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Structural and Normative Barriers in Girls' Education: A Case Study of District Bajaur, Pakistan

Abstract

This research relies on a qualitative approach examining various barriers to female education in the post-conflict tribal area of District Bajaur, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), a province of Pakistan. The study investigates how the structural barriers, such as lack of educational facilities, fewer employment opportunities, and lack of security, are coupled with normative elements based on sociocultural aspects, such as traditional customs of Pukhtunwali, gender roles, and early marriages, depicted in twenty semistructured interviews conducted with female students aged between fifteen and twentyfour. The findings reflected that such structural norms are interrelated, and these also contribute to a vicious cycle of systemic exclusion of girls in this marginalized region. The study finds that any approach that takes a "one-size-fits-all" or "one-policy-fitsall" strategy is ineffective, and calls for more comprehensive, culturally responsive strategies and sound security to bring about lasting improvements in girls' participation and learning in schools.

Keywords: *Girls' Education, Structural Barriers, Normative Barriers, Pukhtunwali, PostConflict Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is key to social mobility, personal development, and national development, yet millions of girls in the Global South face significant barriers to accessing formal education despite decades of international promises and national policy changes aimed at achieving universal education (UNESCO, 2023). Around the world, there are an estimated 129 million girls not in school, due to a complex mix of structural inequalities and entrenched gender norms that systematically exclude girls from the same educational opportunities as boys (UNICEF, 2023). Girls' education is especially undermined where poverty and rigid gender roles intersect in conflict and low-income countries, in which cultural and institutional barriers combine to devalue or often ignore girls' education. Globally, gender inequalities in education are a serious means of perpetuating gender inequalities in social inequality, particularly in South Asia. In rural and disadvantaged communities, girls are systematically excluded, and out-of-school girls are at greater risk of being out of school than boys in the richest households, by three or four times in the poorest (Unterhalter et al., 2022).

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Conservatism in mobility norms, lack of gender-specific sanitation, and a lack of female teachers in rural settings further magnify this situation. This is especially a problem in Pakistan. The school-age gap in girls' enrollment is the result of long-standing social norms favoring boys' education, and the public education sector has long suffered from underfunding (Malik, 2022). An education budget of <2.5% of GDP is among the lowest in South Asia, reflecting state priorities that are misaligned with the educational needs of marginalized groups (UNDP, 2023). After the enactment of the 25th Constitutional Amendment in 2018, the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) became part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province and were brought into the regular legislative and policy frameworks. Pursuant to the 18th Amendment (2010), education was transferred to the provincial governments, and KP had a chance to change how education is planned in the newly merged districts. The post-merger policy initiatives include KP Elementary and Secondary Education Foundation (KP ESF), KP Education Sector Plan (2015 – 2019), and Newly Merged Districts Education Program (NMDEP) that have been taken up to address the historical institutional neglect of tribal areas (Government of KP, 2019; UNICEF, 2022). Regardless of these changes, there are significant implementation gaps in some districts, such as Bajaur, particularly in girls' schools, the number of women teachers, and community engagement. The District of Bajaur is a most revealing example. HRCP 2015 reports that during the period 2007-14, Taliban militants destroyed more than 460 schools, most of which are for girls and which they label as **“cultural and religious threats”**. This past of violence continues, still represented in school selections in this rather peaceful moment, where families have become sensitized to the hazards of girls being seen in public. In addition to the existing structural challenges and conservative norms, this postconflict situation places an additional burden on a few girls in Bajaur.

This study aims to fill the existing void in the scholarship regarding how structural barriers such as inadequate facilities, lack of female teachers, transportation issues, and economic factors combine with the normative barriers of tribal norms, rigid gender norms, early marriage, and community stigma to create systematic educational deprivation for girls in District Bajaur. Using mixed methods, the research relies on qualitative in-depth interviews with a sample of 20 female students aged 15–24 to bring to light the lived experiences of these intersecting barriers and to understand how these barriers are experienced at the levels of institutions, communities, and families.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research into girls' education in the developing world has shown that a simplistic view of the issues around access and attainment, based solely on economic or infrastructural deficiencies, is inadequate, and that a more comprehensive approach takes into account the interplay between structural barriers and normative systems (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). Rural and marginalized girls have consistently been found to be subject to multiple disadvantages in South Asian studies, especially in situations of conflict and low state capacity, coupled with conservative cultural norms. There are material and institutional barriers, such as a lack of qualified teachers (particularly female teachers), the absence of sanitation, a lack of transport, and inaccessible schools, that directly impede access to education. These gaps are especially

important for girls in settings where family values are associated with modesty, privacy, and protection of girls. The lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure – boundary walls, separate functioning toilets, and having female teachers – is known to be an important barrier to family decisions regarding the enrolment of daughters, especially during the adolescent years (Unterhalter et al., 2022; Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021).

Normative influences, rooted in cultural traditions, religious interpretations, and gendered expectations, significantly shape educational decision-making within the household. Research in traditional rural settings has shown that the traditional division of labor assigns girls the role of future wives and mothers and views formal education as unwarranted or even socially disruptive (Colclough et al., 2000). Such normative systems are reflected in early marriage, which disrupts education; domestic labor norms, which reduce the time spent on school; norms of mobility, which limit access to secondary and tertiary education; and social stigmatization of families that allow girls to attend secondary and tertiary education. This is further aimed at complicated in the Pakistani context, where national policies ensuring universal education face implementation challenges and entrenched norms that favor male education (Aslam & Kingdon, 2012). The fact that sons' education investment is given higher priority by resourceconstrained households also reflects broader cultural norms that define male education as a long-term investment with economic returns and female education as a short-term investment due to early marriage norms (Lloyd & Sathar, 2002).

Historical marginalization, institutional neglect, and militant conflict have combined in the FATA to create particularly high levels of educational exclusion for girls (Bibi, 2007). In the absence of gender-segregated schools and teachers, the Pukhtunwali tribal code, which emphasizes honor (ghairat) and honor (izzat), and the gender segregation of educational spaces have been interpreted as limiting female mobility and education (Ullah et al., 2019). In the case of education, Shinwari (2017) reports that tribal elders and religious leaders have disproportionate power in deciding whether or not people go to school, and that many people view formal learning as culturally inappropriate if it is not related to the Quran.

The process of militancy by the Taliban across FATA and neighboring KP districts has further aggravated the existing barriers by targeting the education infrastructure of the country with deliberate attacks, especially girls' schools (Khan and Naqvi, 2012). HRCP recorded the damage of more than 460 schools, which not only made access to education difficult but also caused psychological trauma that has been affecting the community-level decisions regarding the enrolment of girls (HRCP, 2015). District-specific studies in District Bajaur report very low literacy rates among females, a lack of educational facilities, a shortage of female teachers, and community-wide opposition to girls' education, particularly within cultural and religious interpretations (Zada, 2012; Hammad & Bibi, 2023). These research findings highlight the need to think more broadly about infrastructure, economic assistance, community norm change, and the regular enforcement of government policy as a package rather than individually. In

significantly marginalized educational contexts, girls exhibit resilience, agency, and aspirations; many of them set high goals for school and develop strategies to overcome difficulties, according to new findings (Unterhalter et al., 2022). These studies indicate that infrastructure investments, economic support, improved safety measures, and normative transformation through participation can significantly increase access and educational attainment in such constrained environments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the experiences of girls in District Bajaur who face structural and normative barriers to accessing education, using a qualitative methodology. Because the context and complexity of the exclusion of young girls from formal education required in-depth descriptive narratives and an understanding of the traditional context that could not be gained through quantitative approaches, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate. In-depth interviews were conducted as a data collection strategy. This enabled the collection of in-depth narratives and experiences, which are essential for understanding systemic educational deprivation.

Research Site and Context

This district was selected due to its position in Pakistan's historically independent tribal areas, the documented history of violent episodes and institutional negligence, and cultural norms that limit girls' educational possibilities (Ali et al., 2020). Given its location at the intersection of post-conflict recovery, tribal structural organization, and governmental role, the area provided an analytically fruitful setting for investigating how these dynamics interact and affect female education.

Research Instrument

An in-depth interview guide was designed, comprising 25 open-ended questions. Five key areas: socio-demographic background; normative obstacles related to cultural and religious aspects; structural barriers, such as infrastructure and resource constraints; aspirations and resistance techniques; and perspectives on possible interventions. The guide was pretested with a few participants to ensure its validity, sensitivity to cultural differences, and ability to provide in-depth qualitative data. The guide was modified afterward, resulting in the final research instrument.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was used to select participants, who had to be female students from District Bajaur, literate, enrolled in or having previously attended educational institutions, and aged 15 to 24. To reach more eligible people through social networks, the purposive recruitment strategy was combined with snowball sampling. The final sample consisted of twenty female students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, educational levels, and community backgrounds within the district.

Data Collection Procedures

In December 2024, data was collected over seven days. To address delicate topics in a confidential and comfortable setting, interviews were conducted in participants' homes and schools. While preserving participant liberty and privacy, a local gatekeeper was employed to gain access to participants and cultural customs. To allow participants to express themselves in their Preferred language, interviews were conducted in both Urdu and Pashto. The interviewer used active listening, follow-up probing, and respectful engagement to elicit specific answers and be sensitive to the participants' emotional well-being. Interviews were performed at the participant's own pace.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, translated into English, and then back-translated to ensure accuracy and semantic integrity. To identify trends, themes, and key connections in the data, thematic analysis was used (Rafiuddin et al., 2023). Ten broad themes, including structural and normative barriers, the reinforcing nature of these barriers, institutional shortcomings, and participant agency, emerged from the initial open coding, which produced a long list of concepts and categories based on the accounts of the participants. This methodical interpretation was made possible while being true to the statements and experiences of the participants.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION Structural Dimensions of Educational Exclusion

Structural Aspects: Infrastructure, human resources, transportation, and economic factors are the fundamental obstacles to females' access to and persistence in school in District Bajaur. The lack of basic facilities like boundary walls, gender-segregated functional toilets, reliable electricity, and proper classroom furniture was repeatedly mentioned by the participants, even though most students in Pakistan's cities take these for granted. One participant summed up these deficits as follows:

“Our school has a broken boundary wall, no separate toilets for girls, so we do not attend school in case of any medical emergency or problem, as we feel very unsafe.” (Participant 20)

Such infrastructural deficits are particularly pronounced in cultures that emphasize modesty and the protection of women from the male gaze. The lack of physical barriers and separate facilities runs counter to families' concerns about daughters' safety and respectability. More than 60% of the schools in the district reportedly do not have female teachers, creating obstacles for families who are not comfortable with having a male teacher teach their daughters, especially during adolescence when gender segregation norms are stronger (Hammad & Bibi, 2023). Poor instruction and virtually no one-on-one academic help resulted from exceptionally high student-to-teacher ratios, with at least 3 students per instructor. One of the main structural obstacles was transportation, which combined safety concerns with financial limitations. Without school transportation, participants reported needing to walk up to five kilometers on

challenging terrain to get to school. 2014 saw the suspension of government transportation owing to security incidents, which left households without any reasonably priced options:

“It takes 45 minutes to an hour to get to the school from my house, and there is no special way for girls to get to their schools or colleges, which makes it very difficult to get there. As a result, girls frequently miss school.” (Participant 1)

Economic limitations made these access obstacles worse. Households already facing financial difficulties were significantly burdened by the cumulative cost of textbooks, uniforms, writing supplies, and test fees. In general, women's education was viewed as a short-term investment, whereas men's education was seen as an investment for the future. Those with limited finances made deliberate decisions to prioritize their sons' education:

“Yes, money problems are a problem; many of my friends had to leave because their families couldn't afford exam fees, books, or uniforms.” (Participant 4)

Normative Frameworks Constraining Educational Opportunities

In addition to these structural barriers, norms embedded in tribal practices, cultural traditions, and local religious interpretations affected girls' educational participation in various ways, through individual, family, and community norms and practices. The Pukhtunwali code, which organizes social relations around the concepts of honor (*ghairat*) and dignity (*izzat*) as they relate to women's behavior, movement, and social visibility, was a significant part of the participants' narratives (Ullah et al., 2019). The families repeatedly saw girls' education, especially after primary school or outside the family community, as a potential danger to family honor, either by contact with males or by behaviors that were seen as being incompatible with the family community:

“Our culture is playing a very crucial role in stopping women's education, under the name of ‘ghairat’, and ‘izzat’. They think that it is a threat to them that the girls will be exposed to Western cultural practices, and they can get out of control.” (Participant 11)

Girls were assigned the role of future wives and mothers, and formal education was seen as irrelevant or even counterproductive to their roles at home (Bibi 2007). There was a general sense that participants felt girls were expected to be doing housework (cooking, cleaning, childcare) while also going to school, which created time pressures and fatigue, which led to girls missing school and dropping out:

“So, they think that the only responsibility of any girl is to carry household responsibilities and not leave their homes because they think that household responsibilities are their responsibility.” (Participant 3)

One of the most significant normative obstacles was early marriage, which was found to be one of the most significant obstacles that systematically ended girls' educational journeys in

midadolescence. Participants shared how marriage commitments and expectations prevented them from continuing their education:

“When I was in 9th grade, I got married at the age of 16 years, and I had to drop out of school and take the responsibility of my home because it is not allowed for girls to continue their education after marriage.” (Participant 8)

It was clear that religious interpretation was ambivalent. Participants acknowledged that Islam emphasizes the need for education for all Muslims, yet local religious leaders frequently restricted girls' formal education to studying the Quran because they believed that other types of education were immoral or culturally improper for girls:

“In actuality, Islam does not forbid women from learning; rather, the religious authorities oppose it, claiming that reading the Quran is the only important thing and that girls should stay at home to pursue other forms of education.” (Participant 5)

A sense of normative perplexity and a religious justification for educational constraints that the participants themselves believed were at odds with Islamic ideals resulted from this discrepancy between the scriptural norm and the local religion's norm.

The Reinforcing Interaction of Structural and Normative Barriers

One of the study's main conclusions is that normative and structural barriers are mutually reinforcing processes that worsen educational exclusion rather than existing independently. In a normative system that promotes female modesty and Honor, the absence of boundary walls or female teachers becomes increasingly significant. Normative issues of girls' safety and respectability, on the other hand, become materially significant when structural issues (long distances, lack of transport, poor facilities) make these concerns real. This creates a vicious circle in which structural shortcomings justify normative limitations and normative rules diminish political pressure to address structural problems. The consequences of armed conflict illustrate this intersection. The Taliban's attacks on more than 460 schools, mostly girls' schools, from 2007 to 2014, have caused long-term psychological trauma and material damage that has affected educational decision-making (HRCP, 2015). Daughters' exposure and vulnerability were fears internalized by families, as expressed by one participant:

“Terrorism is a major factor that hinders women from education... the terrorists targeted the girls' school and, in this day and age, we are dealing with the trauma of the past.” (Participant 1)

This post-conflict legacy further reinforces pre-existing cultural norms and bias against the movement and exposure of women, with actual security concerns reinforcing and justifying pre-existing norms and restrictions.

Institutional and Governmental Inefficiencies

Participants reported that the system of institutional and governmental failures that marginalize girls from education was due to poor funding, weak policy implementation, lack of monitoring systems, and lack of gender-specific interventions. Although the constitution was amended in 2010 under the 18th Amendment and the governance structure was reformed after the merger of the districts under the KP Education Sector Plan and KP Newly Merged Districts Education Program (NMDEP), the participants noted that the policy intentions were not reflected in the actual improvement of the educational situation in Bajaur (Government of KP, 2019; UNICEF, 2022). One participant expressed a common feeling of state abandonment:

“In tribal areas, the government failed. There is no proper budget we get, there are very few schools in the area, also there are no scholarships for the students, no one is there from the government to have a check on what is going on in the educational sector.” (Participant 4)

A lack of scholarships and financial aid specifically for girls from poor families is a significant policy gap, which means that the education costs are being shouldered by the families in acute poverty. For instance, when school transportation was canceled in 2014 without providing a substitute mode of transportation, security-related administrative decisions may create additional obstacles to access for the most vulnerable. In addition to creating direct obstacles to girls' education, these institutional shortcomings also convey to the communities that the state does not prioritize girls' education, which strengthens preconceived notions about the value or unappealing nature of female education at the community level.

Resilience, Agency, and Educational Aspirations

Despite these stacked obstacles, participants showed high levels of resilience, agency, and educational aspiration, and they developed adaptive strategies to stay in school and expressed strong motivation for educational attainment. Many participants noted that a key goal for their professions was medicine, with an awareness of the importance of female health workers in communities where women are denied access to male health workers due to gender norms:

“In the future, I want to be a doctor because female doctors play an important role in my society. There is a soft corner for doctors in my society, and I can help my people as much as the boys do.” (Participant 1)

Adaptive coping strategies were negotiating with family members for permission to attend school, obtaining encouragement from supportive family members or teachers, establishing peer study groups to make up for poor instruction in school, and, in a few cases, continuing education at home after marriage:

“I didn't leave school because of marriage, but I continued my studies from my home, where I took my exams on exam days. There was a whole pressure of society, but I changed my way to a simpler one, so that I could at least complete my education.” (Participant 8)

However, in these cases of agency, it is clear that in the absence of significant enabling conditions, structural, financial, and normative, more girls in Bajaur would be able to successfully navigate educational pathways.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the problem of educational exclusion of girls in District Bajaur is not a single problem, but rather a complex and self-reinforcing system that is driven by structural gaps and normative constraints that work together to systematically exclude girls from meaningful access to and completion of formal education. Cultural preferences that value female modesty and honor are exacerbated by infrastructural limitations (no boundary walls), teacher shortages (particularly among females), and transportation issues. Economic pressures meet gender-based resource allocation patterns that prioritize investment in boys' education over girls. The impact of militant violence on education is ongoing, not only because of the destruction of educational facilities, but also because of the psychological trauma that confirms the perpetuation of gender-restrictive norms. More importantly, these barriers cannot be solved by a single-dimensional solution. Progress can only come from meeting the needs of infrastructure development, economic sustainability, community normative engagement, and government policy enforcement simultaneously. Girls' aspirations and adaptive strategies indicate their desire to learn and their readiness to take advantage of opportunities when they are available in Bajaur. There are several recommendations for action in the study. Gendersensitive physical design, boundary walls, gender-segregated sanitation, and safe transportation with female staff must be the first priority in infrastructure investment to meet the material and cultural prerequisites for girls' enrolment. Addressing gendered opportunity costs to drive girls out of school is critical and requires scholarships and conditional cash transfer programs for girls from poor households. Community engagement strategies should be accompanied by the involvement of respected community members, such as progressive religious leaders, who can help redefine girls' education in ways consistent with Islamic values and the Pashtun culture of dignity and family investment. Last but not least, the post-merger governance structure established by the 18th and 25th constitutional amendments offers an unfulfilled promise: KP and federal institutions must secure dedicated, accountable funding streams, transparent monitoring systems, and sustained policy implementation in Bajaur and other marginalized merged districts. The compound barriers identified in this study must be resolved over time, with political commitment and resource allocation. The participants' aspirations to become doctors, educators, and other professionals serving their communities are more than just personal objectives; they represent a shared potential that Pakistan cannot afford to leave unrealized.

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Curating School Climate Through Peace Pedagogy

Abstract

Pakistan has been ranked at the bottom of the Global Peace Index for many years. Educational institutions provide young learners with opportunities to develop universal human values. The study at hand was an intervention planned to introduce peace education modules for teachers' professional development. After a basic needs assessment, schoolteachers in the Capital Territory of Islamabad, Pakistan, were selected, and teachers and head teachers participated together in this professional development workshop. Later, qualitative data were collected through teacher reflections, focus group discussions, instructional practices observed during classroom visits, and feedback from interviews with school leaders. The main objective was to identify effective practices, challenges, and institutional support mechanisms for implementing peace pedagogy in schools. Thematic analysis highlighted that peace pedagogy has positively influenced school climate by creating emotionally safe, respectful, and inclusive classroom environments, even in limited-resource settings.

Keywords: Peace Pedagogy, School Climate, Cooperation, Social and Emotional Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

The students' academic, emotional, and social practices and well-being have a crucial impact on the school environment. Encircling relationships, safety, instructional strategies, and the classroom setting refer to the general standards of school life (Hina et al., 2024). Despite being venues for imparting knowledge and promoting peaceful ideals, educational institutions paradoxically have the capacity to sustain violence. Bullying, racial and ethnic discrimination, and physical punishment are only a few of the ongoing issues that hinder the successful implementation of peace education in schools (Hammaren, 2022). Academic material in many educational organizations still prioritizes over moral and emotional development, which encourages a scrappy learning environment (Bajaj, 2022). The positive school environment promotes student participation, respect for one another, and emotional safety, whereas violence, student stress, student bullying, and subpar academic performance have been identified as indicators of a negative school climate (OECD, 2020). Global concerns about the urgent need. The improvement in school environments through inclusive and value-based educational strategies is a concern that has been raised globally in recent years because incidents of school

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violence, emotional distress, and social isolation among students have increased day by day. Students feel safe and experience lower bullying when schools foster social understanding and polite communication (OECD, 2020). UNESCO (2019) reported that students recognize social tensions, confront bias, and improve their conflict-resolution skills. Despite the growing significance of awareness, regular classroom communication, instructional methodologies, and school rules, peace education has not been practically incorporated. A practical framework has been used to improve the school environment rather than merely as a theory; systematic research is needed. Peace education has become more important in today's culturally diverse and conflict-affected societies. The need for peaceful learning environments to foster societal harmony and sustainable development has been recognized by educational institutions worldwide (United Nations, 2020).

The concept of peacebuilding through shaping school environments through peaceful teaching methods, school policies, and daily interactions has been highlighted by the idea of curating a school climate through has integrated emotional literacy, ethical thinking, and conflict management into classroom practice by treating students' behavior as distinct from instruction. According to research, kids exhibit better emotional regulation, healthier relationships, and increased willingness to learn when peace principles are incorporated into regular instruction (Harris & Morrison, 2013). While building conflict-resolution skills through communication and mediation with empathy requires further grooming and emotional regulation among students (Saleh & Rukiyati, 2025). Huma (2024) identified the challenges and issues of peacebuilding in Pakistan, as well as the types and forms of existing adverse childhood experiences in various regions of the country. She then developed the peace pedagogy framework for schools and professional development modules for teachers to enhance inner peace, peacebuilding around them, and peace pedagogy within and beyond schools through place-based inclusive pedagogies (Huma, 2025). This paper is the outcome of a study that served as a pilot of the modules and adds to the body of research emphasizing the significance of education through peace pedagogy in peacebuilding and social transformation by examining peace pedagogy as both a teaching method and a school-wide concept.

LITERATURE REVIEW Purpose and procedure

The purpose of this study was to identify effective practices, challenges, and institutional support mechanisms associated with implementing peace pedagogy in schools. This study is a qualitative evaluation of an intervention that examines the contribution of peace pedagogy to fostering a positive school climate. This study also found that instructional settings, student involvement, teaching practices, and the institutional environment all contribute to fostering peaceful environments. We focused on teaching teachers through a peace pedagogy module, collecting teacher reflections and facilitating a focus group discussion during implementation, and finally conducting classroom observations, in addition to principal interviews and teacher focus groups. The participant teachers from four schools in the Islamabad Capital Territory were selected based on an initial survey. One rural (Government girls' school, Kot Hathyal) and one urban school for boys (Government elementary school Chatta Bakhtawar), and one each for girls participated in this study.

Data Sources

Data were collected in three phases: Pre-implementation: teacher reflections (open-ended questions), Implementation: reflective blogs during training modules, and postimplementation: classroom observations, headteacher interviews, and focus group discussions. In the pre-implementation phase, teachers reflected on common practices in schools. Then, teachers received training with three modules - one for inner peace, one for peacebuilding, and one for peace pedagogy. During implementation, teacher reflections on modules of peace pedagogy were gathered in online blogs. In the post-implementation stage, a toolkit was designed for classroom observations and interviews with school principals, and a focus group discussion was conducted to explore teachers' experiences and challenges. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns and themes related to school climate and peace pedagogy.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are presented through different interactional dimensions of school life, including teacher–teacher, student–teacher, parent–teacher, and student–student relationships. These interaction-based findings were further analyzed to identify three key aspects aligned with the objectives of the study: (1) effective practices, (2) challenges, and (3) institutional support mechanisms for implementing peace pedagogy in schools.

Section 1: Pre-Implementation and During Implementation

Here are the major findings across the themes identified in teachers' responses to the openended questions before the professional development modules were introduced, as well as in blogs written during the workshop. This section describes what was the status of school climate at that time.

Teachers-Teachers Interaction: A Professional Code of Conduct

Teachers reported that they usually remain friendly with each other but remain in competition, with professional jealousy present. Some teachers were described as noncooperative with one another, and leg-pulling and back-biting were common. Although the teachers were welleducated and qualified, they behaved poorly and did not act professionally. One respondent reported, “In public schools, there is strict observation and a clear-cut code of conduct. Teachers are overburdened and stressed, which is why they usually do not have happy, lively interactions with each other either.

b. Socio-Economic Background

Teachers' behavior with each other depends upon their backgrounds. Respondents mentioned that, despite being highly educated and teaching at elite schools, their behavior is inappropriate. Teachers' behavior is not respectful towards each other. Teachers are part of society, and they behave mostly like other people in society and become discourteous towards less affluent colleagues.

c. Race, Religion, and Ethnicity

Religious acceptance appears to be the most challenging aspect for teachers, while economic differences are more commonly accepted. Interestingly, ethnic diversity doesn't seem to significantly impact the interactions among teachers.

One of the respondents reported:

“Well, it depends on the teacher's belief system. Generally, teachers behave well with their fellow teachers, but in some cases, as I have mentioned above, teachers may have biased treatment toward those coming from remote backgrounds, thinking that they are inferior to those groomed or educated in cities or of the same ethnicity”.

Role of Headteachers

The respondents emphasized that it all depends on the principal; the principal can make schools more inclusive, and if they maintain a professional code of conduct, there is no issue. Teachers, parents, and students have to obey the orders of the authority, and they can control and maintain discipline. Teachers reported that principals do not spend much time with teachers and exhibit autocratic behavior, dictating and ordering. Respondent also mentioned that principals are focused only on results, not on overall organizational behavior or the school environment.

Parent-Teacher Interaction

In this regard, many different perspectives were shared, but an interestingly stated quote to begin with is

“Parents may exhibit anger or aggression when they feel their child is being treated unfairly or when they disagree with school policies or decisions.”

Further, the themes generated through comments are following:

a. Socio-Economic Background

It was reported by public school teachers that parents usually do not visit public schools and only come to address a call about some sort of misbehavior or poor grades in their child. Teachers usually do not interact directly with students, but they do meet the headteachers. Teachers show more respect to parents from well-off backgrounds. They display arrogant, aggressive behavior toward those who do not come from affluent families. The parents either do not visit schools or, if they are called to complain about their child's poor performance or undesired behavior, then the teachers insult and even ridicule the parents, especially when they come from a low socio-economic background. In public schools, children usually come from non-affluent backgrounds, and teachers and headteachers often mention that they are studying here free of cost and that they must perform well.

b. Race, Religion, and Ethnicity

It was reported that in one public school, the students come from the same locality; therefore, their ethnic backgrounds are usually the same. The difference in class, families, and race is there. Some families are considered superior on the basis of either land ownership or religion. Certain families are considered more respectable than others. For instance, they mentioned Chaudhary and Syed, respectively. Whenever they visit school, the headteachers give them extraordinary respect and honor.

Student-Teacher Interaction

Here again, before diving into the themes generated through analysis, one interesting quote stated by a teacher is:

“Sometimes students show aggression towards teachers when they feel they have been treated unjustly.”

a. Socio-Economic Background

Teachers show sympathy for students from non-affluent families and even collect money to cover their educational expenses. They support parents in continuing the child's schooling. The students in public schools come from different backgrounds. Teachers are polite and wellbehaved with the children of influential people. Families that own land and businesses have a higher social status, and teachers seem to be influenced by these families. They do not punish those students very often.

b. Race, Religion, Ethnicity

Teachers maintain a distance from the students of other faiths. They do not act harshly but favor students who share the teacher's faith. Students of other religions feel hesitant to interact with teachers. Their parents also do not come to school very often. Teachers do not provide much support to them.

c. High and Low achieving Students

Teachers mostly behave in a friendly manner with students, but sometimes show frustration or aggression when dealing with disruptive behavior in the classroom or when facing challenges with workload and resources. Their anger usually targets the low-achieving students. Teachers assign roles to students in group work based on their previous performance, and they already hold prejudices against low-achieving students.

d. Students with Special Needs

Teachers in regular schools do not know how to assist students with special needs. They believe these students should attend special schools rather than regular schools. They think these students need special attention and assistance, which cannot be provided when teaching a large class. They also maintain that the students with special needs feel inferior, and other students feel disturbed in the presence of these students. Teachers cannot differentiate between special needs, learning difficulties, and intellectual disability. Teachers use these words alternatively.

Student–Student Interaction

“Students might display anger or aggression due to academic pressure, social conflicts, or personal issues. This can manifest in arguments, defiance towards authority, or even physical altercations.”

a. Abusive Language

Cursing and using abusive language are common among teenagers. They avoid using such words and phrases in front of teachers, but they use them very frequently in playgrounds. They seem to use cursing phrases during aggressive outbursts and fights among students. Teachers and the school administration take strict action: issuing warnings, meting out punishments, and suspending students.

b. Aggressive Behavior

Students mostly remain in a calm, friendly tone with each other in class, but aggressive behavior is more commonly observed on playgrounds, in cafeterias, and outside the school gate. They mostly maintain discipline; only a few of them, who are also involved in “bullying,” sometimes show aggression in classrooms.

c. Bullying

Bullying is reported in school and handled mostly within the school through warning letters and sometimes punishment. A few cases are reported at district offices if there is severe physical violence or abuse. Girls have more verbal bullying and fewer physical fights reported.

d. Grouping

Students form groups, and usually high-achieving students do not mingle with low-achieving students. Even when given collective assignments and projects, they do not work well together, and some of them dominate group activities. In the Government school, students have almost the same socio-economic background, and the groups are not divided on these bases. But language, ethnicity, and religious exclusion are observed. In private schools, socioeconomic differences also matter a lot, and class differences are evident among student groups.

Teachers’ Self-Reflection

Teachers talked of hopelessness, emotional weariness, and a lack of emotional intelligence. Although they were aware that they needed to change on the inside, they lacked the means to do so. Many felt under-supported by the leadership and overburdened by demands. Instead of being meaningful, teaching grew mechanical.

Section 2: Implementation and Post-Implementation Stage

This section presents the changes that occurred during the training, as described in reflections, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations conducted after the implementation of the peace pedagogy framework at the selected schools. The five main themes organize the

findings: Teachers' self-reflection, student-teacher interaction, parent-teacher interaction, student-student interaction, and school climate.

Teacher–Teacher Interaction

a. Inner Transformation of Teachers as the Foundation for Professional Relations.

Teachers' reports of a discernible internal transformation were among the most compelling findings of the post-implementation period. Teachers frequently reported that the training improved their understanding of the value of self-awareness, patience, and emotional control in the workplace. Many teachers reported that before attending peace pedagogy training, they responded to stress emotionally, with criticism, or with conflict, while the training has made them aware of the need to manage their emotions and conduct themselves peacefully. Teachers also reported that their relationships with their peers were becoming "less reactive" and "more reflective." The program emphasized that peace within a school starts with peace within the instructor and urged educators to consider how their emotional state affects others.

b. Development of a Peace-Oriented Professional Identity

The training program had enabled teachers not only to work on inner peace but also to become peace builders, rather than maintaining their traditional identity as subject teachers. This new identity transformed their relationships, and the school changed from a competitive to a collaborative workplace. Teachers were willingly sharing educational resources and adopting inclusive teaching methods, and providing emotional support to colleagues. The teachers explained during focus group discussions that they now understood competition to be harmful for institutional unity.

c. Teacher Well-Being and Emotional Balance

Teachers mentioned that they are experiencing less stress while mindfulness activities are developing better patience and improved abilities to manage work-related pressures and personal challenges. The headteachers confirmed that teachers who received training maintained better attendance rates and showed improved emotional stability. The peace modules, according to teachers, offered them strategies for owning their emotions and balancing work and personal life, which helped them manage their stress levels.

d. Changing Staffroom Culture

The staffroom environment became more respectful after, and teachers were sharing their experiences more openly about how they are helping students using multiple instructional strategies. They reported that staff members developed better communication skills, while their gossip, negative speculation, and sarcastic comments became less frequent. Teachers stopped complaining to each other while they used their reflection notebooks to exchange ideas about classroom challenges. The staffroom evolved from being a place of silent conflicts into a collaborative area according to teachers' feedback.

e. Role of School Leadership in Sustaining Peace

The headteachers participated in the professional development modules. Teachers at schools with participatory leadership by administrators chose to use peace practices. Teachers smoothly transformed the classroom and corridors with the head teachers' willingness and without restriction. They shared that now we know how democratic values build a healthy and happy environment. The protection of school harmony was seen as the headteachers' responsibility more than anyone else. Teachers believed that the sustainability of peace education depended upon support from leadership.

Student–Teacher Interaction A Shift from Control to Care

The trauma-informed peace pedagogy training enabled teachers to adopt care and empathybased inclusive methods in their classroom practices. They were trying to maintain open communication and direct eye contact, and to make a conscious effort to use soft words and address each student by name. Teachers adopted non-violent communication methods to deliver peaceful corrections and listen actively, using statements that began with "I." The students responded better to instructions, showed voluntary participation, and maintained emotional stability.

b. Classroom Emotional Security

The teachers explained how they worked to create an environment that fostered students' sense of safety during their learning. Students felt at ease when they asked questions, shared their thoughts, and admitted their mistakes. The teachers observed that students participated more in class and showed fewer signs of anxiety. Teachers reported that academic performance and classroom conduct improved due to the safe emotional environment. The children used to remain silent, but they now speak with self-assurance.

c. Individual Attention and Empathy

It was observed that teachers were trying to respond to all students, with special attention to those facing difficult circumstances. They were trying to identify emotional distress and traumatic experiences as learning barriers that students cannot see. Teachers learned that student misbehavior stemmed from unmet emotional needs rather than deliberate disobedience. The teachers reported adopting guidance as their new approach after gaining this understanding.

d. Academic Discrimination and Labeling Practices Decreased

The classroom environment showed a clear change through the reduction of students being labeled as either "strong" or "weak." Teachers worked to combat discrimination by creating projects that brought together students of different ability levels. They were trying to ensure that students receive equal access to school resources and activities, regardless of their academic achievement to date. Teachers focused on student development instead of seeking flawless results. Teachers were seen creating a collaborative environment for students' work and progress rather than assigning positions.

e. Trauma-Informed Classroom Practices

Teachers maintained patience when students showed signs of emotional instability. Students received empathetic responses when they shouted, displayed aggressive behavior, or showed fear. Teachers used timeouts, breathing exercises, and quiet spaces, with colors and paper provided to help them express their feelings. They adopted alternate methods to help students calm down. Teachers showed concern rather than anger when they noticed students displaying signs of stress in their behavior.

Parent–Teacher Interaction A Greater Sensitivity and Respect

The teachers reported noticing a major change in their perspectives following their training program. The teachers mentioned that they have learned to acknowledge and appreciate parents, while highlighting the issues and challenges, because they realized how important it is to respect all, regardless of their background or financial situation.

b. Better Interaction

The teachers reported that they now see parents as partners in student learning and, instead of waiting for parents to begin complaining, initiate healthy discussions. The use of WhatsApp and other ways to maintain school communication and to send positive messages to support and encourage.

c. Parents' Participation as Stakeholders

Teachers began involving parents in place-based take-home activities. Parents were able to participate in cultural days, campaigns, and festivities, which improved ties between the school and the community.

Student–Student Interaction A Growth of Cooperative Behavior

The implementation of peace pedagogy led teachers to observe significant changes in student social interactions. Students began assisting each other during activities and sharing materials without being asked. The projects designed for group work provided an opportunity to solve problems together rather than compete. The teachers observed students becoming more comfortable when assisting their classmates who needed help with their work. The natural development of peer tutoring eliminated student hesitation to explain concepts to their peers and learn even better themselves. The collaborative learning environment fostered stronger student relationships and reduced classroom tension, making it a peaceful space.

b. Reduction of Aggression and Bullying

Teachers reported a noticeable drop in bullying and violent behavior following active classroom discussions aimed at resolving conflict. Teachers substituted dialogue, encouragement, and cooperative strategies to avoid harsh punishment. They maintained that students were gradually learning empathy, kindness, and peaceful conflict-resolution techniques. Classroom observations revealed fewer arguments and no significant physical fights during class or playtime; students were seemingly conscious of their behavior and

respected personal boundaries; and the decline in bullying demonstrated the effectiveness of peace pedagogy in promoting polite discourse among students.

c. Social Inclusion

The participation of previously marginalized students was another important shift. Some teachers reported that pupils who were usually silent and cut off from their peers were included in random grouping strategies for collaborative learning. Now these children were participating confidently in group projects and class discussions. Teachers reported improvement in classroom participation, and those pupils started making friends more readily. This demonstrated how students' feeling of safety and belonging was enhanced by peace-oriented activities.

Teachers' Self-Reflection

Training motivated the teachers to incorporate ethical principles into their professional identities. Teachers noted that their connections were enhanced by small ethical acts such as attentive listening, gentle correction, and openness. Ethical commitment evolved from an external rule to a personal obligation. Teachers' identities changed as a result of self-reflection. Teaching was now seen as a duty to raise peaceful people rather than just a regular employment. Teachers had the view that education is a tool for nation-building and social healing. They talked about setting an example of tolerance, kindness, and patience. This identity shift made classroom teaching a meaningful endeavor aimed at creating a peaceful community at the local level.

Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of peace pedagogy led to the emergence of several effective practices, such as empathetic teaching, non-violent communication, cooperative learning, and reflective teaching practices. At the same time, multiple challenges were identified, including teacher stress, socioeconomic and religious biases, a lack of training in inclusive education, and limited resources. The study also highlights the importance of institutional support mechanisms, particularly the role of headteachers, school leadership, and supportive school culture, in sustaining peace pedagogy practices. These findings demonstrate that while peace pedagogy has strong potential to improve school climate, its effectiveness depends on continuous support at both the individual and institutional levels.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study emphasizes peace pedagogy for cultivating school climate by providing modules and training on it. Stress, inequality, emotional distance, and poor relationships among teachers, students, and parents have been found in the school climate before implementing peace pedagogy. Teachers were unaware of the influence of emotional factors on students' academic performance, so they reacted with punishment. The studies by Begum (2012) and the OECD (2019) also indicated that school climate becomes negative and conflict-prone when emotional safety and inclusion are lacking (Begum, 2012; OECD, 2019).

The concepts of emotional awareness, empathy, nonviolent communication, social-emotional learning, and cooperative practices have been introduced among teachers during the implementation stage. Teachers' responses showed that they began to recognize their emotional patterns and understood how unresolved stress affected student behavior. This change is consistent with Ashraf and Huma's (2019) studies, which state that the foundation of peace education is teachers' preparedness to make the classroom peaceful. Teachers are considered an important component in creating a caring and peaceful classroom, rather than in managing classrooms.

Insightful changes in the school environment and classrooms have been observed in the postimplementation stage. Students feel more respectful and secure when teachers practice kindness, patience, and fairness in the classroom. School observations revealed supportive teacher behavior, peer cooperation, and reduced bullying. The study by Candel and Cubbon (2013) was also found to be significant in reducing verbal violence and improving student empathy after peace programs. Transformation was identified by teachers as a major outcome. Peace pedagogy makes the teachers peacebuilders, not just subject instructors. Maria Montessori's perspective that education, not politics, forms the foundation of peace has been reaffirmed in our study, just as Wanjiru (2018) stated that teachers' reflective practices help students unlearn harmful beliefs and adopt peaceful values through reflection and modeling. Social-emotional learning and improved interpersonal interactions among students and teachers demonstrated how peace pedagogy helped students modify their behavior, making them more cooperative, emotionally aware, and socially connected. CASEL (2020) and Durlak et al. (2017) have already supported this, emphasizing that social-emotional skills improve students' behavior and academic engagement. However, the study highlights a lack of resources and limited policy support for implementing peace pedagogy in schools, which resonates with Nkengbeza (2016), who noted that teachers showed commitment, but long-term sustainability requires leadership involvement and institutional backing. Headteachers played a key role in supporting peace pedagogy. Schools with supportive leadership demonstrated better implementation, whereas a lack of involvement posed challenges.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that orientation to the modules helped teachers change their own self-care habits and adopt peace pedagogy. Such experiences and professional development trainings can make a significant contribution to improving and curating the school climate. In the preimplementation stage, the relationships were found to be weak, emotional safety was missing, and inequality or discriminatory behaviors were reported. During the implementation of peace pedagogy modules, emotional awareness among teachers was developed, empathy towards children coming from diverse backgrounds was highlighted for the first time, and they actively learned peaceful teaching approaches and strategies to help them heal and come out of the trauma caused by adverse childhood experiences. During the school observation or postimplementation stage, classrooms were found to be a positive, cooperative, and collaborative environment that indicated positive relationships, and students also felt safer and more supported. Hence, peace pedagogy helped teachers, first of all, with self-care and emotional well-being; then in transforming their behavior by incorporating empathy and

compassion, making classrooms peaceful and free from fear and stress; and finally, in enabling children to be calm and happy. Collective and cooperative learning also enhanced students' confidence and developed empathy. Bullying and aggressive behaviors of students were reduced due to clear policies, open dialogue, and support for anger management. The role of headteachers is critical for sustaining peace pedagogy in schools. The study also confirmed that peace values are not just to be infused into textbooks, but are an appropriate direction for the whole teaching and learning process, as well as for social interaction. When peace values are embedded in daily routines and physical spaces are designed with caution and consciousness, schools become healthy and safe spaces. However, for long-term success, teacher training programs, government policies, and school leadership must actively support peace education and collaborate. In conclusion, peace pedagogy does not simply teach peace; it builds peaceful and responsible citizenship. When educators become peacebuilders, schools transform into safe and nurturing spaces that prepare students not only for exams but for life.

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Subdued Resistance as a Force of Change in Rahman's Selected Short Stories

Abstract

The study explores how subdued resistance and subtle defiance are portrayed in Rahman's selected short stories. Rahman's stories are significant in shaping the passive acts of resistance and defiance that ultimately lead to revolutionary change in society. The current investigation offers a fresh perspective on how covert resistance can catalyze radical change in society. Through textual and thematic analysis of the short narratives, applying the postulates derived from James's theory of resistance, and examining the forms and patterns of subdued resistance, this study emphasizes how these actions led to significant revolutions in individuals and society. Moreover, the research posited Rahman's short stories as a counter-narrative, cross-examining prevailing literary works that favored explicit methods of effecting change. The results suggest that exploring subdued resistance in literature reveals its significant role in societal change, encouraging further research into its impact across cultural and interdisciplinary contexts.

Keywords: Subdued resistance, cultural defiance, identities

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the representation of life. This quality of literature has been used by the authors to propagate certain philosophies and change minds, with resistance to oppression among the many themes (Zala 26-27). The authors have drawn on the literature to show human struggle against oppression, replete with examples of overt rebellion, defiance, and revolutionary acts that catalyze social change. Along with these overt, loud examples, literature also presents covert, subtle forms of resistance and defiance against the oppressive acts of the powerful (Shah 39-40). The current study explores the patterns of this subtle and subdued resistance.

Background of Study

Literature has always been used as a tool to control minds, to propagate certain ideals, to practice power, and to resist power. It is used as a subtle force to reveal the patterns by which power is constructed and practiced in a society, and how resistance to that power is created and turned into a force to challenge those in power and break the status quo. Literature trains and prepares minds to rebel, to resist through the characters' overt, heroic acts of chivalry and valor. It also offers covert and subdued patterns of resistance that are rather slow-moving and

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apparently un-heroic, yet they serve as a tool to bring about permanent changes in individuals' minds and, ultimately, in society (Ardaa; Freire 43-50). Harlow (Layoun, 1989), in her seminal work, signifies the importance of literature that portrays and propagates covert acts of resistance. The acts of subdued and subtle resistance are woven under the surface and are removed from overt acts of rebellion and non-conformity. They are quieter modes of challenging the status quo. Unlike overt acts of bravery that attract immediate attention and win laurels, the covert and subtle acts of defiance and resistance are slower and demand more patience and perseverance. McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2017) discuss the concept of the narrative of resistance, which, according to them, is the crafting of stories by individuals that present a counterargument or antithesis, instigating social and political change by igniting the desire to resist. Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) portrays the institution of slavery and explores how personal narratives can change individuals' minds, leading to a wave of change large enough to overturn power structures in favor of those enslaved. Weiss (2005) portrays in the novel the resistance of the working class against Nazi Germany. It is a great display of nonconfrontational resistance discourse against the oppressors. Kour (2024) argues that literature serves as a source of hope for the marginalized, enabling them to stand against corrupt forces without confronting them face-to-face in brutal onslaughts. Salve (2022) examines the impact of literature on various social movements in India, emphasizing how literary expressions foster solidarity and challenge oppressive systems.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the understanding of resistance in literature by shedding light on the often-overlooked, subtle dynamics of subdued resistance. It explores how individuals navigate oppressive structures and societal norms through subtle acts of defiance, offering a deeper insight into the complexities of resistance. By analyzing Rahman's short stories, this study enriches the discourse on literature's role in addressing societal issues and fostering critical thinking. It underscores how literature can serve as a mirror of the multifaceted nature of human resistance, thereby enhancing its relevance in contemporary discussions.

Problem Statement

This study attempts to portray how subdued resistance is perpetuated and serves as a force for change in society. The current study also attempts to address the apparent research gap in the limited literature on subdued resistance as a force of change. Existing studies predominantly emphasize overt and explicit forms of resistance. The subtle acts of defiance, nonconformity, and subversion that operate beneath the surface have been ignored. This gap underscores the need to examine the complexities of subdued resistance and its role in driving societal transformation. In Pakistani fiction, subtle defiance remains largely unexplored. Tariq Rahman's *Just a Child* and *The Olive Branch* portray powerful acts of opposition that reshape characters and challenge authority. This study examines how such subdued resistance functions as a transformative and retaliatory force while also redefining resistance as a psychological and socially reformative act. Many studies on resistance in the literature tend to focus on Western literary traditions and canonical works. There is a research gap in the examination of resistance, particularly subdued resistance, in the context of literature from non-Western and diverse cultural backgrounds. Rahman's short stories, rooted in a specific cultural context, offer an

opportunity to bridge this gap by exploring how subdued resistance is portrayed within diverse cultural settings.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine subtle resistance in Rahman's selected short stories
2. To explore the role of subtle resistance in reshaping the characters' development
3. To assess how subtle resistance serves as a force of retaliation in Rahman's selected short stories

Research Questions

1. What are the manifestations of subtle resistance in Rahman's selected short stories?
2. How does subtle resistance contribute to character development in Rahman's selected short stories?
3. How does subtle resistance serve as a force of retaliation in Rahman's selected short stories?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research is a qualitative textual analysis of selected short stories by Rahman to highlight the pattern of subdued resistance and its various subthemes portrayed through characters. Qualitative research is significant for analyzing themes such as gender, power, and resistance. As no numerical data are involved and only an in-depth psychological study of the characters is required, qualitative analysis is best suited to the research. The researcher has opted for this paradigm because it allows for a deep exploration of the often-subtle forms of defiance embedded in the narratives. By employing qualitative and textual analysis, it is easy to uncover the implicit ideologies, societal critiques, and the subtle ways in which characters resist and challenge the status quo. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive understanding of how Rahman's stories serve as a vehicle for subtle social and political critique.

Theoretical Framework

The applied theory is James C. Scott's theory of resistance (*Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, 1985), adapted by Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson (*Everyday Resistance: Exploration of a Concept and Its Theories*, 2013), applied to a text of short stories. According to this theory, Scott has provided a perspective on hegemony and invisible power which has been influential though also controversial. Scott has talked of the idea of "transcripts", whereby he has discussed the social settings that deal with particular ways of speaking and behaving. Scott has discussed different characters and how they portray a new way of speaking and behaving. These methods have been particularly explained in situations where violence has been portrayed. These types of resistance affect both types of people, individually and in groups. Scott has observed that in social settings, both the dominant and the weak have been caught in the same web and face the same situation. Scott has expressed the psychological/ cultural view of hegemony as subconscious and internalized images. But with the concept of resistance, Scott explains that power lies somewhere between structure and

agency. Scott has suggested that there are clear connections between resistance and ideas of hidden power. Just like, according to Scott, hidden powers can be used by powerful actors to keep certain issues in solved forms. Similarly, some powerless groups can employ strategies of resistance to hide their actions from the powerful, using these methods to clarify the situation and make themselves invisible. An example of African-American spirituals is appropriate for these kinds of circumstances. Scott has also offered an idea of everyday resistance linked to daily chores. Scott has explained the daily resistance, such as foot-dragging, evasion, false compliance, pilfering, slander, and sabotage. Scott's ideas are more directly applicable in such a society where ideological resistance is disguised, and the status quo is part of the trend. These forms of resistance require little coordination and planning. Scott's ideas have been applied to political and social situations and explained in various literary texts.

Hebdige has introduced two Germanic terms related to his theory of subcultural ideas. These two terms are known as conjuncture and specificity. Subcultures form a new system that addresses communal and symbolic concerns and negates the older system, which deals with industrial society, norms, and regulations. But specifically, this system addresses age and class, and how people navigate society, keeping these phenomena in mind. People living in such social systems deal with specific styles. These styles are linked to phenomenal and social conjunctures that reveal their specificity. Subcultures mix with one another, blending different styles to portray true identity through hybridization, as seen across society. These identities operate with relative autonomy, together specifying the image of subcultures within a social system. These relative autonomies have been contracted by subcultures within a social system through a fractured class system, gender gaps, and work, among other factors.

Hebdige, in his theory, has discussed two groups: white working-class youth and Negro. These two groups deal with the revelation of true identity, whether it is openly admitted or partially suppressed by any social group. Black cultural forms have been considered highly significant because they convey key aspects of society. By observing these aspects, people determine the influence over each subcultural style. He has explored the relationship between different subcultures and their influence on society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is replete with examples of resistance. Literary texts are pregnant with critical thought, helping people understand power structures and prepare to challenge them. Literature also offers a subtle form of covert resistance, i.e., subdued resistance, which is equally significant in bringing about the changes in society to stand up against the forces of the status quo. The current research seeks to reveal the patterns of subdued resistance portrayed in Tariq Rahman's short stories. Hadia's thesis (47) employs Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis to explore how South Asian fiction represents the resistance of female subalterns. Focusing on novels like *The Holy Woman*, *The Dowry Bride*, and *Brick Lane*, the study reveals how women navigate and challenge patriarchal constraints through subtle forms of resistance.

The study by Tamara (421) advocates for Quiet Resistance, defining it as a form of defiance driven by personal attachments rather than solely by justice. Contrary to the belief that only

justice-based resistance is legitimate, the paper asserts that Quiet Resistance should be recognized as genuine and emphasizes the importance of acknowledging resistance motivated by personal connections. In a study, Callegari and McHugh identify another type of resistance discussed in literary works (21). The study explains women's resistance and their struggle to maintain their identity in society. The researchers discuss the efforts of women who struggle to maintain their place in society (39).

The concept of subdued resistance in Edwidge Danticat's "Caroline's Wedding" and Chimamanda Adichie's "Imitation" is intricately woven into the experiences of migration depicted in these short stories (Amber, 229). As the characters navigate their transformative journeys to the United States, their interactions with the forces of Blackness, gender, and class reflect a subtle yet powerful form of resistance against the constraints imposed by neoliberal capitalism. Through a Black feminist lens, the stories invite a progressive reconsideration of diaspora, highlighting the resilience and complexity of these subdued forms of resistance (239). With reference to literature by Middle Eastern writers, Layoun discusses Harlow's ideals of subtle resistance and defiance. Layoun is of the view that it is not necessary to always choose militant ways to resist, as often it causes more damage to the oppressed, but it can be embedded in narratives to create awareness and to give a counter-narrative, i.e., a different perspective to show resilience and resistance against those using power as a tool to control. The same ideals are promoted by McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance, who argue that storytelling and narrative can be used as tools for counter-storying, allowing marginalized and muffled voices to be heard (191).

The study by Jahangir and Rasool examines how Pakistani English novels portray subaltern resistance through characters who challenge elitist narratives. By analyzing works like *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, and *The Pakistani Bride*, the authors highlight how marginalized voices assert agency within oppressive socio-political structures. The study by Singh (93) explores the concept of resistance in everyday life, emphasizing its multifaceted nature and various manifestations, including silence, opposition, cooperation, and ignoring others. It discusses how resistance emerges from power dynamics, such as children defying school rules, and how it contributes to social friction and change. Through the metaphor of theatre, it illustrates the interplay between human behavior and power structures, highlighting both overt and covert forms of resistance. Ultimately, the text underscores the pervasive nature of resistance in shaping social dynamics and collective experiences.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The discussion and analysis section presents a detailed qualitative textual analysis of Rahman's selected short stories, showing how often-overlooked, subtle forms of covert resistance challenge the oppressor. The analysis is theoretically grounded in the everyday resistance theory of Scott (as adapted by Vinthagen and Johansson), revealing how characters challenge the status quo and threaten power structures. The following is the analysis based on the postulates derived from the theory of resistance.

Resistance through Intersectional Identities and Cultural Defiance

In Tariq Rahman's short stories, resistance through intersectional identities and cultural defiance is portrayed through characters who quietly challenge oppressive socio-cultural systems. Rahman's narratives reveal that resistance often manifests in subtle acts of defiance shaped by the characters' intersecting identities, such as gender, class, and social status, ultimately reshaping the world around them. The close textual analysis of *Just a Child* highlights that the characters' actions and interactions show subdued resistance through intersectional identities and cultural defiance. A thorough study of the story through the theoretical framework reveals the implications of their actions and motivations within the story's social context. Central to the story is the child's fascination with the narrator's injury. Moreover, the narrator's flashbacks and reflections on the plight of resistance and the complex issues associated with it, in particular personal and social contexts, are integral to subdued resistance. Following is the analysis of textual excerpts taken from the story:

"One heard such a great deal about the dark ditches and the fatal rat-a-tat of the foe's machine guns, that the sight, validating as it were, the reality of that terrifying warfare, drew considerable attention" (Rahman 70).

In these lines, the narrator has highlighted that war has brought nightmarish trauma as an unavoidable and unnoticeable dilemma as a result of war. The war has been otherwise glorified as an institution of societies since the inception of mankind. The injured narrator has been bearing the baggage of suffering and is therefore resisting the so-called glorification of the war by countering the lustrous arguments of the common public, forcing them to see with their own eyes the catastrophes war has brought to their doorsteps.

"Old women could hardly dissemble their anxiety. "How dreadful," I heard one of them screaming, but all the invalids do discover this very restaurant. What did he do, I wonder?" (Rahman 70).

The narrator further engages readers through the horrific depiction of the pain experienced by the public, particularly women. Social contexts lure men into ideological thinking and compel them to incite one another to wage war. The women, however, are the ones who face the consequences of glorified notions of war, both by losing the ones they love and the social status they are left with, both during and after the wars. They live in the same society and, therefore, have a confusing state of mind. On the one hand, they resist notions of war because they can assess the gravity of their loss; on the other hand, they are forced to set their insecurities and losses aside because social conventions and norms do not allow them to show their dismay. Likewise, the women, in the context of the story, are unable to show their dismay at the harsh realities of war because societal norms show discomfort at such a weakness.

"I smiled. They reminded me of my own grandmother, whose possessions I pleased to fling down the window into the streets" (Rahman 70).

The narrator's flashback in the given text symbolizes the narrator's denial and rebellion against the family's tyrannical expectations of an individual. The excerpt further highlights how the narrator has established resistance as a historically significant cultural characteristic in opposition to the authority of culture and society. This act shows that the narrator's interest in throwing his grandmother's belongings is a defiance of societal norms. It also acts as an example of resistance through personal subculture within his society.

"The entourage was completed by a gracefully outfitted nobleman with an impression of quiet dignity around him" (Rahman 70),

The character, the narrator of the story, is talking about the typical representative of British colonial cultural behavior during the colonial reign. The protagonist's subsequent encounter with the British further highlights the colonized people's subcultural resistance to the colonizers. The narrator's identity is championed as that of a war veteran, insofar as his past actions during colonial rule are concerned. Moreover, his description of the British indicates his resistance to the British aristocracy's colonial attitude towards the colonizers.

"I busied myself in an English delicacy, the brag of the café, and examined the whole room for connections till my eyes came back to the child. He was still watching me" (Rahman 71).

This excerpt indicates performative resistance on the part of the protagonist in light of Butler's theory of performative resistance. In a public restaurant, the narrator, while eating an English dish, is conscious of looking around for acquaintances, thus indicating colonial and cultural identity. Whereas, the act of the boy looking at him shows an instance of performative resistance where the narrator's war injury is juxtaposed with the consumption of the colonial dish as a performative resistance.

"He brightened up, stood on his chair, and swayed his handkerchief to me" (Rahman 71).

The child's reaction to the narrator's expectations also serves as an instance of performative resistance, an unlikely behavior for children. The child's behavior contradicts and resists the orthodox norms of politeness in the story's social context.

"We greeted each other politely, but the sturdy aloofness of his blue eyes suppressed my geniality" (Rahman 71).

The text highlights the interaction between Sardar Hamayoun and the narrator. This excerpt highlights how performative interactions veil tension through forced politeness among social actors living and interacting with one another, regardless of their differences. Through controlled body language, the characters manage their feelings of hatred and discomfort toward each other. The control of social actors over their body language and tone is governed by the social norms of the society to which they belong.

"The reluctant little child stared at me with wide-eyed concentration. Not me, but innovation had engrossed his stare" (Rahman 70).

The lines are analyzed through Crenshaw's intersectionality approach. The analysis indicates that the way the narrator's injury shapes the child's reaction is based on the age difference between him and the child. Further, there is a difference in the level of experience and innocence between the child and the narrator. In expected social behavior, the child's stare response is marked by curiosity, whereas the same response from an adult would be reserved or conditioned by the social context. The difference in child and adult responses directly results from intersecting social identities across different age groups, generation gaps, or innocence towards orthodox norms.

"He kept on watching my leg keenly. It was an origin of attractive captivation for him" (Rahman 72).

The given lines also show the continuity of intersectionality in relation to identity, as the child seems fascinated by the narrator's injury. Again, the factors behind the fascination are the child's age and innocence, as the child has not been influenced by societal perceptions and established norms. Moreover, the fascination of the child also indicates intersectional resistance because the adult experience of the injured leg of the narrator neither directs the child to the trauma of war nor to the horrific physical imperfection of the narrator.

"This shocked the house. His sister--for so she looked to be--got him unhappy. His father rotated to inspect the room, compelled a well-bred smile on his face, and stalked over to me, with calculated arrogance" (Rahman 71).

The child's reaction to the narrator's injured leg contrasts subtly with his family's reaction. The family's reaction to the child's experience highlights how social norms work through power dynamics. As far as his sister is concerned, she leaps to control the child's behavior, while the father attempts to show forced politeness towards the narrator's broken leg. The actions of both the father and the sister reflect compliance with social expectations, while the narrator's bandaged leg signals the child's subdued resistance to social decorum.

"He stayed staring at my leg. The incapacity captivated him. It swelled his juvenile thoughts. It fenced me with a radiance of heroism; tinted me as a war hero, one of the kinds he heard so much about" (Rahman 72).

The child's fascination with the narrator's broken leg indicates the former's idealization of the latter as a hero, which consequently challenges society's orthodox connotations of disability. Traditionally, the disabled have been looked down upon as pitiable, poor creatures who need to be empathized with. Furthermore, the disability also results in a dehumanizing attitude of society towards the disabled, as per the existing social norms. However, for the child, the injury acts as a token of honor rather than a social stigma or physical weakness. Thus, the child's behavior highlights the child's subdued resistance through an intersectional lens.

"I stretched to shake hands with him when he came near. He smiled and drew out a dirty, wilted, tiny paw. I took it in simulated sombreness, taking an air of grave importance" (Rahman 73).

The interaction between the child and the narrator is a performative act that subverts the orthodox understanding of child-adult interaction. Here in the text under investigation, the narrator's behavior signals mock seriousness, and the child's enthusiastic response during the handshake shows a collective resistance by the characters as social actors, questioning social hierarchies and so-called formality.

"What is your name, sir?" he asked me with childlike inquisitiveness. 'You may call me Uncle Jahanzeb,' I expressed to him" (Rahman 73).

The excerpt above indicates that both the child and the story's narrator exhibit performative resistance to societal authority as they negotiate names with each other. The child's question to ask him for his name shows the child's resistance to adult authority regarding the decorum of conversation within orthodox societal norms. Moreover, it defines the child's identity and agency in relation to societal conventions.

"One day I told him that they had resolved to take the bandage off my leg. I would then be all right. 'All right,' he whispered in a small voice." (Rahman 77).

The given lines show the child's subdued reaction when he hears that the plaster on the narrator's leg has been removed. It is so because the removal triggers a conflict in the child's mind: he does not want to accept the change in the narrator's physical appearance, as the narrator's bandaged leg identifies him as a hero. This instance further illustrates a complex form of resistance regarding interpersonal relations and perceptions.

"Abruptly, I sensed a potent push and was shaken backward. The chair jumped down the slant and picked up speed as it went. I yelled out in fear as I found myself plunging down the slope...When I woke up, both my legs were in plaster" (Rahman 77).

The transformation in the child's behavior shows a more dramatic instance of resistance to the physical change in the narrator's appearance. It invokes anger and fury in the child as the appearance shatters his conception of a hero. Therefore, the child shows resistance by pushing the narrator down the slope. The child did so because he wanted to maintain the status quo in the face of change. Furthermore, his action indicates overt resistance to both the change in the narrator's physical appearance and the loss of the idolized conception of the narrator, as this development affects his constructed identity.

"I noticed I had become rather a hero among his friends. They'd all cluster around him in the meadow and tell them fascinating mysteries of the little war I had been through" (Rahman 74).

The text above highlights that the narrator's war experiences have elevated him to legend status among the children's friends in the suburbs. This behavior of the children towards the narrator

is the most subtle example of everyday resistance by ordinary children to society's established narratives. It further indicates that what the society has been ignoring as the brutal realities of the war has been idealized by the children. It also highlights that the children's resistance reveals their fascination with heroism, a subversive act in relation to society's otherwise impulsive and orthodox attempt to veil the brutal realities of war from children's experience.

The children in the story have formulated a subculture of resistance that questions the war experiences of both the narrator and the adults. Through this subculture, the children have constructed their own group and their own norms, which allow them to celebrate the crippled war-affected narrator against the dominant cultural narratives that present them as marginalized and pitiable survivors of war. Moreover, from the perspective of performative resistance, the narrator's identity as a hero has been constructed through the children's repeated performative acts, as they time and again celebrate the narrator as a hero rather than treating him as an injured, pitied, or dehumanized creature like the rest of society. The narrative has been constructed in such war that the children's subdued resistance towards disability of war-affected people, stigmatized as pitiable subjects, is a form of resistance that constructs a positive identity of the war-affected people. The children's positive behavior towards the narrator as a legend also stems from intersectionality, as they have been free of societal prejudices due to their innocence and relative inexperience compared to adults. Their intersectional identity as children allows them to view the narrator in ways adults might not, highlighting the multiplicity of perspectives that shape resistance.

"They imagined it as if we were the fire dragons of a fairy tale. We were the knights, and an atmosphere of enigma and amorousness enclosed our wartime heroism" (Rahman 74).

The fascination of innocent children with war is shaped by fairy tales in which knights and dragons embark on expeditions to underscore the power of the powerful. It indicates the children's resistance to the orthodox adult narratives that project war with either mundane or negative connotations. The romanticized conception of war among the children highlights everyday resistance to the associated tragedy and loss, in contrast to the adult conception of war. This conception of war among the children creates a subculture of tales of bravery and adventure about mythical heroes. The subcultural and mythical status of war among the children highlights a perspective that contrasts with the dominant culture's sense of war. Repeated storytelling of mythical narratives by the children is an instance of performative resistance that also constructs a positive image of the narrator, rather than framing him within orthodox cultural narratives about war-affected people. Children's age is a dominant intersectional factor shaping their narratives of bravery and heroism, fostering a subculture of resistance to the dismal, gloomy view of warfare.

"Their fancy had elevated me to a level almost mythical. Through the talismanic glass of glorious childhood, they viewed me" (Rahman 75).

The excerpt highlights the role of the children's perception in constructing the narrator's mythical identity. It is evident that despite the injuries and dominant cultural norms associated

with war-affected figures, the narrator is immortalized by the children as an ideal hero. It once again indicates that the children have consistently resisted narratives that marginalize and stigmatize the narrator's identity within a post-war cultural context. It is further analyzed that the repeated idealization of the narrator has created a subcultural identity and narrative around the narrator's heroism and bravery. The children neither consider the narrator's disability pitiable nor do they change their stance towards the narrator in light of dominant cultural norms and practices. Furthermore, their intersectional status as innocent members of society leads them to resist cultural labeling and consistently reinforce their norms by championing the narrator as a hero. The intersectional understanding of constructed identity also shows that subdued resistance shapes identity and constructs meaning.

The narrator's remarks here highlight how the children's everyday resistance has been reciprocated across several episodes in the narrator's construction of identity as a legend of a fairyland. Their everyday resistance has helped the narrator enjoy his newly acquired identity as a product of the children's imaginations. The narrator has resisted the orthodox social expectations imposed on him. The children's narratives further complement and help the narrator build his own narrative against societal expectations that he be an object of society's demands and a humble, passive individual with a passive identity defined by the society he is part of. The subcultural context also creates a space for the narrator to present an alternative identity rather than an established, passive one. Otherwise, the narrator, as a representative individual within expected cultural norms, would have been marginalized and would have remained satisfied with the established identity. The narrative of the children's resistance to societal expectations and norms, and the narrator's collective participation, accelerates everyday resistance to those norms. Likewise, the repeated performative resistance has helped the narrator to sustain his newly acquired mythical identity, which would have been diminished or curbed at its inception by the agents of existing norms. The children's repeated acts have made the narrator an active agent in resisting and reconstructing his individual identity. In an intersectional context, the narrator's identity as a war veteran and the children's imaginary constructs have combined to create a space for durable and significant resistance against the tyranny of the orthodox conventions of the society he is part of.

"It was amusing being the hinge of their thoughtful, wonderland world. Their fancy had raised me to a level almost mythological" (Rahman 75).

The final piece of textual evidence in the story "Just a Child" shows that the narrator's identity is established through the children's everyday, subdued resistance. As a result, this has cast the narrator as a symbol of bravery, power, and heroism. Moreover, the nature of the resistance is so strong that the narrator no longer feels himself to be a stigmatized and pitiable subject, because his identity has been subverted by the children's counternarrative of resistance. Furthermore, the subcultural layer of resistance has not only challenged the dominant cultural norms but has also imbued the narrator's new identity with alternative meanings. Both performative resistance and intersectionality complement, reinforce, and sustain the narrator's identity, providing it with a strong footing against orthodox conventions. On the one side,

resistance subverts the established norms of the society in which the narrator and the children are a part. On the other hand, it establishes meaning and value within the established subculture to counter societal bias.

In the story *The Olive Branch* the theme can be explored through the actions and interactions of the characters, particularly how they navigate their identities and resist societal or cultural expectations.

The Lord's misuse of the olive branch for personal gain and power is met with eventual resistance from the people and the knights. His cultural identity as a powerful and oppressive figure is ultimately challenged by the olive branch's symbolic power. The subdued resistance is seen in the way the knights and villagers refuse to follow his commands after the olive branch's influence. This suggests a collective cultural defiance of tyranny and oppression, in which the olive branch symbolizes a deeper, unspoken resistance to the Lord's authority.

"Then the Lord rearranged the Knights, but before the instruction was out of his mouth, the men who held him let out a scream which came from the most untamed part of the human heart. And they ripped him and dug their teeth down into his body, and their shrieks were worse than those of wolves after a kill" (Rahman 236).

In the short story "Saint Satan", this subtheme is portrayed through the very character of Satan himself.

Here are some textual evidences that support this theme:

"He was exasperated to talk to them, but they only giggled at him. He was infuriated. He was the Leader of Hell, and there they mounted tranquility, telling him that there was no Hell and no Satan. Goodness, what had the world come to? The evil spirit was really dissatisfied. "Even the evil spirit has his spirits, same as other people," he murmured, not helpful about his syntax, and strolled away.

"Just then one of the foulest contests in the long dress came over and approached Satan as an old assistant ... My beloved Sir, he said sincerely, I'm not his godliness Bishop ... It's all a fault really" (Rahman, 247).

Satan's embarrassment when mistaken for a religious figure underscores the tension between his identity and societal expectations. His resistance to being conflated with religious authorities, whom he opposes, is a subtle form of cultural defiance. This interaction highlights the complexities of his identity, which is entangled with the very institutions he seeks to undermine.

"Just then one of the worst frights ... and then with a final effort, "I'm Satan, gentlemen." (Rahman 248).

God's reinterpretation of Satan's actions as inadvertently contributing to human happiness challenges Satan's self-perception as a force of evil. This reframing represents a cultural

defiance of traditional religious interpretations, suggesting that even acts intended to disrupt can lead to positive outcomes. It also illustrates the intersectionality of Satan's identity, where his role as a rebel is questioned and redefined in ways that resist conventional binaries of good and evil.

The story *Just a Child* presents the subdued resistance through the characters' actions and interactions, highlighting the intersectional identities and cultural defiance. The author uses the flashback technique to present the child's fascination with injury, casting light on resistance and the complex issues associated with it, particularly in personal and social contexts, which are integral to subdued resistance. He presents the idea that injury is a burden of suffering, and he resists the glorification of war with lucid arguments that counter the public narrative. He is becoming a rebel against the family's tiny orthodox expectations as an individual. The story also presents the idea of performative resistance, with the narrator's war injury juxtaposed with the consumption of a colonial dish. Moreover, the disability of the child is presented as an honor in the story instead of a stigma or physical weakness. The behavior also highlights the child's subdued resistance through an intersectional lens. The story also shows everyday resistance, which is reciprocated across several episodes in the narrator's construction of identity as a legend of fairyland. Everyday resistance helps the narrator enjoy his newly acquired identity as a product of children's imagination and, in this way, he participates in resisting the orthodox social expectations attached to it.

Similarly, the story *The Olive Branch* presents resistance through the characters' intersections, particularly in how they navigate their identities and resist societal and cultural expectations. The Lord's action of misusing the Olive Branch for personal gain and power is met with virtual resistance from the people and knights. His cultural identity as a powerful and a pressive figure is ultimately challenged by the symbolic power of the olive branch. The subdued resistance is seen in the way of the night, and the villagers refuse to follow his commands after the olive branch's influence. Their act is collectively showing the resistance of local people against the operation figure and a collective cultural defiance against the tyranny and operation of the Lord's authority.

CONCLUSION

Rahman's short stories are replete with instances of subdued resistance. Rahman provides a platform to explore the underrated forms of resistance that serve as catalysts for change (Mahmood). The study is a journey that explores how Rahman, through his characters, educates people and prepares their minds to stand against the oppression and tyranny of the powerful by employing covert, subtle patterns of resistance, ultimately leading to change. The study seeks to find out how apparently soft and innocuous acts of resistance challenge the status quo and shake their power base, ultimately leading to breaking the power centers. Tariq Rahman's short stories collectively illustrate how subdued resistance operates on multiple levels—individual, social, and political. The characters are found posing threats through covert acts of defiance rather than overt rebellion. It is quite evident, as Scott has suggested, that subtle acts of resistance pose a threat to oppressive forces, as do open defiance. It is also revealed that,

through subtle acts of resistance, people unite and support one another covertly, ultimately leading to a great movement for change. Rahman's short stories portray diverse viewpoints that challenge existing power structures by educating individuals. Tariq Rahman's short stories offer a deep and detailed look at how small, everyday acts of defiance can challenge and change oppressive social and political systems. His stories show that even minor acts of resistance can make a big difference, highlighting the strength and resilience of those who are marginalized. Rahman's focus on these subtle forms of resistance offers a new way to understand how change can occur in societies. In his stories, Rahman illustrates resistance in various ways. Characters often use quiet actions, such as slow compliance or pretending not to understand, to resist their oppressors. These actions might seem small on their own, but they can add up to create significant disruptions. This approach shows how people manage to resist their difficult situations. Rahman also points out that solidarity among the oppressed can make these small acts of resistance even more powerful, leading to broader social change. His stories demonstrate that even small, persistent acts of defiance can lead to real change. By focusing on everyday resistance, Rahman shows that change often comes from gradual and subtle actions. These small changes can disrupt oppressive systems and lead to significant shifts in society. Rahman also shows how these subtle forms of resistance empower people. His characters use low-profile acts of defiance to assert their independence and cope with difficult conditions without facing direct punishment. This approach is especially important when open rebellion is too risky or not possible, making subtle resistance a crucial strategy for those facing oppression. Overall, Rahman's work redefines resistance by showing its many forms and wide impact. By focusing on small acts of defiance, he expands our understanding of how resistance works and what can lead to change. His stories offer new insights into social and political issues and highlight the important role of subtle resistance in driving change and challenging power.

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The Digital Rhetoric of Resistance: Intersectional Feminist Praxis by a Pakistani Instagram Activist

Abstract

This research examines the discourse of resistance produced by a Pakistani feminist influencer to challenge the patriarchal norms and gender hierarchies. We have collected fifty posts from the Instagram account of Atee (@myavaaz). We have employed Feminist Critical Discourse analysis to examine how the discourse constructs and deconstructs the gender inequalities. The analysis shows that Atee utilizes various discursive strategies, including evaluative language, first-person narration, and rhetorical questions. Her use of carousel posts strategically exposes post-marriage oppression, in-laws' control, and the normalization of abuse. The result foregrounds the micro-level domestic oppression where women face confinement to household labor, emotional manipulation, and economic dependence. Together, these mechanisms reveal how these social anomalies are sustained and produced through everyday discourses in Pakistani society. Focusing on Instagram as a feminist site of resistance, this study contributes to the burgeoning field of feminist critical discourse analysis and Pakistani feminism.

Keywords: Pakistani Digital Activism, Instagram, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Pakistani Activists, discursive strategies

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary feminist activism is rapidly growing across various digital platforms to amplify their voices, critique the marginalization and oppression of women. Through personal narration, compelling storytelling and shared knowledge about gender inequalities, women and marginalized groups are utilizing online spaces to build solidarity, resistance and collective awareness around social injustice. In Pakistan, networked feminist resistance is widely spreading on Digital spaces. Girls at Dhabbas is a substantial example of networked feminism. Girls at Dhabbas aimed to reclaim public spaces where women have traditionally been excluded or discouraged (Saeed, 2018). The movement was further expanded through the use of #GirlsatDhabbas. This hashtag challenged men's control over everyday public spaces by making women's presence visible and politically meaningful (Kalim, 2022). This digital turn in feminist movements is evident in increasingly womendriven movements on digital platforms. Similarly, on a Facebook women-only

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group, Soul Sisters Pakistan was initiated by Kanwal Ahmed. The purpose of this group was to create an online safe space for women where they can discuss their experiences and daily life concerns. Shahzadi, Mujtaba, & Anwar note that this group allowed women to discuss personal and social concerns, share experiences of sexism, and build supportive feminist communities (2024).

Hashtag movements are also an evolving form of activism across all online platforms. People use hashtags to form solidarity across digital platforms. It has become a defining feature of now a days Pakistani digital feminism. Hashtag movements such as #MeToo, #motorwayincident, #JusticeForNaqib, and #JusticeForZainab have demonstrated how digital protests can form solidarity and amplify public anger. These hashtags have been utilized to demand justice and raise awareness. Previous research has examined several aspects of the digital landscape, such as digital circulation (Kalim, 2023) and reactionary Twitter discourse around gender-based violence (Arshad, Jabir, & Ahmad, 2024). The Existing scholarship has proved that Facebook, Twitter/X, and hashtag activism can function as powerful tools for feminist expression and political intervention in Pakistan.

Despite the rapid growth of digital activism, Instagram remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by examining the Instagram posts of Pakistani digital activist Atee (@myavaaz). Instagram has variety of features like carousel posts, reels, captions, hashtags etc. making it a multimodal space. Activists are utilizing compelling storytelling, viral hooks and trending topics to actively engage their audience. These multimodal affordances enable activists to combine personal narration with political critique. This approach is different from Twitter/X-based hashtag activism or Facebook-based community building. This research offers a thorough examination of the Pakistani Instagram activist Atee (@myavaaz). Her work bridges local cultural sensitivities and digital resistance that's why it is significant to pay scholarly attention. She addresses the social issues that are usually treated as private family matters into a public feminist critique. She challenges the assumptions that normalize women's unpaid labor, obedience, silence, and dependence. She strategically uses posts, captions, and rhetorical questions. Her discourse is influenced by religious and cultural references, testimonial narration, and visual framing. By focusing on Instagram as a multimodal site of feminist activism, the present study contributes to scholarship on Pakistani digital feminism, feminist critical discourse analysis, and platform-based activism. The research demonstrates how the digital resistance is produced through everyday text that exposes hidden structures of patriarchy.

Research Questions

1. What discursive strategies and feminist themes are evident in the Instagram posts of Atee (@myavaaz)?
2. How does a Pakistani Instagram activist's discourse challenges gendered power relations in society?

LITERATURE REVIEW Digital Activism in Pakistan

Feminist activism has increasingly moved across digital platforms, recently. Social media platforms enable women and marginalized groups to narrate lived experiences, challenge dominant ideologies, and build solidarities beyond political institutions. Prior scholarship

on digital feminisms argues that online platforms have expanded the spaces through which feminist politics are articulated and contested. Scholars have examined hashtag feminism as a form of digital consciousness-raising. Digital platforms are viewed by feminist media scholars as socio-political arenas where speech produces identities, protests, and collective demands (Baer, 2016; Clark, 2016; Keller, 2016). The studies have highlighted how social media campaigns such as #MeToo, #YesAllWomen, and #WhyIStayed have proved that personal testimonies can be sites of a political critique (Mendes et al., 2018). Studies have also recommended against glorifying feminist digital activism excessively. For instance, online platforms are shaped by algorithmic visibility, surveillance, harassment, and platform capitalism (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

Digital Activism in Pakistan

In Pakistan, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are vigorously utilized by activists to highlight systemic inequalities and mobilize audiences. Previous scholarship has provided insights into feminist activism in Pakistan on digital platforms. The existing work has underlined the use of digital spaces for reclamation (Mushtaq and Baig, 2021), the growing networked feminism (Kamal, 2022), the role of affective digital circulation (Kalim, 2023), and the complexities of Muslim feminism in South Asia (Atluri, 2022). These studies suggest that social media platforms have become crucial for feminist activism in Pakistan. These platforms enable women to articulate resistance, negotiate constraints, and challenge entrenched patriarchal norms with greater ease. However, most of the existing scholarship has focused on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. There is limited research on Instagram and its role in feminist activism. To address this gap, the present study explores how a Pakistani feminist activist utilizes Instagram to contribute to the advancement of new feminist perspectives.

Instagram as a Multimodal Site of Feminist Activism

In recent years, Instagram has emerged as a multifaceted platform for not only social interaction but social activism for various social issues such as climate change and gender and racial inequalities (Habib & Kalim, 2025). There are platforms' affordances of Instagram, such as the option of visual storytelling, carousel posts, and reels. These are useful for meaning-making. Instagram's features, such as live broadcasts, also create opportunities for activists to engage with audiences directly (Zapinno & Rubini, 2021). Feminists have also found Instagram useful. Barbala (2022) considers that "platformized feminism" as activists to use Instagram to create micro-themes on gender issues. In Pakistan, feminist activists like Kanwal Ahmed (@kanwalful), Shehzil Malik (@shehzilm), and Maliha Abidi (@maliha-z-art) also use Instagram for feminist advocacy and personalized branding. This shift in feminist activism shows a personalized digital resistance as storytelling and life coaching serve as tools to dismantle patriarchal exploitation. Atee (@myavaaz), who identifies as a mentor and coach, utilizes her Instagram to address issues related to marriage, identities, in-laws, motherhood, and social stigmas surrounding taboo topics in Pakistan.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

In this study, we used Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as a theoretical framework that combines the concerns of Critical Discourse Analysis and feminist theory.

We are drawn to FCDA, as it allows us to examine how discourse sustains, normalizes, and challenges gendered power relations (Lazar, 2014). FCDA considers gender functions as an ideological structure (Lazar, 2007). It suggests that gender is organized through unequal social relations. Men are often positioned as dominant and women as subordinate. This hierarchy is embedded in family practices, cultural norms, and everyday language. FCDA draws attention to the complexity of gender and power relations (Lazar, 2007). It examines subtle forms of power such as emotional manipulation, silencing, shame, dependency, and moral pressure. FCDA reminds us that discourse participates in the construction and deconstruction of gender (Lazar, 2007, 2017). Language shapes how gender roles, identities, and power relations are understood. As a matter of fact, FCDA further treats critical scholarship as a form of academic activism. Its purpose is not only to describe inequality but also to reveal the discursive mechanisms that sustain it and to support possibilities for social changes (Lazar, 2007). Moreover, FCDA requires critical reflexivity. The researcher must remain aware of her own interpretive position and of the socio-cultural context in which discourse is produced and circulated. FCDA is suitable for this study. Firstly, FCDA allows us to see how Atee's Instagram posts do not merely communicate personal views, but also expose how patriarchal meanings are produced through everyday assumptions about marriage, domestic labor, obedience, emotional control, and women's dependence. Secondly, we could see how Atee's posts challenge normalized beliefs about women's roles within the household and marriage via discourse. Finally, the activist orientation of FCDA is suitable for this study. The selected Instagram posts functioned as feminist interventions. They raise awareness and challenge silence around domestic oppression. A reflexive stance helped the study as analysis remained attentive to the context.

FCDA Scholarship

Feminist discourse analysis provides valuable insights into the challenges, forms of resistance, and complexities of feminist activism in Pakistan. Amber (2024) analyzed the Aurat March discourses through Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). She focused on online blogs that discussed the event. Using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), Nartey (2021) analyzed Ghanaian feminists' blogs to examine how women leverage online media to project their voices and construct positive identities. He identifies three key resistance techniques: 1) criticizing patriarchy and systemic oppression, 2) challenging degrading gender narratives, and 3) celebrating women who resist sexism. Through careful language choices, these blogs empower Ghanaian and African women. In a follow-up study, Nartey (2024) examined Nigerian blogs to highlight FCDA's efficacy in analyzing feminist discourses. Nartey's findings showed the role of these blogs in fostering sociopolitical action and signal a commitment to social justice by amplifying women's voices and identities in contemporary Nigeria. These studies demonstrated that FCDA is a useful framework for analyzing feminist discourse because it connects linguistic choices with broader struggles over gender, power, representation, and social justice.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative and interpretivist. We selected fifty Instagram posts published between 2021 and 2024 purposively from the research site. Following the Social Media

Analytical Framework (Stieglitz et al., 2014), an actor-based approach was deployed. This allowed us to give attention to the selected activist account Atee's (@myavaaz) as a key node within broader feminist communication networks. At the time of data collection, the Atee's (@myavaaz) account had 43,700 followers. We found a considerable level of reach and influence relevant for this study. We only collected publicly available posts. Posts were positively selected on the basis of their relevance to feminist themes and substantial public engagement. These posts were further archived and preserved data in form of screenshots. Selected posts were also coded by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic coding approach. we coded and organized into key themes related to 1) oppression, 2) empowerment, 3) resistance, and 5) solidarity. This approach allowed us to interpret data through FCDA.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Atee is the voice behind Instagram account @myavaaz. She is a Pakistani diaspora working to break oppressive cycles in South Asian communities. She identifies herself as a mentor and coach. Furthermore, she engages with the audience not only through her posts but also receives direct messages from Pakistani women. She actively uses carousel posts, captions, and hashtags. She challenges patriarchal norms, oppressive practices, and financial dependence of women. Her discourse contains a strategic blend of religious references, Islamic counter-discourses, and feminist resistance. She highlights the microdynamics of domestic oppression, household labor, and emotional manipulation. She often utilizes the technique of storytelling and captivating dialogue to engage the audience.



Figure 1: A screenshot showing the Instagram bio of @myavaaz

Critiquing Domestic Oppression and Gendered Labor

Atee confronts the domestic labor of women based on the gender divide in which men are viewed as breadwinners and women as caregivers. She critiques the systemic gendering of privilege and the unequal power dynamics that disempower women in Pakistan. She calls for social reforms to restore Islamic traditions and disapproves of social norms that benefit Pakistani men. In her carousel post, she tactfully blends strategies of rhetorical questions,

giving personal examples, and offering religious counter-narratives to challenge restrictive gender norms and reframe women's agency.

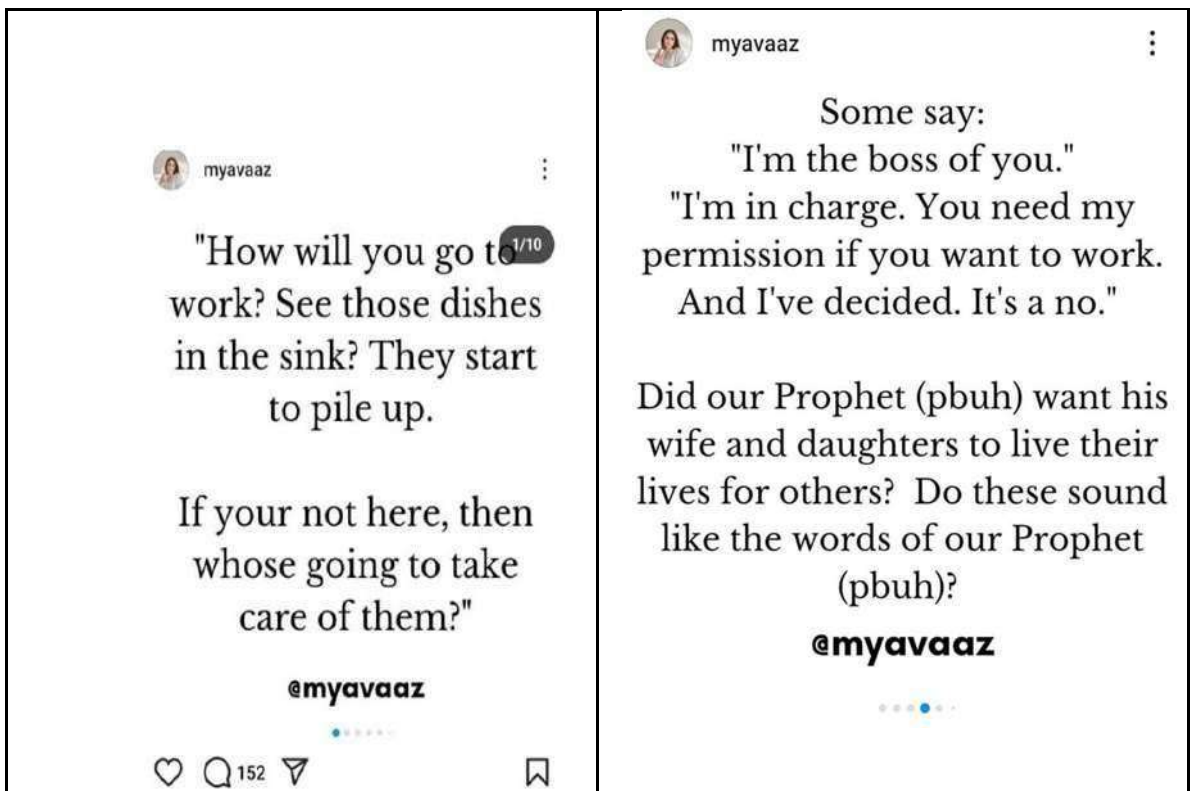


Figure 2: Atee's (@myavaaz) post on the domestic labor of women

The post highlights how domestic responsibilities restrict the social mobility and professional aspirations of women in Pakistan. She uses words like “dishes” and “sink” to draw attention to how language itself encodes gendered power relations by positioning household chores as inherently feminine obligations. She uses rhetorical questions to expose the naturalization of women's unpaid domestic labor: “*How will you go to work? See those dishes in the sink? They start to pile up. If you're not here, then who's going to take care of them?*” This framing reflects the preservation of traditional values that confine women to household roles. Her post reminds us how power is reproduced through everyday social structures. One of the striking features of Atee is the use of religious framing to dismantle masculine hegemony. She juxtaposes authoritarian language like “*I'm the boss*” and the prophetic example. The repetition of the pronoun “I” signals aggression and control. Her rhetorical question contrasts patriarchal statements with prophetic teachings. She asks: “*Did our Prophet (pbuh) want his wife and daughters to live their lives for others?*” Here she challenges the legitimacy of such misplaced authority. Atee deconstructs the professional-patriarchal paradox in Pakistani society. She exposes the domestic restrictions imposed by progressive men with high-status professions such as medicine and engineering. She uses the words “deny” and “right to work” to describe how even educated men perpetuate gender inequalities, enforcing a domestic “labor contract.”

Her post further expands the critique to a social level as she highlights the broader consequences of excluding women from public and economic life. She quantifies the scale of structural inequality. She shared how denying women the right to work excludes “*over 50% of the Muslim population.*” Her strategic use of numbers draws attention to the wasted potential of Pakistani women's absence from the workforce. The low female labor participation in Pakistan is 13–14% compared to men, 's 49%. This reflects ingrained beliefs that men are breadwinners and women are homemakers (Gutek et al., 1991; Rehman & Roomi, 2012). This post situates gender inequality as a systemic barrier to national development. From a feminist critical discourse analysis perspective, this carousel post exemplifies the principle of exposing and challenging power asymmetries and socially constructed discourses that sustain male dominance. Atee not only critiques patriarchal norms but also raises awareness and advances a feminist vision of equal gender relations.

Critiquing Traditional Gender Roles and Expectations of Pakistani Women Atee's posts reveal gender biases and create critical consciousness in a conservative setting, hence demonstrating feminist praxis. Atee uses resistance as a way of contesting patriarchal ideologies. She advocates for religious principles rather than male authority. She argues that Pakistani society is plagued by discursive hegemony and male supremacy.

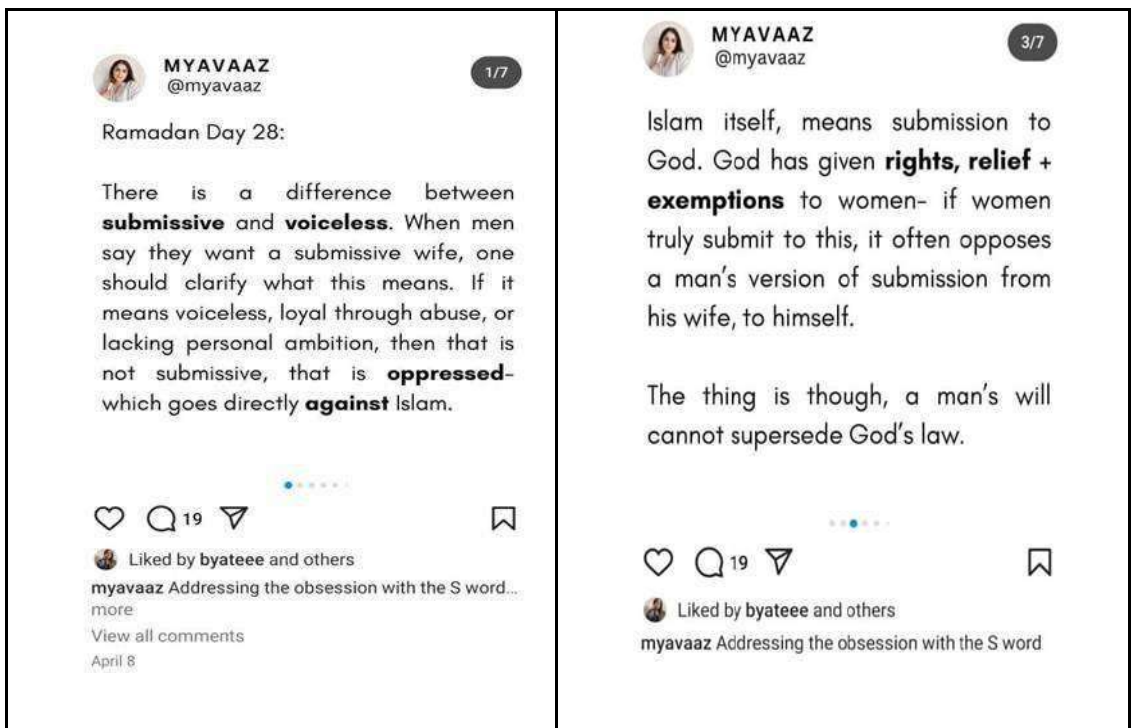


Figure 3: Atee's (@myavaaz) post on "Addressing the obsession with the S word (12)"

This carousel post examines the intricate dynamics of the submission of women in South Asian Communities. She talks about the social expectation of "submissive wives" who

serve to control the behavior of women. She uses powerful language, such as “loyal through abuse,” to draw attention to the oppression faced by Pakistani women. In her post, she repeatedly emphasizes the term “submissive” to remind readers about the institutionalized pressures faced by females. She differentiates between submission and voicelessness, which she argues is a contradiction to Islamic values. She critiques the misuse of religion as a means of enforcing conformity: “*Many of the males from the Desi community use religion as a tool for conformity.*” Her post juxtaposes two perspectives of submission: 1) rooted in religious principles, and 2) constructed through patriarchal expectations. Attee’s post reframes submission as *obedience to God rather than men*. She underlines how men often attempt to subvert the divine notion by imposing their own version of submission onto women. She strategically uses bold characters to emphasize key terms such as “rights, relief + exemptions” and “God,” highlighting the positive and empowering aspects of submission to divine law. She uses phrases like “man’s unreasonable, irrational demands” to implicitly illustrate the negative, controlling, and patriarchal framing of women’s obedience. By using an assertive statement that “a man’s will cannot supersede God’s law,” She prompts readers to critically evaluate and resist men’s manipulation of religious narratives to justify gendered dominance. In this carousel post, Attee further argues that unreasonable patriarchal demands strip women of their rights and agency. Attee knows how deeply entrenched these patriarchal values are, so she advocates for gradual social change by encouraging women to confront these inherited patriarchal beliefs, aiming for social transformation and resistance to traditional gender roles.

Divorce and Stigma in the Pakistani Context

Another issue highlighted by Attee is Divorce, one of the most stigmatized issues in Pakistani society. She highlights the paradoxical expectations placed on Pakistani women on this issue, the social construction of the discourse around divorce, and the problems faced by divorced women in Pakistan.

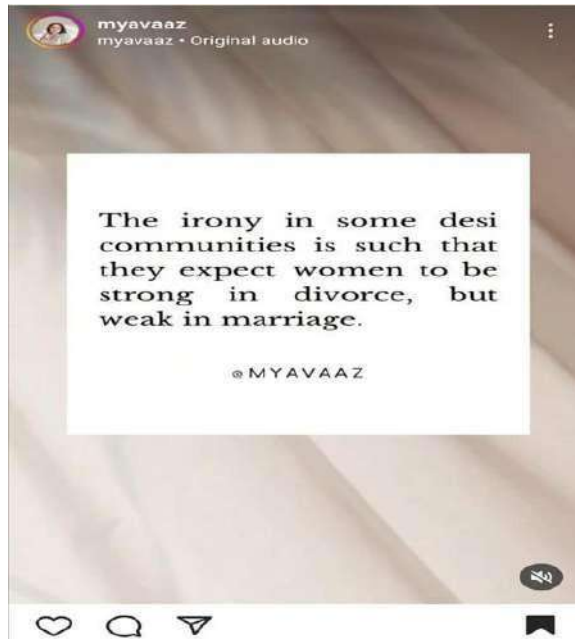


Figure 4: Atee's (@myavaaz) post on Divorce

Pakistani women are denied power within the marital sphere, and they are expected to exhibit resilience even when marriages fail. This highlights contradictory standards. She uses lexical contrasts “weak vs strong” to dramatize this double bind. The use of hashtags like #DivorcedNotDamaged also serves as a counter-discursive strategy, reframing divorce as freedom rather than shame. In the caption, she states that *“You can't reverse decades of asking women to be basically cowards and then blame them for not being strong enough during a divorce.”* From the FCDA perspective, this post reflects critical reflexivity as praxis. Atee exposes the contradiction of cultural conditioning and challenges the intergenerational training of female submission. Divorce has a substantial social stigma in Pakistani society. Women are expected to suffer problematic marriages rather than seek divorce (Nadeem, 2024). Another issue underlined by her is invoking Islamic law's allowance for khula. She reframes religious discourse as a potential resource for women's empowerment, countering cultural misinterpretations that stigmatize separation. Such awareness and resistance to contemporary patriarchal beliefs can help women organize women-friendly programs to support women.

Promoting Self-Worth and Agency

Atee in this carousel post highlights women's right to set boundaries and rejects the expectation of managing others' emotions. The post highlights how women are blamed for men's aggression, in-law egos, or extended family conflicts. She reframes self-care as feminist resistance (Lazar, 2007).

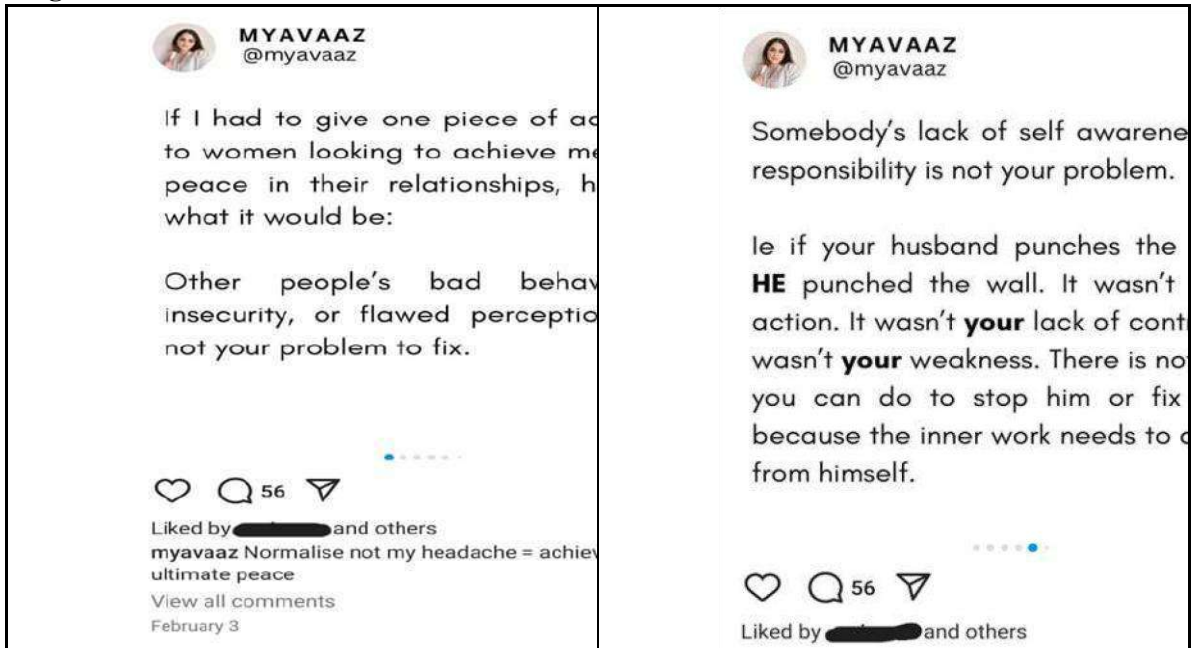


Figure 5: Atee's (@myavaaz) post on "Normalize not my headache = achieve ultimate peace"

In this carousel post, she advises women that "Other people's bad behaviour, insecurity, or flawed perception is not your problem to fix." She rejects the cultural demand that women should preserve harmony at the expense of their own mental health. The use of declaratives and the equal sign (=) shift accountability back onto men. The strategic use of terms like "ingratitude/lens" exposes the constructed nature of male dissatisfaction. She further highlights in-law hierarchies. The use of kinship terms such as bhabhi grounds the critique in localized contexts. Atee also critiques the irrational policing of women by in-laws. She states, "If your husband punches the wall, HE punched the wall. It wasn't your action," emphasizing male accountability.

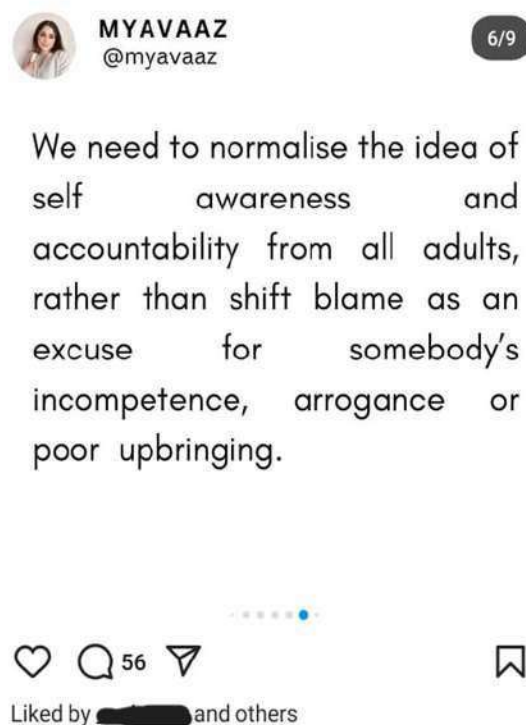


Figure 6: Atee's (@myavaaz) post on "Normalize not my headache = achieve ultimate peace"

She further broadens the critique to collective responsibility by stating, "We need to normalise self-awareness and accountability from all adults, rather than shift blame as an excuse for somebody's incompetence, arrogance, or poor upbringing." Here, the inclusive pronoun "we" frames accountability as a social value. She rejects the blaming of structural failings on women. She foregrounds how society inherits patriarchal patterns across generations and puts all the burden on women. In conclusion, she states, *"It's your choice to choose not to have a share in it. Not your headache."* She repeats the lexicon "choice" to assert boundaries as a feminist principle. She advises women to disengage from others' irrational behaviors. By reframing boundaries and accountability as feminist acts, Atee promotes self-worth and agency, linking personal empowerment to broader social transformation.

Atee has been using Instagram to primarily critique at the micro-level domestic oppression, focusing on the lived experiences of women within households, marriages, and intimate relationships. The analysis of her carousel posts on unpaid domestic labor, rhetorical posts on submissiveness, and hashtags such as #NormalizeNotMyHeadache demonstrated the invisible burdens placed on Pakistani women. She critiques gender bias within the household, aligning with previous studies showing that everyday family practices reinforce patriarchal structures in South Asia (Amjad & Rasul, 2017; Habiba et al., 2016, as cited in Ashfaq, 2024). Atee challenges male dominance and discursive control in Pakistani society.

Her posts function as social activism, raising awareness of traditional gender roles and oppressive expectations. She exposes post-marital oppression, in-law control, and normalized abuse. Her work demonstrates how gendered power relations in Pakistan are socially constructed and perpetuated through discourse (Lazar, 2007). She converges postmarital oppression and solidarity-building, addresses the stigmatization of divorce, and challenges the paradoxical expectations that women must remain submissive in marriage yet resilient in separation. She reframes divorce as liberation through hashtags such as #DivorcedNotDamaged. This demonstrates how digital feminist spaces can simultaneously critique oppressive systems and cultivate alternative communities of care. The analysis highlighted some of the key patterns: 1) the use of carousel posts on Instagram to share layered narratives that address marriage, in-laws, and social stigmas; 2) strategic use of first-person narration; 3) the use of evaluative, strong language; 4) rhetorical questioning to voice the lived reality of Pakistani women. Collectively, her posts highlight how Instagram functions as a feminist site of resistance, enabling the amplification of marginalized voices.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the discourse of emerging Pakistani feminist activists on Instagram. It found that the Instagram-driven activism can re-engineer the gendered norms through community-building, narrative framing, and digital activism. The study highlights the significance of digital platforms as a space for resistance and political engagement by blending digital activism and feminist rhetorical analysis. Atee utilizes Instagram as a perspective-sharing platform. Through compelling storytelling, first-person narration, and religious framing, she not only challenges the power asymmetries and oppression of women but also proposes solutions that can result in social emancipation and social transformation. Her praxis-oriented discourses reflect a form of feminist academic activism that contributes to social change by emphasizing the importance of collective action. This study contributes to FCDA theory by demonstrating how the principles of FCDA, particularly gender relationality, analytical activism, and critical reflexivity, operate in contemporary South Asian online platforms. The use of carousel posts reveals a different visual form of gender relationality that is not yet theorized in FCDA scholarship, which has mostly focused on textual analysis. The layered, multi-perspectival format of carousel posts enables her to present gendered power relations as well as personal, familial, and systemic. This allows followers to understand micro-level domestic conflicts within broader patriarchal structures. Moreover, her strategic use of religious discourse to resist patriarchal norms expands analytical activism beyond secular feminist frameworks. Atee leverages Islamic teachings to reframe women's rights and agency. She demonstrates that marginalized communities may employ religious authority to challenge patriarchal interpretations, a theoretically significant variation in FCDA applications. Ultimately, the study argues that critique alone cannot bring social change; it fosters the political awareness necessary for action. Through feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study explores how language both reflects and shapes power dynamics. It also reveals that activists are already catalyzing transformation by challenging traditional narratives and enhancing women's agency.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in its scope and methodology. The data was collected from only one Instagram account (myavaaz). This allowed an in-depth exploration of activists' discourse, although the results cannot be generalized due to various reasons. First, the sample doesn't represent overall feminist perspectives in Pakistan. As Pakistan is a dynamic country with various feminist perspectives, for instance, liberal, socialist, religious, and secular ideologies. Second, the linguistic and gender studies may have influenced the data interpretation. Although we have employed reflexivity to lessen the personal bias. That's why the results cannot be generalized to the broader feminist activism in Pakistan.

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Revisiting Nepal's Children Act, 2018: A Contemporary Legal Analysis

Abstract

This article examines the constitutional protections afforded to children in Nepal. The Constitution of Nepal, a federal document, ensures a wide range of rights to children and outlaws all forms of discrimination against them. The Children Act ensures the right to confidentiality in criminal matters involving children, provides for diversion, prohibits the demand for bail, and forbids the imprisonment of children. The legislation also mandates that the state create a Children's Court as a dedicated district-level court. However, the state has yet to constitute such dedicated Children's Courts; instead, juvenile matters are currently handled by Juvenile Benches within District Courts. Moreover, both the Constitution and the Children Act remain silent on certain critical issues, such as mandating specialized expertise for judges presiding over juvenile justice matters. This paper discusses and critically analyses the constitutional and legal frameworks relating to children in Nepal.

Keywords: Juvenile, justice, children, law, constitution, Nepal, CRC

INTRODUCTION

In Nepal, Children's rights and issues are acknowledged in both the Constitution and specific legislation designed for them. The nation, recognized as the home of the Himalayas, has implemented a substantial set of laws to tackle the issues faced by its minority population. This dedication is evident in Article 39 of the Constitution of Nepal, which explicitly and authoritatively ensures children's rights. Article 39 guarantees each child's entitlement to education, health, support, appropriate care, sports, recreation, and comprehensive personality development, with related duties assigned to both the family and the government. Child marriage is prohibited by law, and the law forbids physical or sexual abuse, as well as all other forms of torture against children. Comprising as many as ten clauses, Article 39 seeks to secure children's rights for their cognitive, educational, physical, and spiritual growth. Nepal's civil laws recognize the property rights of children and prohibit discrimination based on gender in any manner. Article 12 of the Constitution grants individuals the right to acquire citizenship consistent with their gender identity, thereby reinforcing constitutional protections against

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discrimination. These constitutional and legal frameworks collectively aim to supplement and strengthen children's rights and causes. Despite this, the reports suggest that more than 5,000 Nepali children are struggling from pillar to post to obtain their birth certificates (Ed., The Kathmandu Post). These instances, in one other way, frustrate Section 4 of the Children Act, 2018, which guarantees every child the right to identity and birth registration. Similarly, Nepal began enacting specialized child legislation with the Children Act, 1992, which was subsequently repealed by the Children Act, 2018. The current Act establishes a separate bench within the District Court to handle juvenile matters and is progressive in several respects. Notably, it permits the creation of distinct juvenile courts in every district and forbids the requirement of bail for juvenile delinquents.

Despite these initiatives, significant gaps remain. The juvenile justice system needs additional reformation to more effectively promote the best interests of children, who are the nation's future. For example, the 2018 Act requires the establishment of a child fund and a local child rights committee within each local body, as well as the appointment of a child welfare officer. According to 2023 data from the National Child Rights Council (NCRC), out of 753 local levels, only 240 have established child committees, while 276 have appointed child welfare officers. In the same way, 216 possess child funds, and 325 have established the protocols concerning the safeguarding and advancement of child rights (Bhattarai, 2023). Nepal's transition to a federal governance system has expanded the responsibilities and authority of local governments, creating opportunities and obstacles for fostering child-friendly governance at the community level (Vaidya R and Baniya B, 2025). This paper examines the juvenile justice regime embodied in Nepal's Children Act, 2018, by exploring its historical background, relevant international precedents, and the prevailing constitutional and legal frameworks, with a view to critically reviewing the legislation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nepal stands out as one of the initial nations in South Asia to implement a "Comprehensive code of laws and human conduct," a document that amalgamated laws, ethical, and religious principles. Nepal is recognized as one of the first countries in South Asia to adopt a "Comprehensive code of laws and human conduct," which combined legal, moral, and religious guidelines. Notably, this Code also included clauses concerning children. For example, if a child made funeral offerings for both his biological and adoptive fathers individually, the child had the right to obtain a half share of assets from each. When there were no sons, daughters had the right to inherit their father's estate. A child under eight years of age was viewed as comparable to an unborn child, and until reaching 16 years, a child was deemed uneducated.

Following the *Nyayavikasini* (*Manavnyayashastra*), Nepal implemented the *Muluki Ain* (National Code) in 1854 (1910 BS), marking the first national code established after the unification of Nepal by the illustrious King Prithivi Narayan Shah. Nevertheless, the Code lacked a distinct chapter focused on children, though some provisions—such as rights to parental property—were included. The Children's Act, 1992, was the initial law focused solely on children. The Constitution of Nepal, 1990, enacted following the establishment of democracy, had already acknowledged the status of children and included provisions about

their rights. The Children's Act of 1992 recognized key principles and provisions of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. In that same year, Nepal implemented the Labor Act of 1992, which banned child labor by outlawing the employment of children under fourteen years old. However, children over the age of fourteen identified as minor workers were allowed to work in safe occupations.

In 2000, the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act was enacted to proscribe child labor. This Act governed working hours (not to exceed 36 hours per week) and forbade the employment of children under 16 in dangerous jobs. It also banned the hiring of children under the age of fourteen in any type of work. The legislation categorized the tourism sector as a risky industry. Failure to comply with the act resulted in penalties, which could include a prison sentence of up to one year or a fine of up to fifty thousand rupees. Likewise, the Kamaiya Labor Prohibition Act of 2002 prohibited bonded labor, including bonded child labor.

The Nepalese government has implemented various policy measures to promote and safeguard children's rights. The 2003 Poverty Reduction Strategy sought to reduce poverty by the end of the Tenth National Development Plan (2002-2007) and included initiatives to achieve this goal. The National Master Plan on Child Labor (2004-14) recommended rehabilitation initiatives for rescued child laborers and reiterated its recommendations. Nepal's dedication to eliminating cross-border child trafficking. Similarly, the School Sector Reform Program (2009-2015), the National Action Plan for Children (2005-16), the National Human Rights Action Plan, and the National Action Plans on Trafficking of Women and Children and on Bonded Labor (from 2001 and 2010, respectively) were important policy efforts implemented by the Nepalese government. The government allocated budgets to district and local bodies to foster a supportive environment for children and to meet the objectives for eliminating child labor.

The Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2007 contained clauses for the elimination of child labor and obligations by the involved parties to undertake specific initiatives for the betterment of women and children. Despite these commitments, the government data and studies depict a depressing reality. In Nepal, children are primarily engaged in informal sectors such as restaurants, transport, construction, agriculture, small and cottage industries, carpet and brick factories, potting, and domestic labor, with cases reported of children being involved in hazardous work by falsifying their age (Report, 2018). The National Population Census records 104,714 working children (56,267 males and 48,447 females), while the 2014 Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey reports that 37.4% of children aged 5 to 17 are involved in child labor (Report, 2018). The Report on the State of Children in Nepal further suggests that child labor is widespread for several reasons. Children are often hired because they are easily available, paid less, and made to work longer hours than adults. These depressing realities have the potential to frustrate Nepal's commitments expressed under legal frameworks.

Meanwhile, Nepalese law prohibits marriage under the age of 20 for both bride and grooms. However, the data suggests that this legal mandate is yet to be implemented in letter and spirit. The Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 revealed that 15.5% of women aged 15 to 49 were married before age 15. It also indicated that 24.5% of girls aged 15 to 19 had married

before turning 18 (Report, 2018). Child marriage is prevalent in illiterate and indigenous ethnic groups and the Dalit community members (Save the Children Report). Against this backdrop, State intervention is urgently needed, especially for marginalized groups, to ensure that their children can access education, secure better employment opportunities, and lead dignified lives.

The Education Policy and Education Act, 2009, provides for free fundamental education until Grade VIII. The National Master Plan (2011-2020) sought to eliminate poverty by 2020 (ILO).

In 2016, the total number of schools stood at 34,739, which rose to 35,601 in the fiscal year 2017/018. Of these, 29,035 were public/community schools, and 6,566 were institutional/private schools. Among the total, 907 were religious institutions (*Madarsa*, *Gumba*, and *Gurukul*). The number of religious schools had been 879 in the preceding year but increased to 907 in Fiscal Year 2017/018 (Report, 2018).

The Fiscal Year 2025/26 budget allocates Rs. 211.17 billion to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, signaling a strong intent to reform. However, the Ministry's Flash Report 2025 highlights serious structural issues: many schools have fewer than 50 students, over 40% of community schools lack full-time principals, and senior teachers often manage schools without administrative or child development training. The student–teacher ratio remains inefficient, with cases such as a school in the district of *Khotang* operating with only nine students and two untrained teachers, as observed by Bista (2025). In this respect, the government schools are yet to be operated in line with national policies.

Finally, the Constitutions of Nepal—the Constitution of Nepal, 1990; the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007; and the Constitution of Nepal, 2015, the most recent constitution—have consistently supported the safeguarding and advancement of children's rights since the reinstatement of democracy in 1990. Section 2(e) of the National Civil Code, 2074 BS (2017) defines the term "minor" as a person below the age of 18 years. In Nepal, the 2007 Interim Constitution was the first to incorporate children's rights into the constitutional framework, while the current 2015 Constitution offers more explicit and detailed provisions concerning children's rights (Bashyal, 2021).

The constitutional provision and legal provisions embodied under the Children Act, 2018, are designed to safeguard and advance the rights and well-being of children. However, problems such as child marriage, child labor, poor management of government schools, and nonadherence to provisions of the Children Act often highlight a gap between the government's commitments on paper and their implementation in practice. For instance, Juvenile Benches at District Courts still do not consistently ensure the presence of social activists and child Psychologists, and courts continue to struggle in providing a child-friendly environment. In addition, interpreters for children are not adequately provided, and the mandate for the presence of child psychologists remains largely formal rather than substantive, maintains Paudel, T.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a legal investigation using a socio-legal framework to examine children's rights, related issues, and their implications for Nepal. The paper critically analyzes the constitutional and legal provisions for children in the Himalayan Republic. The data sources for this study include legal texts, scholarly articles, jurisprudence, and national policies pertinent to children's rights and juvenile justice in Nepal. The inclusion criteria comprised legal texts (laws, regulations, and court decisions) and academic literature (journal articles, books, and prior research) that specifically address child rights, child protection, and juvenile justice. Moreover, the Children Act 2018 is a piece of legislation that addresses children's rights and concerns. The exclusion criteria involved documents not directly related to Nepal's juvenile justice regime. The selected documents were prioritized based on their significance in shaping legal frameworks, judicial practice, and socio-legal discourse on children.

The qualitative document analysis technique has been applied in this research. Content analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, key themes, and legal mandates regarding child rights and protections. Legal documents were analyzed to understand statutory provisions and judicial interpretations, while literature documents provided insights into socio-legal perspectives, policy implications, gaps, and comparative frameworks. Through this methodology, the paper critically examines the legal framework, scholarly debates, gaps in enactment and enforcement, challenges impeding the law, and other socio-legal dimensions of child rights in Nepal.

Constitutional Scenario

The Constitution of Nepal ensures that every citizen has an inherent right to be free from any type of discrimination. The constitution's preamble aims to reinforce equality, fraternity, justice, liberty, and an inclusive federal democratic framework with a socialist perspective. The constitutional charter does not encourage discrimination in any way; instead, it explicitly forbids it. In Part-II, the constitution contains stipulations regarding citizenship and declares that no individual shall lose their citizenship. Nepal adheres to the principle of *Jus Sanguinis* rather than *Jus Soli* when granting citizenship. Thus, citizenship is conferred based on lineage. In simple terms, a child born in Nepal to a father and mother who are not of Nepali descent cannot obtain Nepali citizenship solely on the basis of being born in Nepal. But if a child's father and/or mother is Nepali, the child obtains citizenship by descent, as provided in Article 11(3) of the Constitution. If the mother is Nepali, the father holds a foreign nationality, and neither the mother nor the child has obtained citizenship in another nation while living in Nepal, the child may receive naturalized citizenship.

In the same way, if a child is discovered in Nepal and the location of both parents is unknown, the child has the right to citizenship by descent. Article 12 states that an individual can acquire citizenship reflecting both lineage and gender identity. This measure has been initiated to safeguard citizenship rights concerning gender identity, which encompasses transgender individuals. The Constitution ensures a wide range of essential rights for individuals, including minors. The section on basic rights starts with Article 16, which assures the right to life and freedom. Article 17(1) states that no individual shall lose their personal freedom unless it is done in accordance with the law. Article 17(2) ensures six essential freedoms, including the

right to express opinions and the freedom to move and reside, which are equally accessible to children. Article 18 ensures the right to equality and equal legal protection, which is also applicable to children. Additional guaranteed rights encompass the right to be free from torture, the rights of crime victims, the right to be free from untouchability, the right to practice religion, the right to privacy, the right to a healthy environment, the right to receive education, the right to healthcare, the right to adequate food, and the right to secure housing.

Article 39 of the Constitution expressly provides for children's rights. It guarantees the right of every child to education, health, support, appropriate care, sports, recreation, and comprehensive personality development from both the family and the government. The Constitution bans child marriage and forbids physical or sexual abuse, along with any other forms of torture against minors. Containing up to 10 clauses, Article 39 seeks to protect children's rights concerning their comprehensive mental, educational, physical, and spiritual growth. This way, scores of regulations for children are available under the constitutional framework itself. This demonstrates the dedication and seriousness of the constitution drafters in safeguarding and advancing children's rights.

International Scenario

The protection of children is a broad concept that entails safeguarding children from all types of violence and guaranteeing their protection from actions and situations that undermine their healthy development. It also refers to the prevention of and response to exploitation, neglect, physical, mental, or emotional harm, as well as other forms of violence against children. The children, who are individuals below 18 years of age (as provided under Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), are human beings; individuals are granted human rights inherently. These fundamental human rights are conferred upon them from the very fetal stage. There are laws on record that guarantee property rights, and among other rights, to an unborn child as well. For instance, Section 13, Transfer of Property Act, 1882: Where, on a transfer of property, an interest therein is created for the benefit of a person not in existence at the date of transfer, subject to a prior interest created by the same transfer, the interest created for the benefit of such person shall not take effect, unless it extends to the whole of the remaining interest of the transfer in the property.” This Act applies in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, with some modifications.

The United Nations (UN) adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on November 20, 1989, which has been ratified by a record 196 countries, excluding the United States (US). The convention has been celebrated as the global commitment to children everywhere. On the global front, the League of Nations, an international organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, was established after World War I to address unresolved international issues and foster collaboration to achieve global peace and security. Established in 1920, it was officially dissolved in 1946. On September 26, 1924, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the League of Nations. The Declaration required the states to ensure that every child has the right to grow materially and spiritually; the right to food; the right of orphans and abandoned children to have shelter; the right for children to receive assistance

during times of hardship; the right to a means of living; the right to protection from exploitation and the freedom to be raised in a way that fosters social awareness (Geneva Declaration). It was drafted by Eglantine Jebb.

In this way, the roots of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) date back to 1924, when the League of Nations adopted the Geneva Declaration. On 11 December 1946, the United Nations General Assembly created the United Nations Children's Fund, initially named the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), to deliver urgent food and healthcare to mothers and children in nations affected by the Second World War. UNICEF's mandate has also evolved to address the ongoing and lasting needs of children and mothers in developing nations. Correspondingly, it became a permanent part of the UN system in 1953, and the terms "International" and "emergency" were excluded from the organization's title, although the original acronym, UNICEF, was retained (CCOI).

Meanwhile, children's rights received international protection for the first time from the UN in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 25 of the UDHR states that mothers and children are entitled to special care, assistance, and protection. It highlights children's entitlement to special care and support. This objective can be achieved by protecting children directly and by protecting mothers as an indirect way of safeguarding children. This article emphasizes specific care and support, while Article 26 addresses access and the purpose of education. The right to an education has been guaranteed as free and mandatory, at least at the primary and basic levels. Technical and vocational training ought to be widely accessible, and higher education should be attainable for everyone on the basis of merit.

The protection of children was further augmented with the adoption of the 1959 Proclamation of Children's Rights. Principle 1 of the Declaration grants children the right to be free from discrimination based on race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or social origin, property, or various other reasons. Principle 2 obliged states to ensure that children receive special protection to enable them to grow mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially. Similarly, the declaration guarantees other rights, including: entitlement to a name and citizenship; entitlement to social security, shelter, healthcare services, and food; specific care for disabled children; and entitlement to free and mandatory education for children in primary grades.

The international commitment to the protection of children was further strengthened through the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR). Articles 23 and 24 of the ICCPR, 1966, envisage that children have the right not to be discriminated against on any ground, that their rights should be protected in situations involving the termination of their parents' marriage, and that every child shall have the right to have a name and citizenship. The provisions, such as special protection, social security, and the prohibition of child labor, are set out in Article 10 of the ICESCR, 1966. The International Conference on Human Rights, 1968, was held to assess the progress made by the signatory countries in the two decades since the adoption of the UDHR in 1948. The conference stipulated that safeguarding families remains

a priority for the international community. Paragraph 16 of the conference stipulated that couples would have the right to freely and responsibly decide the number and spacing of their children.

Likewise, in 1973, the International Labor Organization (ILO) adopted Convention 138, setting 18 as the minimum age for employment in hazardous environments. In 1974, the UN General Assembly approved the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflicts to prevent assaults or detention of women and children during armed conflict. Its regulations seek to preserve the dignity of women and children. The declaration requires the states to adhere to the Geneva Protocol of 1925 and the Geneva Convention of 1949 to uphold human rights during armed conflict.

In 1978, the Human Rights Commission presented a draft for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Subsequently, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 1979 as the International Year of the Child (IYC) to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Notably, UNICEF was instrumental in monitoring IYC. In 1985, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules) were adopted to promote the best interests of the child, encompassing education, social services, and fair treatment for juvenile detainees (UNICEF). In 1989, the United Nations ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), often referred to as the Child's Bill of Rights. The CRC acknowledges the human rights of children, encompassing their social, economic, political, civil, and cultural rights. It compels the states to implement a minimum set of standards to safeguard the rights and interests of children without any discrimination.

In 1990, the World Summit for Children took place in New York. The Recommendations for Preventing Juvenile Offending (Riyadh Guidelines) were adopted to require states to develop detailed crime prevention strategies and to implement them within national legislation, policies, and practices. This convention outlines strategies for preventing crimes against children (UN). Afterward, the Child Rights International Network (CRIN) was established in 1995. It was an outcome of the formal meeting of the specialists from UNICEF, Save the Children, Defense for Children International, and various other organizations. In 1999, the International Labor Organization adopted the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, obliging states to immediately prohibit any form of work that could endanger the health, safety, or morals of children. Article 6 imposes a duty on states to create and execute action plans aimed at abolishing the most severe types of child labor. Article 9 states that the states must notify the Director General of the International Labor Organization Office regarding the ratification of this convention (ILO, 1999).

In 2000, the United Nations General Assembly approved two optional protocols to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, obliging the states to adopt laws, policies, and practices to prevent children from being abused or sexually exploited. After a couple of years, children's representatives spoke for the first time at the United Nations Special Session on Children (in 2002). The World Fit for Children agenda was adopted, outlining specific goals to enhance children's futures over the next 10 years (UNICEF).

In 2006, UNICEF and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime collaboratively released Manuals for Measuring Juvenile Justice Indicators. The Manual requires states to implement changes in juvenile justice systems. In 2010, the UN Secretary-General released the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A new optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 2011. Under this protocol, the Committee on the Rights of the Child can investigate complaints of violations of children's rights. In 2015, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by South Sudan and Somalia. This agreement is the most broadly endorsed international instrument, with 196 countries. However, the United States has not ratified it to this day.

In contrast, the Committee on the Rights of the Child comprises 18 experts who oversee the implementation of the provisions of the UN CRC. It also monitors the execution of the stipulations of the two optional protocols on the CRC, Article 43, Para-2, UN CRC. The Committee is established under Articles 43, 44, and 45 of the Treaty on the Rights of Children. The Committee has a role in consulting and cooperating with specialized UN agencies to implement the provisions of the Convention. The Committee meets three times each year for three weeks in January, May-June, and September. Every state party must provide the Committee with periodic reports on the implementation of children's rights within its nation. These developments demonstrate that the international community has been serious about upholding the rights and concerns of children worldwide at all times.

Towards The Children Act of Nepal

In the third year after the Constitution's implementation, the Government of Nepal enacted the Children Act, 2018, to ensure children's fundamental human rights. The Act is divided into ten separate chapters. The Act includes regulations concerning children's rights (Chapter 2); responsibilities towards children (Chapter 3); Juvenile Justice (Chapter 4); special care and rehabilitation for children (Chapter 5); organizational provisions on child rights and welfare (Chapter 6); protection and enforcement of child rights and responsibilities towards children (Chapter 7); crimes against children (Chapter 8); sanctions, compensation, and adjudicatory body (Chapter 9); and Other (Chapter 10). This legislation has annulled the Children's Act of 1992. Undoubtedly, every child is entitled to live with dignity. Section 3 of the Act, 2018 states that each child is entitled to live a significant life. This clause requires the government to implement essential preventive and protective actions, including avoiding accidents that affect children and reducing the risks they might encounter.

Section 4 provides that every child shall have the right to name, nationality, and identity. Section 5 provides rights against discrimination. This arrangement prohibits all forms of discrimination, including distinctions between sons and daughters, biological and adopted children, or between one child and another under their care. It also forbids discrimination between adopted children and biological children. The provision is inclusive in nature, covering multiple grounds—such as religion, race, caste, ethnicity, sex, origin, language, culture, ideology, physical or mental condition, disability, marital status, family status, occupation, health status, economic or social status, geographical region, or any other basis—on which discrimination is not permitted.

Unless the context otherwise requires, no child can be separated from his or her father or mother against their wishes. However, the court may order the separation of a child from their parents and place the child under the custody of a guardian. In this regard, Section 6 provides that a child living separately retains the right to maintain personal relationships and meet with his or her parents.

The Children's Act, 2018, obligates the state to ensure both the protection and the participation of children in matters that benefit their overall growth. The right to protection includes the right to receive appropriate care, nurturing, protection, and affection from the family. Section 7 provides that children have the right to protection from all forms of physical and mental violence, neglect, inhuman treatment, or untouchability, and it prohibits the engagement of children below the age of 14 in hazardous occupations. Under Section 7(10), the central, provincial, and local governments are empowered to take necessary measures to protect children. The children, who are capable of forming an opinion, would have the right to participate in decision-making that concerns them, to be made by their family, community, school, or other public agency or institution, as provided under Section 8 of the Act, 2018. The Children's Act, 2018, outlines provisions regarding child justice under Chapter 4, with Section 20 being particularly significant. This section emphasizes that all persons, office-bearers, and the child court involved in dispensing child justice must take several factors into consideration. These include listening to the views of the child before making any decision, considering the views of the parents or guardians, using language, speech, and behavior appropriate to the child's age and level of mental development, and communicating with the child in a language they understand, with the assistance of interpreters if necessary.

The investigating authority may take the child into custody. However, they cannot apply force to the child. The child may be kept in an "observation cell" for a period not exceeding 21 days. Probing a child can be done in the absence of his parents or guardian, but only in a child-friendly atmosphere. The government of Nepal may appoint a police staff trained in child justice to undertake the investigation. A delinquent would not be kept in detention during the period of trial unless he is found guilty of committing an offense punishable with imprisonment for a term that may be of three years or more; or if there is danger to his/her or others' life, or if there is fear of his/her escaping.

The Act explicitly under Section 25 guarantees the rights of child victims. They have the right to receive information in a language they understand; the right to be involved in or participate in the proceedings; the right to free legal aid; the right to receive copies of documents, including decisions and orders; or the right to receive police protection. Similarly, the children, who are in conflict with the law, would have the right to information regarding the proceedings and charges; the right to speedy and fair justice; the right to free legal aid; the right to confidentiality in the process of administration of justice; and the right to information regarding constitutional or legal rights. The delinquents have the right to provide or receive information in the language they understand and speak. They should be provided with interpreters if required.

- **Diversion**

The Act, 2018, provides for diversion, an intervention approach that redirects youths away from formal proceedings in the juvenile justice system while holding them accountable for their actions. Section 27 provides that there could be no room for divergence in case the child has committed an offense punishable with imprisonment for a term of three years or more.

While making a decision to divert the child, the following things would be taken into consideration:

- a. Child's admission to committing the offense;
- b. Consent of the child, parents, or guardians;
- c. Consent of the victim;
- d. Nature and gravity of the offense

The investigating authority or government attorney would have to rely upon the report of the child's physical and mental conditions before diverting. While diverting, one or more of the processes stated below would have to be considered:

- a. Compromise between the child delinquent and the victim.
- b. Making the child realize his wrongdoings;
- c. Provide necessary counseling.
- d. Refer the child for community service.
- e. Refer the child to an organization for care and protection.
- f. Release the child under the guidance of the child welfare authority
- g. Entrust the child to the care of his or her father, mother, or family members, or guardian
- h. Involve the child in a training or educational program

The child, once diverted, would be monitored by the probation authority to ensure participation in the diversion process.

- **Child court**

The government of Nepal, on the recommendation of the Judicial Council, may establish the required number of Child Courts. Section 30(3) provides that a Child Bench shall be constituted in each district court to conduct proceedings. The constitution of the Judicial Council is set out in Article 153 of the Constitution of Nepal. It sees the Chief Justice of Nepal as Chairperson, while the Law Minister, the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court, one jurist nominated by the President on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, and a senior advocate nominated by the Nepal Bar Association as its members.

In February, the government decided to establish the first juvenile court in the federal capital. The court, based in Bhaktapur, began functioning from April 15, 2025, and handles juvenile cases from Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, and Kavrepalanchok (The Kathmandu Post, 2025). However, specialized child courts are yet to be established in the country.

Section 30(4) envisages that the District Judge, Social Service Provider, and Child Psychologist or Child Specialist could be members of the Child Bench. The hearing and proceedings of the cases against the child shall be conducted in a closed bench. The case must be disposed of within 120 days on a continuous-hearing basis.

In this context, learned Justice Tej Narayan Paudel observes that the child benches have not included social workers, child psychologists, or child experts as members. The arrangements for a child-friendly complete bench have not been made so far. Children involved in legal proceedings are not being kept with peers of their own age; they are not being kept separate from the public. He further argues that there are problems related to the issuance of time-bound summons. Under the Children Act, 2018, due to general delays, cases that should have been decided within 120 days have not been finalized, he opines. Social workers and psychologists have not been properly involved in the procedural and investigative aspects. Children involved in legal proceedings are not being questioned using child-appropriate methods, argues Justice Paudel, T.

To ensure child justice, the Chief Justice of Nepal assigns the senior-most judge of the District Court to hear cases related to children by exercising the power under Rule 6 of the Child Justice Administration (Procedure) Regulations, 2019. The Supreme Court of Nepal, in the case of *Dhangadhi 33 v District Police Office, Kailali, et al.*, held that, generally, among all the judges posted at the respective court, the judge with the highest seniority becomes the senior-most judge. In the absence of that judge, the judge with the next highest seniority assumes the position of senior-most judge. The senior-most judge of the District Court is expected to serve as the chief person responsible for the court's functioning, and since a court is a body with perpetual succession, the position of senior-most judge cannot remain vacant. Therefore, among the available judges, the one with the highest seniority automatically becomes the senior-most judge to hear the matters of children.

Still, the law does not require that the Bench possess expertise, have studied relevant material, or have received training in Juvenile Justice.

• Punishment

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Punishment (Section 36)</i>
1	Child of under 10	No case, no punishment to be instituted
2	Above 10 and below 14	Kept in observation up to six months, or up to one year in child correction home
3	14 years or above but below 16	Half of the punishment prescribed for an adult (i.e., to be kept under observation for a period equivalent to half of the imprisonment term prescribed for an adult).
4	16 years or above but below 18	Two-thirds of the punishment prescribed for an adult

5 Below 16 years of age

No punishment, including an order for keeping a juvenile under observation in a correction home, shall be imposed unless the act constitutes a heinous, grave, or repeated offence [Sec. 36(7)]

Considering the nature of the offense and the circumstances under which a child committed it, the child court has been entrusted with the power to postpone punishment. The court would take the following things into account while postponing punishment:

- Having any member of the family or guardian to teach him good human behavior;
- Having a service-providing organization provide orientation to the child;
- Psychological counseling;
- Assigning a child under the guidance and supervision of the school, family, guardian, or service-providing organization;
- Referring the child to community service;
- Referring the child to a correctional home for not exceeding the duration of punishment.

If there is significant improvement or reformation in a child kept under supervision or in a correctional home, the child welfare authority may recommend to the child court that the correctional period be remitted or waived. Nepal has adopted a “restorative” approach to child justice administration. The delinquents would not be handcuffed, shackled, or kept in solitary confinement, detention, or prison. Their punishment or offense would not be counted, and such children would not be disqualified from any job or other opportunity because of an act committed during their childhood.

- **Special protection**

The children who are abandoned, orphans, infants born due to rape, children of separated parents, infected with HIV, child laborers, or children of the deprived Dalit community would be provided special protection by the government. Such children would be kept in Children's Homes until they have been rehabilitated or until they reach the age of 18 years. The sole purpose of such an arrangement is rehabilitation and social integration.

- **Institutional Framework**

The Act, 2018, directs the state to establish the National Child Rights Council at the national level and state and local level child rights committees at provincial and local levels for protecting and promoting the rights of children. Also, there would be a child welfare authority at the local level to safeguard children's rights. A children's fund would be set up to provide immediate rescue, relief, and rehabilitation. The fund would include amounts received from the government of Nepal, provincial governments, local governments, amounts remitted by

citizens and organizations, foreign aid, aid from international organizations, amounts received in lieu of fines imposed by the child court, and other sources. The child court may pass an order on the offender, or direct the government or the Children's Fund to provide a reasonable amount of compensation to the victim.

- **Role of Judicial Committee**

The "Judicial Committee" has been entrusted with the power to receive complaints relating to the mistreatment of children's rights. Upon receiving the application, the Committee may call the individual involved within 24 hours. If it seems that the individual involved has infringed upon the child's rights or has failed to meet their responsibilities toward the child, the Committee will issue a directive to the individual, organization, or agency at the local level within 30 days of receiving the application to uphold the child's rights or compel the individual to fulfill their obligations to the child.

Article 217 of the Constitution of Nepal provides for the establishment of a Judicial Committee in every local-level government to facilitate the administration of justice at the grassroots level. The Committee is chaired by the Deputy Chairperson of a Village Council or the Deputy Mayor of a Municipality and is authorized to hear and settle disputes as prescribed by federal and provincial laws. To ensure collective decision-making, the Committee consists of two additional members, nominated by the Chairperson of the Village Executive for a Village Council and by the Mayor for a Municipality. Through this constitutional mechanism, local governments are empowered to resolve certain disputes efficiently and enhance access to justice for local communities.

- **Crimes Committed against Minors**

The 2018 Act, in Section 66, outlines an extensive list of actions and failures that constitute offenses against children. It encompasses: participation of children in addictions like smoking, drinking, or gambling; permitting access to, or employing children in leisure activities at bars or similar venues; exposure to pornography, involvement of children in pornography; imposing physical, mental, or any type of punishment; causing injuries, harm, humiliation, neglect, discrimination, exclusion, hatred, isolation, or torture; utilizing children in experiments; sexual conduct; child marriage; child labor; and others. Section 72 mandates penalties of fines and imprisonment for crimes committed against children.

- **Incapacity**

An individual found guilty of child sexual abuse will be considered to have perpetrated a crime demonstrating moral turpitude. Nepalese law clearly states that individuals found guilty of crimes involving moral turpitude are disqualified from contesting elections, joining any organization or political party, and entering the civil service. Where a person working in any public or private institution commits an offense against a child, they shall be removed from their position. Based on the severity of the offense, the perpetrator will be disqualified for up to 10 years from participating in any work that entails direct interaction with children or from

being appointed or elected to such institutions or organizations. Section 67 of the Children Act, 2018, is the relevant clause in this context.

- **Privacy**

The legislation seeks to safeguard the privacy rights of minors. In this context, Section 78 states that no individual may publish or broadcast any information revealing the identity of a child involved in a case currently under consideration by the Child Court. If disclosing the identity would not adversely affect the child's best interests and the Child Court permits it, the child's identity may be disclosed.

- **Age Determination**

For age determination, documents such as the date of birth noted in the child's hospital-issued birth registration, a birth certificate provided by local authorities, a school certificate stating the date of birth, or the age indicated in a birth chart (*Janmakundali*) or as revealed by the father, mother, or family will be considered.

- **Miscellaneous**

This Act is central legislation under which the government of Nepal has been conferred the power to frame rules. However, the Supreme Court would outline the operational procedures for administering justice (Section 85). If there is dissatisfaction with the child court's ruling, an appeal may be filed with the relevant High Court within 35 days of the ruling. In court practice, it is observed that police officials involved in juvenile cases appear in court in police uniform, along with the juveniles. The Supreme Court of Nepal has issued scores of welcome verdicts to uphold the cause of children. In the case of *Abha Parajuli, affiliated with PDS Nepal, on behalf of 64 Chinchu 75(O) v Surkhet District Court and Others*, the Supreme Court, on March 25, 2022, held that no judges, except for the highest-ranking judge of the District Court, will have jurisdiction to preside over the Juvenile Bench. In the instant case, the Juvenile Bench was presided over by a judge who was not the senior-most, which was held to be contrary to law. The apex court annulled the decision of the court of first instance, stating that the trial court's proceedings contained a jurisdictional error.

Issuing a writ of certiorari filed by Birendra Tharu, the apex court, on March 23, 2022, quashed a decision of Kapilvastu District Court. In this case, the Kapilvastu District had demanded a bail bond from the delinquent, sent the child behind bars, and, prior to the trial, which was conducted ordinarily, was in non-compliance with the Children Act. The law prohibits the Court from demanding a bail bond from the delinquents, forbids imprisonment, and requires proceedings before the Juvenile Bench. Under Section 24, the Act prohibits the demand for bail and guarantees. In India, Section 12 of the Juvenile Justice Act permits the imposition of bail bonds or sureties on delinquents.

CONCLUSION

The Government of Nepal has enacted a substantial body of laws to protect the rights and welfare of children. The Constitution of Nepal assures a set of fundamental rights for children, and these rights are of natural importance. From Hindu-influenced laws to the implementation of a specific children's law in the early 1990s, and from the downfall of the Hindu monarchy to the dawn of secular republicanism, Nepal's child law regime has adopted a secular character in recognition of established legal principles. Nepalese law prohibits the imposition of bail on juvenile delinquents. It neither permits the police to handcuff juveniles nor allows courts to imprison them in jails where adult offenders are housed. However, the juvenile justice regime appears, to a certain degree, more restrictive than restorative for several reasons. First, the law allows judicial authorities to order that juvenile delinquents be kept in correctional homes. Secondly, Section 27(1)(c) of the Act empowers the Juvenile Court to issue diversion orders irrespective of the claimed amount, fine, or term of imprisonment. Simultaneously, Section 27(2) limits diversion when the juvenile is charged with an offense that carries a potential prison sentence of three years or longer. This illustrates that although the prior provision expands the range of diversion, the following provision considerably restricts it. The sentencing regime under the Children Act is based on age categories—below 10 years, ages 10 to 14, ages 14 to 16, and ages 16 to 18. The law classifies children by age group and prescribes legal measures accordingly. However, it does not adopt a uniform parameter that defines a child as a person under 18 years old. Moreover, the Children Act recognizes police investigation, providing that a police officer trained in juvenile justice shall investigate instances concerning minors in violation of the law. Such involvement of police authorities may have psychological effects on a child's mind. The government could instead consider establishing a separate investigating agency to deal exclusively with juvenile delinquency cases. In the case of postponement of punishment under Section 36(5), clarity and precision are needed. While the law bars courts from demanding bail from juvenile delinquents, it simultaneously permits the imposition of fines. In this respect, the law reflects a dual and inconsistent approach. In addition, the Constitution and statutes confer upon citizens the right to obtain citizenship at age 16 or older, whereas the age of majority is attained upon reaching age 18. Moreover, the minimum marriage age for both the bride and the groom is set at 20 years. These legal provisions do not conform to one another. There is a pressing need to harmonize the law on age-related thresholds, particularly regarding the minimum age for citizenship and marriage. The provision relating to citizenship, in particular, indicates that the minors are entitled to obtain citizenship upon attaining the age of sixteen years or above, which further highlights the inconsistency in the legal framework. Above all, the prevailing legal practice and precedent in Nepal is that the senior-most judge of a District Court presides over juvenile matters through the Children's Bench (Juvenile Bench). The law does not prescribe any standard requiring a judge to possess specialized expertise in juvenile justice. This constitutes a serious flaw in the legal framework, as seniority does not necessarily equate to expertise.

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Barriers to Accessing Post-Natal Care Services for Women in Rural Punjab (Kasur), Pakistan

Abstract

Care provided to the mother and her newborn immediately after birth and throughout the postnatal period, up to 6 weeks, is called postnatal care (PNC). The purpose of this study was to investigate the barriers to postnatal care in Kasur, a district of Punjab. In Kasur, cultural and socioeconomic factors hinder women from accessing post-natal care services. Using qualitative methodology, this research investigates the barriers to post-natal care by interviewing recently parturient women within a year of marriage, revealing the underlying issue. As a result of the interviews conducted, it was established that patriarchal systems and cultural practices, along with inadequate income and lack of transport, present major hurdles. Addressing these barriers will enhance maternal healthcare in rural communities and integrate the region into global initiatives aimed at lowering maternal and infant mortality rates.

Keywords: Post-natal care, maternal health, rural Punjab, healthcare access, gender disparities, socio-economic barriers, Kasur, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

The services offered after giving birth are a critical component of the overall health care continuum for mothers and their newborns. In this regard, the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that appropriate postnatal care provides health education and optimally guides infant feeding, while also averting maternal and infant morbidity and mortality through early intervention and optimal infant feeding practices. Sadly, this care remains a significant unmet need for many women in rural areas of Pakistan, particularly in Kasur. The reason is that women face cultural, social, and economic barriers that restrict them from seeking or receiving PNC. The United Nations listed Pakistan among the nations that continue to be a concern for global public health in terms of maternal and child health due to its post-pregnancy health challenges. Furthermore, health policies are neither evidence-based nor evaluationdriven,

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thereby perpetuating restrictions on access to PNC.

While these are marginally lower, they are an indicator of the disparities in the underlying infrastructure of service delivery, highly present due to a lack of proper means in these rural, underserved areas of Kasur. Economic means, such as the affordability of transportation and medical, plus traditional beliefs, such as the use of unqualified medical doctors (traditional birth attendants), strongly reinforce the windowless sociocultural norms. This study seeks to understand the numerous barriers to accessing postnatal care in the Kasur region. From interviews conducted with recently married women who have recently given birth, the study correlates the lack of support from the spouse, inadequate funds, poor systems, and cultural norms as the main culprits that deny women the aid they so greatly need during the post-natal phase of their motherhood.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As with many rural regions in Pakistan, the Kasur district has inadequate access to postnatal care, even when such services are available. Among these, the cultural mindset seems to have the most destructive effect, coupled with economic hardships and low social status, which limit a woman's freedom and decision-making regarding her healthcare. It makes it difficult for women to receive basic but greatly needed medical attention, raising the risk to their health, for infections, postpartum hemorrhage, mental health challenges such as depression, and other ailments. The lack of awareness regarding the importance of post-natal care further exacerbates the situation. In rural Kasur, there is a high reliance on informal healthcare services, which are not supplemented by regular visits from healthcare professionals. The aim of this study is to investigate these barriers and propose ways to enhance healthcare accessibility in rural areas, with particular attention to culture, community engagement, and financial frameworks.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the cultural, social, and economic barriers constraining women from utilizing post-natal care services in rural Kasur, Punjab.
2. Research Questions
3. How cultural practices and norms shape women's access to post-natal care in rural Kasur?
4. How do family dynamics and communal support structures influence women's utilization of post-natal care services in rural Kasur?
5. What are the socio-economic barriers to accessing post-natal care services for women in Rural Kasur?

Significance of Study

This research is significant for several reasons. Primarily, it captures the unique barriers women in rural Kasur face when seeking postnatal care. These challenges need to be understood if efforts to improve maternal and infant health outcomes in rural areas are to be effective. This research will certainly aid policymakers, healthcare providers, and non-governmental organizations in devising better healthcare programs by identifying cultural and economic

barriers, thus enhancing maternal and infant health outcomes. This study also contributes to the discussion of maternal health in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) by highlighting the difficulties women face in rural areas. The resultant healthcare frameworks will be more comprehensive and better designed, leading to a decline in both maternal and infant mortality rates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The need for post-natal care (PNC) services increases due to the health needs of mothers and infants. However, many women in rural Pakistan, especially in Kasur, are unable to access these services due to various barriers. Targeting these barriers requires understanding various cultural, social, economic, and infrastructural factors that influence access to postnatal care. This literature review analyzes the available literature on barriers to postnatal care services in Pakistan and other jurisdictions with similar contexts.

Cultural Influences on Post-Natal Care Decisions

In some cultures, women's roles are secondary, creating obstacles to the provision of healthcare services in rural regions. In the Men's decision-making control over the female members of the family, as is seen in the patriarchal culture of Rural Punjab, women of the household do not have the liberty to go to the hospital. Ibrahimi (2022) describes how women facing masculinist cultures struggle to exercise autonomy, which hampers their ability to seek post-natal care services. Most men are uneducated concerning the health needs of their women, and because it would be considered wrong to permit himself to be with the mother until her condition demands his presence. In addition, Khadim et al. (2024) stated that herbal and home remedies, which are part of several generations' culture, are frequently used as post-natal medication. These remedies are believed, rightly or wrongly, to be milder and more natural even when fundamental maternal necessities are inadequately met. The taboo surrounding conversations on maternal health still persists, which leads to the magnification of challenges faced during post-natal care to the worst possible scenarios. According to Shahzad et al., 2025 cultural factors restrict women from coming forward to highlight issues related to childbirth, which may result in overlooking the possible underlying concern.

Awareness and Education on Maternal Health

Education and information dissemination regarding postnatal care pose a notable barrier to access. Many women, especially those from rural regions like Kasur, do not have access to specialized health education that teaches them the significance and necessity of postnatal care. Zain et al. (2021) highlighted this issue, noting that health education targeted towards rural populations greatly improves maternal health practices. As is often the case, these programs are underfunded and infrequent. In several rural families, women make health choices, which include post-natal care, after consulting older relatives, predominantly mothers-in-law. This refers to drawing on existing knowledge and even practices, which makes it highly unlikely that women would seek medical help, especially in situations where there is little or no awareness about the risks owing to a lack of post-natal care. Jafree et al. (2021) emphasized the gap in health literacy and the role of grassroots community interventions in promoting maternal health. Those working at the grassroots level, whose involvement is meant to educate,

mobilize, and empower women, have the potential to alter this scenario and remove the culturally binding norms that adversely affect women's healthcare-seeking behavior.

Economic Barriers to Accessing Post-Natal Services

Economic factors are still a major concern during the planning and postnatal care stages in most rural areas. In Khan et al.'s (2022) study, the lack of funds to pay for consultations, medication, and transport was noted as a significant barrier to seeking essential postnatal care. Kasur region faces acute poverty, which keeps many families below the poverty line. There are often neglected determinants of women's health spending as well as health care spending, which are available and are viewed as a luxury instead of a necessity, like food, education, and even childcare, in terms of well-being. Misu and Alam (2023) also highlighted that household poverty, inability to afford transportation, and indirect healthcare reduce the likelihood of seeking postnatal care. Similarly, another study found that women from poorer households consistently exhibit lower PNC utilization than those from wealthier households (Asim et al., 2021). Another issue is the cost of transportation to and from the health care facility. There are numerous hilly areas in Kasur that are far from health care centers because public transport is infrequent or nonexistent. Women without access to a private car find it nearly impossible to travel for post-natal check-ups, which limits their ability to access healthcare. It has been noted by Franzke et al. (2022) that in rural areas, the cost of travel to healthcare facilities is so high that many patients cannot afford to visit medical practitioners, causing severe suffering for many families.

Health Infrastructure and Availability of Services

Moreover, the lack of primary healthcare infrastructure remains a foundational barrier to accessing post-natal care in rural Pakistan. Zafar et al. (2022) described the situation at rural health care facilities in Kasur, where the children's wards inequitably lack the necessary strategic advances, medical equipment, and supplies, as well as skilled healthcare workers to enable effective postnatal care. Without sufficient funding, these facilities have little access to basic drugs and surgical materials. The situation is, in fact, made worse by a shortage of medical staff, such as surgeons and gynecologists, which means that most women in the rural regions are not able to get the appropriate post-birth care that they need. Additionally, the mobility and accessibility of healthcare facilities in rural areas are problematic. In most cases, villagers' homes are far removed from the healthcare center, and the absence of a proper road network makes it harder for women to reach post-natal care services. According to Kaiser and Barstow (2022), the insufficient road network complicates the already limited means of transport available, making it very difficult for women to access healthcare services, especially postnatal care.

The Role of Social Support in Post-Natal Care Utilization

Social support is one of the most important determinants of women's willingness to seek postnatal care services. Sayani (2023) argued that women with stronger social support, particularly from spouses, in-laws, and other relatives, are more likely to attend post-natal check-ups and follow the guidance provided during them. This support can take different forms, such as emotional support, childcare, and even transportation to the healthcare center. As noted earlier, in the rural regions of Kasur, several women's struggles are compounded by

a lack of family support, especially from their spouses and in-laws. Jafree (2023) noted that women whose spouses and family do not support them are less likely to pursue post-natal care. This kind of support, or the lack of it, can create a sense of isolation that is detrimental and leads to mental health problems like postpartum depression.

Theoretical Framework

The literature on barriers to women's access to postnatal care services presents theoretical propositions grounded in health systems, social determinants, and gender theories. According to these frameworks, this analysis examines the propositions to understand the barriers women face in accessing postnatal health services after childbirth. Health system theory suggests that structure and delivery of care are essential in providing care (CrearPerry et al., 2021). The results show that in rural Punjab, the availability and access to high-quality healthcare are key factors influencing women's likelihood of receiving postnatal care. Weak health infrastructure, inefficient equipment, and fewer healthcare facilities in these areas deny such women the requisite and timely maternal health care. Transportation to the facilities, lack of transport, and a dearth of skilled birth attendants compound these difficulties and reduce access to postnatal services. The social determinants of health also emphasize the prominent societal structural factors that define a person's health status. Lack of education and poor employment opportunities, in the rural areas of Punjab in particular, pose a problem in accessing post-natal care for these women. Due to this, low income prevents women from seeking private healthcare, and illiteracy minimizes women's understanding of the significance of post-natal healthcare. Moreover, culture, family expectations, and tradition, in which women are supposed to be caregivers but not care receivers, limit their chance to get health care services. Gendered approaches to relevant structures emphasize the gendered relations of care in access to needed health care (Barr et al., 2024). Another aspect we noticed is culture, and the prevailing bias of men against women governs women's health-seeking behavior in rural Kasur. Menfolk tend to make health-related decisions in their families, especially those from conservative backgrounds, leaving women powerless to seek appropriate post-natal care.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative approach centered on interviewing recently married women who underwent childbirth and are facing multiple hurdles in obtaining postnatal care. The present case study uses a qualitative approach, given its focus on capturing in-depth, personal, and sometimes visceral experiences of women from the rural Kasur region regarding postnatal care. Personal accounts of experiences, perceptions, and attitudes constitute essential information for analyzing the sociodemographic and economic factors that hinder access to healthcare services. The research focuses on obtaining firsthand accounts from participants through semi-structured interviews, allowing them to narrate detailed experiences of healthcare services encountered following childbirth.

Participants

The focus of this study is on married women living in Kasur, Punjab, who have given birth within the last two years. Ten married women were interviewed. The interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. These women were relevant to the study because they experienced challenges in accessing postnatal care. A purposive sampling approach was used in this study to select participants. The approach enables one to focus on selecting

individuals who fit a detailed outline relevant to the study, thereby helping address the problems posed by the target population.

Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth interviews. An interview guide was developed to conduct interviews. It was mainly comprised of three sections. These interviews last from thirty minutes to more than an hour. Overall, the experience was tough while taking the interviews because most of the women felt hesitant to share their experiences.

Ethical Considerations

In this regard, ethical considerations were crucial to this study, with the aim of minimizing harm and promoting participants' rights throughout the research. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. In this study, anonymity was achieved by not mentioning names in the analysis. The researchers have not linked any information to any participant.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The following primary themes were derived from the interviews that were conducted and analyzed in a thematic manner:

Themes	Sub Themes
Experiences of Childbirth	• Difficulties faced during childbirth • Delivery method (Normal/C-section) • Medical checkups after childbirth • Main person responsible for care after delivery • Health problems after childbirth (bleeding, infection, etc.) • Home remedies and traditional treatments
Cultural Barriers	• Restrictions on new mothers (dietary, indoor, physical activity) • Family decision-making about post-natal care • Preference for traditional birth attendants over doctors
Social Barriers	• Family and husband’s support in post-natal care • Difficulty in reaching healthcare services (transportation, permission)
Economic Barriers	• Negative behavior or negligence from health professionals • Difficulty in discussing health concerns with family or doctors • Financial constraints preventing access to post-natal care • Prioritization of other expenses over post-natal care
Mental Health & Postpartum Depression	• Emotional struggles (sadness, anxiety, etc.) post-childbirth

- Emotional exhaustion and withdrawal from family or baby
 - Lack of emotional support from husband or family
-

Nutrition & Health

- Food and nutrition post-childbirth
 - Rest and managing household work post-childbirth
 - Breastfeeding challenges (pain, milk production, use of formula)
-

Childbirth Experiences

This theme reveals the stark truth as well as the extreme hardships that women undergo in the rural region of Kasur, Punjab, while giving birth and in the post-giving birth period. This includes the life-threatening consequences and physical suffering associated with giving birth to a child and the socio-culturally and economically rich circumstances that surround these experiences. The accounts of women show how they struggle throughout the perinatal and postpartum periods, which affects their physical and mental health because of the chronic shortages of maternal healthcare amenities.

Childbirth Contributions

Due to cultural constraints, women face extreme physical pain because of substandard medical facilities and a lack of skilled birth attendants in the region. Many described being in severe labor pains and having to be transported over great distances. Complications, unsanitary conditions, havens of the ill-fortunate, and lax enforcement of sanitation regulations all serve to worsen life-threatening situations.

"Even with my second child, I grappled with the same challenges as my first. I was released from the government hospital mid-way due to the lack of funds, so I had to deal with many complications that came along with the delivery on my own. My husband was unemployed, which meant I had no access to money for food or transport to a job, and no way to support myself." (Participant X)

Mode of Delivery (Normal/C-Section)

The women's experiences with birth ranged from natural deliveries at homes or clinics to Csections done in urban hospitals. While some women experienced a normal delivery, others underwent C-sections and did not receive adequate post-surgical care or follow-up, which heightened their exposure to infections and slow healing.

"It was a normal delivery, but it happened at home, not by my choice. Had I had a means of transport and the necessary funds, I would have gone to the hospital. My family believed it was

better for me to stay home because they thought traveling late in the evening was unsafe.” (Participant X)

Medical check-ups after childbirth

A concerning proportion of women noted that they did not receive essential postnatal care. Many obstacles, including a lack of finances, long distances to healthcare facilities, and the ungrounded belief that they did not require additional care after giving birth, turned into active barriers for seeking necessary medical attention, even in cases of severe discomfort or impairment of bodily functions. "My in-laws didn't see the necessity for checkups after labor. As for my husband, he did not support it either. I simply focused on the baby." (Participant X) The maternal health care decision processes in this context appear to have been managed mostly by the husbands and mothers-in-law, who controlled when to seek medical attention, if at all. This maternal control led to the disregard of essential medical advice, prioritizing cultural practices instead.

“My in-laws assumed that I would rest, so I did. Simultaneously, I remembered other family responsibilities that I needed to address. My husband was not helpful either. He was occupied with his work.” (Participant X)

Health issues following delivery (bleeding, infection, etc.)

Most of the study participants reported having complications such as significant blood loss, recurrent infections, and febrile conditions as sequelae of childbirth. With the lack of trained medical practitioners, these issues were often neglected, resulting in prolonged suffering and increased health risks for mothers.

“I felt weak and bled a little after having a C-section, but the pain was really bad. I did not receive adequate support after surgery, and my in-laws did not allow me to go to my follow-up appointments. They thought I was being dramatic and managing on my own.” (Participant X)

Folk medicine and other traditional practices

With such limited healthcare options available, women relied on home remedies and advice from community-based midwives (dais). Although these approaches are rooted in culture, they rarely address the underlying problems and issues of postpartum health—and often make complications worse.

“We mostly utilized home-use methods. The household was not in a position to visit the doctor, so everything we tried was at home. Some of the things worked, some did not” (Participant X).

CULTURAL BARRIERS

This theme examines how women's access to post-natal care is shaped by the culturally embedded norms and traditional customs in rural Kasur, Punjab. Social norms alongside patriarchy construct systems that curtail women's freedom and influence their post-natal healthseeking behavior. The cultural barriers noted in this study underscore how maternal health is deeply intertwined with women's discrimination along the socio-political context and, oftentimes, worsens the conditions for the newly delivered women.

Restrictions on new mothers (diet, activity, indoor mobility)

New mothers are often placed on an outright dietary restriction and are expected to remain indoors. They are largely prohibited from indulging in any form of movement or exercise, even when such movements are gentle or light and would be considered supportive to one's recovery. These restrictions may lead to inadequate food intake, muscle weakness, and slow healing.

"In my family, a new mother's confinement requires her to stay home for forty days with restrictions on food and physical activity. Although I was not able to leave the house or do heavy physical labor, I still had to attend to the baby and the house, which was very tiresome." (Participant X)

Family post-natal care arrangements

Typically, the options available to Supportive Participants regarding Biographical Information and Post-Natal Care Order (PBIS) are center-based, multidisciplinary, and comprehensive. Very often, these options are not in the purview of the new mother. Rather, it is immensely or completely controlled by the husband, mother-in-law, or other older family members. Along with other accompanying cultural modalities that govern women by virtue of their gender, women are unable to seek professional medical attention because they tend to rely on cultural prescriptions.

"In my family, decisions are made by women of the older generation, like my mother-in-law and my mother. If they tell me to remain in bed, I have to follow through. I don't get to make decisions about my own health." (Participant X)

Preference for traditional birth attendants rather than doctors

A great number of families have a bias toward traditional birth attendants (dais) rather than accepting professionally trained healthcare givers. This is due to deep-seated cultural notions, confidence in traditional methods, and, at times, unfavorable attitudes toward hospitals or clinics. While the comfort which dais exude is based on the niceties of their customs, they indeed do not have the skills needed in dealing with complications or emergencies, which is risky to maternal health during the post-natal stage.

"Mainly, women rely on the assistance of informal attendants. It's far away and expensive, and there is the notion that the old ways are much better and safer. There is a plethora of old women who, for some bizarre reason, assert that during their time no one visited hospitals and everything was just fine" (Participant X).

SOCIAL BARRIERS

This theme describes how women's social relations and societal structures profoundly affect access to postnatal care. In the case of Kasur, Punjab, women who have recently given birth are faced with social restrictions because of norms that dictate family structures and community relations. These constraints extend beyond physical health to encompass the social determinants of women's preparedness to make decisions appropriate for them.

Support from family members and husbands

It plays an important role in a woman's recovery after childbirth. In some families, the husband and in-laws assist the mother to some extent by ensuring she has proper care, nutrition, and rest. However, in most cases, this kind of support is not available. Immediately, there is an expectation of women to get up and take on chores, and, in most cases, there is no emotional and/or physical support given, which makes recovery very difficult.

"After giving birth, my family and husband neglected to support me. To them, post-natal care didn't seem to be a significant factor. During the recovery period, I felt deeply isolated. My husband put in a lot of effort working for the family, but was emotionally unavailable. I felt as though I, single-handedly, had to undertake everything." (Participant X)

Difficulty in reaching health care services: (transportation, Permission)

The practical constraints of transport and the need for male guardians to permit travel outside the home further complicate access to medical care. In most rural areas, basic health services are available, but they are often located a long distance from the village, and reliable transport is either unavailable or very costly. Even where transport is available, women face the problem of going with the acknowledgment of senior family members, like the husband, which causes avoidable delays in treatment.

"I could not go to the hospital because it was really far, and I did not have money for the transport or the medical expenses. There were times when I visited a nearby clinic, but the quality of care was basic and inferior to that of a hospital." (Participant X)

Negative behavior or disregard constitutes the omission of acts by health workers:

Interactions with healthcare practitioners bear a significant impact on women's decisions regarding seeking care. Some women reported contemptuous and dismissive behavior from doctors and nurses, which made them feel belittled. Others had experiences of being ignored, with their concerns not acknowledged and their needs sidelined. Such interactions actively prevent patients from seeking assistance from healthcare providers, leading them instead to self-care or informal traditional systems.

"When I took my baby to the clinic for vaccination, I noticed the nurses seemed a bit rushed. They did not seem to answer my questions thoroughly. It definitely left me feeling rather unimportant, and made me more uncertain about returning." (Participant X)

Struggle articulating health concerns with family or physicians

The more traditional segments of society may regard a woman's health, and especially postnatal health, as sensitive or even embarrassing topics to discuss. The social stigma associated with reproductive health creates a gap of silence because women, and especially expectant and new mothers, do not feel safe to express their worries to family members or healthcare providers. As a consequence, a large number of women are unable to speak up for their health in a timely manner and suffer in silence.

"Health concerns were something I could not share with anyone. My husband did not care, and my in-laws were not people I would want to talk about such issues with. I was coping with feeling quite lonely, which was very difficult for me." (Participant X)

ECONOMIC BARRIERS

This sub-section explains how financial constraints have a major impact on the rural Kasur area, which has limited access to post-natal care services. Economic challenges are a primary barrier not only to the quantity but also to the quality of care available to mothers after giving birth. For a lot of families, the expenses linked to health care, traveling, and buying medicated drugs are far too much. As a result, many women are forced to postpone routine health checks or completely miss crucial post-natal checks.

Financial constraints preventing access to post-natal care

There is a widespread lack of access to healthcare in rural areas due to insufficient financial resources. The combined costs of medical consultations, laboratory tests, treatment, and transportation to healthcare facilities add up. For some families, even modest healthcare fees pose a substantial challenge. This leads women to miss medical checkups or postpone care, which can lead to adverse health consequences,

"Having to care for my family while dealing with financial hardships made it unbearable to seek medical attention. My husband was barely earning anything. They placed greater emphasis on basic necessities than on healthcare. I was conscious enough to know that my condition did not warrant frequent visits, and so I did not request additional visits." (Participant X)

Spending shifts away from post-natal health care

Healthcare services available to families and individuals are financially limited, leading to the worldview that health-related spending is secondary to basic necessities like food, clothing, or shelter. This suggests that care after the delivery is perceived as optional, particularly in instances where women or their families do not comprehend or appreciate the value of attending medical consultations after giving birth. In most cases, the competition for limited resources is bound to place women's health concerns deep below other urgent fiscal concerns, making it difficult for fathers to spend and mothers to recover and maintain their well-being. *"Other expenses like groceries, maintaining the house, and the boys' schooling are essential in our family. Women's health is neglected because society perceives them as highly durable and able to self-soothe."* (Participant X)

MENTAL HEALTH & POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

This section focuses on the unique emotional and mental challenges women endure during the postpartum stage. Giving birth is not only a physical affair, but rather an emotional one as well. A deeper level of sadness, anxiety, and emotional fatigue can often present itself, resulting in a lack of self-care routines as well as the care necessary for the newborn. Emotional support from family and partners is one of the most important factors in how well these women face the challenges.

Postpartum emotional challenges: distress (sadness; anxiety, etc.)

Most women described experiencing sadness after giving birth. Alongside that emotion, they also noted anxiety and unmanageable stress. These emotions were closely linked to the intense suffering from childbirth, hormonal shifts, and the redefining of one's responsibilities as a mother. The lack of sufficient support heightened these emotions, which made the postpartum phase very challenging.

"I felt sad, overwhelmed, and emotionally drained. The baby and household chores were hard. Other days, I simply wanted to stay in bed. I had no means to express my anxious feelings." (Participant X)

Emotional exhaustion, along with withdrawal from familial and infant interactions: A few women described feeling so mentally drained that they effectively withdrew from interacting with their family or caring for the infant. This withdrawal, at its core, was both mentally and physically exhausting owing to an unrelenting cycle of caregiving expectations and social interactions.

"I felt terrible, not wanting to engage with anyone, even my child, but I also felt awful when I found myself not wanting to interact with anyone. Fatigued to the point where I felt myself suffocating due to lack of energy." (Participant X)

Absence of emotional support from husband or family members

Husbands and family members often did not provide, or did not provide enough, emotional support. Women who did not receive sufficient support, compassion, or even acknowledgment during this vital period found recovery, both mentally and physically, incredibly arduous. The combination of a lack of emotional backup and insufficient support led to heightened feelings of isolation and distress.

"They pretty much left me to handle everything on my own. My husband was busy with work most of the time, so I did not have any emotional support from anyone. My in-laws showed no care and did not assist me. So, I felt I had nobody to speak with." (Participant X)

NUTRITION & HEALTH

This sub-theme outlines breastfeeding, rest, and adequate nutrition as vital components of the recovery process in the postpartum period. During this phase, cultural practices, financial constraints, and family traditions profoundly influence maternal health and nutrition. The gaps women experience within these parameters affect their physical recovery as well as their neonates' health.

Food and nutrition after childbirth

The food choices available to mothers postpartum were constrained by their cultural traditions and financial resources. New mothers were also able to consume only certain foods and often had to avoid others due to prevailing socio-cultural and financial beliefs about their effects on healing and milk production. However, economic challenges often limit access to nutritious foods, impeding women's recovery.

"I didn't receive any special help and had to manage on my own. My mother brought a few cultural handicrafts, but my in-laws did not. I was encouraged to take food warm, but did not receive any proper medical attention." (Participant X)

Rest of Activities Relating to Recovery from Surgery

Regardless of how demanding rest was after giving birth, women had to begin fulfilling their responsibilities and household chores almost immediately due to familial expectations. This syndrome was associated with incomplete recuperation and increased fatigue.

"My family told me to rest, but I was expected to do housework as well. It felt like I could not rest because my hands were always tied up with household work. I had to take care of myself and my child alongside all domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, and washing." (Participant X)

Breastfeeding lows (pain, low production, need for formula):

For some participants, breastfeeding was challenging. Some individuals experienced pain, too little milk, or did not have adequate means to effectively breastfeed. In some cases, participants ended up using a formula despite sometimes stringent financial or cultural restrictions.

"As is the case for many new mothers, breastfeeding was painful and difficult at the onset. That said, I was able to cope over time and eventually found enjoyment in the practice. Although I was advised to supplement with formula, my budget meant that I had to continue with breastfeeding." (Participant X)

The research highlights how women from rural Kasur in the Punjab region face complex barriers to accessing post-natal care. These barriers, deeply rooted in the region's culture and socioeconomic context, restrict access to care during the critical postpartum period.

The cultural practices, especially the patriarchal control mechanisms exercised at the level of the family, are instrumental in curtailing women's autonomy, which is self-evident, particularly in matters of health. As Ibrahimi (2022) pointed out, in rural Pakistan, the domination by remarried male family members like husbands or fathers-in-law constitutes a major hurdle towards medical care. A woman's ability to independently control choices pertaining to her health, including the decision to seek postnatal care, is drastically restricted in most cases. This is the dominant view, and it is further tested through this study, as most respondents stated that it was their husbands or in-laws who made the decision whether or not they required medical attention after childbirth. Cultural beliefs and practices around birth and pregnancy contribute to the unwillingness to seek care after giving birth. Reliance on the services of traditional birth attendants and home deliveries is common in rural Kasur areas. In focus group discussions, participants suggested that they faced several challenges with childbirth, but preferred to manage the problem with traditional family advice rather than seek professional assistance. Culturally, this is how society functioned; however, these societal practices pose risks to women's health due to a lack of intervention when care is needed. This is in line with Omer et al. (2021), who argue that such traditional approaches to birthing, while significant to some

cultures, can be dangerous to health, particularly when they replace medically appropriate interventions and qualified clinical personnel.

This study identifies another cultural barrier as the seclusion imposed on women after giving birth. Women in rural Kasur, for example, are told to stay indoors for a period of 40 days after giving birth. Even if the practices are implemented to aid with recovery, they still obstruct movement and prevent women from receiving healthcare services. In the case of Pakistan, the culture surrounding postpartum recovery is framed as women's innate self-care practices, wherein much focus is placed on beliefs regarding one's health as opposed to the necessity of professional medical services (Shahzad et al., 2025). His reasoning is rather sound, since these amenities, albeit well-intentioned, can significantly affect the provision of care in timesensitive situations.

Lack of family support, along with other social factors, plays a critical role in the accessibility of post-natal healthcare services for women. Lack of mobilizing or psychosocial support from in-laws and husbands led participants to neglect their health within the house chores they needed to perform. Male family members' presence during the recuperation phase after childbirth is important, and the lack of this support adds to the already existing burden of exhaustion— physical and emotional—after delivery. For example, Jafree (2023) noted that postpartum mental and physical recovery is mainly the responsibility of husbands. Women in rural Kasur face the expectation of becoming active, fully functional homemakers immediately after childbirth, a standard that is not feasible during the recuperative phase. Limited domestic assistance alongside existing delays compounds a slower recovery, greatly worsening the health complications for many women. Health complications such as postpartum depression, which was often cited during the interviews, quite literally bound these women to the reality— one that they could not escape from—and these health complications.

Resource limitations emerged as another significant barrier to accessing postnatal care in this study. Most participants mentioned their financial constraints, such as a lack of reasonable income to cover professional consultation fees, transportation, and even medical supplies and medication, as serious obstacles to accessing healthcare services after childbirth. This resonates with Khan et al.'s (2022) findings, which highlighted financial constraints as one of the most prevalent factors undermining women's decisions in rural areas of Pakistan to seek postnatal care. In Kasur, where a large population lives below the poverty line, post-natal care is considered unreasonably available. Although spending money on post-natal care can help avert long-term health complications, it remains that for most women, especially those from lowincome families, attending to such needs is simply not a priority.

Inadequate health facilities pose an extra burden on the economy. Underfunded and understaffed, health facilities in the Kasur region make it difficult for women to receive proper post-natal care. In addition, the distance of some villages from towns, combined with scarce transport options, complicates access for women who do not drive. These issues underline the need to develop transport and healthcare facilities in rural regions. Health education delivered by local practitioners significantly changed local women's perceptions of postnatal care. Some midwives and other health workers, after evaluating postnatal patients, educated them on the importance of attending to their health needs after childbirth. Bridging the gap between the

organized health system and the rural community needs to be done. Gebremeskel (2024) explained that this gap can be filled by community health workers. CHWs, as they are widely recognized within the areas they serve, have the benefit of altering a community's cultural perception of actively seeking medical attention through their influence. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of treatment options, combined with the reliance on traditional remedies by the poorly trained CHWs in Kasur.

CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the complex barriers women encounter in accessing postnatal care services in rural Kasur, Punjab. Economically, socially, and culturally, there are strong barriers to women accessing crucial healthcare services in the postpartum period. Women's delay or inability to seek timely medical attention is compounded through patriarchal decision pathways, traditional birth customs, and woeful financial and family support. Furthermore, the lack of developed healthcare facilities in rural regions amplifies these obstacles, undermining women's ability to receive healthcare services post-childbirth for appropriate recovery. These barriers can and should be addressed from different angles, combining the need to develop healthcare facilities with the need to change culture and society so that women are selfdependent in healthcare choices and withdrawn from the women's decision-making reserve. Maternal health in these settings can be significantly improved by Community health initiatives such as policy advocacy directed towards women, active participation of male relatives, and subsidized transportation to healthcare facilities for low-income patients. And most importantly, the employment of women in subsidized healthcare and transportation services will guarantee market-driven access to postnatal care for low-income women. Overcoming these barriers enhances access to postnatal care, improving maternal and infant health outcomes. It would be beneficial for subsequent studies to further analyze the impacts of community-centered policies aimed at improving healthcare access in the rural areas of Pakistan. In doing so, we assure that every woman achieves the necessary care after childbirth, irrespective of her economic status and sociocultural setting.

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Book Review
Between Saints and Sinners: Understanding Men
by

Dr. Kamran Ahmad

As observed, the academic field of gender studies primarily focuses on issues affecting women. However, men, as a contributing, if controversial, principal part of the gender studies, are often not just ignored in scholarly literature but face usual vigilantism also in feminist circles. This obliviousness on the part of gender studies is thankfully addressed by Kamran Ahmad in his book *Between Saints and Sinners: Understanding Men*. The book is divided into five sections, comprising nineteen chapters and three afterwards. According to the author, the book is an invitation to think about things differently.

Kamran Ahmad is a clinical psychologist with decades of experience in gender issues in conflict-ridden and disaster-torn parts of the world, working for the United Nations and several country-based organizations. He is also the founding member of Islamabad-based Mehergarh, a center for learning on gender work, patriarchy, diversity and pluralism, inter-faith harmony, and democracy. The author, in his book under review and, so, his entire gender work, is based on encouraging men to engage in self (re)discovery through self-reflection on the roles men play, which, in turn, affect the lives of men and those around them.

Therefore, the book is organized as a long conversation encompassing shifting and expanding perspectives, such as those of ancient Greek philosophers, to complete the picture of the world in which we live. The purpose is to facilitate transformation. Consequently, the book is neither deliberately academic, employing theories, nor a psychological exposition of or performance of a particular gender. The author sees feminist angst against men as equally unproductive and ineffective for creating a safe society.

Expanding the discussion, the author, in section one, “Men and Masculinity”, goes on to define and deconstruct patriarchy, a hierarchical system that positions men, his work, and traits as masculine as valued higher than those of women and the feminine. Patriarchy is oppressive for women predominantly, but also for men, given the traditional socialization processes. Relating to the nature versus nurture debate, the author distinguishes certain physiologically driven violent provocations against women and the weak, which are uncontrolled among men, but are restricted by obviously controlled behavior.

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Similarly, some kinds of violence are constantly accepted and expected of men, even to the extent of killing. It is all part of the socialization immersed in patriarchal edifice, creating masculinity as a source of insecurity for men, which in turn demonstrates itself in the form of extreme ferocity. Similarly, men's diverse roles as providers are addressed in the second section, aptly titled "Men as Providers". In traditional patriarchal social settings, like in Pakistan and the larger

In South Asia and the Global South, the primary value and key purpose of a man remains being a provider for his family. Men sacrifice their emotions and family, and face the fear of risking their lives. All the hardcore jobs in human life, like defending national borders, working in conflict or disaster areas, and, in fact, the field of science and technology, are occupied by men. This is also the case in highly developed Nordic states, where women often pursue healing and caring professions such as doctors, nurses, and teachers.

Subsequently, as the author articulates, men should be appreciated for the security, support, and facilities they provide to their families and others around them. There must be a gender-neutral work environment, as the basic purpose of gender is to create space for people to have more options. Men in the form of fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons must be honored for putting others' welfare above their own.

Moving forward, section three, "Men as Lovers", goes on to ascertain the biological basis of sexuality and romance, claiming that ignoring biological realities intertwined with psychological forces ruins men if not recognized and integrated into power. Here, the author has questioned the public morality of showing affection to one's in relation to similarly immoral romance, which is also banned in public and is not allowed. Similarly, women's complaints in police stations are often dubbed as *domestic affairs* instead of *domestic violence* in traditional societies. However, limiting sexuality and carnal desires merely to the feminine inside wo(men) is an exaggerated fact which is very controversial yet debatable.

Nonetheless, the conceptualization of sexuality in men of Jungian shadow is certainly a lashing force causing harm to people. Moving along, the author stresses that men are ill-informed and confused about what they like in a particular woman, as it is fundamentally their sexual desires that need satisfaction. It is, however, a bit sparkling, then, as if it were just sexuality that made humans social? Hence, according to the author, love is, in fact, a carnal desire, and unsuccessful love is a blessing for men, reinvigorating the actual human inside an individual, reclaiming his humble individuality and energy.

In the fourth section, "Men and Violence", a purported reason for violence prevalent among many, if not all, men are sought and attributed correctly to the cultural training and socialization process. The same socialization sometimes accepts certain categories of aggression and even expects it from men. Anger and aggression are biological, emotional phenomena experienced by all humans, but they need to be channeled and controlled so they do not turn into destructive, violent behavior. Because life will always present us with various types of anger, failure, and disappointments, as these are the things that give us the sense of being alive. According to the author, emotions should add to life rather than take away from it. Violence in those societies is low where women have alternative ways and legal protection at their disposal, since men in

traditional societies like Pakistan make women dependent on themselves so that they can be made submissive or obedient.

Likewise, Ahmad notes that men do violence not just to women but also to other men. Anger is a natural phenomenon, but expressing it through physical violence is a learned mechanism in which society as a whole plays a role. Also, respect and honor are double-edged swords for men and women. The author contradicts his thesis here by writing that the whole of civilization is about learning to control natural instincts. Earlier, in section one, as he specifically values all sexual desires as want-based and not need-based, then there will be no social controls, and safeguards, and the resulting society will be an anarchist society, which has never existed in recorded human history.

As a result, in the last fifth section, titled “Men and Spirituality”, which seems strange in the book, Ahmad has traced the reasons for patriarchy in the traditional societies of the subcontinent. He is up to a certain extent right, as he writes that patriarchy is unknown in the ancient local knowledge. It is a transported stuff brought by Arians and Muslims to the Indian subcontinent. The spirituality and virtue of men are neither embedded in women’s clothes nor in their public appearance that needs to be hidden. Women cannot hide from men's minds.

Furthermore, in Afterword I, where the entire book is summarized briefly to make the lessons comprehensible, understanding men means not what men do, but why they behave the way they do. In the same way, Afterword II emphasizes that changing oneself requires courage, energy, and honesty to look inwards. The real is the only ideal. Afterward III provides us with gender-inclusive strategies for collective action, asserting that only then will men be healers in a society that has first healed.

The book essentially raises more questions than it addresses, and that is the brilliance of a best book. A slight academic tone and a global inference about the men’s studies may have made the book even more striking and revealing for both men and women. Kamran Ahmad successfully illuminates a life trail for men to reflect on themselves, think critically about their individuality and the roles they play, and analyze their behaviors to build a healthier society.

Notes to Contributors

The Journal of Gender and Social Issues (JGSI) is a research journal published on a biannual basis by Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi. The JGSI provides a forum for the dissemination of findings related to Gender and Social issues from related academic disciplines. The Journal aims to enhance the understanding of social, environmental and cultural factors affecting individuals as well as society. The journal welcomes articles from all disciplines allied to social and gender issues with due importance being given to original and empirical research. At the same time the journal also gives space to comprehensive and up-to-date review articles and book reviews. The JGSI follows the blind peer reviewing policy.

Submission of Manuscripts: All original manuscripts are to be submitted to the Editor via email, along with a cover page giving the title of the study, the author's name and institutional affiliation, if any. The first page of the text should omit the author's name and affiliation. However, it should include the title of the research. It is mandatory to acknowledge the contribution of all authors, organizations and institutions involved in the research, though the journal limits the number of authors to three. Co-researchers must be duly recognized and acknowledged, with the journal waiving responsibility for any conflicts dealing with authorship.

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All accepted articles will become the property of the publisher. All manuscripts should be typed in font size 12, Times New Roman, justified, double spaced with margins of one inch on all sides.

The manuscript should be numbered consecutively throughout the paper. Authors should also supply a shortened version of the title suitable for the running head, not exceeding 50 character spaces. Each article should be summarized in an abstract of not more than 150 words.

Manuscripts including tables, figures, illustrations and references, should be prepared in accordance with the Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th Edition).

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Authors are also encouraged to submit photographs that are relevant to their articles. Photographs (high quality) must be captioned and labeled within the text. The size should not exceed 16 x 12.5 cm (5" x 8") Electronic images must be submitted in high resolution digital format (at least 300 dpi. If not produced by the author/s, the photograph source must be mentioned.

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