

A Critical Exploration of Power Dynamics and Ideological Perspectives in Taboo Narratives within Feminist Discourses

Abstract

This research investigates the power dynamics and ideological perspectives in the feminist discourses in contemporary Pakistan. By employing discourse analysis based on Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model (1989), this study examines textual features, ideological underpinnings, and power structures embedded in the primary and secondary discourses of the Aurat March (Women's March) campaign texts. By exploring these texts' linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions, the study examines the transforming taboo narratives and shifting power dynamics and ideological standpoints within the feminist discourses in Pakistan. The research contributes to understanding the role of language and discourse in creating modern feminist narratives in Pakistan. Also, it highlights how contemporary feminists strategically utilize language to construct a narrative that amplifies their feminist ideals and advances the cause of gender equity in Pakistan. The findings also illuminate how language becomes a tool for asserting agency and negotiating power constructions within feminist discursive practices.

Keywords: Aurat March, Feminist discourse, Feminist ideology, Power dynamics, Taboo Narratives

INTRODUCTION

Examining feminist discourse in Pakistan is paramount when considering linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives on feminist ideals. This paper endeavors to dissect the discourse of *Aurat March*, a notable feminist movement in Pakistan, to unveil its distinctive textual features and far-reaching sociological implications. By delving into the intricacies of identity formation, narrative construction, and power dynamics, this research contributes to understanding the evolving feminist landscape in Pakistani society. The *Aurat March*, more widely known as the 'women's march,' constitutes a series of annual marches in Pakistan dedicated to raising awareness about women's rights. Over time, this movement has expanded its focus to encompass transgender rights, advocating for more robust legal protections for women, effectively enforcing existing laws, and promoting awareness and shifts in societal attitudes. Diverse participants, hailing from various backgrounds and representing both genders, have united in these marches to amplify their voices in support of fundamental rights. This movement has gained global recognition for its use of slogans that passionately call for an end to gender discrimination, the pursuit of Gender equality, and the recognition of shared responsibilities at national and domestic levels. However, it is worth

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noting that these slogans, which passionately advocate for feminist rights, have faced criticism from specific segments of the Pakistani population who perceive them as offensive and contradictory to Islamic and cultural values.

Research Questions

1. What linguistic, semiotic, and thematic strategies are employed in the discursive practices of the *Aurat March* campaign in Pakistan, and how do these textual and thematic discourses create the feminist narrative in Pakistan?
2. What ideological standpoints and power structures manifest in the primary and secondary discourse of the *Aurat March* campaign texts, and how do linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions of these text indicate transforming taboo narratives within feminist discourses in Pakistan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aurat March - Modern Feminism in Pakistan

Aurat March (women's march) refers to a series of women's rights awareness marches held throughout Pakistan since 2018, coinciding with International Women's Day. These marches, inspired by the global *#MeToo* movement, have gradually evolved into a broader movement advocating for transgender rights and improved legal protections for women, to raise awareness and transform societal attitudes. Since its inception, the movement has become a cultural phenomenon, attracting both supporters and critics (Saigol & Chaudhry, 2020). Notably, the campaign has garnered attention due to its utilization of contentious slogans, which have been deemed offensive by many Pakistanis due to their departure from prevailing social, cultural, and religious norms in the country. Following the 2021 *Aurat March* protests, legal petitions were filed against the organizers, accusing them of undermining cultural values (Shah, 2021). Zia (2022) highlights that the organizers of the *Aurat March* lack conceptual and political preparedness, leading them into a predictable religio-patriarchal trap that could have been avoided had they cultivated both ideological and strategic clarity in equal measure to their creative performative politics. Saigol (2020), referring to the *Aurat March* movement as the fourth-wave feminist movement, asserts that while the movement has effectively utilized digital platforms for mobilization, ongoing and inclusive engagement among participants and organizers across the country is essential to address reservations and differences arising from diverse understandings of gender power structures in Pakistan.

Detractors, encompassing both conservative voices and religious feminists, have pejoratively characterized the movement as a foreign and Western-influenced concept to discredit local customs and traditions. In her analysis, Shaheed emphasizes how Pakistani society often tends to view women involved in women's movements as disconnected from their cultural context (2019). Critics of the *Aurat March* campaign have portrayed it as overtly liberal and influenced by Western ideologies, accusing it of propagating sentiments perceived as 'anti-men' within Pakistan. As a result, many moderate women distance themselves from the movement due to its controversial slogans. Akhtar et al. (2021) provide a valuable examination of the *Aurat March* slogans, highlighting their role in challenging patriarchal norms in Pakistan. By analyzing the protest signs from the 2019 march, the study reveals how

these slogans articulate feminist demands and resonate with different strands of feminism, including liberal, radical, and intersectional perspectives. The study demonstrates that the slogans do more than demand gender equality; they question deep-seated social norms and give voice to marginalized groups, including religious minorities and the transgender community. This work is crucial for understanding the complex dynamics of Pakistani feminism, as it shows how the Aurat March serves as a platform for diverse feminist narratives. By including this perspective, the present study builds on existing scholarship to offer a more comprehensive analysis of the feminist narrative construction in Pakistan.

Discourse and Identity - Sociological Implications

Identity is a concept with various interpretations and implications. Butler (1990) views identity as a performance enacted through interactions. Crossley (2005) defines identity as an individual's sense of self, while Mohanty (2005) emphasizes that identity is also shaped by external perceptions. Discourse, as defined by Gee (2005), refers to oral and written language imbued with socio-politically oriented meaning. Discourse, a social activity, exhibits sociological characteristics (Wetherell, 2001). Howarth (2002) equates discourse with the entire social system, emphasizing that discourses fundamentally shape the social and political world. Discourses transcend the texts that constitute them and encompass the ideologies and belief systems generated within those texts (He, 2001). Discourse, therefore, necessitates the inclusion of sociological implications for comprehensive analysis, as it constitutes the act of meaning-making within social life (Wetherell et al., 2001). The relationship between discourse, identity, and social realities is foundational. The social and cultural contexts in which discourses originate and circulate determine their content and influence societal narratives (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Discourse extends beyond mere language use, encompassing language as a type of social practice that both reflects and shapes social order and individuals' interactions with society (Jaworski & Coupland, 2006). Discourses are representatives of the socio-cultural contexts in which they originate and circulate, reflecting and influencing social and cultural norms. By creating and disseminating social narratives, discourses shape and are shaped by the social realities they encompass.

Sloganeering in Feminist Movements

Slogans have always played a powerful role in feminist movements, turning complex ideas into simple, memorable phrases that inspire action and spread powerful messages. They bring complicated feminist concepts to life in a way that speaks to people from all walks of life. Slogans also help highlight how issues of race, class, and gender are connected within feminist struggles. In contemporary feminist movements, slogans continue to play a crucial role in advocacy and awareness-raising. Van De Velde (2022) explores how protest slogans are more than just catchy phrases and how they are powerful political tools that reveal the emotions, identities, and demands of social movements. She argues that slogans act as public performances, giving voice to both individual and collective experiences and influencing political discourse.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**Research Method and Data Collection**

Content analysis as a research method was used with a purposive sampling technique employed to strategically select slogans that are most representative of the ideological perspectives discussed during the Aurat March. The study uses photographs from on-the-ground coverage, showing placards held by participants during the marches, as well as images from official social media pages, where slogans are frequently shared to expand their reach. This approach is chosen to focus on slogans that generate significant public discourse and controversy, as they are more likely to reveal underlying power dynamics and ideological conflicts. The intention is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of all slogans but to critically examine those that have the most sociopolitical impact. The data is collected from the official Facebook pages of the Aurat March campaign in Pakistan, covering the Aurat March processions from 2018 to 2022. These are analyzed to examine the digital amplification of feminist narratives. This study examines the recurring ideological themes and power dynamics within feminist discourses as reflected in the slogans of the Aurat March, highlighting their collective challenge to societal norms and advocacy for women's rights.

Theoretical Framework and Analytical Procedures

This research employs Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model (1989) as a framework to analyze the textual and visual features of discourse and examine the associated social implications and contexts. The CDA model consists of textual, process, and societal analysis, illuminating how discourse generates meaning within social contexts.

To guide the analysis, parameters integrating inquiries from Fairclough (1989), Janks (1997), and Berger (1998) have been formulated and presented in Table 1.

Table 1:*Parameters of Study in Textual Analysis (Umar, 2016, p. 74)*

Sr. No.	Parameters of Study in Textual Analysis
i.	Pictures and images
ii.	Semiotic signs and symbols and their significance
iii.	Codes used (code mixing/switching)
iv.	Lexical and grammatical patterns
v.	Use of selective voice
vi.	Foregrounding and/or back grounding ² the picture or text
vii.	Use of words/phrases with specific connotations ³
viii.	Tag lines/ Topics
ix.	Modality (tone)
x.	Presuppositions ⁴
xi.	Hinting at certain issues
xii.	Embellishments (textual and graphical)
xiii.	Agency ⁵ (information about the power relations); Nominalization (information about agents of power)
xiv.	Ideologically significant words denoting ideological and sociological matters
xv.	Metaphors

By integrating these parameters for studying the textual characteristics of both primary and secondary discourse into Fairclough's CDA model (1989), the resulting research framework is employed to analyze the linguistic, semiotic, and thematic features encompassed within the feminist discursive practices in Pakistan.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Analyzing the Feminist Narrative within the Aurat March Discourse

This section entails the analysis of the data related to the language used in the discursive practices of the Aurat March (occasionally used as *AM* in the present research) feminist discourse. The primary objective is to examine the prevailing themes within the data and to comprehend how these themes are established through textual elements that encompass relational, expressive, and experiential values. Additionally, this section focuses on exploring the ideological perspectives and power dynamics inherent in the primary and secondary discourse of the Aurat March campaign texts, particularly in relation to identity and power.

² To Huckin (1997) foregrounding highlights the ideas in the text, whereas, backgrounding helps to understate the ideas.

³ *Connotations* to Chandler (2002) are "the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations produced as a reader decodes a text. The term also refers to the relationship between the signifier and its signified" (p. 225).

⁴ Goddard believes that *presupposition* are "all about reading between lines; since this is, as it suggests, a hidden process, it is very interesting to advertisers, as we can be taking in all sorts of assumptions without consciously paying attention to them." (1998, p. 125)

⁵ Agency gives information about the doer of things.

Rethinking Conventional Gender Perspectives and Redefining Feminine Ideologies

Throughout history, men have constructed narratives about women, which have been widely accepted as standard ideologies. Just as language is a human creation, so are the limitations imposed on women, dictating what they can achieve, how they can achieve it, to what extent, and through which means. Against this backdrop, the Aurat March narrative seeks to redefine traditional notions of limits, boundaries, agency, and power, thus reconstructing a narrative of their own through the use of linguistic devices in their feminist discursive practices. The discourse of the AM campaign offers a compelling context for discourse analysis, particularly in terms of language usage and its various linguistic and extralinguistic features that aim to redefine and reconstruct contemporary feminine ideologies.

Figure 1:

Addressing Sexual Assault



In Figure 1, an image depicts a female participant in the AM holding a placard with the words '*DON'T GET RAPED*'. This references the prevailing societal norm in Pakistan, where women often face blame for being raped, attributed to factors such as provocative clothing, going out alone without a male companion, staying out late, or even simple acts such as wearing perfume or attracting the opposite gender through physicality. By ignoring any reference to the doer and rendering the rape victim passive, the statement effectively shifts all blame onto the victim and removes the rapist from the narrative. To highlight this issue, the deliberate striking out of the word 'GET' and the letter 'D' in the inscription draws visual attention to the need for redefining traditional social behaviors using the linguistic technique of introducing agency into an otherwise nominalized socio-linguistic pattern. The text here aims to redefine the concept of blame for rape by holding the perpetrator accountable, directly reproaching them for their actions.

Another narrative challenged by the Aurat March discourse is the societal obligation imposed on women to conform to standards of beauty, particularly for the sake of pleasing men. This obligation manifests privately, socially, and even culturally, pressuring women to maintain

their youth, physical appearance, and figure for an extended period of time, disregarding natural changes that occur after childbirth and over time. The AM discourse aims to disrupt this behavioral pattern by creating a new, more realistic narrative that encourages women to break free from the unrealistic beauty requirements and standards imposed as per social standards. Consider Figure 2 in this regard:

Figure 2:
Assertive and Unapologetic Narrative



Figure 2 shows an image shared on the official Facebook page of the Aurat March team, in which the linguistic technique of topicalization is employed. The inscription on the picture boldly declares, *'Women don't owe you pretty'*, establishing an assertive and unapologetic tone. This text serves as a lesson for women to maintain self-assurance in the face of societal pressures that demand prioritization of their physical appearance at any cost. It also challenges men in society who assume that women must always embody beauty, youth, and charm. The text establishes modality through confident assertions, emphasizing that women do not owe anyone their time and effort in conforming to societal expectations of beauty.

The AM discourse endeavors to challenge another longstanding notion about *ideal women*, namely, the association of heroism with sacrifice and selflessness. Throughout history, women have been socialized to prioritize self-sacrifice and submission in the context of domestic inequalities and prejudice. The visuals depicted in Figures 3 and 4 exemplify the process of redefining femininity and reshaping gender narratives.

Figure 3:
Reshaping Gender Narratives

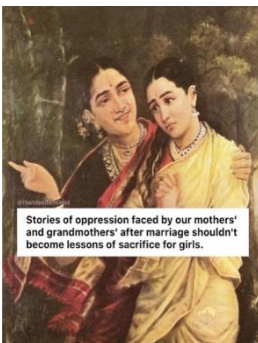


Figure 4:
Redefining Femininity



The text on these images serves as a lesson in self-awareness for women. The inscriptions on the images challenge the conventional definition of a heroic woman who endures domestic injustices in silence and submission. Figure 3 portrays the impact of social and cultural norms on a woman's well-being, with the younger woman burdened by her circumstances while the older woman appears content as she perpetuates the lessons of subservience to the new bride. The text boldly challenges societal norms by asserting, '*Stories of oppression faced by our mothers and grandmothers after marriage shouldn't become lessons of sacrifice for girls.*' While Figure 4 conveys the message, '*Tu khud ke liye ji*', translated as, '*Live your life, for yourself only*'. The text aims to redefine women's worth, value, space, and priorities by critiquing the traditional expectation for women to sacrifice their dreams, aspirations, and self-love to maintain marital harmony. The text challenges the subservient customs that have been passed down through generations of women. It offers a new definition of modern womanhood, emphasizing that the oppression endured by previous generations should not be the focal point of women's lives, nor should it be considered a lesson in sacrifice. The AM discourse redefines the traditional feminine narrative by advocating for a woman's own world, prioritizing her own needs above sacrificing herself, her freedom, and her dreams for the desires of her family.

The feminists have a statement to convey through the placards showcased in Figure 5:

Figure 5:
Agency within Discourse



Figure 5 portrays women participants of the Aurat March holding two placards, each bearing a significant message. One placard features the text '*Weak men fear strong women,*' aiming to challenge the perception of men towards strong women and shed light on the existing social reality where men feel uncomfortable in the presence of strong women. The text explicitly condemns men who fear strong women, labeling them as weak. The selective voice used in identifying such men as weak asserts the assertiveness and modality of the text, granting authority to the text producers. Their narrative is presented as a factual statement, expressing their views with certainty and inherent authority. The other placard bears the caption '*It's my choice*'. The image on the placard depicts silhouettes of two women, one wearing a head covering and the other without. The head covering in Pakistan symbolizes a woman's religious affiliation. The image portrays women with different choices regarding their religious attire, emphasizing the message of personal choice. The placard's direct

assertion establishes a tone of certainty and grants agency to the text, asserting that women have the right to choose how they dress according to their religious beliefs. The caption expresses the text producers' opinion as a factual evaluation based on their own beliefs, further reinforcing the embedded authority of the discourse. This aligns with the Frankfurt School's notion that real power lies with the creators and mediators of the text, as the consumers are influenced to accept the narrative presented to them with implicit power.

Reconceptualizing Taboo Narratives

Gender equality remains a paramount goal for contemporary activists in Pakistan, urging a reevaluation of societal norms and structures. The Aurat March feminist discourse is characterized by its emphasis on taboo topics and its questioning of deeply entrenched power dynamics that have permeated Pakistani society for many years. By openly discussing these taboo subjects and challenging long-standing power structures, the Aurat March narrative becomes more contentious among the general public. In Pakistan, several topics, including rape, drug abuse, divorce, menstruation and hygiene, marital rape, and domestic violence, are considered taboo. Within this context, contemporary feminists in Pakistan fearlessly highlight these taboo topics through the texts shared in marches, rallies, and on social media platforms. An illuminating example of this can be observed in Figure 6, sourced from an Aurat March campaign page on Facebook.

Figure 6:
Silenced Voices



Figure 6 portrays a compelling image of a young girl with her lips bound by the hands of an adult family member, symbolizing the discouragement of her voice. The accompanying caption, ***'Be quiet! This is the matter of our family's honor!'***, reflects a commonly used statement within Pakistani households, influenced by societal pressures that suppress women's ability to speak up in the face of personal and social adversities. This image serves as a reflection of the concept of honor in Pakistan, which revolves around women within the family. In Pakistan, ironically the notion of male honor is closely tied to women's sexual conduct, posing a potential threat to family honor. Even when a woman in the family experiences mistreatment, harassment, or disrespect from an outsider, she is discouraged from speaking out against oppression. Societal pressure dictates that she remains silent about instances of sexual assault or harassment, ultimately blaming her for the unfortunate incidents she encounters both outside and inside her own home. The distressed expression on the girl's face in the image poignantly conveys the burden of oppression imposed upon her by society. The use of selective voice, exemplified by the caption inscribed on the image,

highlights the plight of harassment victims in Pakistan.

One notable topic that has gained prominence in the contemporary feminist discourse is consent. Sexual harassment, rape, and even marital rape, which are typically shrouded in silence, have become significant subjects addressed within the feminist discourse. By bringing attention to these contentious issues, the movement aims to challenge societal norms, initiate conversations, and strive for a more inclusive and equitable society. Figure 7 exemplifies Aurat March's engagement with these taboo topics, particularly focusing on the concept of consent. The image emphasizes the need to address sexual harassment and rape within the broader context of power dynamics.

Figure 7:
Empowering Consent



Figure 7 depicts an image of a girl with her mouth taped, displaying the word 'YES' on it. The accompanying caption, **'IF IT'S FORCED, IT'S NOT CONSENT!'**, reinforces the notion of a woman's autonomy and her right to her own body. This concept applies not only to public spaces where women face physical harassment but also to private domains, including instances of marital rape. The text unequivocally establishes that any physical action imposed on a woman without her genuine consent cannot be considered consensual. The text producers present their opinion as an indisputable fact, reflecting their beliefs through a selective voice that emphasizes the fundamental importance of consent in all relationships. This narrative aligns with the feminist discourse, shedding light on the significance of consent and empowering women to establish their own physical boundaries. In the context of Pakistan, where women have historically been deprived of the agency to define their personal boundaries, this narrative represents a significant shift.

One of the most prominent features of the Aurat March feminist discourse, which has garnered significant criticism from the general public, is the use of controversial slogans. These slogans have sparked intense backlash and misunderstandings. Among these slogans, the most infamous and highly criticized one is **'Mera jism, meri marzi'**, translated as **'My body, my choice'**.

Figure 8.1:
Asserting Autonomy



Figure 8.2:
Challenging Norms



Figures 8.1 and 8.2 display two images from different rallies organized by the Aurat March in support of feminism in Pakistan. Both images feature placards bearing the inscription '*Mera jism, meri marzi*'. While this slogan may appear straightforward and logical to individuals with an enlightened mindset, its interpretation differs significantly among average Pakistanis, who are deeply entrenched in a complex web of social, cultural, and religious ideologies. For them, this slogan contradicts religious norms and challenges cultural values. The slogan is often seen as a manifestation of waywardness, defiance, and rebellion, granting women the audacity to openly assert their rights over their bodies. Although the slogan serves as a reference to the need for women to stand against violations such as rape, harassment, unwanted pregnancies, abortions, forced marriages, and marital rape, it is deemed highly controversial and offensive by the general public.

Figure 9:
Perception Divide



Figure 9 provides insight into the public's perspective on the infamous slogan. The text on

the placard, translated as *‘Women: My body, my choice’, ‘Society: Why do they (women) want to roam naked?’*, highlights the disparity between the intended meaning of the slogan and society’s interpretation. According to the feminist narrative, the slogan signifies a woman’s demand for absolute autonomy over her body, particularly concerning matters of physical contact and biological decisions. However, the general public perceives the slogan differently, viewing it as an expression of shamelessness and a desire to free oneself from sociocultural and religious obligations. This interpretation fuels the public concern that dismantling these socio-cultural norms would undermine the deeply rooted religious ideologies and disrupt the social fabric of Pakistan.

Within the contemporary feminist discourse, there is a distinct and pervasive theme of questioning double standards and challenging long-established norms, that have long been considered taboo in Pakistan. The discourse content surrounding the movement has captured the attention of the masses, primarily due to the effective utilization of linguistic devices in the slogans employed. Figure 10 serves as a noteworthy example:

Figure 10:

Deconstructing Dichotomies

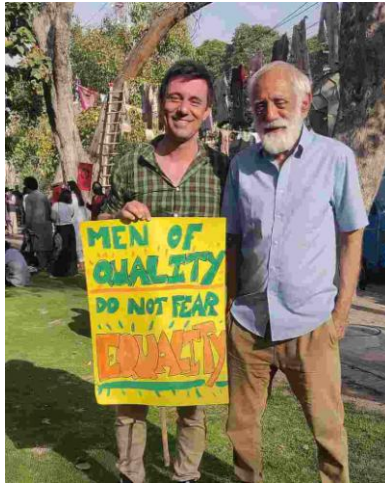


The slogan in Figure 10, which reads “MEIN KARON TOH SLUT; TU KARAY TOH STUD” (translated as ‘If I do what I want, I am labeled a slut; if you do what you want, you are called a stud’), utilizes certain linguistic techniques to convey its message effectively. The deliberate choice of words, ‘slut’ and ‘stud’, creates a poetic effect, with both words written in the same red color and sharing similar structures of four letters, beginning with the letter S. Despite the rhyme and visual similarities, the words ‘slut’ and ‘stud’ carry starkly contrasting meanings. ‘Slut’ carries a highly negative and derogatory connotation, associating it with a wayward woman, while ‘stud’ is endowed with positive connotations, denoting heroic qualities in a man. This dichotomy aptly captures the contrasting perceptions assigned to individuals based on their gender in Pakistani society. By employing this wordplay, the slogan effectively captures viewers’ attention and prompts them to recognize the contradiction inherent in prevailing gendered perceptions within society.

Shifting Power Dynamics and Ideological Perspectives

Gender equality has long been the aim of contemporary feminists in Pakistan, sparking a noticeable shift in the perceptions of power dynamics of gender identity. These marches are not limited to women; they attract enthusiastic participation from many men, especially those belonging to the upper-middle class. Figure 11 illustrates an example of this phenomenon:

Figure 11:
Shifting paradigms



The image presented in Figure 11 depicts two men, likely a father and his son, actively participating in the march. They appear self-assured as they hold a placard bearing the inscription, '**MEN OF QUALITY DO NOT FEAR EQUALITY**'. The use of all capital letters in the topicalized text emphasizes and amplifies the message conveyed. This technique aims to influence the reader's perception of Gender equality. Accompanying the image, a caption through the use of selective voice asserts, '**Real men know what equality is, and aren't afraid to march for the opposite gender**', thus reinforcing the message. The text producers' opinion is presented as an indisputable fact, rooted in the producers' own set of beliefs. The message creates a narrative that challenges traditionally held beliefs, which view accepting women as equals as a sign of weakness. The term '*real men*' is a social construct and is associated with men in positions of authority, often perceived as unemotional and unsympathetic towards women. However, societal norms are evolving, and the definition of '*real men*' is being redefined. The participation and support of men from different generations and social classes in the Aurat March highlight the necessity of redefining not only narratives associated with women but also those tied to men. This collective involvement signifies a shifting paradigm that challenges traditional gender roles and expectations.

Figure 12 captures the essence of challenging stereotypes not only associated with women but also with men.

Figure 12:
Empowering statements



In the image a woman participant in the march is seen holding a placard featuring the caption, ***'Sons can also cry, Daughters can also fly'***, accompanied by a confident and self-assured smile. This image emphasizes experiential values as the statement originates from an older individual who draws upon her own experiences and personal knowledge of the social world. The linguistic technique of presupposition is employed in the text, as the caption assumes that men are typically not expected to cry, and women are often confined to domestic roles within the existing socio-cultural traditions. This presupposition sheds light on the prevailing socio-cultural gender practices and classifications. By challenging these stereotypes, the text producers aim to promote Gender equality and empowerment. The woman's confident smile further reinforces the message, suggesting a sense of liberation and breaking free from societal expectations. Similarly, the image shown in Figure 13 exemplifies this paradox, showcasing the intricate interplay between strength and vulnerability.

Figure 13:
Breaking Stereotypes



The image shows a woman directly gazing into the camera, exuding strength and resilience. She holds a placard in her hands, which boldly states, *‘Women are not your punching bags. Not physically, not emotionally’*. The image addresses binary oppositions such as strength and weakness, physicality and emotionality, and aggression and submission. The message conveyed in the slogan is explicit and assertive, demonstrating a firm tone that establishes the modality of the text. It identifies power with the speaker, whose discourse is disseminated through the text. The use of selective voice in a self-assured manner, coupled with the confident gaze of the participant, empowers the narrative being circulated. By employing such textual features and visual representations, the feminist discourse offers a compelling lens through which to analyse power dynamics within Pakistani society. It challenges existing norms, encourages critical dialogue, and fosters a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and women’s rights within the country.

Embracing Diversity: Advancing Equity and Belonging

The data highlights the comprehensive scope of feminism in Pakistan that goes beyond advocating solely for women’s rights. Instead, it embraces diversity and inclusion, encompassing various dimensions such as trans rights, the empowerment of women of color, and promoting diversity across ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as addressing labor-related issues. The contemporary Pakistani feminist discourse actively acknowledges the role of stay-at-home housewives within the laboring circles, advocating for their recognition and support, not only in financial terms but also in terms of emotional well-being. Figure 14 exemplifies this perspective.

Figure 14:

Recognizing Unpaid Domestic Labor



The image shows a placard bearing the inscription, *‘Un-paid labor is still labor’*, and an image of a pregnant woman, possibly representing a housewife engaged in domestic household tasks. Through this portrayal, the rights of domestically oriented women are being advocated, emphasizing that domestic chores are indeed a form of labor that warrants acknowledgment and recognition, similar to paid work outside of the household. Furthermore, the Aurat March demonstrates its support for victims of rape and sexual harassment. In a post shared on one of their Facebook pages, the producers of AM discourse express, *‘AM stands in solidarity with the victim-survivors of sexual harassment and*

violence and will continue to do so.' Through this text, the AM feminists demonstrate their unwavering support for assault survivors by establishing a strong emotional connection with the readers. The carefully chosen words, such as '*stands in solidarity*', carry immense value and positive connotations, allowing readers to relate to the cause. Figure 16 visually represents support for survivors of assault.

Figure 15:
Marching for rape victims



In Figure 15, a participant is seen holding a poster advocating for rape victims. The inscription on the poster states, '**#I MARCH FOR RAPE VICTIMS AND THEIR UNHEARD STORIES**'. Using the pronoun '*I*' establishes a personal connection between the text producers and the rape victims, creating a sense of empathy and solidarity. The text fosters social relationships, conveying support for the victims of physical assault and their often overlooked and disbelieved stories. This declaration of support reveals the ideological stance of contemporary feminism in raising awareness about the challenges faced by these victims.

Additionally, the feminist campaign has recently included the trans community of Pakistan, giving them a voice and representation. Figure 16 serves as an illustration of this inclusion.

Figure 16.1:
Redefining trans rights



Figure 16.2:
Inclusivity and equality



Figures 16.1 and 16.2 showcase two distinct scenes from the Aurat March protest, both advocating for the rights of the trans community through slogans. The inscriptions on the posters read, '*Trans rights are human rights*' and '*Trans-inclusive feminism always*'. These texts emphasize the expressive values conveyed through clear and direct words, leaving no ambiguity about the strong support for trans rights in Pakistan. Hence, the analysis of the contemporary feminist discourse reveals that the text producers of the campaign construct a particular identity for their movement. This identity represents the cause as one that seeks to redefine the narrative surrounding femininity, challenge stereotypes, and question entrenched patterns that perpetuate gender inequality and injustice.

CONCLUSION

The study delves into the different strands of feminism represented in the Aurat March slogans. It explores how liberal feminism is reflected in calls for legal rights and gender equality, including demands for equal pay, educational opportunities, and political representation. Radical feminism is evident in slogans that challenge patriarchal structures and question traditional gender roles, particularly domestic expectations. Intersectional feminism emerges by including marginalized voices, such as those of religious minorities and the trans community, highlighting the diverse experiences within the feminist movement. Examining these ideological perspectives offers a more comprehensive understanding of the feminist narratives shaping contemporary discourses in Pakistan.

This research contributes to understanding the contemporary feminist narrative in Pakistan by examining the linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions of the feminist discourse. The distinctive textual features of the feminist discourse provide a captivating terrain for investigating language use, both in terms of its linguistic and extralinguistic aspects. This exploration delves into power dynamics in Pakistan while redefining and reconstructing contemporary feminine ideologies. The contemporary feminist discourse challenges conventional notions of limits, boundaries, agency, and power through the skillful

deployment of linguistic techniques that introduce agency to otherwise nominalized sociolinguistic patterns; the desired narrative for the need for Gender equality emerges, necessitating a re-evaluation of traditional social behaviors. The findings illustrate that the AM discourse strives to redefine the worth, value, space, and priorities traditionally attributed to women, thus engendering new narratives. Moreover, in addition to reconstructing the modern feminine narrative, the AM discourse sheds light on the imperative to transform perceptions of gender equity for both genders.

Furthermore, the findings elucidate the operation of power structures within a text, highlighting the ideological interests of the discourse participants. Despite its feminist nature, the AM movement has not garnered complete support from most women in Pakistan. The public holds its perceptions of heroism, nobility, and grace, which are beyond the scope of criticism or endorsement in the conclusions of this research, as are the ideals presented by the Aurat March narrative. This research exclusively focuses on the discourse analysis of linguistic constructions in Pakistani feminist discourse, refraining from making subjective or objective judgments.

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