

The Socio-political Construction of 'Honor' in the Patriarchal Society of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how the notion of 'honor' is usually constructed in Pakistani society. Using the script of an Oscar-winning documentary by Sharemeen Obaid Chinoy, *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*, the researchers have investigated how various socio-political norms, linguistic tools, and strategies have been used to construct the issue of honor killing in a typical Pakistani patriarchal society. A set of tools offered by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) practitioners (e.g. Fairclough, 1992, Van Dijk, 2006, Gee, 2011 and Reisigl and Wodak, 2000) helped the researchers to find that the concept of 'honor', as social actors of the documentary view it, does not seem to be rooted in moral or religious codes rather it is a metaphor for political and social approval. Interestingly, only women are objectified as the carriers of this concept. They are conceived as the agents of disrespect or the violators of 'honor' if an untoward incident happens. These attitudes clearly comment on the political power struggle between genders, which need in-depth investigations in Pakistani society. The analytical framework of this study may be used to analyze media discourse and discriminatory socio-political norms/attitudes in South Asian societies.

Key Words: Honor Killing, Honor, Social and Political Approval, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Media, in its various forms, has become one of the most important parts of today's life. From advertisements to films, dramas, and documentaries, its influence is ever-increasing and intrusive. It is, therefore, relevant to attempt to study the role of media in people's lives in general and the way it shapes specific notions and stereotypes. This study has investigated how Sharemeen Obaid Chinoy's documentary *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*, is constructing the notion of honor and honor killing with the help of language. The researchers attempted to delve into the text of the documentary to study various techniques employed to construct the concept of honor. This study investigates the ways in which different meanings/ideologies are veiled in the language whether deliberately or unintentionally to assume the notion of honor in the society. The

aim is to study the concept of honor as a social convention which acts as a force to assign power to men and women.

The researchers have chosen this documentary to study the construction of honor because acts of violence against women especially honor killings are viewed through the lens of ‘cultural essentialism’. This problem has been studied from various dimensions, e.g. language which is one of the major causal facts in the construction of this culturally essential notion. The notion of honor is rhetorical as well as symbolic in nature whose meaning can be contested in different linguistic and cultural groups (Welchman and Hossain, 2005). Furthermore, the researchers have chosen to study how the characters in Chinoy’s documentary construct honor because the said documentary is an attempt to show the aftereffects of a real event and has attempted to capture how honor killing is a grave concern in Pakistani society. A report on Women issued by Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2016) revealed that more than 300 Pakistani women were killed in the name of honor in less than three years.

For the analysis, researchers have used different tools offered by CDA. This study is an attempt to contribute to the existing literature available on the related subjects especially in Pakistan where CDA is not a widely researched field of study. The studies conducted have so far failed to appreciate how the lexical and grammatical components play a crucial role in shaping certain ideological structures and creating different stereotypes. Using methods offered by CDA, this study has investigated how language can be used to assign various gender roles and how these roles are negotiated by different characters in the documentary under analysis.

It is very difficult to pin down the term Critical Discourse Analysis because it encompasses an array of methodologies and frameworks. Wodak (2002) contended that studies in CDA are “multifarious”, which means that they are derived from various theoretical backgrounds. She postulated that different theories are oriented towards different methods and data. Paltridge (2006) presented that several norms, ideas, and values are conveyed in abstraction in various texts. These notions are important as they engage the ideologies and interests of various sections of a society. Van Dijk’s (2001) assertion is that CDA helps decode the ways in which language is used to project different kinds of inequalities in social and political contexts. In addition, he argued that CDA helps understand the social, political and religious issues of people. CDA’s aim is to understand how various forms of discourse produce and legitimize ‘power, abuse and dominance’. The tools offered by CDA are suitable for the investigation of Chinoy’s documentary because the researchers have identified that notions of power, hegemony, and abuse are manifested in the language of *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*.

Theoretical framework

In order to study the socio-political norms, uncovered through the documentary, in a comprehensive manner, it was necessary to develop a framework which would help the researchers examine the language of *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*. Therefore, the researchers used Fairclough's analytical approach along with Gee's building tasks of language (2005, 2011). The study also incorporated the referential strategies as proposed by Van Dijk (1993, 1996) and Reisigl and Wodak (2001).

Fairclough's (1992) analytical model of CDA provides the researchers with a set of apt and suitable strategies to understand any texts on the lines of power-play. The strategies offered by the CDA model not only help to identify different aspects of language but also how to analyze language in order to understand the hidden meanings. For this paper, the researchers incorporated Fairclough's (1992) analytical properties of 'Wording', 'Metaphors' 'modality' and 'Connectives and Arguments'.

No	Strategy	Purpose
1	Modality	Modality operates on the level of grammar. Fairclough (1992) contends, in simple words, that the property of 'modality' in the language is actually the strength with which some idea or proposition is presented and endorsed. Words like 'will', 'may' and 'should' help the reader understand the employment of modality. In some cases, modality also operates in the absence of modal verbs. Modal adverbs and adjectives can also display modality of different levels.
2	Wording	According to Fairclough, any communicative event can have different meanings which depend upon the lexical choices of speakers. An object or experience can be worded differently depending on different discursive practices. Xin (2005) postulated that that Lexis is always under the influence of some ideology, and impacts upon people accordingly.
3	Metaphor	Metaphors are responsible for structuring the way with the help of which we think and act. They become a part of our basic system of knowledge and affect our thinking patterns in a fundamental and pervasive manner. Furthermore, metaphors are dependent on different contexts and are naturalized through a number of cultural settings and social institutes (Xin, 2005).

Gee (2005, 2011) contented that we fashion our discourse in order to fit into different situations we communicate in and at the same time, these situations

fashion our discourse. In other terms he contends that speakers phrase their words according to the context in which they use the words and at the same time the use of language creates the context as well. Discourse and context in this regard are part and parcel of each other.

The building task useful for this research has been explained below.

No	Strategy	Purpose
	Connections	Gee postulated that it is through language that we draw connections and make things relevant to each other. Things, he asserted, are not inherently connected with each other; rather, the connections are drawn by people who use language. That is why language is used to mitigate, break and strengthen these connections. Language is used to make a connection or render things relevant or non-relevant to each other (Gee).

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) proposed various referential strategies to investigate discourse. The aim of these strategies is to examine how people can be referred to and named linguistically. These proponents of CDA argued that social inequalities may be enacted through these referential strategies. These strategies are used to represent social actors. Expounding on the idea of referencing through language, Van Dijk (1993, 2003, 2006) contended that people use referential strategies to assign negative or positive attributes to certain people. Referential strategies used for this research have been discussed below.

No	Strategy	Purpose
1.	Predicational Strategy	Individuals and groups are stereotyped through predicational strategies. Reisigl and Wodak (2001) contended that people associate both positive and negative qualities and attribute through language. These qualities are called as predicates.
2.	Argumentation strategy	In argumentation strategy, speakers use language to associate different types of stereotypes with the people of in-group and out-groups as well. They make use of 'topoi' to associate these stereotypes. 'Topoi' here refers to parts of argumentation used to constitute inferable or explicit premises. They are employed to connect contentions with conclusion or claims related to other people (Kienpointner, 1998).
3.	Linguistic exclusion	

4. Collectivization
- Reisigl and Wodak (2001) contended that linguistic exclusion is realized through syntax in discourse. It is a kind of referential strategy which generates a discriminatory effect for individuals or a group of individuals. There are two types of linguistic exclusions: suppression and background. (i) to exclude the actor/s in a less radical way, by resorting to Backgrounding, a strategy that leads to a de-emphasis of the actor/s in question rather than their total omission, (ii) on the other hand suppression is removal of all traces of representation of a social actor who is involved in a matter. Both of these strategies can be employed consciously or unconsciously.
- Reisigl and Wodak (2001) contended that we associate ourselves with other people on the basis of our ideologies. The aim of this strategy is to build homogeneity with the help of language. People build homogeneity with the help of deictic like 'we, they, us and through collectives like 'the race, the nation, family and groups', etc.
5. Positive self-presentation and negative other presentation
- Van Dijk (1993, 1996, 2006) contended that language is used to enact differences of 'us' vs. 'them' where 'us' is always presented in a positive manner and includes all the people of in-group and 'them' is always presented in a negative manner and includes all the people of out-groups. In positive self and negative other dichotomy the former is always right and morally superior while the latter is always wrong and morally inferior.

With the help of this framework, the researchers have conducted an in-depth analysis of Chinoy's *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness* on the basis of the following research methodology.

Method and procedures

This study is qualitative and the textual data for the analysis have been obtained from Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy's documentary *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*. This study aimed to decipher how hidden meanings and ideologies are embedded in the language of characters in the documentary to manifest their power and dominance. The researchers employed selected analytical properties given by Fairclough (1992) and selected building tasks of language proposed by Paul Gee (2005, 2011). Furthermore, this study will also use the selected referential strategies given by Wodak and Reisigl (2001) and Van Dijk's (1993, 2003, 2006). With the help of these strategies, the researchers have investigated how power, its abuse, and ideologies are embedded in the documentary and how language played a significant role in assigning power to certain characters.

Findings of the study

Honor killing is the central issue discussed in the documentary. The text of the documentary revolves around the idea of honor and honor killing in the light of different socio-political dimensions of Pakistani society. The plot of the documentary revolves around the life of Saba, an uneducated girl from a rural village some 150 kilometers away from Lahore. The documentary starts with the episode of Saba recuperating after an attempt on her life by her family. The documentary then reveals the context of and reason for the assault: Saba eloped with her former fiancée against the will of her family. The documentary then shows Saba's struggle to get herself justice and various socio-cultural hindrances which she faces during her journey. Although the apparent purpose of the documentary is to show Saba victorious. A careful reading of the documentary shows Saba falling a victim to the cruel patriarchal norms and values. The story of Saba's father is intertwined with that of Saba's. He is an oldman, incarcerated behind bars along with his brother after the attempt on his daughter's life. The most surprising thing about him is his guiltless stance after the assault.

Wording and connections

The vocabulary used in the documentary by Saba's father shows that the notion of honor that he was trying to preserve was defined externally; all he was trying to do was preserving it. This shows that there is a very strong connection between the concept of honor and social approval. Honor is something divine; rather it is a social construct which is contingent upon various factors and can be abided by or violated according to the context in which people are living. The words of Saba's father show that he was afraid of social disapproval when he assaulted on Saba's life. He knew that the only way to win his social approval back was to try to remove the object of disrespect: Saba. 'Whatever we did, we were obliged to do it' (14:06). It is important to understand here that what mattered most for Saba's

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family was actually the attempt on her life, not necessarily to kill her. Although they did not succeed in killing her, yet they were redeemed after the attack. "Look, everyone says I am more respected after this incident. People say I am an honorable man. They say what I did was right. It was the proper thing to do. I have other daughters too. Since the incident, they have received proposals, each one of them" (35:20'). Therefore, it can be assumed that the attempt of Saba's murder was not triggered by any genuine view of 'honor' or any logical attempt to safeguard it. Rather, the perpetrators appeared to be motivated to seek a pretentious social approval. Words like 'obliged' reveal that he made an effort to legitimize his actions to survive in the society. In this regard, we can assume that there lies a strong connection between the actions of Saba's father and the society. It is because his actions resurrect his honor in the society.

It was not only Saba's father and the other male members of the household, but also the female members of the household felt the same amount of disrespectfulness and shame. In case of her father, the overall impression which is conveyed by the use of a passive verb 'obliged' is that what Maqsood did was exactly what was being expected of him; there was no other respectful way. The documentary shows Saba's sister, approximately as old as she was, reiterating the same idea in these words: "Our family was never questioned by anyone. We were respected by the entire community. Now people who feared us are taunting us. We have stopped going anywhere even to friends and family. We keep to ourselves because of the shame she has brought upon us in front of everyone" (12:14-12:26). The phrase "was never questioned" reveals the over-all impression of what Saba's father did and the motivation behind his actions. His other daughter, Saba's sister, makes it clear that that the only viable choice for their family was to kill Saba. Otherwise, in order to avoid shame, they had to leave the town. Also, Saba's father makes it clear in the above-quoted statement that he did not do it for any personal reason, but to protect the rest of his family. He says that they are respected once again and his other daughters are receiving proposals for marriage, which means that their social status was restored.

Use of metaphors

The most important metaphor of the documentary is the word 'honor' itself. Its frequent use by Saba's father, three times in four utterances, shows its importance. A careful examination of the documentary shows that the word 'honor' seems to be a metaphor for social approval. The idea of respect associated with 'honor' is relevant and a constructed one. In this case, 'honor', for Saba's father, is the restoration of social approval. By the end of the documentary, it is revealed that Saba's father thinks himself as an 'honorable' man after his assault on his daughter's life. The fact that he feels 'honorable' after his attempt on his daughter's life reinforces the idea of 'honor' for the audience.

Repetition

The repetition of the idea of Saba's father as an 'honorable' man by different characters shows the extent of his success. Almost, all the other characters, with the exception of Saba's lawyer and herself, are trying to create room for Saba's father on account of his responsibility towards the other members of his family. One way or other, mildly or strongly, they convey and reinforce the idea that he is an honorable man after his attempt on his daughter's life.

Modality

In the documentary under analysis, Saba's father makes use of 'deontic modality'. He uses the word 'obliged' in his statement i.e. "we were obliged to do it". This word, in particular, reveals the strength with which Saba's father was forced to take an attempt on his daughter's life. Furthermore, he says that 'I will kill you myself. You are my daughter; I will kill you myself' (14:50). His statement here not only show his conviction regarding his actions but unearth how he treats his daughter as a mere possession who is responsible for bringing disgrace to his family. When interviewed in the jail about his crime he states "My whole life may be spent in jail. I will stay here for my honor, for respect" (16:40). The use of modal verb 'will' reveal the power and strength in his statement. He is ready to spend his whole life in jail just to save his honor. Once again, a connection can be drawn between his actions and the social pressure he faces because of them. He is ready to spend his whole life just to save his 'honor' which is a social construct.

Referential strategies

In this documentary, different characters used language to name others which allowed them to place the groups and individuals with opposite views in the social world.

a. Predicational strategy

In *A Girl in The River: The Price of Forgiveness* the description of Saba's character involves the use of 'predicational strategy'. Saba is continuously invoked in words coupled with 'shame', disgrace and all. Her family, again and again, refers to her as a person who brought shame upon the whole family. The stereotyping of a love marriage involves the idea of disgrace to the family of the girl, in some cases even the family of the boy as well. It is because of this that her mother, sisters and all other members of the family continuously invoke this stereotype to highlight the shamefulness of Saba's act. All of this is done through the employment of various predicational strategies. For instance, at the beginning of the documentary Aqsa (Saba's sister) said: "Who can tolerate such betrayal from a daughter, who runs away and marries without their consent?" (12:20). This

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utterance shows that a stereotype has been realized i.e. no one expects their daughter to elope and if such things happen the solution only is to kill the daughter.

In another scene, Maqsooda (Saba's mother) says "This is what happens when the honor is at stake" (13:05), therefore, we can assume that once again a predicational strategy has been used as a stereotype has been realized. Maqsooda's statement further strengthens the notion of the construction of honor killing, as her postulation leads us to a long history of such happenings in the country.

b. Argumentation strategy

In the documentary, the characters involved in Saba's attempted murder, i.e. her father and uncle, associate positive attributes to their crime by invoking the notion of honor again and again and by stressing to restore the balance that Saba's elopement had initially disturbed. Their act and their justification are not only bought by others but they are ratified. Above all, the ratification comes from her mother and sister. The latter can be heard saying, "All our family did was to preserve their integrity and honor" (12:01). Her mother also reiterates the same idea, "No woman should disrespect others. No woman should ruin her parent's reputation" (13:00). Saba's uncle, who is also an accomplice in the murder, says, "For an honorable man what my brother did was absolutely right" (13:46)

These 'argumentation strategies' show that Saba's family use language to validate the wrong/evil attached to their crime by painting Saba as a criminal. They portrayed their attempt on Saba's life as something which may bring a healthy socio-cultural change in their lives.

c. Linguistic exclusion

Throughout the documentary, Saba was omitted as an actor and under-represented in terms of her identity. The whole discourse revolves around an idea that Saba has put her family's honor at stake by eloping with Qaiser, however, she is put in suppression through the discourse of documentary. Saba is a direct victim of an attempted murder which was committed for the so-called protection of honor, but she is not consulted on this matter. Her opinion on honor does not come clearly before the audience. The discourse of the documentary failed to take her to say on the notion of honor. Linguistic exclusion of Saba on the notion of honor throws light on the idea that honor is associated with men in this documentary while women are just objects or carriers of this idea.

d. Positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation

The demarcation of two social groups is more than visible in *A Girl in The River: The Price of Forgiveness*. One of the two groups, the perpetrators of the crime, are in favor of honor killing while the second group suffers from the heinousness of

the crime. The only way for the former group to absolve themselves of the crime is to present the latter group with negative traits. Once the first group has committed the crime of attempting on Saba's life, they cannot go back. They have to exclude her from their own group with positive traits and place her in the other group which they need to incarcerate. That is why her father says, "She took away our honor" (14:08); he asks his daughter, "Why did you leave your home with an outsider?" (14:54), these statements render insight into his ideology, because when Saba left her home for an 'outsider' she became an 'other' for her family and was no more a part of their 'us'. Therefore, she may be viewed and treated as a negative person by her family.

The above-quoted views show that the notion of honor is constructed socially. It shows that it is actually people who attach a certain set of expectations with an individual, especially a female, and then hold them accountable if they are not able to fulfill their 'duty' to the society. At one point in the documentary, a sitting of the elderly of the village takes place to discuss this matter and one of them gives these comments, "Our society doesn't respect people whose daughters run away, people say, 'look their daughter ran away'" (22:10). It is noteworthy to understand here that these words are coming from a member of the 'Panchayat', a group of elders, who have the authority to intervene in an array of social matters. These comments show how this notion of honor is endorsed by the institution of the Panchayat. This also once again highlights the division between two groups and how it is reversed in the favor of those whose actions are approved by the society, in this case, the perpetrators, and those whose actions are considered a violation, in this case, Saba and a handful of her supporters.

Furthermore, in the documentary under research, people have been 'collectivized' on the basis of their shared beliefs. The group which favors Saba's killing is a group of indistinguishable individuals who manufactured homogeneity on the basis of the notion of honor. The representatives of this group used deictic of 'we' in their discourse to draw a consensus against Saba and painted her as an actor who is responsible for bringing disrespect to her family.

Discussion

In this study, the researchers have investigated the assigning of various societal roles to men and women in a patriarchal society, and the motivations behind and gains from this assigning. Furthermore, researchers delved into the script of the documentary to study how language was used by different characters to construct the notion of honor. A careful albeit intrusive repetitive study of the language of the documentary and attending to its visuals yielded the conclusion that the focus of the documentary was on the discussion of honor killing. Aided by the tools of CDA, further inquiry into the nature of discussion resulted in the conclusion that honor is a social construct and a metaphor for social approval.

Welchman and Hossain (2005) postulate that honor has three main aspects: a sentiment, its manifestation (in conduct) and thirdly the evaluation of this conduct

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(in the eyes of others). In simple words, honor encompasses a person's estimation of his own social worth and the acknowledgment of that worth in the eyes of society. Viewed this way, honor has overlapping meanings, multiple connotations and a number of ideas like reputation, dignity, esteem, pride, and virtue. The findings of this study are related to (Welchman and Hossain, 2005) definition of honor as the documentary makes it very clear that the supposed 'dishonorable act' is the one which is not approved by the society. Once such an incident happens, the documentary further tells, it becomes the responsibility of the male members of society to restore the things to their initial balance. The documentary adds that the method and way for the expected response to 'the violation' is also supplied by the society. This gives one faction of society, in the case of this documentary the male faction, the power, and control over the other faction. Here another concept which runs parallel to honor is that of 'shame' is applicable. Wikan (2008) contends that people who value honor are not only concerned to maintain it but strive to avoid acts which can bring shame to them. Mandelbaum (1988) contended that terms honor and shame are interrelated because honor is related to the expected and correct behavior of individuals in the society and shame is associated with transgressions against the correct and expected behavior. For Saba's father, the honor as such was not a personal matter as it was a social one. On a personal level, he could have solved the dilemma by boycotting his daughter, but it was not sufficient as it would not have won him social approval.

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) contended that people use 'argumentation strategy' to associate either negative or positive attributes to certain people in certain contexts. In the documentary under analysis, all the characters in the documentary attempt to associate negative and morally inferior characteristics with Saba and all those who support her marriage even her own sister Aqsa and her Mother Maqsooda. Here Sen's (2005) idea is relevant which contends that the role of women in the constitution of the notion of honor cannot be ignored. Elder women exercise power over the young girls in the family and collude with men to enforce control over them especially in issues related to marriage. Elder women play a critical role ensuring compliance with the wishes of men; nevertheless, very few women are involved in violence against women. The same happens in *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness* are considered as mere 'vessels' for the honor of men. The concept of honor in said documentary arguably has paved the way for the idea that women are mere objects and property of their male counterparts.

This documentary presents a reflection of a truly patriarchal society. In this regard, Syed et al. (2015) commenting on the social situation of Pakistan contend that women in Pakistan face several victimizing issues like honor killings, domestic violence, exchange and forced marriages. They are denied their voice and the law doesn't protect them rather there are certain laws which favor men like Hudood Ordinance and the law of ordinance. Chinoy's documentary mirrors this very idea and it is evident through the findings of this research. Irfan (2008) contends that unfortunately, the legal system of Pakistan is divided in two parallel system: (i) statutory law and (ii) local customs. The former is mostly implemented

in the urban areas of Pakistan while the latter is prevalent in the rural areas where 'panchayat' a group of rural leaders announce what is going to happen to women especially in honor related cases. In *A Girl in the River: A Price of Forgiveness* Saba seeks help from statutory law and successfully gets her father and her uncle arrested, but elderly men or a group of elected leaders in her village put pressure on the family of her husband Qaiser to persuade her to forgive them.

The findings further reveal that in the documentary under analysis, the primary culprit, Saba's father, as a man of great stubbornness and resilience. He does not express any remorse or guilt and is proud to face any punishment. His behavior is related to the findings of Hearn (2004) who postulates that perpetrators of honor killing are often proud of their doings and when the legal action is taken against them they display their arrests and handcuffs as a sign of their heroism. In the society, their behavior is considered as virtuous and manly because honor killing affirms a man's social capacity to exercise power over the females in his family. In the documentary under analysis, Saba's father and uncle consider themselves heroic and chivalric because they show no remorse over what they did to Saba and use language in a manner which reveals that they feel triumphant.

A number of acts can be considered hurting honor, chief among these are those which violate women chastity or faithfulness to man. Bourdieu (1977) postulated that the sexual virtue of female is tied to her family's symbolic capital within the society and any woman who offend the prevalent notion of honor or acts against this capital must be punished. Murder in this context is seen as the most legitimate means for protecting or restoring honor. An attempt on Saba's life was an attempt to preserve her family's symbolic social capital. The researchers have identified that through the tactful use of language there was an attempt to highlight Saba's suffering in the documentary; however, in that process, it renders insight into the social factors, which force a paternal figure to take such extreme measures against his daughter.

Conclusion

The research has concluded that the construct of 'honor' as depicted in an Oscar-winning documentary, based in Pakistan, assigns the gender roles to men and women, which mirror the typical characteristics of a patriarchal society. The analysis of the documentary has established that 'honor' is basically a metaphorical idea which is displaced with the social acceptability of men in the society. Men have been given power in the documentary and women are expected to serve, follow and oblige them. If any woman tries to go against her pre-defined roles, men can use violence to subdue her by force. Some sections of the society seem to support this use of force for the protection of the socio-political constructed notion of 'honor'. Although music and visuals would have played a significant role in establishing the themes of the documentary, the researchers could not study it beyond the text owing to limited time and space.

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This study may give social awareness to young people because it unearths the ways in which various important social issues can be constructed through the tactful use of language. Furthermore, this study may also help the students of political and language to see how gender roles are defined in a patriarchal society, similar to Pakistan, and how these roles can be executed in media using different linguistic tools and strategies.

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