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**NEGOTIATING SINGLE MOTHERHOOD: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE
ANALYSIS OF GENDER, AUTONOMY, AND MATERNAL IDENTITY IN
PAKISTANI TELEVISION DRAMA *BEHADD* (2013)**



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Abstract

The critical examination of the way single motherhood is discursively constructed in Pakistani telefilm, Behadd (2013), has been conducted to investigate the issue using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Based on the framework of CDA proposed by Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (2008), the language, narrative patterns, visual representations, and character interaction in the image are examined in terms of how they are used as a device in the production and regulation of gendered identities in the context of a patriarchal society. Thereafter, the study views the screen of a television drama as a discursive arena in which meanings of motherhood, the feminine, women's autonomy and moralities are being constructed, negotiated and normalized. Intersectional Feminism (Crenshaw, 1989) is also used to help investigate the interactions between social power, cultural expectations and class in the construction of the meaning of single motherhood. Adopting a qualitative research design, selected scenario sections and dialogues of Behadd undergo macro-level and micro-level content analyses to examine how selected discourses such as sacrifice, maternal responsibility, emotional labour and female autonomy are constructed through the pattern of the conversation, narrative structure and symbolic aspects of the discourse. The findings show that while the telefilm offers a modern picture of women's autonomy, representations of this type are securely contained in dominant patriarchal discourses, which maintain the emphasis on women's responsibility and sacrifice. The women's agency is thus formed, but not as a legitimate autonomy. The study contends that Behadd represents single motherhood as a state of negotiation, as a social identity that is at stake, where women's voice and agency are affirmed yet at the same time limited in the discourses enmeshed in culture. The paper connects the micro-level linguistic practices with the macro-level sociocultural ideology, and brings up the ideological approaches of Pakistani Television dramas to create and reinforce gender-based norms. The research has the potential to contribute to feminist media studies as it provides an illustration of how CDA helps to elicit subtle mechanisms in the discursive process around which gendered power relations are reproduced.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

Gender identities are not naturally occurring categories, but rather socially and culturally constructed through discourse, institutions and representation (Butler, 1990; Mottier, 2004). Moreover, TV dramas are ideological sites where the cultural values and social expectations are produced and circulated again and again. These dramas, through the repeated portrayal of characters with interpersonal relationships and the emotional struggles, shape the audience's understanding of

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acceptable behaviour, family structures and gender roles. However, TV dramas have great cultural power, especially in Pakistan, as they are watched by people of all ages and classes. Thus, representation of women, motherhood, and relations with family in these dramas plays a significant role in shaping the public identity of moral, femininity and social identity (Shabbir et al., 2021; Ahmed & Wahab, 2019).

Television dramas continue to be one of the most significant mediums of mass media within Pakistani society and have a significant impact on how the community perceives femininity, family, and morality (Shabbir et al., 2021). Women's characters are often depicted in acceptable ways of 'sacrifice', 'emotional work' and 'home responsibility'. Maternal responsibility, generally and particularly the mother, is glorified as epitome of womanhood and decency. Relational identities of care and family responsibilities are the focus of the construction of women in such representations (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019; Tabassum & Amin, 2020).

It is within this socio-cultural setting that the single motherhood identity appears as a category under construction, which questions the prevailing ideologies on family structure, morality and dependency of females. Single mothers may be caught up in contradictory discourses that highlight their challenges and, at the same time, portray them as independent. In this sense, media representations of single parenthood are valuable platforms to explore gendered social-bodies' negotiations in Patriarchal societies.

Dramas on women's empowerment and women's autonomy are part of the increasing storylines of Pakistani TV dramas. But such depictions are sometimes restricted to the stereotypical and expected roles of a female and a mother (Mehra, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2024). This contradiction is particularly significant in thinking about the communication of TV drama as an important cultural text to comprehend modern discourses of female agency, juxtaposed with continued patriarchal structures.

This study has explored the repercussions of tensions related to motherhood, autonomy, morality and femininity as seen in the medium text of the telefilm *Behadd* (2013). The research applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the role of language, the nature of narrative structuring, visual means and character interaction in the process of constructing and deconstructing gendered identity. Theoretically, Intersectional Feminism (Crenshaw 1989) informs the study, enabling the examination of the interaction of class, culture, and social expectations, and how this interaction impacts women's experiences.

The value of this research is that it has not much contribution in two folds in feminist media studies and discourse studies in Pakistan. The study takes this up a notch by combining representation with the discursive production of meaning. It reveals that the television dramas in Pakistan represent ideological sites that contribute to the construction and maintenance of cultural discourses of gender and motherhood. It also offers methodologically by explaining how CDA can be used for television textual analysis to relate micro level practices in texts to macro level practices in culture.

Background of the Study

Gender in the media has continued to be an important field of research in feminist media studies as media tools not only document social life, but they are also actively involved in producing and normalizing cultural sets of meaning. Television dramas, especially, are a strong cultural product having a strong influence on society regarding morality, family system, women and social identity (Lazar, 2007). Understand that TV dramas have a prominent role in Pakistan because they are easily available and have an emotional touch with the audience. Thus, these dramas are important in the

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reproduction and legitimatization of dominant social norms concerning gender roles, motherhood and family ties (Shabbir et al., 2021).

The representation of women has been repeatedly shown in Pakistani tales made on television, that women are mostly involved in traditional and patriarchal systems. Female characters are frequently depicted as sacrificial mothers, dutiful wives and caring nurturers who are "emotionally responsible" to the family, and dedicated to domesticity and domestic roles in general (Fatima, 2019; Mushtaq & Ali, 2022). These images help reinforce the idea of ideal femininity based on patience, endurance, caring and morality. Even though films in Pakistan have in recent years started featuring educated and independent women, they are typically confined to a narrow spectrum of values, and ultimately reinforce an existing and unchallenged patriarchal framework (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2024).

Alongside this, the current portrayal of women in media has uncovered an inherent conflict between the modern and the traditional expectations of women. Themes on women empowerment, women professionalism, women personal freedom, etc., have been finding way into Pakistani dramas increasingly often but most of the time these are dealt in such a way that traditional family values and gender hierarchy are restored again (Mehra 2019). In the broader context, this contradiction is a reflection of the complex sociocultural dynamics of Pakistan, where modernity and evolving gender norms complement conservative cultural values. Thus, television dramas are crucial discursive arenas in which such ideological contradictory negotiations and normalisations take place.

Although there is a large body of literature on the topic of gender representation in the Pakistani media, most of the studies conducted in the past have limited themselves to content analysis for the purpose of recognizing the overarching themes and stereotypes (Saleem & Shafiq, 2025). Such representation studies can draw attention to patterns of representation, but that research often neglects to explore the production and legitimation of gendered power dynamics in discourse. So far little research using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been conducted to examine the way the language, interaction, story structure, and pictures create gender identities and patriarchal ideologies in Pakistani serials on television. Therefore CDA can disclose more of an analysis since it examines discourse and ideology and how it is linked with power, how people's social inequalities are perpetuated through daily communicative acts (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2008).

Moreover, single motherhood has been relatively ignored in the study of media as a socio-cultural identity in Pakistan. Single motherhood is a socially contested identity, due to pressure around parenting within the context of a patriarchy that places a high premium on motherhood in terms of sacrifice, morality and family unification (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019). Therefore, the representation of single mothers in the media is a place of great interest for the study of gendered negotiation within cultural and ideological confines. But, the literature has paid less attention on how single motherhood has been discursively produced in Pakistani dramas and how single motherhood representation does both challenge and reinforce the dominant gender norms.

There is another major reason why the study of telefilm as a separate media form is lacking. Unlike long running drama serials, telefilms provide short and high-tension stories with occasional references to social issues, frequently in symbolic complex and emotive manner. However, telefilm has not yet been explored much in Pakistani feminist media research. Behadd (2013) is a very instructive case to discuss because the film definitely deals with the issues of women either in the position of mother or women autonomy, emotional satisfaction, between generations, and social morality. The telefilm evokes symbolically wider ideological discourses on women's identity and

agency in Pakistani society due to its narrative and character interactions.

Keeping these gaps in mind, the current research aims to explore the discursive representation of single motherhood in Behadd (2013) with reference to Critical Discourse Analysis theoretical perspective and Intersectional Feminism. This research focuses on unpacking the process whereby language, narrative organization, visual and conversation shapes and frame gendered identities in a discourse dominated by the male line of authority. The study aims to contribute to the existing feminist media studies in Pakistan, bringing together the micro level linguistic practices with the broader level of the conceptions of ideologies regarding gender that are in play, and thus add to the understanding of how television dramas help to produce, negotiate, and normalize gendered power relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The reviewed literature on the representation of gender in Pakistani television dramas consistently underscores the media's key role in shaping and reinforcing social conventions about masculinity and femininity. It is a common opinion among scholars that television dramas are not only the manifestations of social reality but also powerful cultural texts that create and naturalize gender ideologies (Shabbir et al., 2021; Khan & Imran, 2025). In this paradigm, the issue of gender roles is offered in a repetitive pattern in the form of stories in which women are placed in the emotional and domestic spheres, and men are allotted the sphere of power, reason and power to make decisions.

Much has been written about the stereotyped portrayal of women in Pakistani media. Females are represented as self-sacrificing mothers, dutiful wives, and morally accountable caretakers whose major identity is based on family and relational roles (Fatima, 2019; Mushtaq & Ali, 2022). Such representations contribute to the idea that femininity is defined by emotional labor, patience, and endurance, and they restrict women's agency and place them in the realm of the domestic. According to Ashfaq and Shafiq (2018), such representations create an idealized version of womanhood that views suffering as a virtue, does not encourage resistance and makes inequality a natural, culturally appropriate thing.

Concurrently, the current research has found an increasing trend of allegedly progressive discourses that aim to make women seem independent and empowered. However, this flipping around has been described more as a contradiction, and the way these representations are constrained to the traditional models. Instead of being portrayed as an apparently independent female character, the stories of such a character conclude with a resolution that reinforces the status quo in terms of gender roles. Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2024) argue that empowerment as portrayed in Pakistani dramas can be, in many cases, purely symbolic, allowing to create the impression of transformation yet recreating the same systems of patriarchy. This conflict between the modern and the traditional is part of a larger society in which new gender roles are in harmony with deeply established cultural norms.

Beyond representation, several studies have also examined the embedded power relations in media discourse. As an example, Khan (2021) points out that plot elements like domestic violence are normalized or excused through narratives, supporting unequal gender relationships. In the same way, Saleem and Shafiq (2025) interlock gender with the concepts of class and power, showing that female representation in socio-economic groups differs, yet they are all subordinate to males. The results of these studies imply that media talk cannot exist in a vacuum but is strongly engaged with the system of social inequality.

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Insofar as a lot of the literature emphasizes the representation of women, the key element of gender discourse has also been discussed as the construction of masculinity. The male characters are portrayed as hegemonically dominant, emotionally detached, and socially dominating most of the time, which supports hegemonic manhood (Shabbir et al., 2021; Khan & Imran, 2025). These representations legitimize male authority and normalize gender-hierarchical relationships. Simultaneously, they also suppress the identity of men as they curtail the representation of vulnerability and emotional multiplicity.

Notwithstanding the abundance of current research, most studies rely heavily on content analysis, which primarily determines patterns and frequencies of representation. Although this is a valuable technique for charting recurring themes, it has not been very effective at revealing the underlying discursive mechanisms that create meanings and reproduce ideologies (Saleem & Shafiq, 2025). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), on the contrary, offers a more detailed approach to the study of power relations and social conventions by viewing language, narrative structure and symbolic representations as interconnected systems that serve to maintain power (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2008).

Besides, a significant deficit of studies dedicated to single motherhood as a sociological label in Pakistani media discourse is also evident. The literature in the field tends to cover the roles of women in general terms, without critically analyzing the formation of non-traditional identities such as single mothers and the processes of negotiating and arguing them within cultural discourse. It is especially important in a society in which motherhood is romanticized within a patriarchal structure, which is more likely to foster family cohesion and the sacrifice of women (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019; Tabassum & Amin, 2020).

Also, the topic of telefilms as a specific media type has not been fully studied in the literature. Compared to long-running drama serials, telefilms have less detailed stories, which can render more intense and focused depictions of social problems. Nevertheless, they have not been used thoroughly in gender discourse studies. The telefilm Behadd (2013), which is so focused on the conflicts between maternity, independence, and society, offers a good opportunity to explore those problem areas further.

Taking into account these gaps, this paper integrated a critical discourse analysis approach, guided by Intersectional Feminism, to provide an insight into the manner in which the identity of a single mother needs to be constructed and negotiated within Pakistani media. By not following a descriptive approach to analysis, this study has provided a more informative account of how media texts uphold and challenge hegemonic gender ideologies by putting relative emphasis on discursive practices. In this regard, it helps in perpetuating the current sociological debate surrounding gender, power and representation within Pakistani society.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach of this study was Intersectional Feminism. In analyzing the telefilm Behadd (2013) the researcher uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These frameworks facilitated the analysis of the research not just from a perspective of representations of gendered identity in media discourse, but also from a larger lens of how wider constructions of power, morality, culture and patriarchy play out in the lives of women, specifically single mothers in Pakistani society. Intersectionality, a legal concept first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), is grounded in the belief that the oppression and privileges faced by women should not just be

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examined within gender or by simply using either the axes of race or class, as race/culture, class, and social status influence the lives of women in overlapping ways. Crenshaw attacked what he viewed as the more traditional and uniformed feminist mannerism of considering women as an all-encompassing group and stressed that systems of inequalities were not mutually separate or distinct. For this reason, Intersectional Feminism emphasizes the interdependency of social identities and how power dynamics contribute to the multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization.

However, the Black feminist scholars and activists who took on an intersectional feminist perspective and rejected the mainstream understanding of feminist theories, such as Bell Hooks (1981), Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Angela Davis (1981), shaped the development of intersectional thought. Particularly, Patricia Hill Collins discussed the “matrix of domination” and how systems of gender, class, race and social hierarchy work together to keep everything in check, keeping people in a position of inequality. In a similar manner, bell hooks stated that feminism should not ignore power systems but engage them especially those that impact on gender oppression. These real-world expressions drew intersections to the fore, defining intersectionality as a means of grasping the complexity of women's lived reality in various sociocultural contexts.

The intersections between the status of gender, class, family, culture, religion, morality and social norms impact women's identities, and the fundamental fact of Pakistani society that women are the guarantors of the family's happiness and peace makes Intersectional Feminism relevant to recognise. For instance, motherhood is a culturally regulated phenomenon not just about an individual identity, but about sacrifice, emotional labour, family honour and moral responsibility (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019). Single mothers who don't fit in with the social norm may be subject to ideological control and social judgment. Thus, it was necessary for this study to examine the negotiation of single motherhood in Behadd using both the structures of patriarchy, morality, class privilege and cultural expectations.

Additionally, the theoretical framework of Intersectional Feminism provided an insight into the discussion of the portrayal of autonomy of the Pakistani women in TV drama films. Contemporary dramas, however, show educated women who are independent, playing within socially acceptable ethical and moral boundaries which are always dominated by domestic duties and the male expectations (Iqbal et al., 2024). This structure allowed to explore the aspects of both recognition and limitation of female agency, highlighting that women's agency is to some extent regulated, but not entirely determined in the image. By this structure it could be examined how Behadd at the same time gives voice to women and provides limits to their agency, with the effect that women's independence is treated as socially regulated rather than self-determined.

The theory used in this research is Critical Discourse Analysis CDA theory proposed by Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (2008) is the main theoretical analysis used in conducting studies in this research. For CDA, discourse is a social practice that constructs and naturalises ideas, identities and power relations. Media discourse produces meanings through elements of language, visuality, interaction, and narratives. Numerous TV dramas thus serve as discursive realms in which gender identities are produced and renegotiated in the general context of cultural and social regulations.

This research is not a simple descriptive content analysis, but it is an analysis of the discourse in a critical fashion. Content analysis is useful to derive prevailing themes and representational patterns from the telefilm. Still, CDA is useful for the analysis of interwoven patterns at the level of language, conversation, emotion and symbols, which also reproduce patriarchal ideologies. Content analysis provides an entry point into a wider critical discourse analysis.

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The study, aiming to structure the analysis in a systematic way, approaches the discourse from three analytical levels, all of which are interconnected:

Three Levels of Discursive Analysis in the Study

Analytical Level	Focus of Analysis	CDA Function in the Study	Examples from <i>Behadd</i> (2013)
Macro-Level (Thematic Representation)	Recurring themes, narrative patterns, ideological representation of gender roles	Identifies dominant discourses surrounding motherhood, sacrifice, patriarchy, and female autonomy	Repetition of motherhood as sacrifice, domestic femininity, moral expectations from women
Meso-Level (Interaction and Conversational Practices)	Dialogues, turn-taking, interruptions, silence, emotional tone, conversational authority	Examines how power relations are negotiated and reproduced through everyday communication	Male declarative speech (“Yeh faisla ho chuka hai”), female justification, interruptions, emotional negotiation
Micro-Level (Linguistic and Symbolic Meaning-Making)	Word choice, metaphors, gestures, visual framing, body language, spatial positioning	Reveals hidden ideological assumptions embedded within discourse and representation	Use of “qurbani,” domestic visual settings, silence as masculine authority, isolated camera framing of Nadia

Together, these three levels of analysis linked individual linguistic practices with broader sociocultural ideologies. Intersectional Feminism, combined with CDA, further strengthened the framework by reflecting the intersection of class, morality, and cultural norms in the construction of Pakistani media discourse surrounding single motherhood.

Research Methodology

The overall methodological approach of this research was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and qualitative research design was applied for the analysis of the discursive constructions and negotiation of single motherhood in the Pakistani telefilm *Behadd* (2013). A qualitative approach was deemed suitable since the study investigated the meanings, representations and ideology contained in the language, narrative structures and interactions with the characters, rather than quantitative measurement.

The approaches of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that rely on the conceptualizations of Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (2008), according to which discourse is the place where power

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relations and social inequalities are created and perpetuated, have been the basis of the paper. The analysis made possible by CDA also facilitated going beyond surface-level representation and to critically examine how gendered identities and relations were made in the telefilm in terms of linguistic preferences, plot, and visualization.

The primary source of data used in this research was the telefilm *Behadd* (2013), which is approximately forty minutes long. The telefilm was broken down into scenes that centered on plot, setting, and communication of the characters. Major scenes of this corpus were chosen in a purposive sample and analyzed in detail. The selection was made against the research questions and theoretical framework, where only the scenes directly related to the sociological themes of single motherhood, maternal sacrifice, female autonomy, patriarchal authority and generational conflict were counted. The scenes showing transitional, comic or non-gendered discourse were trimmed so as not to lose the analytical focus. This purposive sampling has seen to it that data collection was not done by chance but in the most strategic way to fit in the research objectives.

The unit of analysis included scenes, dialogues, interactions, and visual elements like body language, gestures, spatial positioning, and so on. This trans-layered approach allowed examining the discourse on a macro and micro level. The process of data collection involves repeated telefilm viewing to measure knowledge and thoroughly analyze the data. The first viewing served to get an idea about the overall plot and characters; the second one, in its turn, helped to identify the most widespread gendered patterns; and the third one, in turn, helped to select the scenes and write the interesting dialogue in a systematic manner. Linguistic aspects, emotional coloring, pauses and breaks and non-verbal communication were paid special attention because these aspects are the main ones in the mechanisms of discourse, which exist outside verbal communication.

The analysis started with the latent content analysis, which was used to uncover themes and common patterns in the selected scenes that carried meanings, represented ideology and demonstrated discursive features. The study did not measure the frequency of words in the text but included deeper topics that were sent to the reader through a dialogue, pictorial elements, emotions and character relationships. It was done in an inductive-deductive way to develop the coding framework. Some codes were developed based on patterning from within the telefilm itself, others were ideologically derived from a variety of concepts, including patriarchy, maternal sacrifice, emotional labour, autonomy and gendered authority.

The latent coding process aimed at revealing the naturalization of certain conceptions of motherhood, womanhood, morality and power within the discourse. The usage of symbolic language, the tone of the conversation, the pauses, the silence, the visual framing, and the positioning of the narrative were given special consideration because they helped create an ideological framework of gender identities. In this interpretive approach, latent content analysis became a preliminary discourse analysis that was used in the data collection process, which provided guidance to the researcher in the execution of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the telefilm.

Content analysis and conversation analysis were also included in the overall context of CDA in the research. At the macro level, content analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns across the telefilm and to gain a structural sense of how gender roles were expressed. At the micro level, conversation analysis focused on conversations and interactions between characters, including turn-taking patterns, interruptions, silences, tone and word choice. These micro-level interactions were uncovered as evidence of discursive power, disclosing the processes of

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implementing authority and subordination via everyday communication. Lastly, Critical Discourse Analysis was used at the interpretive level to relate these patterns to the dimensions of a broader sociocultural ideology. This step explored how the practice of the sacrifice of women was normalized, the authority of males was justified, and single motherhood as a disputed identity was created in Pakistani society.

This understanding informed the interpretive process as the researcher assumed the position of a part of the same socio-cultural environment whilst remaining critically reflexive. As a Pakistani media communication follower, the researcher could immerse himself in the telefilm's cultural elements and comprehend the subjectivity of qualitative interpretation. To realize the analytic rigor, any interpretation relied on the text data such as dialogues, scenes and visual descriptions. The systematic approach used for the data selection, repetition viewing, coding and interpretation were employed to boost the transparency, reliability of the study, and guarantee that the analysis procedure became consistent, theoretically well-founded and sociologically meaningful. The macro-level analysis was linked to the analysis of the widest possible spectrum of ideologies and reoccurring representations of gender in the telefilm. In this stage, themes of sacrifice, maternal responsibility, autonomy and patriarchal morality were noted through content analysis.

The meso-level has addressed the interaction among characters. In this phase, the use of words, pauses, interruptions, expressions and dialogue management were analyzed. This goal was to illustrate how activities and routines of everyday communication established and perpetuated authority and subordination.

The micro-level analysis focused on the figures and images in the telefilm, and the language and symbols. The meanings of metaphors, tones, gestures, camera framing and visual composition are explored through analysis. These features emphasised the dynamics of emotional regulation which naturalised patriarchal privilege and thereby[1] limited women's agency.

Translayered Coding and Theme Generation Strategy

Analytical Layer	Focus of Coding	Type of Data Examined	CDA Purpose	Example from <i>Behadd</i> (2013)
Textual Layer	Repeated words, metaphors, recurring thematic expressions	Dialogues, keywords, emotionally loaded phrases	Identifies dominant discourses and representational patterns	“Qurbani,” “zimmedari,” “maa,” “had,” “izzat”
Interactional Layer	Conversational structure and communicative behavior	Interruptions, pauses, silences, tone, turn-taking	Examines how power operates within everyday communication	Male conversational control, female justification, emotional negotiation

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Visual-Symbolic Layer	Non-verbal and cinematic representation	Camera framing, gestures, body language, domestic spaces, lighting	Reveals ideological meanings beyond spoken language	Nadia isolated in domestic spaces, lowered gaze, restrained posture
Interpretive-Ideological Layer	Broader sociocultural meanings and power structures	Combined interpretation of textual, visual, and conversational patterns	Connects discourse to patriarchy, gender norms, and cultural ideology	Motherhood normalized as sacrifice; autonomy framed as moral risk
Theme Generation Layer	Synthesis of recurring discursive patterns into analytical themes	Integrated findings from all previous layers	Produces CDA-informed thematic categories	“Chains Draped in Silk,” “The Illusion of Choice,” “Voices in Collision”

Single Motherhood: Insights through CDA

The identity of single motherhood has not been performed in the form of something definite and stable, but as a discursive production of a composite and continued negotiation between autonomy, morality and cultural expectations. The telefilm introduces the discourse of motherhood in a wide-ranging and even contradictory set of discourses, both restrictive and enabling of female agency. Conversation analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and content analysis all enabled the identification of four leading themes delineating the mechanisms through which the gendered identities are constructed using linguistic, visual and narrative strategies in the telefilm.

“Chains Draped in Silk”: The Subtle Domestication of Womanhood

Construction of motherhood as a sacrifice and moral duty, which is the most prevalent theme and the leading one, is also a rhetorical thread running through the story. Motherhood in Behadd is not a negotiable and redefinable position; instead, it is brought up many times as an ethical ground, which demands emotional tolerance and denying oneself. Particularly, this is quite evident in the packaging of the numerous encounters of Nadia Jamal, whose identity is continuously diminished to her maternal identity. In a moment of emotional outburst, Nadia tries to explain her system of life choices to her daughter. She speaks in an emotionally detached but calm voice, *“Maa hona sirf zimmedari nahi, ek qurbani hai jo har roz deni parti hai... aur har baar apni khushi se pehle tumhari sochni parti hai.”* The diction of this phrase is itself interesting since it naturalizes the concept of sacrifice as an obligatory part of being a mother and a necessity that must always be there, but not as a social necessity.

In this instance, it's Heavenly Mother's relationship with herself, her erasure, and emotional resilience. The statement validates one of the cultural understandings and virtues of woman's

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sacrifice. In another shot, Nadia's daughter is asking herself why she made the choices she did:

“Aap hamesha sab ke liye compromise karti rahi hain... kabhi apne liye kyun nahi socha?”

A small part of the conversation addresses the value of sacrifice, something that has been expected of a man, but the rest of the conversation falls silent after the patriarchal expectations are raised. In addition, one character says on a family quarrel:

“Maa ki zindagi uske bachon se alag nahi hoti.”

This means the singleness of motherhood is symbolically erased and motherhood is conceptualised solely in terms of ‘mothering’ others and relationships.

Dialogue is underpinned by visual discourse. Nadia's availability is repeatedly represented in private settings, and her actions are kept to a minimum: sometimes she is depicted in a sitting position in dark lighting with introspective gestures and eyes downward. Close-up camera shots bring out emotions and psychological distancing. This way of visually framing women is part of the ideology which makes them appear disciplined objects who do not unmask patriarchy, but superficially disobey it.

From a CDA perspective, these markers of the language and images are frequent and establish a norm that uses the association of feminine with sacrifice. The telefilm is not only about the presentation of women as caregivers but it is also orchestrating the notion of caring as the moral base of womanliness itself. Thus, Behadd's theme exemplifies the construction of the patriarchy in women's work as romanticizing work that involves emotions and makes selfless sacrifice to be the norm for women's motherhood.

This discussion can be augmented by visual framing. The scene setting puts Nadia in a domestic setting, often sitting or motionless, and in low-key lighting and close camera viewpoints, which accentuate emotional vulnerability. Slow speech, well-in-check gestures and lowered look are indicators of an internalized form of discipline, and point to the fact that she is not forced into an unwilling commitment to sacrifice, but rather controlled internally. It could be symbolized by internalization of the patriarchal ideology, where women are able to represent and recreate their expectations of themselves through CDA. The repetition of such scenes throughout the telefilm forms motherhood as an ethical judge by which female identity is gauged. Any departure from this is put in the context of moral failure and not background. With this, sacrifice is not only normalized but also made to be highly valued in morality. It serves to cement further a gendered system whereby the value that women have is centered around their ability to do emotional work.

“The Throne of Silence”: Masculinity and the Authority of Restraint

Mixed with this is the second theme: the illusion of female agency within the frame of a very strict story, which suggests the paradoxical depiction of female agency. Following a quite parallel path, Behadd introduces the figure of a confident, educated, and socially mobile woman, Nadia, but in any case, as a component of discursive processes which redefine her independence as a conditional and possibly problematic concept. Telefilm gives Nadia free time when she can express herself and make choices. However, the free times are generally pre-defined by narrative and conversational tools that reinstate the traditional norms.

This contradiction is visible in several confrontational dialogues. In one scene, Nadia asserts her right to make decisions regarding her own life:

“Meri zindagi ke faislay karne ka haq mujhe hona chahiye.”

In order to demonstrate this, there is a moment in the scene where a confrontation takes place when

Nadia insists that she has a right to make personal choices about her life, only to be challenged by the reply, "*Tumhari zindagi sirf tumhari nahi hai... tum maa ho, aur maa ko apne faislay apni marzi se nahi, zimmedari se karne chahiye.*" This discussion is especially enlightening, as it re-examines independence, not as a privilege, but as an ethical responsibility that is congruent with maternal responsibility. The regulatory tool in overpowering the agency of Nadia is the paradigm shift in the regulatory aspect of prescribing as a means of disclosure rather than choice as a means of disclosure. The conversational order is also a favorite element; Nadia is capable of talking, but her voice is tipped away and repeated in the moral setup, which curbs its power.

It is one of the forms of ideological containment in CDA terms: this empowerment is formally acknowledged but structurally restricted. The telefilm thus helps to develop what can be referred to as organized liberty, where women appear to be self-reliant but bound by the cultural norms. Feminist media criticism also claims that there are certain apparent successes that usually contain underlying inequalities (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019). This limitation is further encouraged by an intersectional approach in that, irrespective of her privileged social position, class and education, Nadia cannot entirely distance herself from the ethical requirements that accompany motherhood. It is greater to prove that autonomy is not rigidly distributed, but it is formed under the impact of interweaving behaviors of gender, culture and social norms.

“Voices in Collision”: Generational Conflict and Gendered Morality

The third theme relates the gender construction of authority, not only in linguistic expression, but also in interactions and interaction, to emphasize that power is a part of our daily interactions. In Behadd, the control of the authority (male) is achieved not by an obvious establishment of dominance but by some subtle discourses that foster decisiveness, conciseness and control. Male characters will be making claiming statements like *Yeh faisla ho chuka hai, it can be done* or *Is baat par mazeed behas ki zarurat nahi hai*, there is no discussion on it. Insistent power implies not that it can be discussed, but that it must be done, they would be making statements of “this has to be done” or “this matter can be done, *Yeh faisla ho chuka hai*” The fact that these statements are not emotionally expounded bolsters the relationship between masculinity and rationality.

A female voice, however, is one that justifies, explains and moves emotionally. There generally aren't more grandiose statements like "Nadia wants to give meaning to" or the like, but rather she is working on finding meaning. This juxtaposition forms a hierarchically organized communication hierarchy in which the males' words are final, substantive, and fatally decisive, and the females' words are responsive, secondary, and importantly speaking defensive in nature. In such a force, the pauses take on their own special meaning; typically, the female voices are disrupted or distracted in times of conflict.

In a CDA perspective, the micro-levels linguistic patterns represent the identification of language-forciveness as a form of power and not. As long as it is repeated, authority has been reassured and seems natural and inevitable. This also reflects the perspective of Van Dijk (2008) whereby power is manifested in terms of the process of discourse control whereby the more powerful groups determine the conditions on which communication is to be carried out. Gender, in Behadd, is linked to this control and it is the male characters that are the “glue” of the discursive arena. On a more abstract level, it can be said to be the reiteration of dominant masculinity in the Pakistani media wherein males are depicted as the decision makers and females as the makers of emotional and relational space.

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The dialogue shifts the discussion away from individual rights toward maternal obligation. Female autonomy is therefore delegitimized through moral discourse. Similarly, in another scene, Nadia is told:

“Aurat ki azadi tab tak theek hai jab tak us se ghar toot na jaye.”

This statement reflects conditional empowerment, where women’s freedom remains acceptable only if it does not challenge patriarchal family structures. In another emotionally tense interaction, Nadia attempts to justify her emotional needs:

“Kya maa hone ka matlab yeh hai ke aurat apni khwahishat bhool jaye?”

Instead of receiving validation, her question is met with silence and disapproval, emphasizing how female desire itself becomes socially suspicious. Another dialogue further reinforces this containment when an elder remarks:

“Maa ko apne faislay jazbaat se nahi, zimmedari se karne chahiye.”

Here, autonomy is reconstructed as a moral duty rather than self-determination.

The redirection also denies Nadia autonomy, with her rebellious moments also being depicted as upsetting, affecting her emotions, and not really considered socially warranted behavior. While the telefilm affords her the options to voice in her own style, her voice can be stilled or reframed as moral voice or a playfully affectual tonus. The action is one of attitudes taken as a performance. The statement is symbolic in the sense that she asserts the presence of female agency but it is circumscribed.

Nadia's class privilege and education does not ensure complete autonomy from an intersectional feminist viewpoint, as cultural positioning around motherhood persists as a continued association with her identity. Empowerment in the telefilm is therefore not free of negotiation and restricted to certain conditions. In sum, it is the theme of this very work that Behadd is able to give the impression of woman's freedom and at the same time hold her down with morality and emotional discourse rooted in the patriarchal system.

“The Illusion of Choice”: Agency, Autonomy, and Narrative Containment

The fourth theme, the negotiation of single motherhood as a negotiated identity, summarizes one of the main conflicts of the telefilm. It is not an established or accepted identity of Nadia, who is, in fact, a single mother, and she is obliged to justify herself each time, in a situation of social judgment. Her choices are under interrogation by the other characters, in addition to the fact that the very structure of the narration does so. In one particularly educative scene in which there is generational conflict, an older character remarks, "Aurat ki asli pehchan uska ghar hota hai... aur jab aurat apni had se bahar nikalti hai, toh sirf apni nahi, poore ghar ki izzat daav par lag jati hai." The quote shows the reasoning of a culture that diminishes the female persona to domesticity and moral responsibility and sees any deviation as a threat to the societal order.

This discourse is frequently exemplified by constructing such scenes in a visual way. The narration frequently puts Nadia at the center of a crowd of people, in which different characters attack each other, which makes her feel alone, and she is attacked by people. Her body behavior is generally defensive yet calm and peaceful, and this presentation is a continuous bargaining between the resistance and submission. Even the telefilm opens up opportunities in which Nadia breaks these expectations. Still, these instances are relatively short and cast in the form of experiences that disturb more on an emotional than a social plane.

This theme can be discussed within the framework of intersectional feminism and can be

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understood in the context of a complex conflict between gender and cultural norms and the generational expectations linked to single motherhood. Motherhood has an impact on the identity of Nadia, which is determined by the moral framework within which Nadia's motherhood of Nadia is evaluated. Single motherhood, therefore, is a negotiated identity, defined by the telefilm as not to be freely adopted and accepted, but to be openly debated through discourse.

Discourse becomes apparent in several scenes involving generational confrontation. In one particularly significant dialogue, an elder character states:

“Aurat ki asli pehchan uska ghar hota hai.”

The statement reduces female identity to domesticity and positions family roles as the ultimate measure of womanhood. In another scene, the same character remarks:

“Jab aurat apni had se bahar nikalti hai, toh poore ghar ki izzat daav par lag jati hai.”

The phrase *had se bahar nikalna* symbolically frames female independence as social transgression. Similarly, Nadia faces moral scrutiny when another character questions her choices:

“Log kya kahenge ek maa ke bare mein jo apni marzi se jeena chahti hai?”

This dialogue demonstrates how societal judgment functions as a mechanism of patriarchal regulation. In another emotionally tense interaction, Nadia quietly responds:

“Har aurat ko sirf maa ke roop mein kyun dekha jata hai?”

This is a question that confronts dominant ideology, but the surrounding ambiance of silence and emotional tension suggests how hard it is to go out of step with the socially normalized expectation of gender.

This is amplified when it is visual. Nadia often comes across in the crowded rooms of families, representing emotional and social alienation. Her demeanor is reserved and her eyes lowered and her back straightening, hinting at a wobbling balance between defiant and compliant forces. Even instances of rebellion are brief and tender, indicating that the tale in the end focuses on maintaining social cohesion and order over meaningful change.

A feminist perspective from the lens of gender and intersections makes single motherhood in Behadd a negotiated identity negotiated through morality, culture and family honour, and in terms of the expectations of the patriarchy. Slight glimpses of dissenting to the norms are offered in the telefilm, but throughout, they are swallowed up by the prevailing cultural ideology. The theme thus shows how Behadd on the one hand exposing and on the other hand consolidating patriarchal structures show up when single motherhood is presented as socially vulnerable and subjected to moral regulation, and is repeatedly contested.

Together, these themes showed that Behadd is a complex discursive field that produces and regulates gender identities and, in some cases, provokes them. The telefilm will not only be a reproduction of the norms that characterize patriarchy, but it will also expose their contradictions, allowing moments of tension and resistance to run free. But these times are later contextualized in a bigger ideological framework, whereby stability and conformity play a more significant role. With the help of CDA, we can understand that not only is discourse engaged in the process of reflecting the social reality, but discourse is also involved in the process of producing and sustaining the social reality. In a period of over two years, Behadd illustrates how the discourses of the Pakistani media work out in the ongoing negotiation of gender, power and identity within Pakistani society.

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Discussion

The results of this study show that Behadd (2013) is a discursive field in which the identity of single motherhood is continuously produced, dialogically negotiated and controlled via words, phrases and story structures/orientations and interaction between characters. Based on the theoretical work of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Intersectional Feminism, the result of the study shows that through the perspective of the triple culture, the telefilm is able to construct the space for the expression and empowerment of women and also uphold the patriarchal cultural norm. This, in turn, reflects the general sociocultural dynamics that prevail in Pakistan, where traditional roles of women as mothers and moral custodians and as responsible family caregivers are compatible with the modern ideas about women being autonomous and empowered.

One of the key findings of this study is the concept of discursive construction of motherhood as 'sacrifice' and 'affectional effort'. A study shows that motherhood has always been depicted as a social role and a moral obligation that requires sacrifice, perseverance and sensitivity. Conforming to the previous feminist study in Pakistan, which suggests women are idealized as caretakers and martyrs in dramas (Ahmed & Wahab, 2019; Tabassum & Amin, 2020). These representations are not neutral from the CDS perspective, but rather have a clearly ideological agenda, automatically associating the feminine gender with emotional labour and self-giving, an association which is increasingly developing as the number of materials with this trope grows. As Fairclough (1995) exclaims, discourse can be a principal factor in the constitution of social realities, and in this case, it can be seen that the repetition at linguistic and visual levels serve to normalise motherhood as the final statement of female identity.

The study also focuses on the gendered perception of women's autonomy, in the telefilm. Nadia can certainly be said to be educated, socially aware, and able to make personal choices, but she has limited agency: there is conditionality and morality. Throughout the narrative her independence is consistently transferred to familial duties and maternal responsibilities. This is in line with the pre-existing study, indicating that female empowerment is often portrayed in Pakistani dramas in symbolic manner rather than a transformative way (Iqbal et al., 2024; Mehra, 2019). The telefilm does not prohibit any resistance coming from the females, but this resistance is always enclosed in a male patriarchy discourse. From an intersectional feminist viewpoint, this reveals that cultural morality, expectations within the family environment, and commonly held social values besides gender all influence women's autonomy. Nadia's identity as an educated upper class woman helps complete Crenshaw's comments of intersectionality. In 'Dying While Black', as a mother and a woman, she still faces the expectations of being a patriotic and moral citizen.

A second significant limitation is that the telefilm's discourse/communicative phenomenon is gendered. The analysis results showed that there were many differences found between the way men and women use speech concerning the exercise of authority. According to the analysis results, it was found that there were many differences in type of speech that was used when talking about exercising authority and it was revealed that male characters used declarative speech with clarity and feelings, while female characters used explanatory speech with feelings of negotiation and justification. Unequal power relations are also further evident through interruptions, silence, control of conversation. The results presented support Van Dijk's (2008) notion that discourse is a mechanism for the reproduction of dominance and social inequality in everyday discourse. The study shows that the control and maintenance of patriarchal authority in Behadd is not only exercised explicitly, but also subliminally through communicative practices that build male

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authority and female inferiority, or subordination.

The results also indicate that the phenomenon of single parenthood is constructed as a socially contested and morally controlled identity. The social judgement and moral criticism is faced, in turn, in making decisions and expressing her wishes, and is shared by Nadia, who is subjected to such evaluations and challenges inasmuch as she is acting outside of the realm of the domestic sphere. This reflects Lazar's (2007) belief in Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis that often media discourse has restricted room for resistance but it ultimately does not change the dominant ideologies. Behadd briefly tests out some of the traditional notions about gender, but the story eventually steers these antagonisms towards conformity with society and stability within their families. The telefilm as a result confesses a kind of "patriarchal disclaimer," rather than questioning the patriarchal form or meaning.

The analysis is reinforced further by the adoption of the notion of Intersectional Feminism which shows how various social factors contribute to the experience and identity of women. The results suggest that class privilege and schooling does not free one from the restrictions of patriarchy. Rather, motherhood remains a culturally prescribed identity influenced by morals and family honour and expectations of gender. This illustrates Patricia Hill Collins (1990) idea of the matrix of domination which are the systems of being dominated that interact and reinforce each other. Consequently, the study shows that the agency of women in the Pakistani media is socially negotiated, not complete.

Overall the Behads (2013) have been linked to the cultural and ideological conflicts between modernity and traditional gender norms in Pakistani society. What is important to note is that the telefilm by no means just reproduces patriarchy but also shows its internal tensions through moments of resistance and emotional altercation and negotiation. But these moments are only structurally contained in a text, which obviously emphasizes the necessity of social order, family solidarity and moral correctness. This approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) along Intersectional Feminism adds value to feminist studies of the media by showing that media discourse actively regulates and constructs gender identities through language, narrative and representation.

Conclusion

The study adopted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Intersectional Feminism frameworks to explore and investigate how single motherhood has been discursively constructed in a Pakistani telefilm entitled Behadd (2013). Findings reveal that the telefilm represents and narrates motherhood as a moral obligation that is intricately tied to sacrifice, emotional work and social responsibility. At the same time, these acts of agency are sometimes seen as expressions of freedom and freedom of choice in women, such discursive freedoms are confined to patriarchal social norms and modes of expression. The analysis also indicates that the power relations are reproduced not only in the form of the stories constructed during the interview but also in the manner of speech, visual symbols, silence and framing of emotions during the interviews.

The study also demonstrates the intersection of masculinity with the types of authorities (rationality and conversational control) and femininity with the types of negotiations (emotional) and accountability (moral). By depicting single motherhood, Behadd plays out the dynamics of what it means to be a modern woman and become independent, while reflecting on family, moral and social roles. The telefilm is thus simultaneously exposed and reinforced by a patriarchal ideology, thus

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being a complex discursive field in which the gender identities are continually regulated and contested.

Future Implications

This study has implications from a sociological and academic perspective as well to understand the role of gender media representation in Pakistan. The research indicates that TV dramas are not only reflections of existing realities of society but also have a strong influence on how motherhood, femininity, morals and the family are understood. The study suggests that future research should elucidate how new media (Facebook and YouTube) and modern stage enactments negotiate the new gender roles in Pakistani culture, specifically in terms of non-traditional female roles like single mothers, working mothers and divorced women.

In addition, the study adds methodologically by showing how Critical Discourse Analysis is incorporated with latent thematic analysis to analyze the media discourse in different aspects. This methodology could be extended with comparative studies in relation to various styles of drama, various localities' drama productions and various drama in streaming media and explore change in discourses of gender and power. Also, work on audience reception could offer some insights into how these representations are Received and Internalized.

A study is important for feminist research as it shows that there is a need for a challenge to the media narrations. Rather, the gentle ways through which norms of patriarchy are normalized led to the groundwork for research and building awareness on this issue. The study is relevant in terms of discussions of feminist approaches because it focuses on the need to question the media discourse and consider the ways in which the media operates in subtle ways to normalize the patriarchy. Resistance or ability to express oneself is possible in some aspects of the story as allowed by Behadd, but the overall takeaway from the story is that patriarchal systems adapt, and include some amount of empowerment but never, ever change the structure of power. Cautionary measures about the inherent significance of feminist studies that turn these ideas of female freedom in culturally conservative societies upside down, as these are still shaped in (and through) the media.

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