

Before it Happens: Foreshadowing in *Tan Man Neel o Neel*

Abstract

This study analyzes foreshadowing in the Pakistani television drama Tan Man Neel o Neel. Foreshadowing is a narrative technique that gives subtle hints about events that will unfold later in the text. It is used to create emotional anticipation and depth, and to strengthen the text's themes. Despite its frequent use, it remains a relatively underexplored area. This study identifies and examines key moments of foreshadowing, including dialogue, and how they hint at future events. The analysis of the drama is significant because it focuses on honor killing as a social evil. The study also examines how the literary device of foreshadowing enhances the meaning of the television drama through dialogue. The study reveals that foreshadowing is not just a literary device but a method of storytelling. This study contributes to a better appreciation of narrative craft in Pakistani television dramas, especially in how they highlight gender-based violence.

Keywords: Foreshadowing, gender-based violence, *Tan Man Neel o Neel*, narrative technique, suspense, emotional engagement, storytelling.

INTRODUCTION

Tan Man Neel o Neel is a Pakistani television drama that provides much-needed social critique on issues like blasphemy, murder, and religious intolerance amongst people, love and alienation, marginalization of women, and sexual assault against men. The drama's main leads are Sehar Khan and Shuja Asad, though the other actors hold their own. The drama is written by Mustafa Afridi and directed by Saif-e-Hassan. The drama addresses mob violence and social injustice to raise awareness in the general public. *Tan Man Neelo Neel* received widespread praise from critics and audiences across the country.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a storytelling technique in which an author hints at upcoming events. According to Evan Gottlieb (2019), foreshadowing is a narrative device in which hints or warnings about events to come are introduced. The hint might be subtle and revealed through objects, paintings, or dialogue between the two characters. Foreshadowing makes the story more interesting and increases readers' involvement. It also helps create suspense for the readers. Foreshadowing is not a new technique; many writers have used it. There are two main types of foreshadowing: direct, which explicitly suggests that certain events may occur,

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and indirect, which provides subtle clues that may only become clear later (Biscontini, 2024). Foreshadowing is used early in the narratives and helps the reader get involved in the story. The readers keep watching or reading because of their interest, which stems partly from the urge to see whether the foreshadowing leads to something substantial as the text progresses.

Rationale of the study

Foreshadowing is a powerful narrative technique that adds depth, suspense, and emotional impact to storytelling, yet it remains underexplored in Pakistani television dramas. *Tan Man Neel o Neel* offers a rich example of how subtle hints and symbolic moments can prepare viewers for future events, creating a meaningful connection between the story and the audience. This study focuses on foreshadowing to fill a gap in existing research, aiming to highlight its artistic and emotional significance. By doing so, it contributes to a better understanding of storytelling strategies in local media. It encourages a deeper appreciation of how Pakistani dramas engage viewers on both narrative and cultural levels.

Purpose statement

The purpose of this study is to examine how foreshadowing is used in the drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel* and its contribution to the show's central themes.

Theoretical framework

Foreshadowing is a literary device that writers use to hint at future plot developments. This might be conveyed through a line of dialogue, a detail in the setting, or the mood of a particular scene. Foreshadowing helps build suspense and lays the groundwork for clever plot twists as the tale unfolds (Cabal). In ancient times, foreshadowing was used in various ways, such as “various supernatural phenomena—omens, dreams, prophecies, and oracles” (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). However, in recent times, “it can be used in diverse naturalistic means, a meaningless comment that turns out to be prescient, a random detail whose significance is subsequently realized” (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). A famous example is the Russian writer and playwright Anton Chekhov. According to him, “If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired” (Abrams & Harpham, 2015).

Dialogic Foreshadowing

This technique involves using dialogue between characters to hint at future events. Through carefully crafted conversations, authors can drop subtle hints and clues to foreshadow what is to come (Feccomandi, 2023). This study will focus on how foreshadowing is used through dialogues in the drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel*. The writer has used dialogue to foreshadow a future event in the television drama. The researchers will analyze the dialogue of different actors and how these expressions later proved prophetic in the series.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will deal with the literature review of the selected television drama, *Tan Man Neel o Neel*. Since the television drama was recently released, there is not much academic literature available, so the researchers used online newspaper reviews and independent reviews. The second part of this study will address the literature on foreshadowing techniques

and how people have viewed them. A review in the Friday Times by Muhammad Ali discusses the television drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel*. The review highlights how Pakistani society has used religion to its own benefit, a central theme of the television drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel*. Another thing that Muhammad Ali sees is how in the television drama, everybody dies, and it does not matter whether the character is the main lead or not. “We do not get to see a hero and his friend unrealistically and ideally fighting the mob, but dying” (2025). Ali is of the view that this “happens, and will continue to happen if Pakistan’s mob mentality is not looked into” (2025).

A review published online calls *Tan Man Neel o Neel* a “thought-provoking drama” which ended with “a tragic and heartbreaking finale” (Web Desk, 2025). The talk is about the love story between Rabi and Sonu and their tragic ending. The review also praises the television drama for talking about “unchecked extremism and also addresses the darker aspects of Pakistani society” (Web Desk, 2025). The final episode of the television drama “leaves viewers with a powerful message about societal responsibility and empathy” (Web Desk, 2025). A study of *Tan Man Neelo Neel*, published in *The Express Tribune*, examines how people have shared their views online about the drama. One YouTube user said, “These are the genuine issues plaguing our society, unlike the clichéd love triangles or unrealistic love stories” (News Desk, 2025). They also appreciate the whole project for keeping it real, from the portrayal of the victim's helplessness to the portrayal of law enforcement and society's attitudes. A comment also criticizes the television drama for not portraying the gruesome violence the way it should have: "I wish the mob lynching scene had been more intense, vividly showing the victims' dread and the mob's madness"(News Desk, 2025). The commenter concludes with "Thank you for finally telling a story that needed to be told long ago" (News Desk, 2025).

The Pakistani television drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel*, as reviewed by *The Federal*, serves as a powerful piece of social commentary on the dangers of mob lynching and rising intolerance in Pakistan. The article highlights how the show’s harrowing final episode, which draws inspiration from real-life incidents such as the 2021 lynching of Sri Lankan factory manager Priyantha Kumara in Sialkot, exposes the misuse of blasphemy accusations as a tool for personal vendettas. Through emotionally charged storytelling and realistic portrayals, the television drama critiques the collective psyche that enables extrajudicial violence, underscoring the urgency of addressing this societal malaise. The review positions the show not only as bold and timely but also as a necessary intervention in mainstream media, urging Pakistani television to move beyond conventional tropes and engage more deeply with pressing human rights issues. A review published online by Maleeha Faisal Siddiqui praises the character of Rabi played by Sehar Khan. According to the review, she is “at the heart of the story” (Siddiqui, 2025). Siddiqui also praises her for her acting, which makes Rabi “an absolute joy to watch”. She also applauds the character of Sonu, played by Shuja Asad, as “a refreshing take on masculinity” (Siddiqui, 2025). Sonu is “unproblematic, sensitive, and deeply respectful of women’s agency” (Siddiqui, 2025). Pakeeza Dar also lauds *Tan Man Neel o Neel* for its “realistic ending” (Dar, 2025). Dar also discusses the acting and states that the drama features “performances that will be remembered forever” (2025). Hurmat Majid is of the view that the strength of the drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel* “lies in its characters (2025).

The reasons for that are “neither perfect heroes nor irredeemable villains but complex individuals shaped by their circumstance” (2025). In the plot, Rabi is looking for fame while dealing with the “scrutiny of an unforgiving audience”. The drama also highlights “desire for autonomy in a society that often seeks to control women’s choices.” (Majid, 2025). On the other hand, the character of Sonu is equally compelling. Unlike Rabi, he is an aspiring dancer. Sonu and Moon's “experiences offer a rare and necessary perspective on the challenges faced by men” (Majid, 2025) in creative fields like dancing.

Studies on Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a literary device used by many writers to establish suspense or pique curiosity. One such example is William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. In the play, Shakespeare uses foreshadowing many times. This is evident in the following lines from *Macbeth*. “There is no art to find the mind’s construction in the face. He was a gentleman on whom I built absolute trust.” (Marshall, 2025) These lines are spoken by King Duncan when he finds out about the Thane of Cawdor and show that his betrayal deeply saddens him. Just as Duncan ends speaking about how he misjudged Cawdor, Macbeth comes, and Duncan greets him warmly, calling him: “O worthiest cousin!” (Marshall, 2025). Here, King Duncan makes the mistake of thinking that Macbeth is loyal to him. In this way, it foreshadows the upcoming events. In the same way that your shadow precedes you if you are walking with the sun behind you, foreshadowing gives a hint, an outline, of what is to follow. Sometimes, foreshadowing is subtle and will not be realized by the audience until later (Marshall, 2025).

Rorie Franklin conducted a study on the opening credits of three TV shows: *Game of Thrones*, *Stranger Things*, and *Westworld*. The study examines how the creator uses foreshadowing in the opening scene to engage the audience from the outset. The study examines how “symbols, musical scores, and textual clues” (Franklin, 2024) are utilized in these series. In the series *Game of Thrones*, symbols hint at alliances, conflicts, and the power dynamics central to the series” (Franklin, 2024). On the other hand, in the series *Stranger Things*, it is music that works to foreshadow: “The musical score builds tension and anticipation, signaling the audience that the ordinary town of Hawkins hides extraordinary secrets” (Franklin, 2024). The color in the series, as well as stylized lettering, “contribute to the overall ambiance, hinting at the show’s blend of sci-fi and horror elements” (Franklin, 2024). In the series *Westworld* the music plays an important role as “the player piano, foreshadows themes of artificial intelligence and the blurring of reality. The clockwork imagery hints at the meticulously crafted world within the park” (Franklin, 2024).

Royse Murphy conducted a study on Joseph Conrad's short fiction. The study examines how Conrad uses various animals in this story to foreshadow upcoming events. One of these short stories is *A Tale of the Sea*, and it tells the story of a Black man named Wait who has spent “much of a voyage not working but ill” (Murphy, 2021). The animal that foreshadows in the story is the Cat. The cat “avoids minor injury when a rope is thrown towards it” (Murphy, 2021). In the same way, Wait also avoids injury “from the biscuit thrown at him” (Murphy, 2021). A crew member saves both Cat and Wait, and it seems that what happens to the cat follows Wait as well. “The fortunes of the cat seem to reflect the fortunes of Wait” (Murphy, 2021). In this way, the cat becomes an object that Conrad uses for foreshadowing.

Research gap

A careful review of the existing literature on Pakistani television dramas reveals a dearth of research on *Tan Man Neel o Neel*, and no scholarly work has specifically addressed foreshadowing in the selected text. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge the gap in the use of foreshadowing in Pakistani television dramas, specifically in *Tan Man Neel o Neel*.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research method in literary study is a way for the researcher to collect and analyze data to answer a specific question. A research method is a way for a researcher to gather information. There are two main types of research methods: Qualitative and Quantitative. Quantitative research is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data (Bhandari, 2020), whereas qualitative research methods are used to find patterns, make predictions, and test causal relationships. Since the study involves analyzing selected texts, the researchers will use a qualitative research method to collect data. This study uses textual analysis to gather and analyse material from the given text. It is a “term familiar to every researcher related to qualitative research”. (Arya, 2020) because it is one of the most important methods used in cultural studies. Textual analysis focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of a text. (Arya, 2020). Catherine Belsey and Alan McKee give two textual methods widely used in literary studies.

According to Catherine Belsey, “Textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself” (Belsey, 2013). In doing so, we should not presuppose anything and should focus on every detail. She also wants researchers to “Never take people’s words for it” (Belsey, 2013), as this helps researchers say something new. Alan McKee holds that textual analysis varies in how people make sense of the world. Different things affect that sense-making, and according to Alan McKee, “Performing textual analysis, then, is an attempt to gather information about sense-making practices - not only in cultures radically different from our own, but also within our nations. It allows us to see how similar or different the sense-making practices that different people use can be” (McKee, 2003). This study will utilize Alan McKee’s model of textual analysis, as it enables researchers to examine texts from different perspectives. It also focuses on how a text makes sense within a given culture. Since the study focuses on Pakistani television dramas and is grounded in Pakistani culture, Alan McKee's method is more suitable.

Delimitation

The study is delimited to instances of foreshadowing in the drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel* and to how these instances are used through dialogue.

Research Objectives

- To examine how foreshadowing is employed in *Tan Man Neel o Neel* to shape narrative progression and character development.
- To explore how foreshadowing reflects and reinforces central themes such as patriarchy, gender-based violence, and mob justice in *Tan Man Neel o Neel*.

Research questions

- How does the television drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel* depict foreshadowing in the development of its plot and characters?
- How does foreshadowing in the Pakistani television drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel* help in revealing key themes like patriarchy, gender-based violence, and mob justice?

Significance

This study is important because it helps understand how foreshadowing works in a narrative. Although foreshadowing as a literary technique has been widely studied in literature and cinema, its subtle use in Pakistani television dramas remains underexplored. Foreshadowing, thus, is not something new in literary studies, but in Pakistani television dramas, there is a dearth of available material. Therefore, this study has significant implications for showrunners who may be interested in employing foreshadowing to enrich their storytelling. The study also contributes to a broader understanding of how Pakistani television dramas function as cultural texts that engage with and critique societal norms. In doing so, it adds value to the fields of media studies, gender studies, and South Asian cultural criticism by demonstrating the role of Pakistani television drama as a medium for both storytelling and social commentary.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In *Tan Man Neel o Neel*, foreshadowing is employed as a narrative device to gradually build the plot and deepen the psychological complexity of the characters, while also exposing structural violence embedded in patriarchal and mob-led justice systems. The title of the drama, *Tan Man Neel o Neel*, means ‘The Body and Mind Covered in Deep Blue’ or ‘A Soul and Body Stained with Pain’. The color blue in the Pakistani context means sadness, bruising, or abuse, which suggests the physical violence, emotional, or psychological suffering of the characters. This pain is evident through the characters of Moon and Rabi. Moon suffers sexual assault at the hands of Bao Qaiser, while Rabi suffers all kinds of pain in the drama. Kami threatens her multiple times, telling her, “I will push you from right here,” when they are both standing on the rooftop (Kami’ 7:59). This is a direct threat as they are standing on the rooftop. After struggling for many years, when she finally achieves her goal of becoming a YouTuber, her cousin Kami gets her killed because she refuses his marriage proposal. In the last scenes of the drama, the audience sees Rabi’s dupatta flying (34:04), which is an indication that she suffers sexual assault.

The Pakistani television drama introduces its male antagonist, Kami, in the early episodes as a volatile and controlling figure. In the rooftop confrontation (Ep. 2), Kami’s threat: “I will push you from right here” (7:59), clearly foreshadows his eventual violence. His possessiveness and inability to tolerate rejection signal the trajectory of his character, culminating in the brutal murder of Rabi and others. Through this foreshadowing, the writers develop Kami not just as a possessive lover but as a symbol of unchecked patriarchal aggression. In episode 2, the writer gives us another hint of what is to come as Rabi and Kami meet on the roof. In this scene, Kami tells Rabi, “Behave yourself. If I see you with

another guy.” (Kami 7:36), as he saw her with another man, which is not allowed to her as she is his fiancée. When Kami says, “If I saw you with another guy...” (Kami, 7:38) as he was about the leave, Rabi urged him to “finish what you were saying, where are you running?” (Rabi, 7:45) Kami comes back and tells her, “I am not running away, I am holding back myself and my words,” (Kami, 7:50), meaning that he is trying to control himself. As Kami tells her in rage, “If you argue with me any further, I will push you from right here” (Kami, 7:59). These lines show the anger issues Kami has, as well as his deep jealousy and possessiveness towards Rabi. Thus, the writer hints at the tragic events that unfold later in the drama.

In episode 4, Rabi talks to Sonu about her cousin's engagement. She tells him that her cousin is “such a scoundrel” (Rabi, 23:03) and that “he does not have any patience” (Rabi, 23:05). “He is way too cheap” (Rabi, 23:07). Rabi tells Sonu that she does not want to spend her whole life with Kami, as he is not a good person. These seemingly casual remarks ultimately align with Kami’s destructive character arc, resulting in the murder of Rabi, Sonu, and other characters in a mob attack driven by jealousy and rejection. Here, foreshadowing develops Kami's character while also reinforcing the theme of violence born from male entitlement.

In the same episode, Rabi asks Sonu to be her boyfriend so that she can avoid getting married to Kami. Sonu tells Rabi that she can use his name as her boyfriend to avoid marrying Kami. However, he also tells her, “Do not get me into trouble” (Sonu, 23:15) because “My mother has no one except me” (Sonu, 23:17). These lines also act as foreshadowing, as at the end of the drama, Kami gets Sonu killed out of jealousy because of the deep possessiveness he feels towards Rabi. The fear that Sonu experiences turns out to be true as Rabi does get him into trouble, and he dies at the end of the drama, just like his other friends and Rabi, at the hands of a mob fueled by accusations of blasphemy. In doing so, writers use foreshadowing to hint at events that will occur later in the series. This exchange exemplifies how personal dialogue can anticipate structural violence, especially when love, jealousy, and male honor intersect in a patriarchal society.

In episode 2, Sonu calls Rabi and asks her to make a video of him and his friend while dancing. During the conversation, Rabi tells him about the views Sonu received on his YouTube dance videos, which totaled 302. “Your videos have received 302 views” (Rabi, 15:02). After that, she tells him that a case under Section 302 has been filed. In Pakistan, a 302 case refers to a case that involves intentionally killing someone. This early mention of number 302 sets the stage for the tragic events in the last episode of the series *Tan Man Neel o Neel*.

Foreshadowing also intersects with the motif of mob justice. In the drama's opening scene, Kami is the leader of a group and takes money from Bao Qaiser, an up-and-coming politician, for the dirty work he has done for him, including blocking the road and burning tires, as well as throwing stones at the police. In the same scene, the audience sees a very close shot of two guns held by guards as the camera lingers on the guns carried by Bao Qaiser's guards; later in the drama, these guns go off as Bao Qaiser kills his political opponent. This scene is a powerful symbolic example of foreshadowing. It also aligns with Chekhov’s Gun, and the writers use it to establish foreshadowing at the very opening scenes of the drama. In this way, the writer hints early in the drama of its tragic conclusion.

In episode 5, people led by Kami are protesting for Moon, who is a victim of sexual assault by Qaiser, a well-known politician. In this scene, Kami tells Qaiser that “The entire crowd is in his hand” (Kami, 11:45). As Kami adds, if they can fall silent at a given signal, they can also use force at that same signal. This scene is important as it highlights what a mob led by people like Kami can do. Kami tells Qaiser, “You have everything, but I have the crowd” (Kami, 12:12). This early indication of Kami's power and intent prepares the spectator for the imminent escalation into crowd violence, highlighting how easily misinformation and personal animosity can lead to devastating consequences. Later in the series, Kami gives the signal, and the crowd kills everyone. This scene is a powerful hint at the future event, which takes place at the end of the series *Tan Man Neel o Neel*.

Episode 10, Rabi's uncle reads a newspaper article and remarks to his wife, "Look at this," explaining how a Sri Lankan man was killed by a mob in Pakistan over false blasphemy accusations. This scene references the real-life lynching of Priyantha Kumara, a Sri Lankan factory manager who was tragically killed by a mob in Sialkot, Pakistan, in December 2021, following false allegations of blasphemy. He is very sad about the religious intolerance of the people. He further says, “Everybody has placed a stone in the chest instead of a heart” (16:18). In this scene, the character is talking about a real-life incident where a mob burned a person from Sri Lanka for a blasphemy allegation. This conversation between husband and wife ominously hints at the event that will unfold later in the episodes. This initial conversation serves as a subtle warning, preparing the audience for the catastrophic consequences of religious intolerance and mob mentality that unfold later in the story. As the audience sees, the mob not only kills Rabi and his friend but also the person reading the newspaper and talking about the religious intolerance of people in Pakistani society. In this way, the scenes highlight the upcoming events in the Pakistani television drama.

In episode 11, Moon tells Rabi that all the boys went to a dance event in Karachi, so no one is left to dance except Sonu and him. Rabi informed them that they could not back down now on their words, as she had already taken the money, and it was also their first event. If they go back on their word, it will leave a bad impression on the people who are paying to see them dance. As a result, they must dance even if only two people remain. Moon tells Rabi, “I will dance till my last breath for your company” (Moon 2;45). Although they are all happy and this conversation is taking place in a very light mood, through dialogue the author foreshadows the future event that occurs at the end of the drama. Moon remains steadfast in his commitment, dancing alongside Rabi and supporting her dance company, until the very end, ultimately sacrificing his life in the drama's tragic conclusion.

In Tan Man Neel o Neel, Kami's threats to Sonu serve as a strong example of foreshadowing that transcends mere dialogue. Kami warns Sonu time and time again about the consequences of meeting Rabi. In episode 3, Kami and his friends stop Sonu from coming to their area and start abusing him. When Sonu tells them not to abuse him, Kami replies, “It is our style first, we abuse, then we shoot” (Kami, 01:03). They warn him with the knife, and Kami tells him, “Do not move, it is a knife dipped in poison” (Kami, 01:03) and “will cause you death in agony within a week” (Kami 2:33). The knife is deadly. Although they just threatened him,

the Knife is a visual and symbolic warning to Sonu and anyone close to him. The knife also serves as Chekhov's Gun, meaning that if you show readers a gun in the first act, it must go off in the second or third act. The scenes also reveal Kami's malicious intent, which is revealed during and at the end of the drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel*. In this way, the writer sets the early stage for what is to come later in the show.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study explores how foreshadowing is used in the drama *Tan Man Neel o Neel* through dialogue. The researchers have highlighted how foreshadowing is used in the drama, sometimes in a light-hearted manner, for example, when Moon says, "I will dance till my last breath for your company" (Moon 2:45). These lines are spoken in a very light and happy mood. However, it turns out to be true in the drama's ending scenes, as Moon dies with his friends and Rabi. The study is important because the technique of foreshadowing is rarely used in studies of local Pakistani television dramas such as *Tan Man Neel o Neel*. Through foreshadowing, the drama *Tan Man Neel* conveys a powerful message about how misleading information can harm people's lives. In its ending scenes, many people die because of false allegations of blasphemy.

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