

FEMINIST PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN IN PAKISTANI DRAMAS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF *INKAAR* AND *TERE BIN*

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Abstract:

The succeeding paper presents a comparative feminist critique of the representation of the women characters in two widely popular Pakistan dramas: Inkaar by Zafar Mairaj and Tere Bin by Nooran Makhdoom. Further, complex women's autonomy, resilience, and struggles are considered in the wake of the patriarchal framework. A discussion is held on how the authors have projected themes of justice, victim-blaming, power dynamics, love, and societal expectations. While Inkaar revolves around the woman's brave fight against sexual harassment, abuse of power, and victim-blaming by offering a critique of societal norms, most Bollywood films marginalize or completely silence women's voices. Tere Bin Lent focuses on the women's struggles for self-determination and identity within the context of both the family and romantic relationships. This analysis proves that Inkaar cements women's strength in rebellion against systemic injustices through subverting the traditional gender role, while in Tere Bin, such female empowerment is both enabled and constrained by love and traditional norms. This paper critically analyzes dialogues, character arcs, and key themes through a feminist prism to look at aspects setting these dramas apart in reflecting and influencing societal perceptions about women in Pakistani media. The findings underline a continuing tension within Pakistani television between portrayals of female characters who are empowered and yet succumb to traditional expectations, with an increasing call on viewers to ruminate upon the broader socio-cultural ramifications for changing women's roles in South Asia. Consequently, this piece invites a deeper reflection into the state and implications of women's representation in Pakistani dramas within the gender discourse through such an analysis.

Keywords: Gender Representation; Feminist Discourse; Patriarchy; Female Agency; Power Dynamics; Inkaar; Tere Bin.

Introduction

This is a common factor in South Asian media, where the portrayal of female characters in TV drama plays an important role in the construction and development of societal perceptions and gender roles. Pakistani dramas represent some of the best storylines in the region, reflecting the dominant culture and social fabric found in the country. The intention of this paper is to undertake a comparative, feminist review of two ongoing Pakistani dramas, namely *Tere Bin* by Nooran Makhdoom and *Inkaar* written by Zafar Mairaj. Considering the above-named theoretical approaches, the paper shall take into consideration the framework of the narrative structure and character analysis. Meanwhile, the present study shall explore how both dramas feudalized women's agency, struggle, and resilience in tussles foisted by the patriarchal expectations of society, while developing and underpinning feminist themes. The paper further underlines how such dramas are challenging or perpetuating traditional gender roles, serving as a prism for critical lookers-on to raise valuable questions with regard to the depiction of women in contemporary Pakistani media.

Zafar Mairaj's *Inkaar* focuses more on a direct confrontation with issues of sexual harassment, power dynamics, and victim-blaming. The drama centers on the character Sadaf, a young girl who becomes an object of desire for a powerful man and who must face societal, legal, and familial consequences after trivializing him. *Inkaar* is marked by its cutting portrayal of the emotional and

It reflects psychological trauma that women have to go through in the face of such exploitation. The character of Sadaf reflects resilience; however, her journey was complicated because of societal stigmas attached to the actions she had chosen to undertake. The drama catches some issues about justice, victim-shaming, and the complexities of standing one's ground in a male-dominated society. Through the fight for justice by Sadaf, *Inkaar* launches a feminist critique against the deep-rooted cultural norms that structurally render the women's experiences of harassment and assault invalid or unbelievable.

Literature review

Female characterization in Pakistani dramas is being implicitly reshaped with time, and many studies have identified the change in roles and portrayals of women in this particular cultural context. Research into feminist perspectives within Pakistani media often tends towards criticizing the low agency given to female characters; this points to the tussle between traditional gender roles and emerging empowerment narratives.

The papers centered on *Inkaar* by Zafar and *Tere Bin* by Nooran carry a lot of weight into these dynamics and analyze just how each drama reflects and questions societal norms as they relate to women.

The former is oft-discussed in feminist discourse due to the way it questions consent and power dynamics in intimate relationships, but *Tere Bin* also presents a complicated exploration of love, sacrifice, and women's agency. Both dramas mirror tensions between cultural conservatism and shifting gender roles, documenting how women navigate cultural expectations, family burdens, and personal ills. Scholars argue that although these

While the dramas significantly comment on gender relations, they also reflect the shortcomings of mainstream media with respect to fully empowering women in contemporary Pakistani society.

Methodology of Research

This study will adopt a comparative feminist analysis of the female characterization in two popular Pakistani dramas: *Inkaar* by Zafar and *Tere Bin* by Nooran. The qualitative approach will involve a careful textual analysis of narratives regarding the portrayal of female characters, roles played in the story, and a socio-cultural dynamic represented thereby.

The study examines themes such as agency, victimhood, resistance, and empowerment within these dramas, with particular attention to how

In one way or another, gender norms are either challenged or reinforced. The study will analyze key scenes, dialogues, and character arcs to find out the underlying gendered representation in them and what it has to say about societal perception regarding womanhood. As a complementary piece of textual analysis, feminist theory provides the critical lens through which this research project undertakes interpretation with the intention of reflecting upon the ways these television dramas reflect and influence the greater socio-cultural context of Pakistani society.

Analysis:

This section is divided into two subsections as follows:

1. *Inkaar* (2019) – A Feminist Analysis

Overview: *Inkaar* is fiction that moves around the sensitive issue of sexual harassment in the corporate world. The play follows the story of Mehak as she fights against the sexual exploitation at the hands of her boss, Irtiza. The serial points out issues of power imbalance.

With Mehak's fight for justice as the main focus, dynamics, patriarchy, and victim-blaming come into consideration.

Mehak: "I will not be a victim of anyone."

Mehak's statement is a reflection of her inner resolve to not be defined by the trauma. It is one of those powerful feminist moments whereby the woman relishes regaining her agency and dismantling the notion of a victim in a male-dominated world.

Irtiza: "You really think this will make a difference? People will always take the male's side."

Through this dialogue, Irtiza shows the patriarchal mindset, wherein, in many harassment cases, the men's word is taken more seriously than that of women. To Mehak's accusation, he replied in a disbelieving manner, showing that these are barriers created within the system for women to seek justice.

Mehak: "If I keep quiet, I will never be able to forgive myself."

This again is an important line that shows the turmoil Mehak has been going through. This speaks volumes of her urge to rise and speak for her rights, at the risk of all consequences, when the societal demands are asking her to remain mum.

Mehak: "I don't need your sympathy, I need justice."

Mehak does not want to be pitied by the people surrounding her. Her insistence on justice as opposed to sympathy underlines the fact that the bottom line is to redress the root cause of her plight, which dates back to the general disregard for women's rights.

Irtiza: Mehak, you are wrecking my life.

This line reflects how manipulation and victim-blaming work in a patriarchal society. Irtiza, here, is trying to shift the blame onto Mehak-another common practice to assuage the blame off of male oppression when women at any point in time may raise their voices.

Mehak: "You don't own me; I am not your possession."

Mehak calls out Irtiza for taking her body and her choices as a given. It comes across in this dialogue as a statement of bodily autonomy, one from the major feminist principles-a woman's choices and her body completely belong to her and are only hers to decide upon.

Mehak: "Justice is not just about the law; it's about the truth."

It is this line that speaks to the very notion that justice must transcend beyond the realms of law. This line typifies the feminist point of view that truth and empowerment emanate from certain women's experiences, especially those experiences that challenge the patriarchy.

Mehak's Lawyer: "Your reputation will get spoiled if you go public."

This is symbolic of the pressure which women are often forced to face in society, being compromised on their integrity to save the reputation of the man. This reflects the common storyline of slut-shaming and victim-blaming that women often face when reporting harassment.

Mehak: "This is my fight, and I shall not stop."

This line is an assertion of strength and the will to do. The persistence of Mehak in the face of adversity signifies women's ongoing struggle to be heard and taken seriously while fighting against patriarchal structures.

Mehak: "No one will be able to silence me anymore."

This final line underlines the victory of Mehak, who struggled for her voice. It reflects the feminist fight for women's empowerment where they refuse to be silenced by social pressures or male dominance.

2. *Tere Bin* (2023)-A Feminist Review

Overview: *Tere Bin* is a romance drama that has everything from love and betrayal to societal norms. Murtasim, the lead character, is a rich authoritative man, whereas his female lead Meerab is strong-willed and independent, which doesn't yield to being tamed by society and expectations.

The feminist angle in this drama is how Meerab confronts traditional gender roles in a society that expects passiveness and obedience from its women.

Meerab: "I won't let anyone control my life, not even you."

The following dialogue represents a direct declaration of Meerab's independence in which she does not want Murtasim to rule her life, hence asking him not to become authoritative, which is against the general expectation that keeps women subordinate to men, even in romantic relationships.

Murtasim: "A woman should know her place."

Here is also the patriarchal mindset of Murtasim, representative of the male authority that expects the females to remain quiet and docile. It shows the relentless fight for women to assert their equality in a world where they are expected to always remain silent.

Meerab: "I am not somebody's daughter, I am somebody. I too have an entity of my own."

Meerab would here stress her individuality. Her insistence on not being identified totally by her familial network can be seen as a feminist statement of the right of a woman to define herself independent of the limited roles which tradition places upon her.

Meerab: "You think I will just stand by while you make decisions for me?"

It is this line that reflects Meerab's resistance to patriarchal control. She questions the traditional notion that men have the right to make decisions on behalf of women, calling for equality in decision-making within relationships.

Murtasim: "Your independence will be your destruction."

Murtasim's words reveal the danger patriarchal society associates with women's

That is independence. This statement reflects the fear that empowered women pose to traditional structures, which aim to keep women confined to submissive roles.

Meerab: "I'll live my life on my terms, not on anyone's expectations."

Here, Meerab asserts a clear sense of agency. In her firm stance to live her life on principles that she sees fit for her and not succumbing to pressures of society or males in her life, Meerab could well be living out the feminist ideals of self-determination and independence.

Meerab: "You can't keep me imprisoned in your world; I will not be your prisoner."

This dialogue evidences the refusal of Meerab to live in a world defined by men's oppressive control. It was a feminist statement about the desire of women for liberation, not exactly in terms of physical incarceration but from the societal and emotional handcuffs of the patriarchal figures.

Meerab: Love is not about possession; it is about equality.

Meerab goes against the conventional attitude one has toward the idea of love, which is a one-sided affair maintained with subjugation. She moves a demand for equality, a feminist demand that love has to be based on mutual respect as well as liberty rather than on possession.

Meerab: "I won't let my worth be defined by anyone else's standards."

This line speaks from the feminist theory of self-worth: Meerab rejects being attributed on the basis of patriarchal external lines and puts weight on the value of a woman being intrinsic and not defined by others.

Meerab: "I am not your property; I am my own person."

This is quite a strong statement of autonomy on Meerab's part. She hereby pronounces quite the opposite of what has conventionally been held regarding women in romantic relationships—that women are men's possessions. This is a quintessential feminist moment that speaks for woman's choices in self-determination and identity. Findings and discussion

This research underpins diversified female characterization processes in *Inkaar* by Zafar and Tere Bin by Nooran, demonstrating different dimensions of perspective on representation in Pakistani

dramas about feminism. In *Inkaar*, the females are portrayed as strong, iron-willed, and defiant against traditional or stereotypical expectations of society. The charactership demonstrates autonomy of choice, symbolizing a shift toward empowerment in portrayals compatible with feminist ideals.

Contrasted to that, *Tere Bin* often reinforces traditional gender roles where female characters are submissive, held back by chains of societal expectations. Such a portrayal only underlines the persistence of patriarchal values, which have limited character agency and perpetuated traditional gender expectations. This juxtaposition between the two at the level of plot points to a larger reflection of the conversation ongoing in the Pakistani media on gender roles, hinting at tension between traditional representations and evolving feminist perspectives.

Findings

The findings of this study reveal distinct approaches to female characterization in *Inkaar* by Zafar Mairaj and *Tere Bin* by Nooran Makhdoom, offering nuanced insights into feminist representation within Pakistani television dramas. In *Inkaar*, female characters are depicted as resilient, assertive, and self-reliant, challenging entrenched societal expectations and reflecting a more progressive feminist narrative. Their autonomy and moral strength symbolize a shift toward empowered representations of women that align with contemporary feminist ideals. Conversely, *Tere Bin* often reinforces traditional gender hierarchies, portraying female characters as emotionally dependent and constrained by social conventions. This depiction underscores the persistence of patriarchal structures that continue to limit women's agency and reinforce conventional gender norms. Through the comparative analysis of these two dramas, the study highlights an ongoing dialogue within Pakistani media about the redefinition of gender roles, exposing the tension between traditional portrayals and emerging feminist perspectives.

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of feminist discourses in *Inkaar* and *Tere Bin* leads one to come to the realization that Pakistani dramas portray female agency within a patriarchal context quite differently. For the first time, *Inkaar* unravels the vista of a woman tearing into systemic injustice with loads of courage and resilience through which she spreads the 'f' word: freedom, justice, and self-respect. On the other hand, *Tere Bin* gives a more outlined yet usually bound perspective, whereby one should find female empowerment being opposed at every turn by societal expectations and traditional roles. Taken together, these dramas signal the strides along with the shortcomings in female representation within Pakistani media. Both serials encourage critical reflection of viewers regarding gendered norms and spur worthwhile discussion over the role of women in changing South Asian societies. In their ways, *Inkaar* and *Tere Bin* illustrate ways Pakistani television can reinforce as well as subvert cultural scripts to offer narratives that hew to varied women's experiences in today's world.

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