes depicting gender roles, family hierarchy, professional identity, workplace interactions, decision-making, women's agency, and patriarchal power relations were selected for detailed analysis. Only those dialogues that significantly contribute to the construction or negotiation of gender ideologies were included in the corpus.

4.5. Data Collection

The selected episodes of *Dr. Bahu* (2026) were viewed repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the narrative and character interactions. Relevant dialogues were transcribed verbatim, and scenes reflecting gender representation, professional identity, family authority, and patriarchal discourse were systematically documented. The transcripts were then organised according to the study's research objectives for subsequent analysis.

4.6. Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analysed using Fairclough's (1995, 2015) Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis. At the textual level, the analysis focused on lexical choices, modality, pronouns, evaluative expressions, metaphors, and interactional patterns used to construct gender identities and power relations. At the discursive practice level, the study examined how dialogues, character interactions, and narrative organisation produced and negotiated meanings related to gender, professional identity, and family authority. At the social practice level, the analysis interpreted these discursive patterns within the broader sociocultural context of Pakistani society to explain how the drama reproduces, negotiates, or challenges patriarchal ideologies and dominant gender norms.

4.7. Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility and dependability of the findings, the selected episodes were reviewed multiple times, and the transcribed dialogues were repeatedly compared with the original audiovisual content. Emerging themes were cross-checked across different episodes to ensure consistency of interpretation. The systematic application of Fairclough's analytical framework further strengthened the reliability and transparency of the analysis.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

This study involved no human participants and relied exclusively on publicly available episodes of the Pakistani television drama serial *Dr. Bahu* (2026). The selected dialogues and scenes were used solely for academic purposes, and all interpretations were presented objectively in accordance with accepted principles of scholarly research. Appropriate acknowledgment of the original media source has been maintained throughout the study.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Discursive Construction of Professional Femininity

One of the dominant discourses emerging from *Dr. Bahu* (2026) is the construction of professional femininity. Unlike conventional Pakistani television dramas, where women's identities are predominantly confined to domestic responsibilities, *Dr. Bahu* constructs femininity through education, professional competence, ethical responsibility, and resilience while simultaneously positioning these identities within patriarchal family structures. The selected dialogues reveal that the protagonist, Dr. Sania, consistently defines herself through professional commitment rather than through traditional gender expectations alone. Nevertheless, this professional identity is repeatedly negotiated against social expectations regarding marriage, domesticity, and family honour. The drama therefore presents femininity not as a fixed cultural category but as a dynamic discursive process shaped by competing ideological positions.

The earliest indication of this professional identity appears in the hospital discourse, where Dr. Sania prioritizes patient care over personal convenience.

Dr. Sania: *"Prepare the examination room immediately. Every minute matters."*

Patient's Relative: *"Please save him, doctor."*

Dr. Sania: *"We'll do everything we can. Stay calm and let us work."*

At the textual level, the dialogue is characterized by imperative verbs such as *prepare*, together with the declarative statement *Every minute matters*. These linguistic choices establish urgency, authority, and professional competence. Unlike stereotypical representations of female characters whose discourse is often associated with emotional dependence, Dr. Sania's language is concise, confident, and action-oriented. The lexical choices emphasize responsibility rather than emotion, positioning her identity primarily through expertise and ethical commitment.

At the level of discursive practice, the interaction constructs a professional hierarchy in which authority derives from institutional competence rather than gender. Nurses, patients, and relatives respond to Dr. Sania's instructions without questioning her leadership. The discourse therefore legitimizes female professional authority within the hospital setting and normalizes women occupying positions traditionally associated with expertise and decision-making.

Within the broader social practice, this interaction challenges conventional assumptions that leadership and authority are inherently masculine. The dialogue reflects an emerging discourse in contemporary Pakistani society in which women increasingly occupy influential professional positions while continuing to negotiate patriarchal expectations. In Fairclough's (1995, 2015) terms, the discourse does not merely describe professional competence but actively constructs an alternative ideological representation of femininity based upon knowledge, responsibility, and institutional authority.

The negotiation between professional identity and traditional gender expectations becomes even more explicit during discussions surrounding marriage.

Aunt: *"We've found a suitable match for you."*

Dr. Sania: *"Marriage is important, but so is my career."*

Mother: *"We only want your happiness."*

Dr. Sania: *"Then I hope my future family respects my profession."*

This interaction illustrates how discourse constructs competing ideological understandings of womanhood. Textually, the conjunction **"but"** functions as a marker of ideological tension, positioning marriage and career as competing rather than complementary social expectations. The repeated use of the lexical items *career*, *profession*, and *respect* foregrounds professional identity as an integral component of Dr. Sania's selfhood rather than a secondary characteristic.

At the discursive level, the conversation reflects a negotiation between traditional family discourse and individual agency. Marriage is introduced as an expected life event, yet Dr. Sania reframes the discussion by shifting attention from marital compatibility to professional recognition. Instead of rejecting marriage, she reconstructs it as a relationship that should acknowledge women's educational achievements and occupational aspirations.

From the perspective of social practice, this dialogue reflects broader transformations within Pakistani society, where increasing numbers of educated women seek to balance professional careers with family life. Rather than opposing cultural traditions, the discourse advocates mutual respect as the foundation of marriage. This representation aligns with Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity by demonstrating that feminine identity is continuously negotiated through social interaction rather than predetermined by fixed cultural norms.

A more explicit articulation of professional femininity appears in the following exchange.

Colleague: *"Do you think marriage will change your career?"*

Dr. Sania: *"It shouldn't. A woman's education doesn't lose its value after marriage."*

Colleague: *"Society doesn't always agree."*

Dr. Sania: *"Society changes when people challenge unfair expectations."*

This extract represents one of the strongest ideological statements within the corpus. The textual organization contrasts institutional knowledge with dominant social assumptions. The modal expression *shouldn't* rejects the inevitability of professional sacrifice, while the evaluative expression *unfair expectations* explicitly identifies patriarchal norms as socially constructed rather than naturally occurring.

Discursively, the dialogue constructs two competing voices. The colleague represents dominant societal discourse, whereas Dr. Sania articulates a counter-discourse advocating gender equality. The exchange therefore becomes a site of ideological struggle in which competing understandings of women's social roles are negotiated through language.

Within Fairclough's social practice dimension, the dialogue reflects changing attitudes toward women's education and employment in Pakistan. Rather than accepting patriarchal expectations as immutable, the discourse constructs social change as a consequence of challenging discriminatory assumptions. This finding supports Hall's (1997) argument that representation participates in producing new social meanings rather than merely reflecting existing realities.

The professional identity constructed throughout the drama is further reinforced after marriage when Dr. Sania responds to pressures from her marital family.

Mother-in-law: *"A daughter-in-law should always put family first."*

Dr. Sania: *"I value my family deeply, but saving lives is also a responsibility I cannot ignore."*

Mother-in-law: *"Balance is difficult."*

Dr. Sania: *"Difficult, yes—but possible."*

Unlike earlier dialogues, this interaction no longer positions career and family as mutually exclusive alternatives. Textually, the concessive construction *I value my family deeply, but...* acknowledges cultural expectations while simultaneously resisting their exclusivity. The repetition of the lexical item *responsibility* throughout the corpus is particularly significant because it reframes professional work as a moral obligation rather than an individual preference.

Discursively, the exchange illustrates negotiation rather than confrontation. Dr. Sania neither rejects family obligations nor accepts the expectation that they should override her professional identity. Instead, she reconstructs femininity through a discourse of balance, presenting professional commitment and family care as complementary responsibilities.

At the level of social practice, this dialogue reflects broader ideological shifts in Pakistani society regarding women's participation in professional life. Traditional representations frequently positioned successful women as choosing between career and family; however, *Dr. Bahu* challenges this binary by constructing professional femininity

through coexistence rather than exclusion. The discourse therefore contributes to an emerging representation in which educated women retain both professional identity and family membership without sacrificing either.

Overall, the selected dialogues demonstrate that *Dr. Bahu* constructs professional femininity through competence, ethical responsibility, resilience, and agency while simultaneously acknowledging the cultural expectations associated with marriage and family life. Rather than presenting women as passive recipients of patriarchal authority, the drama portrays femininity as a dynamic and negotiated identity shaped through discourse. Across hospital interactions, marital conversations, and family negotiations, Dr. Sania consistently positions professional commitment as an integral dimension of her identity, while advocating mutual respect and shared responsibility instead of hierarchical gender relations. These findings reinforce Fairclough's argument that discourse functions as a form of social practice through which dominant ideologies are simultaneously reproduced and contested, while also supporting recent scholarship that identifies Pakistani television dramas as important sites for negotiating contemporary understandings of women's education, professional identity, and gender equality.

5.2. Discursive Construction of Patriarchal Authority

While *Dr. Bahu* constructs an alternative discourse of professional femininity, it simultaneously reveals how patriarchal authority continues to operate within family relationships. Rather than presenting patriarchy solely through overt oppression, the drama depicts it as a normalized social practice reproduced through everyday conversations, family expectations, and decision-making processes. The selected dialogues illustrate that authority is discursively legitimized through age, gender, and cultural traditions, whereas women's professional aspirations are frequently evaluated against domestic responsibilities. Consistent with Fairclough's (1995, 2015) conception of discourse as social practice, these interactions demonstrate how linguistic choices reproduce institutionalized power while simultaneously creating opportunities for ideological resistance.

One of the clearest manifestations of patriarchal authority appears in the following family interaction.

Father-in-law: "*The elders know what is best for the family.*"

Dr. Sania: "*I respect your experience, but my career also deserves respect.*"

Father-in-law: "*Sometimes personal wishes must wait.*"

Dr. Sania: "*Professional responsibility is not simply a personal wish.*"

At the textual level, the father-in-law's statement employs the generalized expression *the elders*, transforming individual authority into an unquestioned cultural principle. The modal construction *must wait* conveys obligation and reinforces hierarchical power by presenting compliance as a moral expectation rather than a negotiable choice. In

contrast, Dr. Sania's repeated use of the lexical item *respect* reframes the interaction from one of obedience to one of mutual recognition. Her description of medicine as a *professional responsibility* further shifts the discourse from personal preference to ethical duty.

Within the dimension of discursive practice, the dialogue constructs two competing ideological positions. The father-in-law speaks from the discourse of patriarchal family authority, where age and gender determine legitimacy. Dr. Sania, however, introduces a professional discourse grounded in competence, education, and institutional ethics. The interaction therefore represents a negotiation between inherited authority and modern professional identity rather than a simple interpersonal disagreement.

At the level of social practice, this exchange reflects broader tensions within Pakistani society, where educated women increasingly participate in professional life while remaining subject to traditional family hierarchies. The drama illustrates that patriarchal authority is maintained not only through explicit restrictions but also through culturally accepted assumptions regarding who possesses the right to make important family decisions. This finding supports van Dijk's (2008) argument that ideology is reproduced through everyday discourse that appears natural and commonsensical.

Patriarchal ideology is further reinforced through expectations surrounding women's domestic responsibilities after marriage.

Mother-in-law: "A daughter-in-law should always put family first."

Dr. Sania: "Caring for my family is important, but caring for my patients is also my responsibility."

Mother-in-law: "People will judge us."

Dr. Sania: "Society should respect women who save lives, not question their commitment to family."

Textually, the modal verb *should* functions differently for the two speakers. The mother-in-law employs it prescriptively to define the ideal behaviour of a daughter-in-law, thereby reinforcing traditional gender norms. Dr. Sania, however, uses the same modal form to challenge prevailing social expectations, arguing that society *should respect* professional women. The repetition of *responsibility* and *respect* throughout the dialogue reconstructs women's identity around competence and public service rather than domestic exclusivity.

Discursively, the exchange demonstrates how patriarchal authority is sustained through social evaluation rather than direct coercion. The phrase *People will judge us* invokes collective opinion as a mechanism of social control, illustrating how cultural expectations regulate individual behaviour. Dr. Sania responds by questioning the legitimacy of these expectations instead of accepting them as fixed social truths. The

interaction therefore transforms domestic conversation into a site of ideological contestation.

From the perspective of social practice, this dialogue reflects the continuing cultural expectation that women's professional success should not compromise family obligations. Rather than rejecting family values, the drama critiques the unequal standards through which men's and women's responsibilities are evaluated. This representation is consistent with Lazar's (2005) argument that patriarchal ideologies are frequently reproduced through ordinary language that presents unequal gender expectations as socially appropriate.

The discourse of patriarchal authority is also evident in conversations concerning career progression.

Senior Family Member: *"International training can wait until later."*

Dr. Sania: *"Opportunities like this do not come twice."*

Senior Family Member: *"Family comes before everything."*

Dr. Sania: *"Professional growth also benefits the family."*

Unlike previous examples, this dialogue shifts the discussion from daily domestic responsibilities to long-term professional development. The lexical opposition between *family* and *professional growth* reveals competing ideological priorities. The family member positions career advancement as secondary to domestic obligations, whereas Dr. Sania reframes professional achievement as a collective benefit rather than an individual ambition.

At the discursive level, this interaction demonstrates how patriarchal discourse often limits women's mobility through apparently reasonable arguments centred on family welfare. Instead of prohibiting professional development directly, authority is exercised through moral appeals emphasizing sacrifice and collective responsibility. Dr. Sania responds by redefining professional success as compatible with family interests, thereby weakening the ideological opposition between career and domestic life.

Within the wider social context, this dialogue reflects contemporary debates concerning women's participation in higher education, international training, and professional leadership in Pakistan. The drama does not portray patriarchal authority as absolute but as a discourse that is increasingly questioned through education, professional competence, and rational dialogue. Consequently, power is represented as negotiated rather than fixed.

Collectively, these interactions demonstrate that *Dr. Bahu* portrays patriarchal authority as an ideological system embedded within everyday discourse rather than merely within institutional structures. Family hierarchy, cultural expectations, and social evaluation function together to legitimize unequal gender relations. Nevertheless, the drama also illustrates that these ideologies are not immutable. Through respectful yet

assertive dialogue, Dr. Sania consistently challenges assumptions that equate authority with masculinity or seniority, advocating instead for mutual respect, shared decision-making, and recognition of women's professional identities.

These findings reinforce Fairclough's (1995, 2015) view that discourse simultaneously reproduces and transforms social structures. While patriarchal authority remains a dominant discourse within the family, it is repeatedly contested through alternative discourses of education, professional ethics, and gender equality. The analysis also supports previous studies (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Noor et al., 2022; Amjad et al., 2025) that argue Pakistani television dramas increasingly portray patriarchy as a negotiated rather than unquestioned system of social power. However, *Dr. Bahu* extends this discussion by demonstrating that the negotiation of patriarchal authority is closely linked to women's professional identity, making it a significant contemporary text for understanding changing gender relations in Pakistani society.

5.3. Discursive Negotiation of Gender Roles

While the preceding sections demonstrated how *Dr. Bahu* constructs professional femininity and exposes patriarchal authority, the drama moves beyond a binary opposition between male dominance and female resistance. Instead, it presents gender roles as dynamic and negotiable social practices that are continuously reconstructed through dialogue, interpersonal relationships, and changing social realities. Rather than portraying gender identities as biologically predetermined or culturally fixed, the selected interactions reveal how both women and men redefine their responsibilities within marriage, family, and professional life. Consistent with Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity and Fairclough's (1995, 2015) understanding of discourse as social practice, the drama illustrates that gender roles are produced, challenged, and transformed through everyday communication.

One of the most significant negotiations of gender roles occurs when Dr. Sania discusses the balance between professional responsibilities and domestic expectations with her husband.

Husband: *"I know your work is important, but our family also needs you."*

Dr. Sania: *"I have never separated my responsibilities as a doctor from my responsibilities as a wife. Both deserve commitment."*

Husband: *"Maybe I should share more of those responsibilities with you."*

At the textual level, the repeated use of the lexical item *responsibilities* is particularly significant. Unlike conventional patriarchal discourse, which often constructs domestic work as an exclusively feminine obligation, the dialogue gradually shifts toward the language of shared commitment. The husband's modal expression *should* signals reflection rather than authority, indicating an emerging willingness to reconsider established gender expectations.

From the perspective of discursive practice, the interaction illustrates negotiation instead of confrontation. Rather than rejecting family responsibilities, Dr. Sania reconstructs them as compatible with her professional identity. Simultaneously, the husband moves away from the traditional assumption that domestic obligations belong primarily to women and begins to position caregiving as a shared responsibility. The discourse therefore produces a collaborative model of marriage founded upon dialogue rather than hierarchy.

At the level of social practice, this exchange reflects broader social transformations within urban Pakistani society, where dual-career families increasingly challenge conventional divisions of labour. The interaction questions the cultural assumption that professional women alone should bear responsibility for balancing employment and domestic life. Instead, it promotes an alternative discourse in which marital relationships are based upon cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual support.

The negotiation of gender roles becomes more explicit during a conversation concerning childcare and household responsibilities.

Relative: *"Children need their mother more than anyone else."*

Husband: *"They also need their father."*

Dr. Sania: *"Parenting is a shared responsibility, not a mother's duty alone."*

Textually, the dialogue challenges gender stereotypes through the repeated lexical choice *shared responsibility*. The relative's statement reproduces a conventional cultural belief by assigning childcare primarily to mothers, whereas the responses of both Dr. Sania and her husband introduce an alternative discourse based on parental equality. The shift from *mother's duty* to *shared responsibility* reflects an important ideological transformation in the construction of family roles.

Discursively, the interaction demonstrates how dominant assumptions are questioned through everyday conversation rather than dramatic confrontation. Instead of denying the importance of motherhood, the dialogue broadens the concept of parenting by recognising fathers as equally responsible caregivers. Consequently, the discourse reconstructs both femininity and masculinity within a more egalitarian family framework.

Within the wider sociocultural context, this exchange reflects changing public discussions surrounding fatherhood, caregiving, and work-life balance in Pakistan. Traditional family structures have frequently associated caregiving with women, while men's responsibilities have been largely confined to economic provision. By challenging this division, the drama contributes to a broader discourse advocating shared domestic responsibilities without undermining family cohesion.

The evolution of gender roles is further illustrated through conversations regarding professional achievement.

Senior Doctor: *"Leadership depends on competence, not gender."*

Dr. Sania: "*Respect should be earned through ability and commitment.*"

Colleague: "*That is how every workplace should function.*"

Unlike previous interactions centred on family relationships, this dialogue situates gender negotiation within a professional institution. Textually, the declarative structure of the statements projects confidence and certainty. The lexical choices *competence*, *ability*, and *commitment* replace gender as the primary criteria for evaluating leadership, thereby challenging discriminatory assumptions embedded within professional discourse.

At the discursive level, the exchange normalises meritocracy rather than exceptionalising female success. The conversation does not frame Dr. Sania's achievements as unusual because she is a woman; instead, it presents competence as the legitimate basis of professional authority. This discursive strategy weakens the ideological association between leadership and masculinity while simultaneously legitimising women's participation in positions of institutional authority.

From the perspective of social practice, the dialogue reflects contemporary efforts within Pakistani society to promote gender equality in professional environments. It illustrates how institutional discourse can challenge broader patriarchal assumptions by redefining authority through expertise rather than gender. In doing so, the drama extends the negotiation of gender roles beyond the domestic sphere into workplaces and public institutions.

Taken together, these dialogues demonstrate that *Dr. Bahu* conceptualises gender roles as socially constructed, context-dependent, and continuously negotiated rather than biologically determined or culturally fixed. The drama neither completely rejects traditional family values nor fully embraces individualistic conceptions of gender equality. Instead, it promotes a discourse of partnership in which professional aspirations, family responsibilities, and marital relationships are understood as complementary rather than contradictory. Such representations support Butler's (1990) argument that gender identities are performed and reshaped through repeated social interactions, while also reinforcing Fairclough's (1995, 2015) view that discourse constitutes a dynamic arena in which social meanings and power relations are continually reconstructed.

The findings also resonate with previous studies (Shahzadi, 2023; Jalali & Wasif, 2026), which argue that contemporary Pakistani television dramas increasingly portray gender relations as negotiated rather than predetermined. However, *Dr. Bahu* extends this discourse by foregrounding the intersection of professional identity, marriage, and shared family responsibilities, thereby offering a more nuanced representation of gender relations in contemporary Pakistani society.

5.4. Discursive Transformation toward Gender Equality

The preceding analyses demonstrate that *Dr. Bahu* constructs professional femininity, exposes patriarchal authority, and negotiates gender roles through everyday

discourse. However, the drama does not conclude with the simple opposition between patriarchy and female resistance. Instead, it gradually constructs a transformative discourse in which gender equality emerges through mutual understanding, shared decision-making, and changing perceptions of authority. This transformation is neither abrupt nor revolutionary; rather, it develops through continuous dialogue, reflection, and interpersonal negotiation. Consistent with Fairclough's (1995, 2015) understanding of discourse as an agent of social change, the drama illustrates how repeated communicative practices can reshape dominant gender ideologies within contemporary Pakistani society.

A significant ideological shift occurs when the husband begins to reconsider traditional assumptions regarding authority and responsibility.

Husband: *"I used to believe that providing financially was enough."*

Dr. Sania: *"A family grows stronger when responsibilities are shared."*

Husband: *"You're right. Partnership requires more than financial support."*

At the textual level, the dialogue demonstrates a clear movement from certainty to self-reflection. The expression *I used to believe* signals a reassessment of previously accepted assumptions, while the lexical choices *shared* and *partnership* replace the hierarchical language associated with traditional masculinity. The discourse shifts from defining the husband's role solely as an economic provider to recognising emotional and domestic participation as equally significant dimensions of family life.

From the perspective of discursive practice, the interaction reconstructs masculinity through dialogue rather than authority. Instead of defending conventional gender roles, the husband actively participates in redefining them. Dr. Sania's response does not reject family values but reframes them through cooperation and reciprocity. Consequently, the dialogue presents equality as a collaborative process achieved through communication rather than confrontation.

At the level of social practice, this interaction reflects changing expectations surrounding marriage in contemporary Pakistan. Increasing educational opportunities and women's participation in professional life have challenged traditional divisions of labour, encouraging more collaborative family relationships. The drama therefore represents gender equality not as the abandonment of cultural values but as the reinterpretation of those values within changing social conditions.

A similar transformation is evident in a later family discussion concerning authority and decision-making.

Father-in-law: *"Perhaps experience should guide us, but every voice deserves to be heard."*

Dr. Sania: *"Respect becomes stronger when decisions are made together."*

Family Member: *"That is how trust is built."*

Textually, the discourse shifts from the absolute authority observed in earlier dialogues to a more inclusive vocabulary characterised by expressions such as *every voice*, *together*, and *trust*. These lexical choices weaken hierarchical distinctions and construct authority as participatory rather than unilateral. The replacement of obligation with cooperation signals an important ideological transformation in the representation of family relationships.

Discursively, the conversation demonstrates that patriarchal authority is no longer treated as unquestionable. Instead, authority becomes legitimate through consultation, mutual respect, and collective decision-making. This transformation does not eliminate the significance of senior family members; rather, it redefines leadership as a relational practice based on dialogue rather than dominance.

Within the broader sociocultural context, the interaction reflects contemporary debates concerning democratic family relationships and gender-inclusive decision-making. By presenting authority as shared rather than inherited, *Dr. Bahu* challenges conventional assumptions regarding power while preserving the importance of family cohesion and intergenerational respect.

The culmination of this ideological transformation appears in the drama's closing discourse.

Dr. Sania: *"Equality does not diminish respect; it strengthens relationships."*

Husband: *"Listening to one another has made us a better family."*

Father-in-law: *"Perhaps real authority begins with understanding."*

The textual organisation of this dialogue is characterised by positive evaluative language, including *strengthens*, *better*, and *understanding*. Unlike earlier extracts dominated by obligation and authority, the final interaction foregrounds cooperation, empathy, and mutual recognition. Equality is no longer represented as a threat to cultural traditions but as a principle that enhances family relationships.

At the discursive level, the dialogue symbolically resolves the ideological tensions developed throughout the narrative. Rather than depicting gender equality as the victory of one gender over another, the drama constructs it as a shared social achievement realised through dialogue and reciprocal respect. Each character contributes to this transformation, demonstrating that ideological change is a collective rather than an individual process.

From the perspective of social practice, the concluding discourse reflects broader societal aspirations toward balancing cultural continuity with changing gender expectations. The drama acknowledges the enduring significance of family, marriage, and respect for elders while simultaneously advocating greater recognition of women's professional identities and equal participation in family life. In doing so, it constructs an alternative discourse in which gender equality is presented as compatible with Pakistani cultural values rather than opposed to them.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that *Dr. Bahu* moves beyond representing women solely as victims of patriarchal structures or men solely as agents of oppression. Instead, the drama presents gender relations as evolving through continuous dialogue, negotiation, and shared responsibility. Professional competence, mutual respect, and collaborative decision-making gradually replace rigid hierarchies, illustrating how discourse can contribute to the transformation of social attitudes. These findings support Fairclough's (1995, 2015) argument that discourse is both socially constituted and socially constitutive, simultaneously reflecting existing ideological structures and creating possibilities for social change. They also extend previous studies (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Noor et al., 2022; Shahzadi, 2023; Amjad et al., 2025; Jalali & Wasif, 2026) by demonstrating that contemporary Pakistani television increasingly portrays gender equality as a negotiated and culturally grounded process rather than a simple opposition between tradition and modernity.

4. Conclusion

This study employed Norman Fairclough's (1995, 2015) Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the representation of gender in the contemporary Pakistani television drama *Dr. Bahu* (2026). Through the analysis of purposively selected dialogues, the study explored how discourse constructs gender identities, negotiates gender roles, and reproduces or challenges patriarchal ideologies within the sociocultural context of Pakistan. The findings demonstrate that *Dr. Bahu* presents gender as a dynamic and socially constructed phenomenon rather than a fixed biological or cultural reality. The drama constructs professional femininity through education, competence, ethical responsibility, resilience, and agency, while simultaneously portraying the challenges women encounter in balancing professional aspirations with traditional family expectations. At the same time, masculinity is represented as an evolving identity that gradually shifts from conventional patriarchal authority toward partnership, empathy, and shared responsibility.

The analysis further reveals that patriarchal ideology is embedded within everyday family discourse through expectations of obedience, domestic responsibility, and male authority. However, these dominant ideologies are not presented as unquestionable or permanent. Instead, the drama depicts discourse as a site of negotiation where female agency, professional identity, and rational dialogue challenge traditional gender norms and promote more inclusive understandings of family relationships. Through these competing discourses, *Dr. Bahu* illustrates the gradual transformation of gender relations by emphasizing mutual respect, collaborative decision-making, and equality without rejecting the cultural importance of family and social cohesion.

The study also confirms the analytical value of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model in uncovering the relationship between language, ideology, and power within

Pakistani television discourse. By integrating textual analysis with discursive and sociocultural interpretation, the study demonstrates how media discourse both reflects and shapes changing perceptions of gender and social power. Consequently, this research contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Critical Discourse Analysis, feminist media studies, and Pakistani television by providing one of the first discourse-oriented analyses of *Dr. Bahu* (2026). Despite being limited to a single television drama, the study offers valuable insights into the evolving representation of women, professional identity, and patriarchal authority in contemporary Pakistani media and provides a useful foundation for future research on gender and discourse in South Asian television.

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