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Nexus between TikTok and Gender Stereotypes: A Qualitative Content Analysis

Abstract

This research examines Pakistani-produced materials on TikTok's reinforcement of gendered norms through performative and visual techniques. The aim was to investigate how gender roles are created and normalized on the virtual content space of TikTok. The main research question of this study was how TikTok content shapes the construction and enforcement of gender stereotypes in Pakistan. The research employed a qualitative design, with purposive sampling used to identify 10 TikTok creators with high online visibility and gendered themes in their videos. A representative video from each creator was chosen and analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. The constructionist approach permitted both surface and latent meaning. Outcomes were that stereotypical narratives were algorithmically privileged, resistant narratives not. The research concludes that hegemonic gender roles are reproduced on TikTok in Pakistan under the entertainment cover.

Keywords: *TikTok, Gender Stereotypes, Qualitative Content Analysis, Digital Performances, Masculinity and Femininity, Thematic Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

With more than 1 billion users globally, TikTok has become a significant platform and a global sensation that influences cultural values, particularly among young people who have incorporated social media into their everyday lives. Yet studies are increasingly demonstrating that, far from being an equal playing field for self-expression, TikTok tends to promote conventional gender roles in both content production and algorithmic prominence. Nouri et al. (2024) conducted a computational content analysis of TikTok and found that gendered stereotypes are embedded in popular content, in which women are stereotyped into beauty, emotional, or domesticity-defined roles, relative to men, who are increasingly associated with humor, assertiveness, and muscularity. The researchers further explain how these are not simply markers of offline gender norms but are constructed and disseminated by TikTok's recommendation algorithm, which privileges deeply engaging but all too frequently stereotypical performances (Nouri et al., 2024; Koivula et al., 2024).

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In addition, the reproduction of gender norms on TikTok is intricately linked to other media constructions and user engagement. Guzman (2022) observes that while the platform offers maximal visibility to marginalized voices, it secretly compensates for conformity to hegemonic gender norms through viral trends and influencer culture. The algorithmic logic of the platform would be biased towards promoting content that follows the dominant gender scripts, relegating counter-stereotypical narratives to the background.

The algorithm that helps creators find their online audience and build community also plays a significant role in reinforcing gender stereotypes and norms (Matlach et al., 2025). Such dynamics indicate that TikTok is both a gendered performance site and a stereotype repetition site. Therefore, it is imperative to examine how such representations are enacted in local milieus like Pakistan.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the acceleration of online environments and the widespread availability of information, significant inequalities persist in how various social groups move and communicate online. Specifically, the reinforcement of social media messages as validating exaggerated stereotypes regarding gender has prompted an inquiry into whether online environments reinforce or subvert established norms. Though platforms such as TikTok provide voice and freedom of expression to marginalized users, they can also be used as forums upon which traditional gender roles are taken over in the name of entertainment. This paradox is even more egregious in societies like Pakistan, where sociocultural culture itself is gender restricted. Existing research has shown the influence of media on shaping perception, but there is little empirical work examining how these processes occur in newer algorithmic forms like TikTok. The absence of local studies on gender representation and the perpetuation of stereotypes within new media creates a knowledge gap in understanding the socio-cultural influence of viral media. This study thus aims to examine the extent to which TikTok content in Pakistan reinforces or challenges gender stereotypes, and how it affects social development and gender equality in the digital world.

Objective of the study

The robust objective of the study was:

To find out the representation of gender roles in popular Pakistani TikTok videos.

Significance of the study

In an era where the public perception is created through digital platforms, it is necessary to dive deep into the influence created by the most popular and widely used digital platform, a global sensation, TikTok. While previous studies have examined the impact of TikTok across different dimensions in Western societies, there remains a lack of such research in South Asian countries, especially Pakistan. With a focus on how the creators are reinforcing gender stereotypes, this study will fill the gap and create the basis for content moderation in Pakistan.

This research will demand readers' attention to increase the visibility of counter-narrative content creators by distributing their content through educational and promotional campaigns. The research calls for transparency and changes to TikTok's algorithmic curation to provide

adequate visibility to diverse, non-stereotypical content. The research also sheds light on the importance of educating Pakistani TikTok influencers in gender representation, stereotype awareness, and inclusive content creation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The world was never the same after the 1980s, when the internet was introduced. Now, at least 3.5 billion people are online out of the total 7.7 billion (the number has now risen to over 8.22 billion), meaning the social media platforms are used by every one in three persons, the number being too large to just ignore the fact that social media is not influencing and affecting our lives as well as the society around us. Among all social media platforms, TikTok is the most talked about, with its distinctive format of short, engaging videos (Rejeb et al., 2024).

Dean (2025) reports that TikTok's growth is unique among platforms, as it took just 3 or 4 years to achieve the growth that Instagram and Facebook struggled to achieve for nearly a decade. The app reached the global peak during COVID-19 when social distancing measures were in place (Feldkamp, 2021). TikTok has received 2.18 billion monthly visits as of March 2025, with 700 million unique visits per month. If we look at the age of TikTok users, 55% are under 30, while the largest group, 37%, is aged 18 to 24. Duarte (2025) also categorized users by age and sex, and the most considerable portion of users was male, aged 24 to 35 (19.1%). Instagram has more users than TikTok, but the average time spent on both apps is approximately the same, indicating TikTok is more "sticky" and has a large number of regular users (Moulton, 2025).

TikTok has grown to play a central role in shaping social discourse online across different societal domains. Scholars emphasize it as a vital space for studying social movements, given its ability to give voice to people, especially youth, in unique and creative ways (Ionescu & Licu, 2023). TikTok shapes broader social narratives by enabling users to bond with like-minded people through shared symbols and cultural markers, fostering intentional collective identification (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019). While marginalized communities use creative, unique content on TikTok to resist dominant norms, they often face limited reach due to reduced algorithmic visibility or content moderation (Ungless et al., 2024; Matlach et al., 2025). Gender stereotypes can be defined as the differences associated with both male and female due to their gender, which can and cannot be true, mainly originating from humans' evolved physical sex differences, like women's reproductive ability and men's physical strength (Ellemers, 2018).

"Women are from Venus, men are from Mars" is a phrase often used to suggest that women and men differ so much that it would not be wrong to say they are from two different planets, separated by millions of miles (Ellemers, 2017). Some scholars argue that there has been no change in gender stereotypes, as its support rests on solid theoretical foundations and on its inherent nature as a social interpretation (Priyashantha et al., 2021).

Even in the late 20th century, when the feminist movement gained momentum, especially during the second wave of feminism, the mainstream discourse consistently resisted any systematic change; instead, it rebranded gender stereotypes under the guise of empowerment

(Gill, 2007). With the advancement of digital media, these stereotypes have not disappeared; instead, they now take a different form in algorithmic amplification and influencer culture (Fraser, 2022). In the media, men and women have been stereotypically portrayed in rigid roles, often binary, men as strong, independent, and protectors, while women are portrayed as fragile, dependent, and caregivers (Wen et al., 2024). On digital platforms like TikTok and Instagram, the influencer culture acts as a catalyst as well as a mirror for these dynamics: influencers create such content that is traditionally appropriate, meaning which resonates with audience expectations, and algorithmic boosts, very carefully shaping norms through repetition and visibility (Gill, 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2023; Nouri et al., 2024). Content analysis of TikTok reveals how deeply embedded gender norms are reproduced, negotiated, and sometimes challenged within its fast-paced digital ecosystem. Gender performativity also draws on visual cues, voiceovers, and viral trends, where users curate their identities strategically to align with what the algorithm amplifies.

Through these patterns, not only is the persistence of binary gender roles evident, but also the commercialization of gender expression through brand partnerships and influencer content (Wen et al., 2024). Traditional gender scripts, in which women are associated with emotional expression, consumption, and beauty, and men with projecting dominance, humor, or independence, are often perpetuated by influencers' content, thereby shaping followers' perceptions of what is socially aspirational or acceptable (Rowley et al., 2023). Boeker and Urman (2022) use the term "eco chambers" to describe how users are shown content based on their watch time, likes, and follows, significantly influencing content recommendations and exposing users to more stereotypical content.

Caballero & Gravagna (2023) further explain how to fit gendered marketing strategies. Influencers often strategically adapt their content to fit gendered marketing strategies, strengthening consumerist ideals tied to masculinity and femininity. In Pakistan, TikTok also plays a role in reinforcing gender stereotypes through algorithmic curation and platform affordance, and contesting through hashtag activism and stereotypical movements. It is found through counter-analyses that the types of content created on this platform are distributed in a binary manner by both genders; female creators adapt global beauty trends, fashion, and domestic-life snippets within conservative frameworks. In contrast, male creators focus on humor, fitness, or assertive personas, leading algorithms to amplify binary gender performances and marginalize non-conforming expressions (Xue et al., 2021; Afsheen & Ahmed, 2021; Nouri et al., 2024).

Through short videos, broader hashtag activism in Pakistan, such as #MeToo and #MeraJismMeriMarzi, extends to TikTok, blending humor, personal testimony, and symbolic imagery to mobilize awareness and solidarity despite critiques of "slacktivism" (Zia & Syedah, 2021). The majority of the existing literature often overlooks fluid, intersectional, or locally situated gender performances by focusing solely on Western-centric frameworks and static binaries (Abidin, 2021). Thus, the research question to focus on in this study was: how does TikTok content influence the construction and reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Pakistan?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

While working within the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes that reality is subjective, context-dependent, and socially constructed, this research used a qualitative design employing qualitative content analysis to explore in depth how the selected content creators construct and reinforce gender stereotypes through their content (Krippendorff, 2018).

Population of the study

In a qualitative study, the term population refers to all the groups of cases and individuals to whom the study findings can be related (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this research, the population consists of Pakistani content creators on TikTok whose content is quite famous among the common people, and their content implicitly or explicitly constructs or reinforces gender stereotypes.

Sampling design

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select content creators directly. A total of 10 content creators were selected, with a gender-balanced sample of five male and five female content creators (Palinkas et al., 2015). Factors such as content relevance, follower base, and thematic richness were also considered when selecting the sample.

Inclusion Criteria

The researcher searched for popular TikTok accounts relevant to the study; a minimum of 50k followers was set as the inclusion criterion, and public accounts were selected. Then the researcher studied each account and selected 1 video from each account that was recently uploaded and relevant to the study's objectives.

Data Collection Method

Following Kozinets' (2020) recommendations for conducting qualitative research in digital and social media contexts, all selected TikTok videos were systematically saved within the application and reviewed multiple times to ensure their relevance, consistency, and analytical suitability for the study. Then, using a gender lens, each video was studied to examine how it constructed or reinforced gender stereotypes through verbal and visual cues.

Analytical Procedure

The study used thematic analysis, a foundational method in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach enabled the researcher to organize and interpret the data in a manner that reveals both surface-level meanings and deeper, latent structures of significance. The researchers used an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge from the collected data rather than imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks (Thomas, 2006). This ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' expressions and the contextual meanings of their content. Both the explicit content and its underlying messages were studied using the constructionist approach. The findings were situated within a broader cultural context and gender norms.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was ensured in the research process to meet academic and professional standards for the study. The research was based on publicly available TikTok videos, so there was no interaction with participants, and thus informed consent from content creators was not required (Beninger, 2017). However, respect for privacy and anonymity was ensured by concealing usernames, personal details, or any identifiable information of TikTok users featured in the video. The real names have been replaced with neutral identifiers (e.g., Creator M1, Creator F2, etc.). Confidentiality, respect for the subjects, and responsible use of digital data governed the study. It included publicly available content, and care was taken to ensure that the analysis would not be used in a manner that would hurt, ridicule, or otherwise misrepresent any individual or group, unless otherwise intended. Additionally, the researcher maintained academic honesty and transparency throughout the process, accurately representing all sources of information and avoiding plagiarism. All secondary materials were cited correctly in accordance with the APA 7th edition referencing style.

Limitations

Although the study presents notable findings on the reinforcement of gender stereotypes on TikTok in Pakistan, it has limitations. Due to a time constraint, a longitudinal study was not possible, which would have yielded better results given the changing trends on TikTok. The study was restricted to TikTok, with no other social media platforms that construct gender narratives. While efforts were made to ensure objectivity, the coding process in thematic analysis inherently involves some degree of researcher interpretation.

Delimitations

The research only sampled content creators and excluded audience voices, which would have helped achieve a better understanding of the construction or interpretation of such content. The anonymity of TikTok's algorithm posed a barrier to measuring how platform dynamics influence content visibility and engagement. The study was restricted to TikTok, with no other social media platforms that construct gender narratives.

Data Analysis

The first stage of thematic analysis was to immerse intensely and repeatedly in the dataset. As per Braun and Clarke (2006), the first step was to develop an integrated understanding of the content, tone, and underlying messages in the selected TikTok videos. Familiarization commenced by watching each video several times in its natural TikTok setting. Visual cues (i.e., appearance, wardrobe, filters) were noted, as were verbal and textual content (speech, subtitles, hashtags), soundtracks, and background noise. Having been familiarized with the dataset, the next step was to create initial codes for all the videos. Coding was completed manually to remain close to the data and to permit inductive insights to emerge organically. The codes generated in the second phase are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The initial coding of the content

Video No.	Creator & Video Description	Gender	Initial Codes Identified
1	Creator F1 – 'Get You a Girl Who Can Do Both' (soft to desi look transformation)	Female	Hyper-feminization, aesthetic duality, male-gaze framing, algorithmic visibility
2	Creator F2 – 'Wife forgets to make breakfast.'	Female	Domesticity as female duty, emotional labor expectation, good wife trope, gendered responsibility
3	Creator F3 – 'Cringy girlfriend skit.'	Female	Attention-seeking female stereotype, emotional dependency, infantilization, performative cuteness
4	Creator F4 – 'udh di phiran lip-syncing.'	Female	Romanticized vulnerability, visual spectacle, male-centric emotional framing, sexualized femininity
5	Creator F5 – 'Laal Pari transformation.'	Female	Hyper-feminization, beauty as value, sexualized choreography, beauty filters and desirability
6	Creator M1 – 'Bachi check kar.'	Male	Objectification of women, normalized male bonding over female bodies, gaze-driven humor
7	Creator M2 – 'lip-syncing car video.'	Male	Wealth = masculinity, male entitlement, women as prizes, performative coolness
8	Creator M3 – 'Phupho on Eid'	Male	Jealous woman trope, female conflict, toxic in-laws stereotype, generational female pettiness
9	Creator M4 – 'post-marriage tone shift.'	Male	Ideal vs. real woman binary, emotional volatility stereotype, performative pre-marriage femininity
10	Creator M5 – 'Ghost girl joke.'	Male	Sexualization of women, even in absurd contexts, emotional shallowness in masculinity, and the trivialization of fear

In the third step, the initial codes from the ten selected TikTok videos were examined, aggregated, and grouped into broader candidate themes. Through the process, the dataset's trends were determined, whereby various codes logically fit into the categories' conceptual or contextual importance. Once the themes were determined, the fourth stage was a stage of close reading, interpretation, and testing of these themes against coded data and the dataset as a whole. These themes can be shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Finalized themes with associated Coding

Finalized Theme	Representative Codes
Performative Femininity and Beauty Standards	Hyper-feminization, Beauty filters, Visual desirability, Aesthetic transformation
Romantic Emotional Labor and Gendered Sentimentality	Soft-spoken pre-marriage ideal, Emotional dependency, Romantic longing, Emotional expressiveness
Masculine Entitlement and Objectification	Male gaze, Objectifying humor, Sexualization, Male bonding over female bodies
Domesticity as Female Obligation	Good wife trope, Household labor, Emotional burden, Conflict with in-laws
Transformation Tropes and Ideal-Real Binary	Pre-marriage vs post-marriage behavior, Emotional volatility, Behavioral shift trope, Soft to loud contrast

In the next phase, all the themes from Phase 4 were described in full detail and assigned a brief, conceptually centered label that captured their meaning. It meant moving away from description to determine the edges, scope, and significance of each theme. In Braun and Clarke (2006), theme definitions were restricted to encompass both semantic content (what is literally represented) and latent meaning (what ideologies or cultural messages lie behind the scenes).

Performative Femininity and Beauty Standards

Women are portrayed as valuable when they conform to idealized beauty norms through glamor, filters, and styling.

Romantic Emotional Labor and Gendered Sentimentality

Women are depicted as emotionally dependent and defined by their attachment to romantic relationships.

Masculine Entitlement and Objectification

Men are shown objectifying women casually, reinforcing entitlement, and normalizing sexist humor.

Domesticity as Female Obligation

Women are framed as naturally responsible for household duties and emotional caregiving.

Transformation Tropes and the Ideal-Real Binary

Women are idealized before marriage and mocked for assertiveness after, reinforcing a binary between the “ideal” and “real” woman.

This final step of thematic analysis aggregates the five themes uncovered after conducting an inductive content analysis of 10 carefully selected TikTok videos by Pakistani male and female creators.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Performative Femininity and Beauty Standards

Female TikTok users, Creators F1 and F5, are excellent examples of how women's online worth is tied to visual attractiveness and adherence to conventional standards of beauty through transformation and makeover videos.

Creator F1's "get you a girl who can do both" brings together a bare-faced, do-it-yourself look with a heavily styled, orthodox shalwar kameez and makeup, employing music drops, beauty filters, and text overlays to create femininity as a performance display for the audience's gaze.

Creator F5's work is all about quick reversals of beauty and dance numbers, usually to "item songs." In one, she migrates from pajama-like looks to a tightly fitted garment, with sensual, choreographed dance steps that accentuate body lines and a sexed-up performance, as characteristic signs of desirable womanhood.

These videos make-up, styling, and sexed-up self-presentation common as a demand for desirability in keeping with Gill's (2007) criticism of post-feminism, where "empowerment" is commodified in reduced ideals of beauty and women's self-esteem becomes reliant on appearance, fueled by TikTok's algorithmic pushes of subtle, high-engagement-appearing imagery.

Theme 2: Romantic Emotional Labor and Gendered Sentimentality

Women influencers, Creator F3 and Creator F4, will likely produce content reinforcing gendered emotion stereotypes.

Creator F3 employs excessive "girly" acting—shrill tones, hammy movements, and man-spasms—in order to depict women as emotionally fragile and in need of male validation. In her 17 June 2025 skit, a woman over-the-top whines to get a man's attention before ultimately reinforcing the stereotype that women's emotions are for male validation.

Creator F4 is all glamorous imagery and romantic lyrics, like a 15-second drama reenacting desire in an electric-blue outfit. As dialogue-free as narrative-free, the video places femininity in the place of adornment and constitutes it by romantic desire.

Both conform to Ellemers' (2018) gendered emotionality thesis, positioning women in sentimental and relational positions while standardizing male emotional detachment.

Theme 3: Masculine Entitlement and Objectification

The three male TikTok influencers @ahsanshafqat, @hussaintareen, and @alihassanmehdi use humor to solidify patriarchal norms and objectify women.

Creator M1's clip catches a group of men at a wedding playfully "scouting out" a woman, ending respect and consent for blind public objectification in the name of innocuous laughter.

Creator M2's posts project masculine privilege, imagining himself in lavish surroundings as a desirable, powerful man who asserts female attention as a trophy that confirms his worth.

Creator M5's skit humorously shifts from fear to excitement when a ghost is revealed to be a girl, sexualizing the scenario and reducing women to sources of male pleasure.

Collectively, these examples illustrate how TikTok humor masks and perpetuates male dominance, entitlement, and gendered objectification within Pakistani society. TikTok creators Creator F2 and Creator M3 use humor to reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes about women in family settings.

Theme 4: Domesticity as Female Obligation

Creator F2's sketch (directed by the creator's wife) depicts an irate wife because her husband left for work without having had his breakfast, compensating for it later by serving him a special dinner. The sketch affirms the idea that the primary role of a wife is to anticipate and provide her husband's requirements.

Creator M3's skit is one in which he plays a nosy "phupho" (maternal aunt) busybody who causes disturbances in domestic peace during Eid, portraying elder or spinster women relatives as catty, nosy, and confrontational by nature.

Both videos illustrate social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012), portraying women as the natural nurturers, managers of emotions, and initiators of domestic conflict—thus illustrating strait-laced, patriarchal ideals of womanhood.

Theme 5: Transformation Tropes and the Ideal-Real Binary

Creator M4's "pre- vs post-marriage tone shift" skit humorously contrasts a fiancée's soft, polite demeanor before marrying with her loud, angry tone afterward. While framed as light comedy, it reinforces stereotypes that ideal women are gentle and compliant pre-marriage, and that assertive or emotional behavior post-marriage is undesirable. By projecting this trend out of context, the video documents patriarchal unease with women's independence and emotionalization, extending wider internet patterns (Fraser, 2022; Nouri et al., 2024) that normalize and solidify restrictive behavior codes for women.

The results of the research reveal categorization according to thematic analysis and the gender of content generators, i.e., Female TikTokers focused on bodily beauty, emotional portrayal, and domestic duty; usually showcased through "hyper-feminine" filters, makeup overhauls, and performative fashion sense. Moreover, videos stressed more negative romantic longing and emotional dependency norms, as well as household domesticity, which were either idealized or framed as women's inherent duty.

In comparison to female TikTokers, male TikTokers represented men's entitlement to objectify women humorously or aggressively. Furthermore, male TikTokers stressed masculinity by displaying affluence, dominance in romance, or patronizing female behaviors. They employed satire or performance (i.e., cross-dressing) to reinforce negative female

stereotypes (i.e., nosiness, aggressiveness). Among the common themes was using patterns of change (narrowly defined as in pre- and post-wedding conduct), which kept projecting women as being unreliable or unstable.

The study examined how Pakistani content creators play a role in the construction and reinforcement of gender stereotypes through their content. Throughout the research, gendered performance was observed in the selected content: female creators foregrounded emotionality, beauty, and domestic themes, while male creators depicted themselves as dominant, assertive, and humorously authoritative. These patterns not only show individual creativity or uniqueness but also reflect the broader, entrenched societal norms.

The findings are in line with the general literature and theoretical paradigms used in the study, as the feminist theory (Gill, 2007) states that TikTok beauty and empowerment model affirms that even so-called "liberated" femininity is structured through patriarchal discourses. The Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) states that the recurring gendered assignment of emotional and household labor to women and coercive and objectifying work to men testifies to the continued significance of gendered division of labor, now extended to virtual environments like TikTok.

These results are consistent with previous research (e.g., Boeker & Urman, 2022; Rowley et al., 2023) that demonstrates influencer culture and platform affordances work to reinforce and echo society-level norms. Although earlier studies identify niches of resistance (e.g., hashtag activism), they are small in scale and scope compared to mainstream narratives. A few creators were observed challenging these gender norms and stereotypes through humorous and ironic performances, but these remained limited in scope and had only symbolic value. So, challenging existing patterns exists at the margins, but dominant norms remain unchanged.

While interpreting the results, one thing has become crystal clear: TikTok does not serve solely as a creative medium; its sole purpose is not entertainment, but also acts as a cultural mirror that normalizes gender dichotomies through repetition and visibility. This repetition of gendered imagery, whether through humor, language, costume, or body language, contributes to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, which does not seem as controversial or harmful, but in ways that seem familiar, entertaining, and socially acceptable.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Content Moderation Guidelines

Collaborate with policymakers and content platforms to implement ethical content moderation that recognizes and restricts gender-stereotypical or damaging depictions.

Promotion of Counter-Narratives

Increase the visibility of counter-narrative content creators by distributing their content through educational and promotional campaigns.

Influencer Workshops

Educate Pakistani TikTok influencers on gender representation, awareness of stereotypes, and inclusive content creation.

CONCLUSION

Much of Pakistani TikTok content actively works in favor of hegemonic gender norms by making highly performative and visual use of language. Women content creators are appreciated and brought to visibility when they adhere to idealized representations of beauty, emotional expressiveness, and the romanticization of home and family—indicating that their online worth is contingent on traditional femininity. Conversely, male creators become popular through the performance of comedy, violence, displays of excess, and the feminization of objects, validating a hypermasculine subjectivity based on privilege and power. Most successful TikTok stereotypes, especially transformation videos and the "ideal vs. real woman" trope, continue to promote binary gender stereotypes and imply greater cultural unease with women's autonomy and aggressiveness. Although specific creators try to resist such norms through counter-narratives and resistance content, its visibility is regularly stifled by algorithmic favoring of conventional, high-engagement representations. In the end, gender performance and construction on TikTok are anything but random; they are strongly determined by platform algorithms, audience expectations, and broad sociocultural sentiment in Pakistan, a testament to the platform's strength as both a site of reproduction and a potential subverter of gender norms.

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Objectification of Women in Esan¹ Proverbs and Folksongs: Wither Cultural Sexism?

Abstract

This paper contributes to the discourse by relating female objectification to oral traditions and folklore, focusing on the content of indigenous proverbs and folksongs of the Esan people of Edo State, Nigeria, as manifestations of cultural sexism. The study adopted an ethnographic approach, using observation and interviews to collect primary data. Added to this was the examination of proverbs and folksongs using Risdianto's three-dimensional model for analyzing folksongs, comprising the contextual, grammatical, and semantic dimensions. The study's findings reveal, amongst others, that the selected Esan proverbs, which have evolved immemorially, are still in use. These artistic works portray images that tend to objectify women, their reproductive parts, sexual functions, and general essence for many reasons; namely, to evoke hilarity, pass across indigenous knowledge, mock the female in comic parlance, and counsel for didactic purposes. Women have accepted it as part of their culture and even participate in it.

Keywords: Objectification of women, female sexuality, cultural sexism, folksongs and proverbs, Esan people of Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Calogero (2012) notes that 'objectification' is worthily explained when he states thus: "To objectify is to make into and treat something that is not an object as an object, which can be used, manipulated, controlled, and known through its physical properties". This is, perhaps, a natural or common human behaviour, attitude, or mental engagement. Objectification becomes an act of sexism when the object of reference is the human body. In many gender and psychology discourses, the female gender is notably identified as the commonest butt or recipient of such objectification, hence the usual reference to 'female objectification' in gender studies, often perceived as derogatory, demeaning, relegating, body shaming,

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¹ The word 'Esan' has three meanings:

- i. a name given to the landmass occupied by the indigenous occupants located at Longitude 605 degree Celsius and Latitude 605 degrees Celsius
- ii. the language spoken by the people found in the same land in Edo State, Nigeria
- iii. and the general nomenclature and means of identification of a people found in the land

exploitative, misrepresentational, or unjust. Swim and Hyers (2009), like Calogero (2012), Mbisike (2024), and Carlsson *et al* (2024), rightly affirm such acts as sexual objectification. Swim and Hyers (2009) go further to describe sexism as “individual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, and organizational, institutional, and cultural practices that either reflect negative evaluations of individuals based on their gender or support unequal status of women and men”. The term ‘cultural sexism’ therefore refers to sexism that exists in everyday culture and manifests in media and art (Savigny, 2020). Agreeably, ‘sexism’ and ‘female objectification’ may not be interchangeable concepts because the latter is subsumed in the former. However, they are very related and condemnable terms in gender and legal studies.

The primary objective of this paper is to demonstrate that female objectification (or the objectification of women) is highly prominent in folklore, oral tradition, and cultural verbal engagements, as it manifests, for instance, in ethnic proverbs and folksongs observed among the Esan people of Nigeria and other ethnic populations. This, in fact, is clear evidence of an aspect of cultural sexism. The overriding question motivating this study, therefore, is: in light of the aesthetic, entertaining, and didactic dimensions foregrounded by the unavoidable presence of female objectification in many age-old ethnic proverbs and songs observed among the Esan people of Nigeria, can elitist culture put an end to this cultural reality? Suppose the answer to the question asked in the preceding sentence is in the negative. In that case, it means the existence of case laws, statutory enactments to protect women’s rights against sexism or female objectification, feminist discontents, activism, and other efforts against the objectification of women, are quite helpless in the domain of cultural sexism.

This study will not go into the macro and/or micro factors that may be responsible for the pervasiveness of cultural sexism as it relates to the objectification of women. That may be the task of another study on this subject. The primary goal of this study is to ethnographically and literarily analyse and describe the impact and importance of female objectifications in specific proverbs and ethnic/folksongs as part of oral tradition and folklore on indigenous societies. Such effort will expose one of the potent reasons accounting for the irrepressible and pervasive consciousness engendering cultural sexism. The implications of this study include evidence of customary acceptance and indifference among indigenous folks, regardless of gender, to the negative connotations of female sexuality. This is evident in the revelations from interviews with local people and in the reactions to the ethnic texts presented for analysis and description. There is also a dominant view that the general acquiescence of female folks to female objectification in oral culture, as posited by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) and Calogero (2012), is a form of ‘self-objectification’ that they imply is culturally and socially enabled. However, the irrevocable fact of the patriarchal foundation of most indigenous cultures and their legacies to modern global culture has also rendered any perspective of culturally induced female self-objectification quite hopeless. Flowing from the primary goal of this study, as expressed above, there is a need to adequately describe the ethnic population known as the Esan people of Edo State and their location in Nigeria. It is from among these people that the proverbs and folksongs selected as primary sources of data are drawn. It is also worth noting that the authors of this essay are members of the investigated ethnic society and are adept in its folklore and oral tradition.

The Locale of Investigation

The locale of investigation, also known as the research community, is Esan. In contemporary scholarship, the word 'Esan' can be used in a tripartite form to mean: a name given to the landmass occupied by the same people, the language spoken by the people found in the Edo central senatorial district of Edo State, and the general nomenclature and means of identification of a people found in the land. Their tradition or origin has attracted so much debate, and to date, much effort is still being expended to set the record straight about the people. The efforts of Okojie (1994), Ojiefoh (2002), and Okoduwa (2007) are worthy of note. In Okojie's (1994) opinion, the Esan people migrated from Benin around 1440 during the reign of Oba Ewuare. However, Ojiefoh (2002) draws attention to another account that the first settlers of Uromi migrated to Egbele in the Uromi area about 1025AD during the reign of Ogiso Orire of Benin. Half a decade later, Okoduwa (2007) maintains that archaeological finds in some areas of Esan allude to the fact that people were already present in Esanland before the eras linked to Esan origin. Stressing this opinion further, he remarked that it would have been practically impossible for people to migrate to areas where the means of livelihood were unsure. Arising from these divergent views, it will not be easy, in the present circumstances, to determine with exactitude the age of the Esan, when they first migrated, and what prompted the migration. However, to say that these people may have migrated from Benin around 1440 is reductive of their age in the regions they occupy and thus undermines the startling revelations of the archaeological finds in some Esan kingdoms, which allude to their having lived for several centuries in these areas. Barring all odds, the consanguinity shared by the people with the Benin kingdom is not in doubt, and their similar cultural practices and linguistic affinity are indicative of siblinghood. This underscores the general belief that Esan is of Edoid extraction (Butcher, 1982, and Okpoko and Agbontaen, 1993).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To gather relevant data for this study, a mixed-methods approach of observation, direct personal interaction, and interviews was used. The choice of a mixed approach was made in consonance with the ethnographic nature of the topic, as Esanland comprises 35 kingdoms. They constitute the Edo Central Senatorial District, in which this study was conducted, in five rural and urban towns (Ewatto, Ewossa, Uzea, Urohi, and Idoia are rural, and Ekpoma, Irrua, Uromi, Ubiaja, and Igueben are urban) as the headquarters of Local Government Council areas, typified as urban areas.

Methodology of the Study

In this study, we find Lebaka's (2018) anthropological research methods, an in-depth ethnographic inquiry to address key research questions, while maintaining sociological concerns in obtaining accurate data. Since this research is more of a sociological and cultural one, his triangulated approach of data collection, consists of (i) Ethnographic observational data, (ii) Interview data, and (iii) Literature searches were deployed in this study. This is further complemented with the use of Data Quality Analysis (DQA) with one hundred respondents investigated in this work, and conclusion drawn from a widespread spectrum that entails some thirty (30) adults between the ages of 25-59 years of age (15 males and 15

females), thirty (30) elderly of 60-80 years of age (15 males and 15 females) thirty (30) Chiefs –all males and ten (10) monarchs- all males. Of the one hundred respondents, thirty percent (30%) were women, while seventy percent (70%) were men. The reason for this type of sex distribution is based on the fact that the locale of investigation is not only agnatic but patriarchal. Added to this is the fact that the Chiefs and Monarchs are all males. Consequently, it is the men who are thus ably qualified to discuss the people’s traditions. To stay on track with data collection, prepared questions to guide field interactions were drawn up. However, the sample of towns selected for this study accounts for 28.57% of the total Esan area in Edo State, Nigeria. They were selected to help us understand the actual situation. In addition to the procedures stated above, a review of relevant literature is included to strengthen the study.

Conceptual Clarification of ‘Objectification’ and ‘Women Objectification’

Simply put, the term 'objectification' has been examined by many people from diverse backgrounds. However, according to Dictionary.com, objectification is, firstly, the act or an instance of treating a person as an object or thing. Secondly, the act or practice of regarding the natural world, or any part of it, solely as an inanimate object of study or exploitation, with no intrinsic relationship to human beings, and thirdly, the act or practice of presenting an idea, feeling, or other abstraction as a concrete object that can be seen, touched, etc³. Of the three perspectives stated above, this essay confines itself to examining objectification from the standpoint of a cultural or systemic relegation/degrading of an individual to a mere object. In Papadaki's (2024) view, objectification of women is a notion central to feminist theory. It can be roughly defined as seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman, *as an object*. The idea of women's objectification is quite often linked to the male folks as the ‘objectifiers’, and sometimes also linked to the patriarchal nature of most global cultures, which entrenches women's objectification, making the female sex the most common victim of objectification. Ironically, however, women partake subconsciously or culturally in helping to entrench the objectification of women. In an earlier research, Nussbaum (1995) identified seven features that are involved in the idea of treating a person as an object:

1. *instrumentality*: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier’s purposes;
2. *denial of autonomy*: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination;
3. *inertness*: the treatment of a person as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity;
4. *fungibility*: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects;
5. *violability*: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity;
6. *ownership*: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold);
7. *denial of subjectivity*: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be considered.

The perception of womanhood and the treatment of women in many Esan proverbs and folksongs are replete with these features identified by Nussbaum (1995). In subsequent segments of this article, we will give attention to such features as they reflect in selected Esan proverbs and folksongs. Women's objectification in the selected texts manifests as a

³<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/objectification>

demeaning cum pejorative term that describes women as sexual objects, commodities/things, lacking autonomy, and relegated. Such texts are used at events / in ordinary social discussions / for advertisement, for didactic purposes, to reprimand, to criticise, to counsel, to express scepticism about attitudes and intentions of the male folks to females, for conveying indigenous knowledge or wisdom, to evoke humour, for entertainment, etc.

According to Mackinnon (1987) 50% contextual gender objectifications have women as subjects against 16% for men. Both sexes (men and women) are recipients of sexual objectification, though the phenomenon is more associated with women. This study agrees with Dworkin (1974), but most especially Mackinnon (1987) in her pornographic study, that the admiration of natural physical beauty as objectification consequently makes harmful what ought to be harmless. The likes of MacKinnon, Dworkin, and especially Nussbaum (2016) further affirmed that: “It is true, and very much to the point that - women are objects, commodities, and some deemed more expensive than others.” In a related category where women were also perceived as sexual objects for conquest, domination, exploitation, possession, and violation, or for use as sex objects...; the latter, however, advocated for the use of the Indianapolis Ordinance as in the case of *Inc. v. Hudnut*⁴, which struck down the American Booksellers, which perceived women in the same light. Dworkin (1974) strongly detests the same and reiterates, “...after all, it is the core of our struggle...” and applauded the significant progress already achieved by women, having recognized their being injured through exploitation and systematic subordination. This study finds that the sexual abuses women are exposed to not only hurt, but also economically de-empower them to the extent that society celebrates even the cruelty that derogates female dignity and integrity. Hence, feminists are now on a rampage to destroy male dominance/supremacy, sex hierarchy, and to create an egalitarian society with a level playing field for both sexes to strive. For example, one of our female interviewees questions why women are fined, abused, and humiliated in cases of infidelity involving both genders⁵?

Objectification of Women from the Lens of Tradition

In the entire world, there is a common tendency to view women as lesser beings. Outman (2014) specifically gave an etymological survey from Greek mythology to the present, how images of the body parts of women have been used in demeaning forms. Till date, the narrative has not changed, even in many forms of contemporary communication, women are equated with animals, inanimate objects and entities. The Esan scenario is not any different. For example, in the Esan contemporary society, there are age-old practices that have been handed down from generation to generation, which relegate women in the social milieu and the people’s organogram. We see a well-orchestrated design to perpetually dominate and demean womanhood (Ibhadode, 2025). There is a general agreement that women objectification is a global reality. That objectification of women is more or less a global phenomenon is well attested to in the view of McKay (2013), when he maintained that objectifying women is taught in our society through gender roles. Talking specifically of the

⁴598 F. Supp.1316 S.D. Ind. 1984

⁵ A submission by F.O. Akhimien on Women Abuse in Male and Female Relationship in Esan. An oral interview conducted at Uromi, Edo State on 11-2-2025.

Esan scenario, Eboiyehi and Akinyemi (2016:92) posit that:

In many Esan communities, when a man dies, the property he acquired over his lifetime is transmitted to those he left behind as their inheritance...Crucial to the concept of inheritance among the Esan is that Native Laws and Customs are governed by the principles of primogeniture, whereby the first surviving son in a family inherits the entire estate (the title, if any) of his late father, with none of the inheritance going to the wives and other children, provided he performed the proper burial ceremony. In contemporary societies and even amidst legislations for a world of equal justice, the narrative of women's objectification remained unchanged. Thus, Agueli, Esposito, Arcidiacono, and Di Napoli (2023:1) note that "Discriminatory attitudes towards women are still widespread and have also pervaded the digital world. They are often connected with the propensity to view and treat women as sexual objects, which sometimes leads to harmful behaviours, such as the sharing of intimate images without the partner's consent". In the Esan culture, it is unthinkable, for example, for a wife to report her husband over a case of rape. Such issues as dead-on-arrival, because, according to tradition, taking what belongs to one is not to steal (Ikhine, 2024).

What are the Negative Effects of Women's Objectification?

From the global lens, the adverse effects of women's objectification are stupendous. According to Vignati (2023), mental distress, which is supposedly a systemic and social issue, is often sadly perceived as a sign of individual failure. Objectification of women is real. It is about power. It is about treating women as if they are less than human. Vignati (2023) further remarks that this treatment begets shame, anxiety, and alienation, as well as a sense of powerlessness and lack of control, which can all result from objectification, increasing the risk of depression in women. Additionally, objectification is also linked to sexual harassment and violence, as women who are objectified are seen as less human and are more vulnerable to mistreatment. All these phenomena can lead to the development of depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders, among others. While in appreciation of the dangers of women's objectification, a myriad of mechanisms are being put in place to arrest the trend in the Western world, it is still quite profound in sub-Saharan Africa and, indeed, the Esan. Women objectification strips women of humanness. Moreover, more disturbing is the fact that there is often no one to speak to, and in some circumstances, women themselves are involved in the perpetuation of such objectification.

According to Ikhanjiagbe, based on an interview conducted in 2025, when a male and a female commit the same offence, the male is often set free, while the woman is penalized in multiple ways. Some of such ways are that the woman should not cook for her husband and children until she is pardoned, she cannot mix with other members of the community, and her pardon starts by having her dance to obscene songs, almost nude, through the village. This act has a boomerang effect not just on the individual but on the entire family. Her children are looked upon with scorn; they are no longer able to socialize with others, fearing that anything could happen that would remind them of their family's ugly past. This background breeds depression, an inferiority complex, alienation, suicidal thoughts, and other shades of disorders. It is in appreciation of these myriads of issues that Ebhomienlen (2020:11) warns that the Church must begin in the area of mental re-orientation of the individual girl child, as well as the general public. The traditional Esan girl child is born into a world whose beliefs

are complex. What this means is that there is an environment made up of people whose beliefs and mindset about the female child are amazingly frustrating. Everything surrounding a girl child is never accepted as good enough, as whatever she does or says is never respected.

The Status of Women in the Eye of the Nigerian Legal System

A contemporary analysis of Esan Cultural Folklores/Orature (an equivalent of oral literature) reveals pejorative tendencies towards women, despite the anti-women practice. This study finds that the Esan society is patrilineal, due to its Primogeniture rule that asserts male dominance, especially for firstborn male children as heirs, regardless of their birth order in the line of seniority. This practice highly disenfranchises the girl-child / female gender, especially on issues of inheritance, successions and widowhood, even though it is a nationwide practice that cuts across class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and religions in contemporary realities, much that - even the Holy Bible condemns this practice - where in Mathew 5: 28 the Bible says; "...do not objectify women" According to Goksun (2020), language does not only pass as a medium of communication, it is also a window through which the collective mind-set of a people can be perceived, and their thoughts represent the cognitive processes of communications." Hence, the derogatory content of Esan proverbs on 'women objectification' cannot be denied, going by the long-enduring Patriarchal society that is not only insensitive to contemporary cultural realities, but also contrasts the accomplishments and virtues of Esan women as affirmed by the Edo State Judiciary⁶ thus as: "...a Socio-Economic instrument to the development of the society." The claim of women objectification by Esan people, has been affirmed not only by the trio of Ehiemua, Aluede and Aziegbe (2023) who emphasized the negativity of Esan proverbs on women thus that; "... it is a sub-textual manifestation of pervasive gender bias and segregation in Esan traditional society, which the contemporary/modern Nigerian reality is struggling to displace/erase, even though the changes are yet to be clearly manifest from Judge-made laws, and the extant national and international regulations.

The Status of Women in the Eye of the Nigerian Legal System

This is perceived from a dual perspective and from the generic viewpoint of gender equity. While from the Customary viewpoint, it is the obnoxious Patriarchal system, and its discriminatory gender-based Primogeniture rule that avails males, dominance/control in socio-economic and political leadership, that the Generic Nigerian Legal system strongly frowns at. Indeed, the Primogeniture rule regulates issues of inheritance and succession in Nigeria, as reiterates Itua (2021), even though it is more palpable amongst the Esan people. Whereas, the Preamble in the Second Paragraph of Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1999 provides for freedom from discriminations against community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion / political opinion; while the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 and other extant laws, also provide equal opportunities for women with their male counterparts, vis-à-vis their rights to Property at divorce or widowhood as decided in *Essien v. Essien* and *Amadi v. Nwosu*, where direct financial contribution to acquire a matrimonial

⁶<https://edojudiciary.gov.ng>

home/mortgage repayment was established as claims to joint ownership. Just as in *Shodipe v. Shodipe*, the Court upheld similar principles for spouses who have clearly shown intentions to be domiciled in Nigeria / taken the oaths of allegiance, as prescribed in the 7th Schedule to the Nigerian Constitution. Regardless of that, it is subject to the provisions of Section 28 of the 1999 (CFRN). Also highlighted are reforms to inheritance and succession that disenfranchise the girl-child/woman, as decided in *Ukeje v. Ukeje* (Married Women's Property Act of 1882).

Here, Gloria, the daughter of Lazarous Ogbonaya Ukeje, was initially excluded from inheriting in her father's estate, which the Court declared to be repugnant to justice, equity, and good conscience. Just as the combined provisions of Section 43 of the CFRN and Section 72 of the Matrimonial Causes Act (9 NWLR (Pt. 1146) 306 of 331 2009), both reinforce the marriage rights of parties, whilst the marriage subsists under an equitably just circumstance of a divorce, in Nigeria. Inclusive is the capacity of children to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria, regardless of location, locality, gender, or tribe. Note that Abia and Rivers States have enacted laws that reinforce women's rights to inheritance, just as key international treaties on gender equality like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1992), also provides: non-discrimination against women; increased quotas on women representation in elective offices; obligates comity of nations in its Article 1 to eliminate all forms of gender based violence and discriminations against women, which it tagged 'the last frontiers of the civil rights movement'; to ensure equal access to opportunities in all spheres of life as regards: political, economic, social, cultural, and civil spheres in their advancements /retaining/changing nationality. So, has Article 189 provided for its Member States' ratification of the CEDAW treaty in 2016?

According to Puri (2016), the reality of time is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Section 1 of the Married Women's Property Act of the Federal Republic of Nigeria helps spouses establish, with proof of direct financial contributions, disputed property rights between them. However, it does not recognize the adjustment /redistribution of matrimonial property between spouses in marriage dissolution. It might interest us to know that the new 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also recognizes gender equity as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development, just as other Foundations on 'Human Rights Commitments and the Implementation of Gender Equality.' Education, Economic Empowerment, Self-Determination, Esteem, and Integrity have been identified as the basis of the wheel of progress toward gender parity/equity. This is what the Patriarchal Esan traditional society lacks, due to its bias and pervasive gender segregation that will take generations of non-static thinkers to change.

Select Proverbs and Songs on Women's Objectification in Esan

In Africa, proverbs serve as catalysts for knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics, and morals. They provoke further reflection and call for deeper thinking (Mokitimi, 1997: viii). According to Aluede, Okakah and Ehiemua (2023:101) "The use of proverbs to buttress points during conversations or cap statements is a common phenomenon among the Esan people of Edo State, Nigeria. In doing this, the speaker is considered someone well-versed in

the people's language and culture and thus well respected as a repository of indigenous Knowledge (IK).” Proverbs in Esan have multifarious functions; they enhance brevity and laconicism, encapsulate a series of thoughts in a catchy, comprehensible form, and serve as the foundation, catalyst, and facilitator of wisdom in daily living principles. Beyond their content, proverbs are better appreciated in a given context. Below is a set of four proverbs that will be discussed in the context of the Esan cultural milieu.

Esan Texts Translated into English

1.	Okhole no so okhuo re re egbe no okpea Oki so re fie ekun-o bho	The conscience that makes a woman to make love to a man should also enable her to twist her waist accordingly
2.	Edin okhuo-i men Oki ro maebhoho	When a woman's privates are disease-stricken It becomes public in the quest for a healing solution.
3.	Okho no bie bhe eki Ai yole gue edin	The woman who has been put to bed in the market cannot be admonished to close up her privates.
4.	Ai ba no okhuoa Na ha ghe ole elo	You do not strip a woman and then look at her face

In a similar vein, a set of four songs selected from the plethora gathered during our field investigation is also presented below as samples to be analysed within the remit of this article, enabling us to draw inferences.

Esan Texts Translated into English

1.	Uwedin kobo nebilo Uwedin kobo nebilo Uwedin kobo nebilo Omamen nu moewan	Buttocks do not remain rotund till nightfall ⁷ Buttocks do not remain rotund till nightfall Buttocks do not remain rotund till nightfall Young girl, be sensible
2.	Edin ne ewa, Edin ne ewaewa	The private that itches The private that itches and itches
3.	Ọkuẹ di kaka? Uwedingbeu! Ọkuẹ di kaka? Enyengbeu!	Will she ever agree? Big buttocks! Will she ever agree? Big breasts!
4.	Qnokhuoni, obalo lea Qba lo lea bho otọ ekperele, ejuda fie kun, da bho nyen egbe, Qbalọ lea bho to ekperele	That woman has pained her considerably. It has pained considerably in her loins Having twisted your waist, also endure the pain It has pained considerably in her loins

⁷ Nightfall as used in this context means old age

Textual Analysis of the Proverbs and Songs

For emphasis, it is important that we state once again that the import of songs is derived from the figurative and literal uses of language in folksong texts. The ways songs are used and interpreted in these communities align with models by Risdianto (2016), who discussed three-dimensional models of song analysis: the contextual, grammatical, and semantic dimensions in the examination of folksongs. In this segment, we take a close look at the four proverbs selected in this study. For the sake of emphasis, we would like to restate them, and they are

1. *The conscience that makes a woman make love with a man should also enable her to twist her waist accordingly.*
2. *When a woman's privates are disease-stricken, it becomes public when looking for a healing solution.*
3. *A pregnant woman under labour pressure at the market and is delivered of her baby at the market cannot be admonished to close up her privates.*
4. *You do not strip a woman and then look at her face.*

From the first proverb to the last one, we see a central thrust - the tendency to see women as sex objects. Regarding the second proverb, in terms of specificity, it is a known fact that any diseased part of the body will require medical examination, diagnosis, and treatment. This procedure does not relate solely to the female body part. In an interview with Akhimien (2025), he intimates that, sub-textually, beyond the second proverb's known superficial meaning, it also connotes that if a woman is promiscuous, everyone, including youngsters far below her age, will have seen her naked and had her. The fourth proverb is a lewd or licentious objectification of the woman as one to be made loved to, which, unconscious to the male speaker, subjects the woman to a doll. When a woman is stripped nude, what happens next? What follows should be mating. Why use women in such derogatory contexts? So, when men are naked, what are the possible ennobling duties that they do? This proverb takes us to the people's construct of women as sex objects. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary⁸ defines a sex object as: "a person regarded especially and exclusively as an object of sexual interest." It means that the female essence is reduced to a mere sex object meant to fulfil a man's desire.

The dualism of the Nigerian legal system, as enunciated by Sagay (2006) and Ocheja (2012) in the law of succession, recommends that the pressures of advocacy under national and international laws ought to enhance gender equality in all spheres, regardless of one's capacity to assert one's humanness in all situations. For instance, CEDAW (1992) focuses not only on identifying the needs of girl children and women, but also formulates specific policies that define their rights, finance their development, identify their challenges, and evaluate State actions and responsibilities. Sexual objectification takes place when a woman's body, parts of it, or sexual functions are split from the rest of her person or treated as if they represent her. This means that the body, or its parts, is substituted for the whole person, thereby depriving the woman of her personality and specificity as a human being (McKinley

⁸Merriam-Webster Dictionary at: <https://www.initiativelifecenter.com>

& Hyde, 1996; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). When a society that is supposedly culturally alert suddenly deviates from its standards to mention women's body parts in derogatory forms, it clearly shows the posture of arrant disrespect for womanhood. An in-depth look at the four songs whose texts are below presents a similar direction of thought:

Buttocks do not remain rotund till nightfall. Privates that itch uncontrollably. Will she ever agree? Big buttocks! Will she ever agree? Big breasts! That woman, it has pained her considerably; it has pained her considerably in her loins. Having twisted your waist, you also endure the pain. It has pained considerably in her loins.

Aging is a universal reality that is not in any way gender specific. So, to say of women that their buttocks do not remain rotund all through their lifetime is more of a satirical statement than telling the truth, because the male buttocks do not become rotund either with aging. The second song talks of an itchy female private part. This is a song sung for a woman who is guilty of infidelity. Sadly, the case of infidelity involves two people, a male and a female. While the male partner is often not mentioned as would have been reasonably necessary, the female is paraded almost nude all through the village as part of the cleansing rite. Surprisingly strange is the fact that it is the women who parade the woman who is being cleansed. Moreover, they sing the obscene songs for the woman to dance to. This is a clear case of female self-objectification. Female self-objectification can best be defined as “regular exposure to objectifying experiences that socialize girls and women to engage in self-objectification, whereby they come to internalize this view of themselves as an object or collection of body parts” (Kroon & Perez, 2013: 16).

Song three presents a context in which a man lusts after a lady. Full of the intention to ask her out, he keeps introspecting, wondering whether the lady will ever agree to his desires. Will she ever agree, big buttocks, will she ever agree, big breasts. No doubt, while the big buttocks and breasts are the features that attract him to the woman, he is, in the same breath, using them to denigrate and devalue her. Of a very pathetic note is song number four. This is a song sung for a woman in labour. Although falling into labour or having labour pains is not an illness, it goes with considerable pain. Rather than lend support and fellow-feeling to a colleague and mate, the consolation she gets is having twisted your waist in your love for mating, and also enduring the pain of birthing. This is awkward and needs to be addressed. Here, we see men attacking women and women also attacking themselves. Changing the narratives on ‘women objectification’ is a must through petitions, peaceful boycotts, and protests against negative/offensive media images; mindfulness and self-awareness; advocating for positive media body image; education about objectification theory; collective actions to leverage religious & spiritual approaches; to seek support for economic empowerment, etc., much as it takes national efforts to ensure the conferment of these rights on the female gender (Ocheja, 2012).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Esan women, whether young or old, face all forms of women's objectification in indigenous proverbs and folksongs. It is observed that this cultural tendency is not the result of a lack of respect or disregard for the woman as a daughter, wife,

mother, or a community woman, nor is it a conscious act of misogyny. Instead, it is a cultural practice that dates back to the tribe's prehistoric existence and is part of the people's folklore. Truly, many proverbs and songs, as seen in the examples given above, subject the female gender or its reproductive essence to ridicule. However, they also serve as one of the means of conveying indigenous knowledge and wisdom. They are sometimes wisecracks. Some indigenous/folk proverbs or songs, as correctly observed by Ajie (2009), are also rendered by women at private or social occasions or to a female counterpart whose conditions or situations necessitate such verbal responses. For example, the fourth song, which ordinarily pictures the pains of a woman in labour, has turned into a light-hearted comic song rendered by the local female folks to their female counterpart, either heavily pregnant or undergoing labour pains and about to be delivered of a baby, rather than to sympathise with her. In the rendition, the women consciously act to provide the pregnant lady targeted in the song with some form of comic relief, to which she responds with laughter or a mirthful smile.

Women interviewed in the course of this study sang the selected songs brought here or helped complete the selected proverbs objectifying women, and reminded them of many others, but laughed it off. The phenomenon significantly traces the root of this cultural sexism, stereotyping, or prejudice against women based on sex in any conceivable way, to traditional settings, to indigenous cultures, to a resistant and robust patriarchal foundation that formed the bedrock of most tribal communities around the globe. The experiences of these writers during direct interviews with local Esan women revealed that all the women found the songs and proverbs fun. One of the women remarked that if men or husbands use female parts or their sexuality to ridicule their wives or other women, it does not mean these men do not love and respect women, and that the men are their husbands. They can say whatever they want. They are heads of their families due to divine providence. Another woman summed it up by saying she believed men originated these proverbs and songs in the past because they are naturally loquacious beings/creatures who do nothing but gossip about women, and ended by saying these songs are hilarious anyway and have become pleasant pastimes for both genders. These women's mirthful acceptance of the phenomenon is self-objectification itself, as described earlier in this essay, and it powerfully signifies how self-objectification has sunk deep irrevocably into the racial memory of the female folk.

The question of 'whether cultural sexism', which forms part of the motivation for this study, points to the extent to which cultural sexism can be tackled for elimination in order to relieve feminist agitators, advocates of legislation, and case laws against the objectification of women. The answer is a helpless negative. Objectification of women is a collective experience of humanity. It cannot be dislodged. It is one of the manifestations of the dominant patriarchal syndrome of mankind, even as semantically revealing as the linguistic term 'mankind'. The past and the here and now of global societies all constitute a man's world.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we examined, by way of definition, what objectification is, providing a basis for interrogating women's objectification in Esan proverbs and folksongs. An intense study of the texts revealing women's objectification in Esanland was done. The study found that this

idea of women's objectification in Esanland has a long history that is intertwined with their culture. Hence, the status of women in Esan is not revocable or sanctioned by any feminist agitation, legislation, or case law. The study also identified the duality and mixed feelings towards women's objectification from local and global perspectives. Given this background, this essay enumerates the adverse effects of women's objectification but cannot argue for its abrogation because of their functions in oral culture. Using relevant proverbs and song texts from Esan culture, the work showed a corpus of traditional artistic compositions of obscene and lecherous colouration targeting women as sex objects, which definitely are anti-female gender or opposed gender to gender equality and a clear manifestation of cultural sexism. However, the willpower to abolish such biases against women in indigenous proverbs and folksongs cannot be mustered because women take delight in it and help render them clearly signifying acts of self-objectification. The patriarchal nature of the society, especially the Esan cultural primogeniture belief system, poses another challenge to any organised act to dislodge or put an end to the phenomenon in her folklore, irrespective of feminist activism and judicial efforts meant to tackle the objectification of women. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) will also be quite helpless in any sensitisation effort or campaign to stop the objectification of women at this cultural level.

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Understanding Illness Anxiety in the Post-COVID Period: Insights from State and Trait Anxiety

Abstract

COVID-19 has been affecting the globe since the very start, and apart from the threat to individuals' physical health, it has also profoundly affected their psychological health. The objectives of the study were to measure illness anxiety amongst healthy people after the COVID-19 pandemic and to examine the association between state anxiety, trait anxiety, and perceived illness anxiety. The Short Health Illness Anxiety Inventory and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults were used to collect the data. Data was collected from 294 participants by using Google Forms. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-test, and hierarchical regression analyses. Regression analysis showed that state anxiety was a significant predictor of illness anxiety, but trait anxiety did not significantly predict illness anxiety. The study found that COVID-19 has, directly and indirectly, been a source of anxiety among people in Pakistan. Moreover, the severity observed varied across people with different demographic factors.

Keywords: Coronavirus, state anxiety, trait anxiety, health anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Pandemics have been spreading across the globe for a very long time. The first pandemic ever recorded in human history was the Athenian Plague in 430 BC (Biello, 2006). This pandemic occurred more than 2,000 years ago, and the Earth has witnessed several plagues, such as the Spanish Flu (1918-1920), Swine Flu (2009-2010), HIV/AIDS (1981 – Present), and many others. The world witnessed the emergence of a unique and distinct virus from Wuhan, in the Chinese province of Hubei (WHO, 2020). Researchers and virologists examined the strain of this virus and found it bears a stark 75-80% resemblance to a virus discovered earlier in the last decade, namely SARS Coronavirus (Perlman, 2020). Although the first human coronavirus was observed in 1960 (Tyrell & Byrone, 1965), Coronavirus has caused epidemics only three times in the last two decades. The first case of COVID-19 was reported in China in December 2019, hence its name. Later, the name for this virus was changed to SARS-CoV-2 due to its stark genetic resemblance to the SARS Coronavirus reported in 2002-2003 (Pearlman, 2020). Researchers and virologists have suggested that this

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virus may have been transmitted from a 2020). The transmission is thought to occur through the respiratory tract and was found in every initial case of each type of Coronavirus that humans have been in contact with. SARS was thought to be linked with bats (Al-Osail & Al-Wazzah, 2017), MERS was linked with camels (Al-Osail & Al-Wazzah, 2017), and COVID-19 was thought to have been linked with bats (Cohen, 2020). The earlier cases of Coronavirus, SARS, and MERS were considered epidemics, and the WHO declared a state of emergency for them (Al-Osail & Al-Wazzah, 2017). However, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are considered the worst. Compared with COVID-19 and its predecessors, it is more contagious. WHO declared a public health emergency on 31st January 2020 (BBC, 2020). According to the WHO's June 30th, 2020, situation report, the total number of COVID-19 cases worldwide exceeds 10 million, including more than 200,000 in Pakistan. The resulting fatalities have crossed 500,000 globally and 4000 in Pakistan. With no vaccine present and only a slight chance of developing it in the immediate future, the human population has experienced a setback and trauma globally.

The impacts of COVID-19 are not restricted only to the health of the masses globally but also affect the socioeconomic segments of societies (Evans, 2020). Pandemics usually create severe to extreme economic gaps for the countries and their masses. The world estimated a loss of 40 billion dollars when SARS emerged (Evans, 2020). Similarly, global GDP is expected to decline by nearly 0.42% in the first quarter of 2020 (Evans, 2020). Developing countries worldwide are more prone to suffering from the pandemic. One such example is that developing countries have fewer diagnostic resources and fail to monitor the exact number of patients in their countries; delayed diagnosis leads to a more intensive course of treatment and the possibility of transmission to others (Li et al., 2020). The transmission of disease across the population is probably the most significant factor to be addressed. Many strategies are developed to contain the spread of the disease, for example, social distancing strategies (Taylor, 2019). In the case of COVID-19, virus transmission is similar to that of other flu-related viruses. The transfer is likely to occur when a normal, healthy human comes into contact with an infected human, either directly or indirectly. However, some people are more likely to spread the disease than other infected individuals only because they do not adhere to the necessary precautions (Galvani & May, 2005).

Illnesses and diseases become pandemics when people lack pre-existing immunity to them (Taylor, 2019). Pandemics cause severe socioeconomic and psychological disruption, along with the prevalent threat to health. Pandemics are associated with a lot of other stressors apart from the apparent threat to health. There is a severe disruption of daily routine, shortages of food and medications, separation from family and friends, loss of wages, etc. (Shultz, Espinel, Flynn, Hoffman & Cohen, 2008). Business ventures experience severe losses; people may develop a significant fear for their safety, families, or jobs. Psychological factors cannot be ignored in this regard, also. During a pandemic, people may develop maladaptive defence mechanisms (Taylor, 2019). The psychological impact of any pandemic is likely to be greater than its medical impact (Shultz et al., 2008). During the 2014-15 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, it was observed that the fear of the disease was more prevalent than the disease itself

(Desclaux, Diop & Doyon, 2017). The fear of Ebola arose in the United States even though it was limited to Africa only (Parmet & Sinha, 2017). In the case of the Coronavirus, during the SARS outbreak, the psychological impact was greater than the medical impact (Cheng, 2004). For some patients who had recovered from SARS, the psychological effects remained persistent even after a long time (Taylor, 2019). People's reactions to specific stimuli, such as a pandemic, are highly diverse (Honingsbaum, 2009). People may react or engage in activities that may include denying the risks and/or taking the necessary precautions (Taylor, 2019).

In contrast, some people are likely to react with an extreme level of anxiety. Taylor (2019) further suggested that a moderate anxiety level can help people act rationally. Whereas extreme fear may be devastating, for example, people may flood the hospitals when a disease outbreak is only a rumour. This, in turn, may incapacitate a nation's health sector. Furthermore, people may resort to extreme measures to remove the perceived source of contamination from themselves (Taylor, 2019). During the SARS epidemic in China, it was reported that people, out of the fear that pets may carry the SARS coronavirus, abandoned and/or killed their dogs and cats either by euthanizing or brutally killing them (Epstein, 2003). Mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and PTSD may be elicited in people due to the pandemic-related stressors (Shultz et al., 2015). People developed extreme distress due to the SARS Coronavirus because it was a novel infection for which no prior information was available, and there was an apparent fear of spreading and transmission to others (Maunder et al., 2006). Taylor (2019) suggested that these are the reasons the next pandemic may have long-term psychological impacts, as seen with COVID-19.

The anxious reaction of people towards a disease or a pandemic may be linked with the possibility or likelihood of an individual experiencing anxiety, i.e., Trait or Trait Anxiety. Spielberg (1979) suggested that people scoring high on the trait anxiety tend to experience the world as ever-threatening. Like trait anxiety, another psychological factor associated with the impact of a pandemic is "health anxiety". Taylor (2019) points out that health anxiety can be spread across the spectrum from mild to severe, and it can either be a state or a trait. People who score high on health anxiety are most likely to overestimate the occurrence of a disease (Berman, 2010). It was also found that people with severe health anxiety are likely to suffer functional impairment (Bobevski, Clarke & Meadows, 2016). Severe levels of health anxiety may make people prone to anxiety even when the outbreak is restricted to a specific region of the world. Such people may misconstrue bodily reactions to stress (e.g., sweating, fatigue) as symptoms of an infection (Taylor, 2019).

As soon as the COVID-19 outbreak began in China, panic spread worldwide. People bought and hoarded everyday-use items that lasted for months, and, obviously, the items became scarce. Pakistan faced a shortage of facial masks, hand sanitizers, and other hygiene products. In the post-COVID era, a significant factor regarding psychological health is illness anxiety. Those individuals who were more anxious during that period about their health experienced anxiety more than less anxious people (Spielberger, 2010). During COVID-19, continuous exposure to health-related information, fear of infection, and uncertainty about the virus intensified state anxiety worldwide (Sampogna et al., 2022). Although the pandemic

environment eventually stabilized, many individuals retained heightened bodily vigilance, catastrophizing tendencies, and persistent fear of disease, which are the core indicators of illness anxiety disorder. During and particularly after COVID-19, the emerging research shows that individuals with high levels of trait anxiety were disproportionately impacted during and after COVID-19. Those who have elevated trait anxiety tend to misinterpret their typical bodily symptoms as signs of danger, etc (Taylor & Asmundson, 2020). This paper gathers information to understand the natural and environmental causes for the anxiety trends observed in Pakistan and the prediction of health anxiety in general.

Rationale

Coronavirus has caused epidemics in the human population three times in the past two decades. In such circumstances, people become more careful than they were under normal conditions. In Pakistan, a disease has never shut down everyday life functioning nationwide. Pakistan witnessed a significant decline in its economic growth. The lens of anxiety, either a state or a trait, automatically helps people to understand the psychological vulnerabilities that the pandemic can cause. The COVID-19 era should be recognized as a global health crisis. It is imperative to study why some people returned to everyday life after facing illness anxiety, while others remained hypervigilant, anxious, and fearful regarding new illnesses.

Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the present study are to study:

- The association between state anxiety, trait anxiety, and perceived illness anxiety in people.
- The predictability of perceived illness anxiety with reference to demographic variables or anxiety variables
- To explore how demographic differences in perceived illness anxiety, state, and trait anxiety among people after the pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is a descriptive study that employs a quantitative research approach.

Participants

The objectives of the present study were to measure illness anxiety amongst healthy people after the COVID-19 pandemic and to examine the association between state anxiety, trait anxiety, and perceived illness anxiety. For the study, 380 respondents were approached via e-mail for data collection, of which 294 responded to the online survey. The overall response rate was 77.37%. So, the study's final sample included 294 individuals who experienced this pandemic but did not suffer directly (male: 128, female: 166). The participants' age ranged from 17 to 57 years ($M=27.86$, $SD=7.60$). Among 294 participants, 173 were married, and 121 were single. Detailed demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Characteristics of Study Sample (N=294).*

Characteristics	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender			
Male	128 (43.53)		
Female	166 (56.42)		
Age		27.86	7.60
Marital Status			
Unmarried	121(41.15)		
Married	173(58.84)		
Staying in Quarantine			
Yes	199(67.68)		
No	95(32.31)		

Note. *f* = Frequency, *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard deviation, % = Percentage

Instruments & Procedure

In the present study, two measures were used for data collection. The Short Health Illness Anxiety Inventory (Salkovskis et al., 2002) measured health anxiety from mild concerns to hypochondriasis. It is a self-reported measure differentiating people suffering from health anxiety from those who have actual physical illness but are not excessively concerned about their health. It comprises 18 items, each consisting of a group of four statements. Participants were asked to read each group of statements carefully and then select the one that best describes their feelings over the past six months. Cronbach's Alpha of the scale was .82. The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults (Spielberger et al, 1983) was used to measure trait and state anxiety. It consists of 40 items, of which 20 assess state anxiety and 20 assess trait anxiety. Respondents responded on a 4-point Likert scale (i.e., Not at all = 1, Somewhat, Moderately, so=3, Very much so=4). Cronbach's Alpha of the State Anxiety Scale was .91, and the Trait Anxiety Scale was .88. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

Ethical Consideration

Informed consent was obtained from the students before administering the scales. It was ensured that the data would only be used for academic research. The confidentiality of the information was ensured.

Hypotheses of the Study

- There is likely a significant relationship between state anxiety, trait anxiety, and perceived illness anxiety in people after COVID-19.
- Perceived illness anxiety is likely predicted by state and trait anxiety in people after COVID-19.
- Males and females would differ in terms of state anxiety, trait anxiety, and perceived illness anxiety.
- There would likely be demographic differences in study variables.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics and Psychometric Properties of Study Variables (N=294)

Variables	k	M	SD	Range		α
				Potential	Actual	
Illness Anxiety	18	14.25	7.45	0-54	0-39	.82
State Anxiety	20	43.51	11.24	20-80	20-79	.91
Trait Anxiety	20	44.18	9.73	20-80	20-79	.88

Note. k= Number of Items, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation.

Table 4.1 presents the mean and standard deviation for the current research variables. It also shows internal consistency for all scales used in this research (Cronbach's Alpha). The findings showed that all scales used in this research are internally consistent.

Table 4.2

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation among Demographics and Study Variables (N=294)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Age	-	-.29***	-.62***	.25***	-.21***	-.24***	-.08
2 Gender		-	.20**	-.29***	.19**	.16**	.13*
3 Marital Status			-	-.17**	.13*	.20**	.12*
4 Stay in Quarantine				-	-.08	-.05	.01
5 State Anxiety					-	.75***	.47***
6 Trait Anxiety						-	.44***
7 Illness Anxiety							-

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, Gender (Male=1, Female=2), Marital Status (Unmarried=1, married =2), Are you in Quarantine (Yes=1, No=2).

Table 4.2 shows the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis used to investigate the connection between demographics and study alternatives. The results presented that age has a significant negative relationship with state and trait anxiety, indicating that older people have less state and trait anxiety than young people. At the same time, gender has a significant positive relationship with state, trait, and illness anxiety, which indicates that females have more anxiety than males. Furthermore, marital status has a significant positive relationship with state, trait, and illness anxiety, indicating that married people have more anxiety than unmarried people. On the other hand, those in quarantine have no significant relationship with any of the study variables. In addition, state and trait anxiety have a significant positive relationship with illness anxiety, indicating that those suffering from either state or trait anxiety may have high scores on illness anxiety.

Table 4.3

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Illness Anxiety from State and Trait Anxiety (N=294)

Variables	Illness Anxiety	
	ΔR^2	B
Step 1	.03	
Age		.01
Gender		.13**
Marital Status		.10
Staying in Quarantine		.07
Step 2	.22***	
State Anxiety		.34***
Trait Anxiety		.18
<i>Total R²</i>	.25	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; β = Standardized Co efficient; ΔR^2 = R Square change; R^2 = R Squar

In Table 4.3, Multiple Hierarchical Regression analysis was performed to estimate the extent to which Demographics, state, and trait anxiety predicted illness anxiety in people during COVID-19. The result showed that step 1 explained a 4% variance in illness anxiety, $F(4, 288) = 2.30, p < .05$. In step 1, only gender significantly predicted illness anxiety. On the other hand, Step 2 explained 21% the variance in illness anxiety, $F(6, 286) = 16.47, p < .001$, which indicated that only state anxiety was a significant predictor of illness anxiety, but trait anxiety did not significantly predict illness anxiety. The total variance explained by both steps in illness anxiety was 25%.

Table 4.4

Results of the Independent Sample t-test for Illness Anxiety and State-Trait Anxiety Independent Samples t-test working area of nurses and study variables (N=100).

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Variables	Male (128)		Female (165)		t	P	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			UL	LL	
State Anxiety	40.98	11.22	45.43	10.94	-3.41	.001	-7.01	-1.88	.40
Trait Anxiety	42.33	10.09	45.58	9.27	-2.86	.004	-5.48	-1.01	.33
Illness Anxiety	13.46	7.02	15.44	7.51	-2.30	.022	-3.67	-.28	.27

Table 4.4, an independent-sample t-test compared state, trait, and illness anxiety in males and females during COVID-19. There was a significant difference in state anxiety scores between males ($M=40.98, SD=11.22$) and females ($M=42.33, SD=10.09$); $t(292) = -3.41, p = .001$, with a medium effect size. These results suggested that females are likely to have more state anxiety than males. Furthermore, there was a significant difference in trait anxiety scores between males ($M=42.33, SD=10.09$) and females ($M=45.58, SD=9.27$); $t(292) = -2.86, p = .004, d = .36$, a medium-sized effect. These results suggested that females are likely to have

more trait anxiety than males. In addition, there was a significant difference in illness anxiety scores between males ($M=13.46$, $SD=7.02$) and females ($M=15.44$, $SD=7.51$); $t(292) = -2.30$, $p = .022$, small effect size. These results suggested that females are likely to have more illness anxiety than males.

This study focuses on the trends of illness anxiety amid COVID-19, indicated by state and trait anxiety levels. Illness anxiety is defined as misinterpreting bodily symptoms, which can easily produce fear of serious illness (Gee, Nowakowski, & Antony, 2015). In this study, researchers emphasize COVID-19 illness and related fear-causing issues. In 2007, Eysenck, Derakshan, Santos, and Calvo defined state anxiety as a distinctive approach to opt for emotional and motivational cues while in threatening situations. In this state, an individual subjectively evaluates circumstances that may harm self-esteem, putting oneself at physical risk, experiencing diffidence, or experiencing self-doubt (Schwenkmezger & Steffgen, 1989). In contrast to state anxiety, trait anxiety is usually considered a stabilized proneness to anxiety in different individuals or a general propensity to deal with coercions that are perceived to be threatening (Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1970). If an individual scores high on trait anxiety, they feel more threats and rate high on the state anxiety scale. This higher level of trait anxiety also increases the anticipated fear of self-esteem, physiological threats, and perceived failures irrespective of objective danger (Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene 1970). Both trait and state anxiety seemed to have a strong and significant relationship with illness anxiety, as manifested in the results (Table 4.2).

The results of the present study depicted that women are more prone to anxiety, whether it is a trait, state, or illness anxiety (Table 4.1). The prevalence rates of anxiety disorders are higher in females than in males (McLean, Asnaani, Litz, & Hofmann, 2011). On the other hand, it is also found from the present study that married couples show relatively higher levels of symptoms of anxiety (Table 4.1). Marital life may bring stressful dysfunctions that can be sexual or emotional, leading towards marital dissatisfaction and ultimately resulting in depression and anxiety (Trudel & Goldfarb, 2010), which is probably not the case among single individuals. Similarly, anxiety levels seem to be lower in older people (Table 4.1), thus predicting that as the person ages, state-trait anxiety levels decrease, ultimately decreasing the prediction of illness anxiety. From a Pakistani perspective, this study has shown no significant difference in the impact of anxiety, whether state, trait, or illness, among individuals who are in quarantine and those who are not staying in quarantine (Table 4.2).

Amid COVID-19, when everyone is struggling to avoid contracting the Coronavirus, they are facing other issues such as financial problems, educational hurdles, limited medical resources, and a lack of awareness of the implications of the law and the system. These factors may increase anxiety levels among people going through the pandemic. However, other factors may prove to control emotional and behavioural responses towards stressful situations caused by COVID-19. During the pandemic, quarantine can help keep people in isolation so they might not catch an infection, such as the Coronavirus. Studies show longer quarantine, and there is a greater chance of getting frustrated and poorer psychological health. People who are in quarantine for longer cannot withstand smaller extensions (Rona et al., 2007). However, in Pakistan, a smart lockdown strategy may have proved beneficial in some ways. This strategy

has helped people manage their frustration and daily life activities amid COVID-19. People in quarantine often have higher anxiety levels due to fear of getting infected or infecting others. This type of awareness is either induced by the media or social media, which can adversely impact mental health through exposure to worrying (Rubin et al., 2016). Thus, knowledge plays an important role in managing stressful conditions. In Pakistan, it is observed that PM Imran Khan has reported “not to worry” and is dealing with situations more balanced.

This type of information might be another factor in the results of no significant relationship between anxiety (trait, state, or illness) and quarantine status. Providing more supplies to people in quarantine can help them manage their pandemic-related stress. Similar struggles are being observed at the individual, group, societal, community, and national levels in Pakistan, which may be another factor of no significant correlation between “stay in quarantine” and trait, state, and illness anxiety levels. Reducing boredom by allowing people to connect with their loved ones through online systems and providing them with entertainment (Pan, Chang, & Yu, 2005); for example, the availability of online content on Netflix and the increased use of media accounts might decrease the stressful environment. Thus, this can be another factor leading to a weak relationship between being in quarantine and anxiety levels. Another study shows that individuals with a repressive coping style, i.e., having a low score on trait anxiety and rating high in defensiveness, have cognitive biases that result in minimizing or lessening the threateningness of situations (Eysenck, 2000).

This argument supports that being in quarantine but adapting to a repressive coping style may result in decreased levels of illness anxiety. Results of the analysis of Multiple Hierarchical Regression (Table 4.3) manifested that 21% of the variance predicted illness anxiety, indicating that state anxiety is a strong predictor of illness anxiety. State anxiety is concerned with the symptoms of anxiety being indicated during threats or stressful situations, as in the case of COVID-19. When people are hospitalized, the rate of anxiety seems to increase, and patients start to indicate fear of being victims of the disease due to misinterpretation of the severity of the disease (McCaffrey & Taylor, 2005). This increase in anxiety also threatens the overall health of patients. Similarly, people facing the consequences of COVID-19, such as increased rates of death, the severity of pain during symptoms, or an increased number of patients at hospitals due to COVID-19, show higher rates of state anxiety. This higher level of state anxiety starts predicting the symptoms of illness anxiety (Table 4.3), where people may misperceive that they might get infected with the Coronavirus, ultimately leading to a cause of fear.

CONCLUSION

This study followed a unique pathway of exploring the possible link between state/trait anxiety and health anxiety among people in Pakistan. COVID-19, due to its high transmission rate, unique genetic structure, and economic impacts, has, in one way or another, generated anxiety in people. It was found that females were higher on all types of anxieties (State, trait, and perceived illness) than males. Older people were less anxious than younger people, and the same was true for married people, who were more anxious than unmarried people. The demographic variable that did not predict illness anxiety among the people was a

distinct result of the present study. This was further supported when it was found that state anxiety has proven to be a significant predictor of illness anxiety for COVID-19 in people, contrary to trait anxiety.

Limitations and Future Directions

These are the few limitations of the study:

- Only Quantitative data analysis was computed, but for more effective and in-depth findings, qualitative data collection and analysis should be conducted in the future.
- The scales were in English, and future translated versions must be used.
- The sample was based on a convenience sampling strategy, but in the future, different people from those professions should also be included who worked in this pandemic on the front line, like nurses, doctors, paramedical staff, police officers, etc.
- One of the significant limitations was the online data collection because it lacked the motivation to respond and fill out the questionnaires, affecting the response rate.
- Data collected during the pandemic's peak time to cross-verify the results would be better for a longitudinal study.

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Patriarchy and Gender Power Dynamics in ‘The Secret Sky’ by Atia Abawi: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Abstract

The research study examined depiction of the gender power dynamics and the role of patriarchy in the production, reproduction and maintenance of the gender based power asymmetries in the novel, ‘The Secret Sky’ by Abawi. The selected text was critically analyzed in terms of the theoretical postulates presented by Michelle Lazar in her theoretical framework of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (2005, 2007). Textual Analysis as a research method was incorporated and the analytical framework of the research was grounded in the feminist perspectives of the Muslim Feminist writers, Laila Abu Lughod, (1986, 2002) and Nawal El Saadawi, (1999, 2002). Though the research study was delimited to the portrayal of the gender power dynamics in the selected novel through the lens of FCDA, yet it would serve to be a small academic contribution to the existing discourse of the gender power dynamics and also to the investigation of the image of Afghan woman in the Anglophonic Afghan novels. The research study would recommend the future researcher to explore the works of the female Anglophonic Afghan writers.

Keywords: *Androcentrism, Patriarchy, Power Dynamics, Features, Atia Abawi*

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan, a landlocked country with rugged mountainous geography is home to a multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi ethnic population of over 37 million people. The Pashtuns being the largest ethnic group comprise 40 percent of the total population. (Huma, 2003) Owing to the unending wars, ethnic clashes and internecine conflicts the Afghanis have suffered unprecedentedly; however, the most grievous sufferers of the dilemma are the women of Afghanistan. Huma (2003) believes that the history of the suffering and pangs of Afghan women is very long because of the antagonism among the varying ethnic and tribal groups living there. She adds that, the tribal laws in Afghanistan are prioritized over constitutional laws and religious teachings. Women’s lives are exploited for the sake of inter-tribal superiority and honour is attached with the body of women which make them more vulnerable. Marriage is used as a contract between different groups for the purpose of making alliances and women are expected to have a total submission towards their husbands and are denied the right of divorce. They are also kept away from getting education. According to Huma (2003) women of Afghanistan are treated as mere commodity. They are confined inside their homes and under the burqa and they do not have any say in the creation of their identities. However, Saadawi (2007) attributes the oppression of women to patriarchy, which always empowers men over women by making women vulnerable. She suggests

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abolition of patriarchy and the patrilineal system for the true emancipation of women. Moreover, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis presented by Michelle Lazar (2005) discusses how patriarchal ideologies are formed, propagated and disseminated discursively, which once produced are practiced in societies and make the male members of society dominant over the female members. The dominated faction is then conventionalized to adopt the set ideologies whether they accept them or not.

Statement of the Problem

Lazar (2007) unlike the postfeminists does not believe feminism to be an irrelevant subject. She argues that the gender based disparities not only exist but have also taken more complex forms with their varying nature according to different contexts. She says that the disparities change with the change in context and are not the same everywhere. As Huma (2003) states that Afghanistan is ruled under a very traditional patriarchal setup for a very long span of time owing to the long history of wars and internecine conflicts, the predicament of the Afghan women is unprecedented. While great scholarly focus has been paid on the suffering of the women of Afghanistan, the works of the female Anglophonic Afghan writers, specifically, the works of Atia Abawi are relatively underexplored. The study was thus an attempt to investigate the depiction of the gender power dynamics portrayed by Atia Abawi.

Research Objective

- I. To assess the portrayal of gender power dynamics in the ‘Secret Sky’ by Abawi.
- II. To investigate the effect of patriarchy and patriarchal structures on the female characters of the selected novel.

Research Question

- I. How does Abawi portray gender power dynamics in the selected novels?
- II. In what way does Abawi portray the effect of patriarchy and patriarchal structures on the female characters of the selected novel?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The early 19th century witnessed emergence of a movement which became famous as the Feminist movement. The movement aimed at bringing a just society which should provide equal status to men and women, so that, women are not marginalized and placed at disadvantageous positions. The main focus of the movement was to emancipate women from the injustices and the overt and covert oppressions practiced in societies with the aim to empower women (Jackson, R. M., 1998). Feminism was a movement to end sexism and to end the sexist exploitation and oppression. So, the feminists are of the belief that due to the unequal power distribution among the sexes, (male and female) females as one of the segments of society are suppressed and subjugated resulting in deterioration of the wellbeing and smooth running of the society. Therefore, the problem is of serious nature and needs to be addressed accordingly. (Hooks, 2000)

The movement got diverse when it went beyond the western boundaries. With the inclusion of women of colour and women belonging to diverse contexts, its basic aim of emancipation of women from the asymmetries also changed. As, women living around the globe do not face the same asymmetries, their problems also vary. Thus, with the passage of time

feminists from varying social, societal, religious and cultural backgrounds emerged with different opinions regarding the issues faced by women and the emancipation of woman from the bondage of androcentrism. These different views are studied under various sub categories like: Liberal Feminism, Black Feminism, Radical Feminism, Social Feminism, Post- Feminism and Anti Feminism. Thus the liberal feminists according to Tong (2009) believe that the human society has a false belief that women are by nature less capable intellectually and physically as compared to men. They rather believe that all human beings possess equal rational and intellectual capacities to perform any sort of job. It is because of some outdated beliefs that women are considered less capable and are kept subordinated.

On the other hand, the radical feminists are of the belief that sexism and patriarchy are the root causes behind the oppression, discrimination and subjugation of women race. They ignore rest of the causes like, gender, religion, culture, disability, social and economic status etc... as the fundamental causes behind the subjugation and segregation of women. They believe that patriarchy is psychologically rooted in the society and is the very preliminary factor behind the oppression of women (Nachescu, 2009). And the movement, post feminism is often referred to as the demise of feminism or the irrelevance of feminism in the western societies. Susan (1992) in her book "Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women" coins the term Post Feminism by explaining the indifference towards the second wave of feminism. The indifferent attitude towards feminism in the western societies according to her is not because the women have achieved all the objectives of equity and equality but because of the advancement of popular culture and advancement, women do not seem concerned about the goals of the previous waves of feminism or rather the women in the west do not even pretend to care about them. (Robinson, Penelope, 2008)

Coinciding with the views, Saadawi (2007) in her book 'The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World' presents very disturbing and distressing images of the hidden faces of the girls and women of Muslim world. She thinks all the adversities faced by women are not because of the religion but because of the political and economic systems which tend to prevail and maintain the hegemony of men over women. She proposes matrilineal system in place of patrilineal, so that women could attain true emancipation. (Saadawi, 2007). In the same way Parveen (2021) in her research work titled: 'Gender Resistance: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Qaisra Shahraz's 'A Pair of Jeans & Other Stories,' discusses that Qaisara Sharaz has portrayed a very different image of women in her stories. The women characters in the fictions in contrary to the stereotypical roles in the society struggle to liberate themselves from the hegemonic gender constrains and try to redefine their identities and reclaim their unheard voices. In the process of unlearning the social and societal schemata the females have to go through, emotional, psychological and physical suffering. As the process of emancipation from the embedded norms is not an easy task, their efforts often pose dire threat to them owing to the androcentric communities. (Parveen, 2021). As the gender based asymmetries are not the same everywhere, they vary with the varying social, societal, cultural and financial contexts, the asymmetries faced by women living in strong and oppressive androcentric setups would differ from those who live in egalitarian societies.

Research Gap

The thorough survey of the relevant literature revealed that the gender based disparities have been examined by various authors and research studies have been conducted on both long and short fictions to portray the gender power dynamics, however, Feminist CDA of the Anglophonic Afghan novels, specifically authored by the female Afghan authors was a relatively less explored field. The thorough investigation of the existing literature could not provide the analysis of “The Secret Sky” under the theoretical lens of FCDA.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research paradigm was adopted in the research study to analyze the novel, ‘The Secret Sky’ by Abawi. The qualitative method of analysis helped the researcher in having an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the novel through the theoretical postulates presented by Michelle Lazar in her theoretical framework of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (2005, 2007). The feministic notions of the Muslim Feminist Saadawi (1999, 2002) were followed as the analytical framework of the research study and textual analysis presented by McKee (2003) was adopted for the analysis of the selected text.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Role of Patriarchy in Gender Power Dynamics

The main focus of the researchers in the current research work was on the female characters of the novel, “The Secret Sky” The story revolves round the female protagonist who lives in strong patriarchal environments and face both the latent and blatant societal oppression. The writer has depicted the living conditions of women in the strong patriarchal set up of Afghanistan where both men and women have to adopt the strict norms imposed upon them by ethnicity and patriarchy. The novel “The Secret Sky,” (2014), starts with the description of a small village inhabited by both Pashtun and Hazara community. With the progress in the story the readers come to know that the lands are owned by the Pashtun community and the Hazaras are their peasants. However, they live together peacefully and without any overt antagonism. Some of the kids play together however some others are not allowed to mingle with the Hazara kids.

Saadawi (1999) holds patriarchal system responsible against all the exploitations and oppressions faced by women. She is of the opinion that the patriarchal system empowers men over women in every field of life because of which women are exploited. The rules, norms, values and taboos are made by men to maintain their authority which weakens the women on the other hand. They become valueless and their efforts are not acknowledged. She coins various exploitations of women like economic exploitation, social exploitation, sexual exploitation and sexual harassment within family. She even talks about share in hereditary and the names given to kids. All according to her show the asymmetrical power distribution among men and women. She is of the view that true emancipation of women is not possible as long as patriarchy reigns in the societies. She believes that mere economic empowerment and getting equal wage do not mean that women have attained their freedom. She wants freedom for women in every aspect of life; social, political, economic and sexual.

Michelle Lazar (2005) while discussing the concerns of a Feminist Critical Discourse Analyst states that:

As feminist critical discourse analysts, our central concern is with critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women as a social group. (Lazar, 2005, p.5) . She elaborates her point by stating that the discourses which are made discursively both through written and spoken language maintain the patriarchal order hence empower men over women resulting in the asymmetrical power distribution in societies.

Foucault (1977) states, “Power relations are a struggle over interests, which are exercised, reflected, maintained and resisted through a variety of modalities, extents and degrees of explicitness.” (p.1-28). According to the above mentioned texts, Atia Abawi has portrayed a very strong patriarchal setup in her novel, “The Secret Sky.” Women face subjugation under the strong patriarchal setup. The central character of the novel, Fatima goes through both physical and verbal sexism and even endangers her life when she goes against the set norms of the society. Many an instances in the novel testify that how deeply the patriarchy is rooted in the society and how it has been ritualized and conventionalized so that not only men but women consider following the brutal norms to be binding on them and a part of their life.

Millet (1977) observes that, “Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant, or masculine, roles and women always have the subordinate or feminine ones.” (Millet, 1977, p. 35) How women are made to think that they are different from men from the very early years of their lives is apparent from the novel “The Secret Sky” as the central character of the novel “Fatima” is told by her mother to behave in a certain way as she belongs to a different gender. Not only she, but also other girls of her age have been told not to go out like boys, as, for girls it would not be decent to go out of their homes and play as the boys do. Fatima for instance says, “My mother says that it’s no longer proper for a girl of my shape to go out and play with boys, that it will be seen as indecent.” (Abawi, P.18). The instance shows us in the same way as Millet (1977) has observed that patriarchy is maintained through institutions like academy, family church etc. in case of Fatima, her family, most specifically her mother is involved in educating her norms of the society. As, the very system, its norms, values, roles and taboos are systematized and conventionalized, the very oppressed beings consider them to be the best way for them to spend their lives. Or, if they have some reservations regarding the accepted norms being cruel, they accept them to be a part of their fate so; they tend to live with them. Abawi (2014) says, those who tend to go against the accepted norms are often “threatened, ostracized or even killed.”

When Zohra tells Fatima that there is nothing for women in the country and they have to accept it as their destiny, Fatima gives a very bold answer and says, may be they could change their destiny and upon asked by Zohra that how would she change her destiny and what else would she do? Fatima says, “I hear there are universities in Kabul—universities that girls can go to. They can become doctors, lawyers, midwives and even artists! They can

read as many books as they want, and no one is jealous.” (Abawi, p.31). Zohra is stunned to hear that and states, “Women on radio and television? They must be orphans! Their mothers and fathers would never let them be so exposed.” (Abawi, p.31). We have got two voices here in these excerpts. For Zohra there is no escape from the system and she has accepted the patriarchal system as something written or a part of her destiny. For Zohra, getting education and learning to read and write would make no difference as, at the end women have to get married and that is the end of their endeavors. Whatever they do or learn would not ease them from the traditional roles which have been ascribed to women. Zohra has got only one wish which is about the person whom she will marry. She says they should only pray that the men who are in their fate may not be too old. On the other hand Fatima does not acknowledge the traditional roles and she thinks of a brighter future. She thinks of different possibilities as opting of careers beyond the traditional duty of housewifery.

When Fatima tells Zohra about the women who work on radio or television, Zohra says that those women who are allowed to careers such jobs where they can go out and disclose themselves must be orphans as parents of women in Afghanistan would not allow women to go out of their homes. When Fatima objects to her statement regarding the women who work out of the confinements of their homes she says, she does not believe that women who work outside are not honourable women but in the society where they are living no women who go out of their houses and disclose themselves would be treated as honourable women.

Lazar (2005) observes that the gender based power asymmetries have become more subtle and nuanced. Now, to apply the theory of Michelle Lazar (2005) on the instance taken we can say that Fatima, educated about the world beyond her village by her father and Bibi’s lessons thinks of a more just world. She is being told that women are inferior to men and should be acquainted with certain tasks which have been ascribed to them by the society. However, Fatima believes that the women have got the right to aspire for positive change in their lives and they should be given the right to have the power for the decisions about their own lives. Saadawi (2002) considers patriarchy to be behind all the oppressions faced by women and believes that the emancipation of women is not possible till the abolishment of the patriarchal system. The patriarchal system empowers men as a group over women so to maintain their power and authority and the empowered men then exploit women in every sphere of life. The ideology is produced, reproduced and maintained with institutions like family, society, cultures, traditions, religion and education.

Sultana (2011) notes that, “The norms and practices that define women as inferior to men, impose controls on-them, are present everywhere in our families, social relations, religious, laws, schools, textbooks, media, factories, offices.” (Sultana, 2011, p.1-18) Fatima is stunned at the news that Zohra is going to be married to a man, who is older than her and accepted by her parents because the man owns a motorcycle. Zohra tells her that, “He’s a distant relative of my father’s. They say that he’s looking for a wife, and he could take care of me. They’re well- off too—they own a motorcycle.” (Abawi, p. 31. Women living in patriarchal setup do not have a say even in the very vital decisions about their own lives. The parents only have the power to decide that whom they should marry, when they should marry and where they should marry. In Zohra’s case the parents have decided that she

should marry a man who is well off as he owns a motor-cycle. When Zohra tells the development to Fatima that she is going to get married, she seems to justify her parents that they have chosen a right man for her. If a person owns a motor-cycle, it means the person can guarantee her bread and shelter. Only the provision of bread and shelter is regarded important to give away the daughter to a man. The discourse is built that there is no need of anything else if a woman has got shelter and is provided with a square meal. How she would be treated, would she be exploited, face any troubles or would she be able to have a loving relationship with the person to whom she is being betrothed is not kept under consideration.

Sultana (2011) has observed that the exploitation of girls, starts from their very family, as girls are regarded a burden, on the other hand, boys are considered to be assets and bread winners. The girls when betrothed enter the next phase of their exploitation as the men they are betrothed to regard them subordinates and exploit them. The subordination, exploitation and discrimination which girls face after their marriage deprive them of their self-esteem and their aspirations. Besides, girls from the very early age are told to act in a certain way. They are told every time that, girls are different from boys. Saadawi (2007) gives her own example as how she was told to behave differently as compared to her brother. When she protested for about the privileges her brother got instead of the fact that she was more talented than him, she would often get the answer that she was a girl and her brother was a boy. The central character of Atia Abawi’s novel “The Secret Sky” says that she was very often told by her mother to behave like a girl and not like a boy.

“Fatima,” she told me, for what was probably the millionth time. She has always felt that I needed to act more like a girl instead of yet another son, and never lets me forget it.” (Abawi, p.32). Fatima’s mother never lets her forget that she is a girl and how she should behave. Chaudary (2013) observes that women have to strictly follow the norms and behaviours ascribed to them by the society to become honourable however there is no need for the men to follow the norms as strictly as the women. Fatima’s mother would often tell her to be a good daughter and would often educate her how to impress her husband when she would get marry. It is like educating her to act like a good daughter and then after her marriage like a good wife. The accepted norms for women to make themselves honourable Chaudary (2013) are being good daughters, good wives and to control their sexuality.

Saadawi (2002) coins the Judaic concept of “incomplete being” for women. It was considered that women have been created without head so they were considered to be incomplete. They would only be completed after their marriage as man had been given the status of “head” of women. The concept prevails in today’s patriarchal set-up as well. Being a woman is accomplishment of the status “womanhood” which is only attained after marriage. In the context given Fatima’s mother tells her that she would become a woman and she would like it after she would get marry. About her own self she says that she was lucky that she married her father who treated her as a friend not as a servant. This also endorses the concept that women are considered as subordinates by their husbands as marriage gives them the authority over their women. Whether they like it or not, the women have to abide by their husbands’ commands.

Butler (1993) argues that men and women have to perform according to the societal expectations which have very strictly been imposed upon them. The roles ascribed to both men and women have been decided and accepted by the society and violating the pre-decided and pre-determined norms means going against the expectations of the society, leading to dangerous consequences. Fatima, the protagonist of the novel, “The Secret Sky,” when fails to abide by the societal expectations; the order of the society stirs and the whole community starts up and pose deadly consequences for her. Fatima faces blatant violence and her very existence gets threatened. She escapes death narrowly; however, her family bears the consequences. Her younger sister, Afia gets murdered and she herself is compelled to seek asylum in one of the United Nation’s centers. Exploitation of Fatima starts from her own home, when her loving father, who had never in her life had scolded her decides to marry her to Karim; his own friend and father of Fatima’s friend, Zohra. “Fato, we have something very important to speak with you about, my *baba* says and then lets out a breath. I nod my head. “We’ve decided . . . your mother and I have decided . . . it’s time for you to get married.” (Abawi, p.98)

Atia Abawi in the “Author’s Note” to her novel, ‘the Secret Sky’ says, In most Afghan cultures, a person’s destiny is scripted by others. This is especially true for a woman. Her destiny is written before she is born, formulated by her family and community. She has very little say. This norm is questioned only by a very few. Those who do raise their voices are demonized, ostracized and even killed. (Abawi, p.198). Same happens with Fatima, the very father, who had never scolded her in his entire life and who had snubbed her mother when she had decided to marry his daughter to a Hazara boy sacrifices her to save his own honour, his family’s honour and the honour of his whole clan. More blatant violent physical punishment come from Fatima’s mother who scalds her hands with boiling water and calls her a “whore.” Her mother gets furious when she thinks of the plans she had dreamt about her. She now believes that Fatima has no longer remained an honourable woman so no man would accept her or even woo her. She even thinks that the future life of Afia is also at stake just because of Fatima’s action.

CONCLUSION

The research study aimed at analyzing the novel, ‘The Secret Sky’ by Abawi (2014) under the theoretical postulates of the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) presented by Michelle Lazar (2005) and under the analytical framework of the Feministic notions of Saadawi (1999, 2002) and Lughod (1986, 2002) . For the purpose, the study adopted the qualitative constructivist research paradigm as it was best serving the purpose of finding the truth which could not be statistically proven by going with the quantitative research paradigm. For the interpretation and analysis of the selected novels to find the gender based power dynamics, textual analysis was adopted. The main focus of the research study remained the protagonist of the selected novel, around whom the stories revolves. The study critically analyzed the gender based power asymmetries being produced, reproduced, negotiated and contested constantly in order to maintain and resist the hierarchical ideologies. The study found out that the setting of the selected story was the strong androcentric context of Afghanistan where the society favours men over women and maintains the hegemony of men by giving them the status of head of the family, head of the

clan, religious leader, law enforcer and executioner. On the other hand it was found in the research that women are given lower status as compared to men.

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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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Notes to Contributors

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