

CHALLENGING MALE PRIVILEGES AND GENDER NORMS THROUGH THE USE OF HUMOUR BY PAKISTANI FACEBOOK USERS

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to explore humour and its use by Pakistani social media users to challenge male privileges and gender norms. Humour has been used for a long as a tool to speak truth to the power and challenge the power structures prevailing in a society at a particular time. As we know that gender is a social construct that is employed by the power that be to establish its dominance over the opposite gender, different feminists have argued that humour can be an effective tool for subverting the dominant position of males in a patriarchal society. Moreover, the three-dimensional model presented by Fairclough provides us with an effective tool to analyze humour, its various forms and its subtle use to question the dominant position of man in Pakistani society. The study is delimited to analyze memes and texts generated by a Woman who seek gender equality in Pakistan and have been advocating equal rights for women. This study finds that humour can be an effective tool to challenge gender hegemony and male privilege. Employing parody, an irony, satire which are different forms of humour can be utilized to expose the so-called neutrality of the language and the power which is intended to serve by such use of language.

Keywords: Male privileges, Gender norms, Humour, Pakistani Facebook users/Pakistan

1. INTRODUCTION

Humor, parody, and mockery from a position of disadvantage are great tools to confront power. They go for the kill, i.e., they deny power the legitimacy that they crave. A serious critique, in some cases, is not that effective. It is for this reason, that there is a lot of social science research emerging dealing with humor, parody, and mockery as political tools. Humor is an effective medium in the hands of those who are underprivileged and at the disadvantage in society. It effectively challenges the hegemonic worldview of the dominant group. Humor is sometimes more effective than a serious critique by presenting an alternative worldview, humor can threaten the legitimacy of the hegemonic discourse. According to Gramsci (1971) power is mediated between dominated and the dominant classes, it is not unidirectional. The dominant class rules and implements its conception of the world because the dominated class agrees to that conception. The hegemonic discourse is exploitative and nurtures inequalities. However, those who are being dominated will withdraw the consent if its disadvantages are displayed to the dominated class. Gramsci (1971) “conceives of the operation of power in a society in an unusual way. He says that people can be dominated by applying along with coercion the strategy of posing that the setup in which they exist is for their benefit. Those asking for gender equality have been at the forefront to challenge the hegemonic worldview of the male-dominated society”. They argue that the existing system of society and its norms, values, and other things have been legitimized by the hegemonic discourse of the male because they are the ones who have been in power to define the epistemological and ontological aspects of gender.

According to Foucault (1966), even the scientific discourse has been favoring the dominant class and is at pains to delegitimize all other forms of sexualities. Heteronormative sexuality has been remained dominant because of the discursive practices prevalent in a particular society (Foucault, 1987). Feminists argue that women have been remained powerless historically, politically, and socially, as they wielded no power to assert their presence and highlight their lived experiences. In his book, *The Order of Things*, Foucault (1987) defines three types of discursive practices, the scientific, social, and the one that is based on lived

experiences. The scientific discourse has been recurrently used to support the socially dominant discourse. In a patriarchal society, a man is considered as the protector of honor of his family women. Even those who are being marginalized by the hegemonic discourse come to believe in it as being the ultimate truth. It is there that they consent to the exercise of power on the bodies. It not only makes women dependent on men but also shrinks their space to exist in society. According to the idea that lies behind this conception of the woman and man relations, women become respectful only when they are related to males, thus depriving them of the right to exist as an individual in a society. It also brings forth the effectiveness of irony, which can reveal the contradiction inherent in any hegemonic discourse.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Humor is an effective tool to challenge male privileges. Social media provides people with an alternative medium to those who do not have access to the mainstream media and narrative and enables them to challenge the hegemonic discourses that affect their lives, but they cannot make it account for the injustices committed against them. Humor reveals the contradictions in the hegemonic discourse which in turn reveals the constructed nature of the worldview which is being projected as natural and common-sense knowledge. This study aimed to analyze the use of humor for challenging male privileges and gender norms.

1.3 WORK ALREADY DONE

Most researchers have explored the effectiveness of humor. But they analyze humor from top-to.bottom.ie they look at the effectiveness of humor when used by the powerful in controlling those who deviate from the culturally defined norms and rights. For instance, the work of Mustafa Abedinifard (2015) entitled *Humor and Gender Hegemony: The Panoptical Role of Ridicule and Gender* explores the effectiveness of humor as a social corrective. However, in the fifth chapter of the study, he mentions the use of humor by feminists, which he considers insignificant in its effectiveness in challenging the hegemonic discourse because of its limited circulation. However, it must be emphasized that the study of humor, when used by the dominated class in its own right, is worthy of examination as it reveals not only the strategies applied by the disadvantaged class to challenge the hegemony, but also displays their alternative conception of the world which is based on equality, justice, and fair play.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study adds to our understanding as to how power operates in society and how even the oppressed come to identify their selves with power structures. Moreover, it reveals the constructed nature of gendered bodies which in turn enables the oppressed groups to recognize their agency and strive for a society that is based on equality and justice. It challenges the truth regimes, which govern inter and intra-groups relations. This analysis shows us how language affects social, cultural, and political factors and how to resist the male privileges and gender norms enforced on us. This study also displays the effectiveness of humor in challenging the male privileged discourse driven by socio-political issues.

This research covers linguistic answers analysis social structural relations like other studies in critical discourse analysis and is consequently socio-political problems and language is informed and reflected. As the study is carried out by disclosing concealed ideas in languages, that enable certain people to challenge the domination of some people over others, such study is of course useful for political purposes as well.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Based on the above-mentioned studies, the following objectives have been formulated

- (I) To analyze the use of humor in challenging male privileges and gender norms.
- (III) To explore the discursive formation of identities
- (III) To find out how the disenfranchised people and/or those who are denied, voicing their grievances exert power over the powerful.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Masculinities and humor studies have yet to find their due acknowledgment; still, they have been steadily growing over the past few decades. Humor studies consist of a much larger but neglected area. In the late 1960s, there arose a movement initiated by men, particularly inspired by the idea that feminism has eroded their male privileges. Consequently, due to the entrenched resistance from their male counterparts, the ideas propelled by feminists did not get currency.

After the late 1960s, in response to second-wave feminism, some men's movements arose in some Western countries. Some, such as the Men's Rights Movement and the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, were less sympathetic to or antagonistic towards feminism, normally attempting to resuscitate what they claimed to be men's lost rights due to the spread of women's liberation movements in the West. Perhaps the most common denominator of such men's movements was their claim about the crisis in masculinity, a controversial concept which has ever since continued to inform many discussions of masculinity. Two leading scholars of gender studies; Michael Kimmel and Michael Kaufman, states (2011) that the sense of crisis in men was further deepened by the emergence of women, gay and lesbian studies. Whereas the civil rights movements started by women questioned gender norms governing men and women's lives.

While in the late 1960s, the civil rights movement had challenged white supremacy, women's and gay/lesbian movements questioned more rooted, more internal (both domestic and psychological) conceptions about the gender relations between and among men and women. In direct response to these changes, in the 1990s the American author and poet Robert Bly initiated the increasingly growing Mythopoetic Men's Movement in the United States. Relying on a symbolic system of meanings, which he had devised from popular Western mythology and folklore, Bly sought the revival of the traditional or supposedly genuine masculinity in the West, a masculinity he claimed had been annihilated by the modern lifestyle. The thoughts and writings of the proponents of such regressive movements, including Robert Bly's book *Iron John: A Book about Men* have, according to Catano and Novak, *Masculinity lessons 2011*, formed the first wave of masculinity studies in the West, a wave whose advocates, more than being willing to advance a dialogue with feminists, conceived men as the victims of feminist doctrines and activities, and therefore sought an alleged original or natural masculinity.

Simultaneously there were considerable numbers of men who were pro-feminists. These advocates of feminism gave rise to men's studies. They distanced themselves from gender essentialism and adopted an understanding approach to the subject at hand. Thus, ushering in the second wave of men's studies. However, "despite their divergence from the previous era of men's studies, the dominant thinkers of the second period still had somewhat resentful attitudes about feminism" (Canato and Novak, 2011). Over the past three decades, the third generation of the studies of masculinity has been thriving. Examining men and male privileges inducing a widely gender democratic and healthier way of life both for men and women. Whereas originating from the second wave, the new one is assumed different names, etc (Buchbinder, 2013).

The scholars of masculinities studies propose that we need to find out the sociocultural mechanism at work that deters people from attempting to raise questions about masculinity. To establish men as their subjects in gender studies, the scholars of masculinity studies have been seeking to inspire consciousness among the public, particularly men themselves, and the role they can play in gender equality (Connell, 2005).

Gender is one of the dominant social constructs of human life, according to Connell. He sees gender as arising from social interactions based on reproductive rights and reproductive differences. Gender is multi-dimensional like all other social structures, it is not just related to working, dominance, or sexual orientation, it can be summed up in a single word, gender. Hence, the structures that form and are formed by gender relations are many. Maharaj describes this as, “seeing man’s specific experience produced by the mutual interplay and are mutually conditioned structures which mainly derive from social realm including cultural, economic political, religious and ideological.” (Abedinifard, 2015).

Connell defined four major frameworks to keep in mind while exploring relations between genders in any context which are structure of power, structure of labour, structure of cathexis, and structure of symbolism are key to understanding gender relations. Connell terms these configurations as gender regimes of the said institutions. The prevalent inequalities between males and females in society require a particular overarching system of male-female social relationships. To be specific, “social structure prefers men over women as a class” (Buchbinder, 2013). Consequently, Connell outlines the ordered nature of western society in terms of gender. He seeks to explore the nature of gendered identities and their connection with each other in society. (Connell, 2007).

The above-mentioned factors must be taken into account which contributes to understanding the particular treatment accorded to a specific gender in a given society (Connell, 2007). However, the dominance of manliness as described by Connell has been subjected to criticism by a few. Victor Seidler questions the globalized idea of male privileges. According to him “it allows the western societies to prescribe for people living in diverse cultures as to what is good for them, without giving them a say to share their experiences.” (Connell and Messerschmitt, 2005).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study; relevant data regarding the topic was collected from a Facebook page named ‘The Pakistani Martha Stewart’ and analyzed accordingly. Fairclough’s three-dimension model is used for analysis. Fairclough model is a highly effective model for the analysis of speech, be it verbal, spoken, written, or produced in the form of visual. it is mainly intended to enlighten us about the structures of the discursive practices which are at play in the production and consumption of a text. The text which is produced for our consumption may seem innocuous at the source but underlying are power relations that control the entire process. hence it is necessary to problematize the process of text production and consumption to reveal the power dynamics which are involved in the process. since humor is a subtle art where what is meant is quite different from what might appear at the surface, there are particular techniques through which language is twisted and manipulated dexterously to produce the intended effects. Fairclough states that what may seem to be quite normal for public consumption, might be a ploy to subject the common people to indoctrination. So, to properly understand the purpose of a text, the analysis of the text is conducted from these three dimensions.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

For textual analysis of the data, the Fairclough three-dimension model is used. According to the framework, each case in the use of language is a three-dimensional communicative event:

Textual analysis: The text includes images, visuals, spoken, written, and a combination of any of these language forms. At this level of the analysis, formal characteristics of the text are identified. In the text analysis, we looked at the sentence structure, use of pronouns, and word selection. It will also look at how the identities are displaced in humor to speak to the power.

Discourse: It is both discursive and social practice since it is concerned with the production and consumption of text in a particular social setting.

Discourse as a socio-cultural practice: This is the explanation stage which is concerned with the relationship between interaction and the social context and how the process of textual production and interpretation is socially determined. The model provides for an analytical framework for empirically conducting research about communication and society. The analysis conducted thus concerns itself with the text process related to the production and consumption of the text and prevalent practices to which the communicative event belongs to.

3.2 Delimitation

Pakistani social media users employ humor to challenge different hegemonic discourses, but this work is concerned with the employment of humor in challenging male privileges. The data is collected from a Pakistani Facebook page.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Fairclough three-dimensional model is mainly concerned with analysing the power relation prevalent in a particular society. It not only analyses the text but delves into unearthing facts that are rendered obscure by the use of language and over time the power structure established through language becomes something neutral. Fairclough's three-dimensional model questions the validity of every truth and is aimed at revealing the power structure operating at various levels in society through language. The study is intended to analyse humour which is employed by Pakistani Facebook users to challenge male privileges.

In Figure 1.

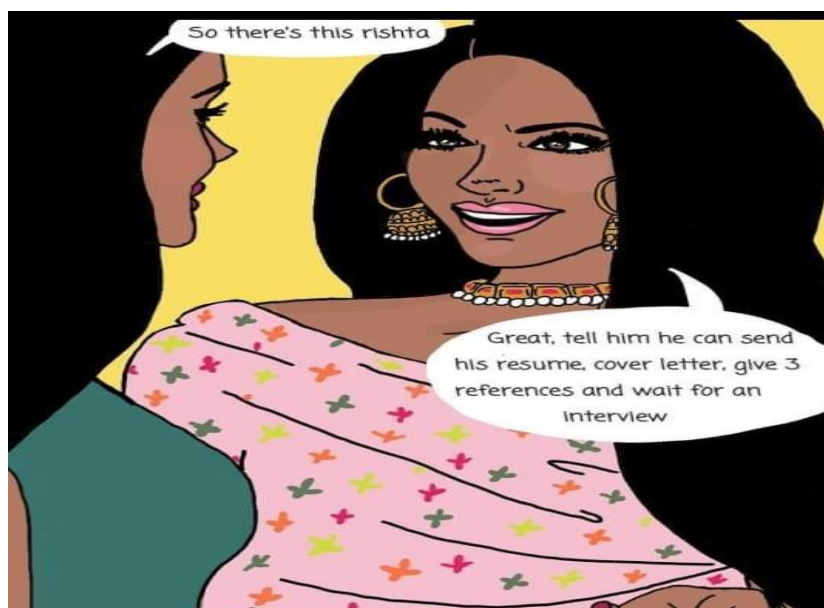


Figure.1.Conversation regarding Marriage Proposal

A girl is seen asking another girl, “so there is a rishta” (marriage proposal). To which the other girl responds, “Great, tell him he can send his resume, cover letter, give three references and wait for an interview”.

The first sentence produced by the first girl simply indicates a fact. The response of the other girl is simply opposite of what is usually expected from a Pakistani girl. Girls in Pakistan are supposed to be shy and not expressive about their feelings. They are not supposed to talk about their ‘rishatas’ (marriage proposals), as it is considered a misdemeanor for a girl to ask about the qualification and financial status of the suitor. However, females are subjects to a comprehensive probe by the relatives of the boy. Her character, her father’s financial status, her weight, etc. are considered and examined from every aspect. She is supposed to be a chef and must know everything about the household chores, otherwise, she will not fulfill the criteria of being a good wife, hence will be rejected. The writer has effectively utilized humour to bring out the contradiction which governs the selections of their respective partners by both males and females. Girls in our society are subjected to lengthy interviews by the relatives of the boy to verify whether the girl will serve as a good homemaker or not. However, the writer has produced funny effects by putting the words into the mouth of a girl. It also shows that men are privileged enough to be choosy about their selection whereas women cannot afford to behave like. Any person hearing these words coming out from the mouth of a girl will be overwhelmed with a strange feeling, however, it will be normal for them if it comes from the mouth of a man.

Figure 2. Shows an elderly woman, probably a mother, asking her young daughter.

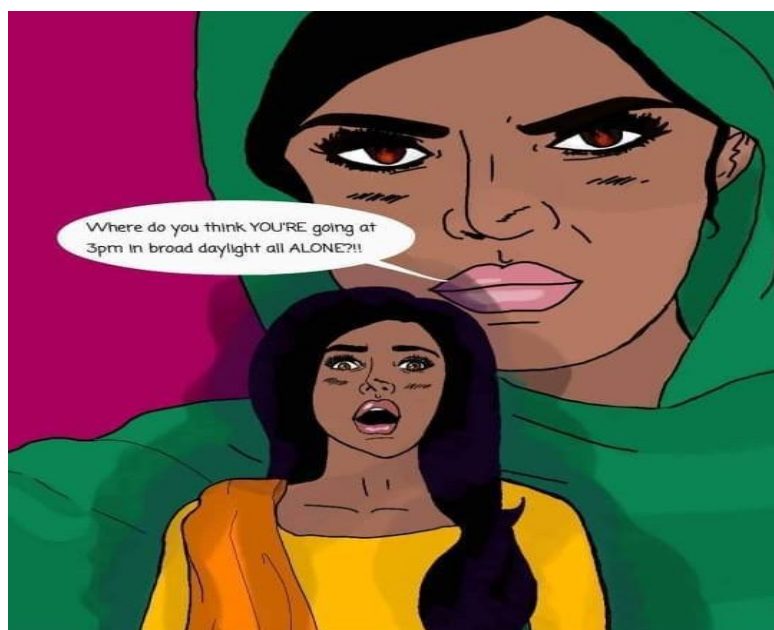


Figure.2. Mother and Daughter Conversation

“Where do you think YOU’RE going at 3 pm in broad daylight all ALONE?”
The reaction of the young girl is one of shock and surprise as evident from her expressions in the picture. The words “YOU’RE, have been mentioned in capital letters, the capital letters are usually employed while referring to some dignitary or any other singularity. However, here in this context, it reveals how women in Pakistani society are subjugated to live their life according to the patriarchal norms of the society by employing different terms of respect. However, the respect accorded to women in Pakistani society vanishes the moment when a

woman attempts to find her way all by herself. In the last part of the sentence, the writer has employed juxtaposed the words in a manner to bring the contradiction. In Pakistani society, girls are not allowed to leave their homes alone. They are to be accompanied by a male of their family when they go out shopping or buy groceries. Since the entire edifice of patriarchy stands on the gender norms established by men, any woman who dares to oppose or contravene the gender norms will be penalized. At the end of the sentence, the word 'alone' has been written in capital letters to emphasize 'the grave mistake a girl is about to perpetrate by leaving her home all alone.' The word broad daylight suggests that women in Pakistan are not allowed to leave their home even in broad daylight, public spaces are no-go areas for women. The writer has tried to challenge male privileges by employing irony as a tool. In Pakistani society male members of the family rarely face the restrictions faced by women, they are rarely asked these questions while leaving home. What is normal for a young male of the family is considered a grave sin for a girl, this brings about the dominant position given to males in our society, as women are subjected to all the restrictions devised by men.

In figure 3. a woman is whispering into the ear to another:



Figure.3. Conversation between two ladies

First one: "I heard she is divorced".

The second one: "her life is over".

In the first sentence, the subject is provided whereas the object is missing. The missing object is very telling as it reveals how quickly a piece of news about women regarding some mishap can spread. The context of the text is a social event as the attire of the woman displayed in the picture clearly suggests. It is common for a woman to discuss the lives of other women to kill their time at such gatherings. The response of the other woman in a terse language shows how deeply ingrained patriarchy has become in our society, even women have internalized it to the extent that they see the world through the patriarchal lenses. In Pakistan, when a woman is getting married, her parents tell her on her wedding day to keep putting with the troubles arising out of the marriage. She is told plainly that she will left barely get any support in case she decides to leave the house she has been wedded into. No accomplishments, no matter how outstanding that can compensate her for their failed married life. Although many divorced women have been struggling through their lives and have been making achievements, their struggle and accomplishments matter little in the eyes of the patriarchal society. If a woman is divorced or is a spinster, neither her life nor her accomplishment can make up for that deficiency, because she does not fulfill the criteria established by the patriarchal order. It also goes to show how deeply ingrained patriarchy is in our society that even women, who can themselves become victims of such circumstances are determining the worth of their fellow

woman according to gender norms is ironic as the same tragedy may befall them anytime. Moreover, a woman's life matters a little if she defies or violates the often-celebrated gender norms of Pakistan, the society considers her dead if she is courageous enough to go and live beyond those norms.

In Figure 4, a woman and man are standing face to face, the man is wearing a cap, indicating that it is a month of Ramazan,

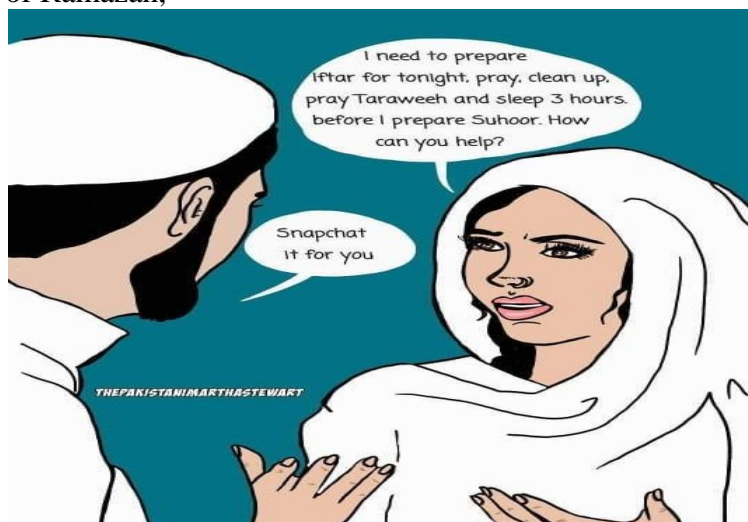


Figure.4. Husband wife conversation

The woman says to him, “I need to prepare iftar for tonight, pray, clean up, pray tarawih and sleep three hours, before I prepare sehri. how can you help”?

The male responds “I can Snapchat it for you”.

Except in the first phrase of the sentence where the woman uses the pronoun I, the rest of the phrases do not find any mention of the word I. it indicates her selfless drudgery in the house, or that she is short of sleep due to the multiple chores she has to perform during Ramazan in her household. In the last sentence, she avoids using the object me, which shows that she considers the male of her family to help her with the chores. Carrying out chores in one's house is usually considered an insult by most males; however, they tend to flaunt their blessings during Ramazan on social without even acknowledging the efforts put into the preparation of those meals. the male members of the family do not consider it manly to help their family members in the kitchen, even those who try to help their family women during Ramazan are subjected to ridicule. most of the males consider doing household work to beneath their dignity as they consider it to be related to just women.

5. CONCLUSION

Humour is an effective tool to speak truth to the power and confront it indirectly by problematizing what is considered to be common sense knowledge. It enables us to question the power structure that has been rarefied due to gender norms. It helps us analyze power structure reinforced through the use of language. Fairclough three-dimensional model provides us an effective tool to analyze humour and enables us to challenge male privileges which are inherent in the gender norms governing our lives. By revealing the power structures that operate through language in our day-to-day life, it enables us to make conscious efforts to reverse the anomalies and struggle for a society that is based on equality, justice and provides equal opportunities to all for growth and protection to every member of it irrespective of their gender, race, etc.

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