

## **Amplifying Female Voices in Pakistani Primetime Drama: A Cultural Feminist Analysis of the Drama Serial 'Udaari'**

Dua Saud\*  
Usama Javed Iqbal\*\*

### **Abstract**

In Pakistan, women and children are victimized frequently by the patriarchal structure. The worst manifestation of this abuse is sexual offense against women and children whose mal-treatment has become the integral part of South Asian culture. This research unveils the sexual abuse against women and children in Pakistan through cultural feminist perspective which highlights the inequalities and disparities women face in patriarchal societies. It also tries to critically analyze the Urdu drama serial Udaari's role in women's empowerment and explores awareness against sexual violence to showcase strong Pakistani female characters who stand against sexual violence and patriarchy in society. It also unveils the caring nature of women who contribute for the development and harmony in the society. The results of this research show that despite being a part of patriarchal society, women direly scuffle to take a stand for their basic fundamental rights. They expose the abusers and instead of considering themselves as victims, they consider themselves as survivors. Furthermore, it also highlights that when survivors and their family take a firm stand against the sexual abuse, it becomes inevitable for the judiciary to provide justice to the oppressed women. This drama also concludes that despite several challenges in the judicial system, the judicial system in Pakistan can still be trusted to seek justice for women in the society.

**Keywords:** Culture, Feminist analysis, Patriarchal, Abuse, Empowerment,

---

\* Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Bahria University, Islamabad

\*\* Lecturer, Bahria University, Islamabad, [usama.buic@bahria.edu.pk](mailto:usama.buic@bahria.edu.pk)

## **Introduction**

### **Feminism and Background**

Pakistan is one of the countries in the world where men have immense social, economic and political powers. The social structure does not permit women to demand their rights explicitly. Women's suppression had widely been witnessed during the so-called dictatorial Islamic regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. However, subsequent regimes have given attention to addressing women's rights in Pakistan. Nevertheless, many local and international NGOs have been at the forefront of protecting women from oppression. Although feminist movements have yet to start in Pakistan, many organizations besides NGOs and influential individuals have taken the plea for women's rights in Pakistan. Furthermore, children and women's sexual abuse is one no-go area where one cannot discuss openly. These conditions have put Pakistani society on the back foot. Notwithstanding, the Pakistani infotainment industry has taken a few steps to highlight this issue. One such example is the Urdu drama serial Udaari telecasted by Hum TV.

Before we deeply dig into the problem, it is important to understand feminism. As per Cambridge Dictionaries, "The belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state" is called feminism. Another definition by Britannica is, "***Feminism is the belief in the social, economic and political equality of the sexes.***" Mary Wollstonecraft is widely regarded as the founder of the feminist movement. Feminism is very diverse and encompasses several sub-movements. Each type illustrates disparate ways in which women are being subjugated and marginalized at the hands of men. Since this research analyzes the drama through the lens of cultural feminism, it is necessary to understand the concept and how it is applied to this research.

### **Cultural Feminism**

Cultural feminism emerged in the 1970s. It seeks to unbridle, reconceive, and reevaluate the feminine traits associated with women. Its main emphasis is on the nurturing and essential qualities of women. Females are the complete embodiment of care, nurturing, peace, and cooperation. Cultural feminism puts a critical lens on the disparities between men and women in the culture and society and seeks to gain equal rights and then dominance of women over men in such patriarchal societies because of their caring and loving nature. For them, by doing so, we can achieve an ideal society. Two prominent cultural feminists are Adrienne Rich and Mary Daly. Adrienne Rich's poems were a product of feminism. She wrote several books, novels, and poems talking about feminism. Instead of saying feminism, she used to say Women's liberation. Rich was of a progressive and liberal mindset. She was a believer in intersectionality

when it comes to feminism. Rich's views on positive contribution to the world by females stem originally from cultural feminism.

Cultural feminism acknowledges the fact that both men and women view the world around them divergently. Nevertheless, women's approach to perceiving the world is of greater value. Women's view of the world is diverse, all-inclusive, and patently preeminent. Cultural feminism celebrates the positive traits of women and acknowledges their positive contribution to the culture. It aspires to construct an all-women society and culture where women can take a deep breath and be free from the manacles of patriarchal society. It challenges the existing structures of patriarchal society by envisioning a women-owned and dominated world. It propagates the fact that women and men are different by nature and actions. The main intent of this theory and movement is to bring all women of different races, cultures, and religions under one roof for the same common objective.

Cultural feminism strongly presents the fact that women and men are different in speaking, ways of thinking, and acting. Their way of warring against the patriarchal forces is the establishment of all women's centers and institutions. Naturally, women are deemed paramount and supreme over men by proponents of this movement. The ethos of care, and nurturing power brings peace, harmony, and sanguinity to the world. Male traits are unfavorable, toxic, and detrimental to society. This argument has been fostered and validated by the fact that men have the tendency to show aggression and be engaged in vehement and ferocious activities. This eventually leads to the destruction of the world, and it negatively influences society and culture. (Mohajan).

Women's solidarity, sisterhood, and shared identity are reinforced through cultural feminism. If women are granted power, women can rule the world more adeptly and make it a better place through their altruism and delicacy.

### **Summary of Drama**

Udaari is the seminal drama serial, directed by Muhammed Ehteshamuddin and written by Farhat Ishtiaq. This drama was aired in 2016 and it proved to be the groundbreaking work in the history of Pakistani dramas. Its powerful performances by the actors, compelling storyline, and core themes had an enduring impact on the audiences. The setting of the drama is shown as the rural Punjab. *This story progresses with two main families including those of "The Tora Khels" and "Shedans"*. Bushra Ansari plays a character called *Sheedan*, who is shown as a tenacious single mother raising her only daughter named as *Meeran*. Patriarchy is seen as a leading influence in the village where they dwell. *Sheedan* is a singer who is the breadwinner of the family. She sings

and entertains people at their weddings due to which they are shunned and stigmatized in society. They are also called as *Miraasi*.

On the contrary, Sajida (a neighbor of Sheedan) works as a housekeeper at different places. She has been widowed and thus is living a miserable life. She has a daughter named as Zebo who is only ten years old. Concurrently, the life of four friends is shown in the city of Lahore. Arsh, Maleeha, Farwa, and Haris. They all have a band and long to embrace music as a career. Sajida's nephew and *Meeran* are together involved in a perplexing relationship with each other. Ilyas (Sajida's nephew) is against *Meeran's* singing and wants her to quit singing to pursue their relationship further. The story then progresses further as Imtiaz, shown as a friend of Pervaiz (Sajida's husband), proposes to her for marriage. Sajida initially rejects but then accepts the proposal for the security of her only daughter Zebo. Imtiaz marries Sajida. After the death of *Meeran's* father, Imtiaz tried to sexually assault *Meeran*. *Meeran* runs away and tells her mother afterward. This incident resulted in an altercation between *Sheedan* and *Sajida*. Sajida blames Meeran for her false intentions towards Imtiaz. This leads to the breaking of all ties between them and consequently, Ilyas also breaks his relationship with Meeran. In Lahore, Farwa is manipulated by her parents to leave music as a career. Milli and her mother visit a wedding in a distant village and there, Milli watches *Meeran* singing mesmerizingly and boldly. Milli with her whole band approaches Meeran, stunned by her voice, and agrees to take her on board in their musical band. Arsh initially is despondent and underconfident about Meeran but both of them gradually turn their seclusion into friendship. This Band then aces a music competition, which leaves the entire village of Meeran, flabbergasted and astonished. Back in the village, Imtiaz grows his sexual desires for Zebo and in the absence of her mother, he rapes her and asks her to remain silent. Sajida, after knowing this all, submits herself to silence to avoid the repercussions bore by Imtiaz. Sajida starts working and earns independently. At last, Sajida after several years, of living in the city, files a case against Imtiaz and wins the case. Zebo gets justice as Imtiaz goes behind the bars. Arsh and Meeran decide to get married despite all the hardships and odds. Meanwhile, Meeran sings for the women who undergo rape and molestation, empowering them.

Apart from child rape and abuse, Udaari also sheds light on some of the most paramount agendas like social disparities, Gender inequality, and how justice is chased. A major notable factor behind this drama's popularity is the star-studded and versatile cast. Bushra Ansari steals the show with her powerful performance. Her role as Sheedan mirrors her diversity as an artist. She has presented a blend of confident, brave, and strong women in the form of Sheedan who goes against all the patriarchal norms and male dominancy exercising free will and power. She also

presents the role of a compassionate and strong mother. Ahsan Khan also leaves nothing to stun the audience with his performance as Imtiaz. Meeran also serves as a powerful character who defies all the societal norms and conservativity to pursue her own dreams. In a similar line, Zebo is presented as an example of a strong girl who despite being the victim of the rape and abuse stands firm and resilient, showcasing the idea that a woman's life doesn't end with the tragedies like this.

All in all, *Udaari* serves as an influential work in the history of Pakistani dramas highlighting sensitive yet important topics. With its powerful message and strong performance, the drama continues to captivate the hearts of the viewers and educate them in the best way possible. This drama has patiently given voice to the voiceless and presented a tabooed subject to raise awareness among the Pakistani masses. This drama not only advocates for awareness but also for a just Pakistani judiciary system aiming to provide justice to all the victims.

### **Literature Review**

The existing Literature delves into the child and women sexual abuse in Pakistan. It also gives insight into the Pakistani entertainment channels' coverage of this issue. Pakistani Dramatization, however, of much publicity, spread customary gender roles and stereotypes. Women are predominantly found in aloof jobs and as being reliant upon their male partners while men are portrayed as strong, autonomous, and controlling (Zaheer).

Wajiha Raza Rizvi and Maheen Imran (Wajiha Raza Rizvi) emphasize that Pakistani dramas like *Udaari* and *Cheekh* specifically shape public opinion about sexual abuse in far-off regions. Pakistani dramatization partakes in the engendering and scattering of such talks fortifying the man-centric standards and guidelines. Women are frequently seen and displayed as enslaved, smothered, and minimized by men. Women's full contribution to homegrown errands bears no appreciation from men rather they are supposed to play out their obligations all day, every day with practically no rest. Mostly women are not allowed to do a job or grocery on their own.

The females acknowledge male-driven thoughts and subjects because of an absence of organization and power. Society sees the dramas projecting women's empowerment and independence from a wary focal point. Pakistani society in general does not accept women's empowerment and considers it against religious and social principles. It is considered that women cannot survive without men's support. Therefore, sexual violence against women and children is prevalent in Pakistani society with the least reported cases. Stark and Flitcraft divulge the further association between child abuse and women's concealment attesting that both come from the man-centric framework when men go out for specific reasons and practice their male power on feeble people including women and children.

(Flitcraft.) Nisha features the requirement for investigation of the etiology of child sexual abuse to consolidate preventive techniques. (P) Patriarchal social orders have consistently strengthened the authority of men.

Men like to practice their power and show their authority through predominance and control. Children and Women have forever been controlled by the men and consider them as their right. Flitcraft and Nisha explain how ladies are displayed as being reliant upon their male partners who are also likewise portrayed in the infotainment industry. Women are treated as delicate beings. Nisha gives an insight into investigating the reasons for sexual abuse of children by men and devising systems as needed. She gives an alternate hypothetical focal point to understanding this matter while discussing how androgens assume control over men as indicated by the natural hypothesis. How the fight between the Id and superego attracts men to that specific point according to the psychodynamic hypothesis explained by Freud. How social learning impels men to commit such demonstrations depends on the perceptions and their interaction with their peers. They try to fulfill their sexual desires while abusing the children who are always vulnerable.

Men's mind as prevailing creatures and trackers is additionally portrayed through the exploration of Nisha, and Stark and Flitcraft. Shuchi propounds that Pakistani dramatization restricted women's public appearance and persuasion of their interests during the rule of Zia Ul Haq. She describes that Zia's regime considered women's 'controlled' appearance on television as a savior of men from evil 'sexual' motivation. There had been voices against that control over females on TV. Not only women but many men also confronted that policy by Zia regime. Interestingly, in protest of that control, many women writers started writing dramas where feminism was given prominence (KOTHARI).

Aisha Malik states that the contribution of NGOs and Global foundations has contributed to bring a change in the Pakistani dramas as well as other shows. That change has had positive impacts so far feminist perspective in the Pakistani entertainment industry is concerned. Delicate subjects like assault, badgering, and sexual abuse have been introduced widely on the screens for awareness purposes. This galvanisation of progress is visible through the *Udaari* drama which means to fly. This dramatization grandstands wonderfully how the survivors of assault ought to know their true capacity and fly, meaning, they ought to keep ascending high and radiate brilliantly with practically no trepidation. Their lives don't end on this specific demonstration experienced by such bold ladies. Such dramas have brought the shift from traditional family issues and conspiracies to real social issues (Malik). Saima Salman is of the view that Udaari has fundamentally contributed a lot in bringing women and child sexual abuse issues to light among the majority. It also highlights, if taken stand, the judicial system also helps women against male abuse. The drama

teaches the viewers to be resilient against such unwanted moves by the men and raise their voices whenever necessary. It also gives a message to Pakistani mothers to take a stand against sexual and otherwise abuse of their kids and they must not remain silent. Featuring the most famous and followed actors in this drama has also been fruitful (Salman). Ikram and Mushtaq appraise this drama for not only highlighting the women and children pleas but showing them the right legal path to handle the violence (Khadija Ikram). Sadaf thinks casting bold and strong female characters can make an immense viewership. She thinks such strong characters help the female in Pakistani society to raise their voices against violence and abuse.

The two important female characters in the drama, **Sheedan and Meeran** are instances of two self-independent ladies who made a stand against Imtiaz's unwanted moves. They had been shown as role models for other women (Haider). Fatima Azhar likewise draws on a comparative story of both these women highlighting the meaning of women standing firm for themselves against the wrongs (Azhar) Sheeba Khan proceeds to complement this narrative by featuring the jobs of the mother in empowering their children, particularly females. (Khan.) Khan, Haider, and Ikram are the promoters of a similar subject.

William (WILLIAM J. TURNIER), Pamela, David, Linda (Alcoff), and Deborah (Gordon) set forth that women and men are socially isolated and separated into pre-laid out obligations and roles that they should fulfill within a society. Women are supposed to be more detached, being engaged with the house tasks though men are considered as the providers of the families, accommodating them, and overwhelming them. They accept that ladies ought to be given similar authority as ladies can outshine men and improve in every aspect of life. They view what is happening of ladies' underestimation through a cultural feminism lens.

Although there are a couple of studies that address the feminist perspective in Pakistani dramatizations, there is an absence of appropriately coordinated exploration to distinguish how Pakistani shows address savagery and sexual abuse against children and women. This study takes the Pakistani drama "*Udaari*" as a contextual investigation that not just features the fundamental explanations behind the abuse but also grandstands how women can be empowered by giving them disparate opportunities. This study examines the explanations behind children's and women's sexual abuse while applying the cultural feminism theory.

## **Discussion**

Women's oppression through a cultural lens is the main argument of this research. Women have been marginalized through decades and this concept has always sparked controversy due to the patriarchal nature of the society. Cultural feminism rose to its prominence during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Celebrating females' values, perspectives, and experiences are

integral to the cultural feminism. This research explores how cultural feminism can be applied to the Pakistani drama *Udaari*. This drama is one of the great specimens of the entertainment industry that promotes women's empowerment in diverse ways.

Amidst all the dramas with the traditional notion of presenting womanhood as either fragile, dependent, or morally corrupt and deceiving, *Udaari* comes forth as a spectacular work challenging conventionalism. It is important to explore what exactly women's empowerment is. It centers on empowering women to understand their true virtue and seek their basic human rights. Women empowerment aims to mitigate women's frailness and dependence, empowering them to gain social, political, and economic rights.

In the social domain, it seeks to empower women in various ways including having access to education and health facilities including the protection of women's reproductive rights, their healthcare autonomy, and well-being. It also seeks to battle against violence, be it any sort of violence. Economically, it endeavors to cater to fair wages, financial independence, and equal employment opportunities for women. Furthermore, politically, it strives for women's political appearance, active participation and influence. There are multitudinous women empowerment movements carried worldwide including the famous #MeToo movement and AuratMarch (in Pakistan). (Sustainable Development Goals)

### **Women's and children's sexual abuse**

Children and women have always been vulnerable to abuse especially sexual abuse by men perpetrators. The horrible repercussion of such abuse includes physical and mental instability. Sexual abuse is any immoral or unwanted activity that encompasses touching, exploitation, and penetration. Numerous laws have been passed in Pakistan to put this evil practice to a halt. Nevertheless, the prevalence of such heinous activities seems not to end. Men have greatly exercised their power and dominance over women and children considering their feeble nature.

The same has been projected in the drama *Udaari* where Imtiaz being a male figure exerted his power over Zebo and took control of her. Feminism considers rape and sexual abuse as a "pseudosexual act". Unequal power distribution, lack of awareness, and education seem to be the root causes of such acts. According to Kalra and Bhugra, Culture plays a significant role in understanding women's suppression and subjugation sexually and physically. (Bhugra). Women's and children's sexual violence also expeditiously escalates a sense of inferiority complex, timorousness, and less public appearance by such individuals. Such, victimized individuals tend to demarcate themselves within the premises of their homes considering themselves as they feel safe inside their premises. They also think of themselves as alien to the rest of the people around them. The

cultures that promote the objectification of women tend to exhibit such acts more. Overall, sexual abuse and violence among children and women spring up multiple evils in society and culture. Victims are often silenced, and they suffer various allegations by the society.

In the Pakistani context, due to patriarchal structures being deeply embedded into the roots of the society and culture, somewhere there has been a dearth of women's empowerment. Gender roles have always been in full swing in Pakistani culture, where men are often expected to be formidable, pre-pollent, and authoritative. Whereas women are expected to be entangled in house chores and have zero participation in social, political, and economic aspects of life. Society, culture, and religion play a significant role in perpetuating such imbalanced norms.

Nevertheless, against all the odds, the Pakistani state has been fully involved in promoting women's empowerment over the past few years. Women's notable and increasing participation in multifaceted aspects of society and culture paved the way for women's empowerment. Numerous personalities including, Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah and Benazir Bhutto represent women's resilience and empowerment as a cornerstone in history. Both of these figures are the signs for women's inclusive participation and representation in politics.

Women's empowerment is incomplete without the discussion of education in particular. Pakistan has made multiple efforts and strategies to educate Pakistani women, especially in far-off, distant, and remote places. Benazir Bhutto Income Support Program provided multiple scholarships to Pakistani female students. Despite all these endeavors, socio-economic barriers and lack of education among the parents of indigenous people, still serve as a barrier to receiving the fundamental education by girls and women. On the same grounds, economically women should be independent too. Women's inclusion in multifarious fields of medicine, technology, and business is essential to their grooming and independence. "**Kashf Foundation**" is a prominent name in empowering women financially. Political representation of women, though less, is still promising. Women have a fixed number of seats in National and Provincial assemblies, empowering them politically. Gender-sensitive issues are also seen through organizations like "**Aurat Foundation.**"

Despite all these efforts and steps, there are still a great number of barriers to achieving women's empowerment in Pakistan. Patriarchy still lies ahead of all the barriers. Cultural norms and societal structures promote male dominance and control restricting females' mobility and liberty. Numerous evil practices, including honor killings, early marriages, etc. hinder women's growth and equal participation in all the affairs of life. Limited economic resources also serve as a worsening factor in women's empowerment.

Women's appearance and involvement in informal sectors escalate their vulnerability to receiving lower wages, exploitation, and sexual harassment. Conservative rural areas still see women's education as unacceptable which makes women destitute and dependent. The formulation of laws for the protection of women's interests do not guarantee their essence due to weak enforcement and foundations. A weak judicial system is also another factor in this regard. These barriers collectively serve as a blockade or hurdle in achieving women's liberty and freedom.

Women are still marginalized, subjugated, demotivated, considered weak and dependent, and treated worse due to the prevailing above situations. Cultural feminism also raises fingers on such aspects, demanding all women's liberty and freedom focusing on women's nonviolent and peaceful nature as compared to men's violent, controlling, and dominant nature.

### **Children And Women's Sexual Abuse in Pakistan**

Children and sexual abuse have been a hot topic during the last decade in Pakistan due to the increasing number of such cases which serves as an alarming factor. Awareness and reporting among people have significantly multiplied and increased during the last few years despite it being a tabooed subject. This awareness and reporting highlight the prevalence of such issues in Pakistan and it serves as a call to action. Rape, sexual abuse, domestic sexual violence, and sexual harassment are a few of the forms of sexual abuse in Pakistan. Social pressure often silences the voices of the victims of such abuse in Pakistan.

A few examples are Zainab's case as a child sexual rape case. Zainab was brutally raped by a suspect Imran Ali on her way to attend a Quran class in Kasoor. Talking about women's rape cases, a notable example is that of Noor Mukadam, a 27-year-old woman from Islamabad who was raped and murdered by her childhood friend, Zahir Jaffer. She was tortured physically by him. Zahir was arrested immediately and was finally sentenced to death in 2022. These two cases impacted Pakistani women a lot in a way that they demanded stronger law enforcement against such perpetrators. Mental health issues also came into the spotlight because of these two prominent cases.

Pakistan decreed multiple laws for the protection of women and children including The Protection of Women Act, 2006, The Child Protection Act, Anti-Rape Ordinance 2020, etc. These laws have proved to be a facilitating factor for women and children, but poor law application still hinders the actual progression of the legal system and resistance to such immoral acts.

## **Pakistani Infotainment Industry's Role in Women Empowerment and Against Sexual Abuse**

### **Role in Women's Empowerment**

Pakistani dramas, music, films, and digital platforms play a prominent role in educating audiences about several things. Pakistani infotainment industry has recently been very vocal regarding women's empowerment. This industry has contributed a lot in resisting conventionalism and promoting gender equality through powerful characters, impactful storylines, and compelling plots.

### **Historic Background**

Pakistani infotainment industry has mostly shown women in passive roles, being indulged in domestic chores and as dependent figures. Historically, women had less appearance and were confined to limited roles with almost no autonomy and agency. With the shift in the attitudes of society, the infotainment industry's narrative also witnessed a significant shift and change. Complex, independent, and powerful female characters are presented today (although not essentially a lot but still they are shown). Pakistani dramas, within this context, have played a dominant role since dramas are the most watched medium of the infotainment industry in Pakistan. Multiple dramas with compelling strong female characters have challenged the existing stereotypes and gendered roles and have also positively shaped the public's opinion in this regard. The major themes of such dramas were, women's empowerment, education, legal rights, career choices, and domestic violence.

*Udaari* is worth mentioning in this regard. These narratives designed and penned down by the Pakistani infotainment industry have proven to reshape peoples' attitudes toward gender equality and women's empowerment through multifaceted ways. Awareness has been disseminated among the viewers regarding the ability to take steps against injustices and to break the shackles of such tabooed subjects. Powerful, resilient, and strong female characters became the role models for Pakistani females and children, aspiring to pursue higher education and independence. *Udaari* has also proven to advocate for legal changings to provide justice to the oppressed ones.

### **Role (Infotainment Industry) In Children And Women's Sexual Abuse**

The infotainment industry over the last few years has shown narratives about children and women's sexual abuse. Media has presented the conditions of such oppressed individuals, and the societal impact on their lives and advocated for the just legal system in this regard. In this way, the media and infotainment industry has significantly played a prominent role in bringing such subjects to the screens and providing people and viewers with food for thought.

*Udaari*, comes again, as a narrative embodying such themes and empowering women to take a stand for themselves. The drama also assisted in raising awareness regarding the prevalence of such issues, and the need for justice by the legal system. Reporting such incidents is a prominent message delivered to the audience which proved to be a groundbreaking drama.

Notwithstanding the reforms and variations, the Pakistani infotainment industry is still dominantly grappling with the idea of gender roles, stereotypes, and conventional *Saas bahu k jhagre* and love stories. Many producers still produce such stories despite all the empowerment and changes because such content generates more revenue for them. The audience of Pakistani dramas is housewives, and they fancy viewing such content. Pakistani dramas, in particular, perpetuate stereotypical notions of presenting women in control of men and men being independent, dominant, and controlling. These narratives further help in strengthening already existing gender inequality, power imbalances, and sexual abuse and violence. Women are portrayed as nurturing figures, obedient daughters, and dutiful wives, sacrificing their wishes for their fathers, husbands, and sons. contrarily, men are projected as decision-makers, protectors, and breadwinners of the family. During times of hardships and adversities, women are shown as patient and noncompliant. On the contrary, men are depicted as resilient and assertive.

Summing up, although the Pakistani infotainment industry has taken several measures to combat the evil of sexual abuse by spreading awareness, the presence of conventional narratives shown dominantly still captures the attention of the audiences. Pakistani infotainment industry needs to produce more dramas and films like *Udaari* to educate both men and women regarding women's prestige and gender equality.

Since this research delves into the application of cultural feminism to Udaari drama, now the aspects of *Udaari* drama to this regard will be discussed.

Few dialogues have been extracted from the drama that can be analyzed through cultural feminism lens.

**Dialogue 1:** "Nahi Ammi Ji, mene nahi jana, Ami ji, mene Doctor k nahi jana." (Zebo)

**Translation:** "No, Mom, I don't want to go, Mom, I don't want to go to the doctor."

This dialogue highlights how Imtiaz's abuse of young Zebo leaves her so terrified that she does not want to visit the doctor by Imtiaz. When Imtiaz tells Sajida to take Zebo to a doctor because of her illness, she resists saying that she doesn't want to go.

**Dialogue 2:**” Aurat ka maqsad sirf shaadi nahi , balke apne sapne bhi hone chahiye.” (Meeran)

Translation: “A woman’s sole purpose should not be marriage only, but also pursuing her dreams.”

Viewing it through a cultural feminism lens, which advocates for women’s inclusivity in all affairs of life, this dialogue has a very strong grip on women’s lives. Meeran’s message strongly presents the idea of women pursuing their dreams and that a woman should not restrict her life to marriage only. This message allows women to dream big and think about meeting their future goals and dreams.

**Dialogue 3:** “Aurat ki izzat uski apni hoti hai, kisi aur ki di hui nhi.” (Sajida)

**Translation:** “A woman’s dignity is her own, not given by someone else.” Through the lens of cultural feminism, this dialogue strongly opposes the idea that women’s dignity is dependent on others, especially on men rather is permeates the concept of self-reliance and self-worth among women. Women’s dignity is not dependent on men but on themselves.

**Dialogue 4:** “Teri jhurat kewi hui, meri dhii nu hath laya tu.” (Sheedan)

**Translation:** How dare you touch my daughter.

This dialogue spoken by Sheedan highlights her character as a strong mother. Imtiaz’s evil intentions for Meera, foretold by Meeran to her mother make her take a stand for her daughter. Instead of sitting silently, she goes to Sajida’s and Imtiaz’s house to talk to Sajida about Imtiaz’s actions. This dialogue educates the audience about the role of mothers in taking a stand for their daughters. Sheedan’s stand for her daughter protects her dignity as well as protects her from Imtiaz.

**Dialogue 5:** “Allah di zaat nu puri Umeed hai menu, insaaf desi Allah.” (Sheedan)

**Translation:** “I have complete hope in Allah, Allah will grant justice.”

This dialogue, spoken by Sheedan when Imtiaz abruptly enters their home in Lahore highlights how Sheedan puts her faith in Allah. This faith gives her the strength and resilience to fight against Imtiaz’s brutality and strive for justice. This also serves as a message to all the victims not to be hopeless when it comes to seeking justice.

**Dialogue 6:** “Abba tu darwaza q band kar raha hai.” (Zebo)

**Translation:** “Why are you closing the gate dad.”

This dialogue, spoken by Zebo, is right before Imtiaz rapes her. This dialogue, if viewed through cultural feminism, again highlights the power

imbalance between Imtiaz and Zebo. Imtiaz being a male figure can easily control Zebo. Contrarily, Zebo is innocent and does not know how to protect her in the absence of her mother.

**Dialogue 7:** “Baat sun meri, Aaj jo kuch bhi hua haina, apni maa ko ya kisi aur ko bataya na to mujhse bura koi nahi hoga.” (Imtiaz)

Translation: “Listen to me, if you will tell your mom or anyone about what happened today then there will be no worse than me.”

This dialogue, spoken by Imtiaz right after the rape, silences Zebo regarding the act. This shows how victims are always silenced. This dialogue raises awareness among the audience to stand with such victims of abuse and seek justice.

**Dialogue 8:** “Aur jo ilzaam lag raha haina mere pe, kia hai, kia hai, aik wari nahi do wari kia hai.” (Imtiaz)

Translation: “And the acquisition that is being made against me, I did it, I did it, it has happened not once but twice.”

This dialogue highlights how Imtiaz in the court speaks up for his evil at the end, enraged at his friend, who gives evidence for his act. This again comes up as a light of hope for all the survivors out there to stand firm and resilient. Justice might serve late but will surely be served.

**Dialogue 9:** “Main victim nahi hoon. Main survivor hoon. Main Bechari nahi banungi, Main apne mujrim ko saza dilwaungi. Sharam mujhe nahi, usse karni chahiye.” (Zebo)

**Translation:** “I am not a victim. I am a survivor. I will not be helpless; I will make sure my culprit is punished. He should be ashamed not me.”

Zebo delivers a speech that has a lot of impact during this exchange. Zebo serves as a model of hope and encouragement for all survivors to seek justice for themselves and put their abusers behind bars because she places a strong emphasis on doing so rather than feeling helpless and ashamed of what happened to her. The possibility that casualties ought to keep their quietness on the grounds that doing so would sell out their respect is additionally projected into uncertainty by this discussion. Cultural feminism can also be applied to the drama's female characters. Zebo, Milli, Sheedan, Sajida, and Meeran are among the notable female characters in the drama. Sheedan is depicted as a brave, tough, and courageous woman who doesn't feel bad about dancing at weddings to make money. Sheedan is an exceptionally strong woman.

Sheedan embodies a progressive mindset. Sheedan is a perfect blend of traditions and modernity. She is not shown as a static character rather she is presented as a dynamic character. She is shown as a nurturing figure as a mother. However, her actions sometimes defy traditional norms underscoring the perplexity of her character. Sheedan's character

resonates well with the ideology of cultural feminism which believes in women's superiority and women's leadership because of her caring, nurturing nature. She extends support to Sajida after the death of her husband, during times of adversity, presenting herself as a true embodiment of a virtuous female character who can surely bring revolution and peace as per by cultural feminism. Sheedan also embarks to protect her daughter, after Imtiaz's brutal and immoral act of harassing Meeran. She does believe in Meeran and makes her way to his house to talk to Sajida about her husband's actions. Sheedan is quite an influential figure within herself as she is a strong advocate for arts and also fights against all the injustices. Her profession as a singer and a dancer explores the tapestry of celebration of arts and the freedom that art grants. Despite the fun made of her and her daughter because of her profession, she does not consider her profession as bad or considers it as making her less dignified in front of anyone. Sheedan's relationship and conductance with the male figures of the drama are varied and complex. Her relationship with her husband shows dynamism as she respects her but Sheedan denies any oppression posed on her. Sheedan relies on male figures but also maintains her agency and dignity.

Sajida is another prominent character that undergoes transformation in the drama. Initially, she is shown as passive, naïve, and a weak lady and then she rises into a strong and protective motherly figure. She marries Imtiaz who turns out to be an alcoholic, and drug addict and abuses her. She grapples with the shackles of societal chains while being in an abusive marriage with Imtiaz. Her outstanding evolution from a helpless lady to a strong resilient woman underscores the dynamic nature of her character. She is a true representation of both courage and pain. The primary role played by Sajjo (Sajida) is a motherly role to protect her only orphan daughter Zebo. When Imtiaz rapes Zebo and she gets to know, she does not seek justice and remains silent initially. Afterward, a shift from passiveness to an active role, she involves herself in community chores, aspiring to help others. Sajida, like Sheedan, also shows variation and diversity in her relationship with the male characters of the drama. Her connection with Imtiaz is all toxic and abusive. Contrarily, her relationship with Arsh (the lawyer who grants Zebo justice) is seen as quite good and supportive. Given Sajida her own, socio-economic status, she becomes empowered and fights against her daughter's abuser. This concept again aligns well with cultural feminism which seeks to empower women and grant them equal status as that of men.

In Udaari, Meeran, a young child, is another notable individual. She is talented and steadfast in her determination. Music is a significant piece of her character, very much like her loved ones. She longs to pursue a career in music, defying the norms of her village. Her love of music reflects her yearning for freedom and self-discovery. All through the show, her

personality likewise goes through a change. Her character embodies multifacetedness because she is a symbol of strength, vulnerability, and self-discovery. She challenges the customary jobs that women are all normal to play and embraces music to satisfy her longing, yet she isn't viewed as a lady since she partakes in family errands and exercises. Meera's love of music not only allows her to express her interests, but it also gives vulnerable people a voice. She uses her voice as a vocalist to warn of dangers and takes part in friendly government assistance programs.

Meeran has a complex and varied relationship with the male characters in the play. She is compared to her mother, who respects men while exercising her agency and influence. She and Arsh, in particular, have a conscious relationship. Arsh is regarded as a reliable male role model who stays by Meera's side every step of the way, especially during her musical journey. Arsh is a selfless man who encourages coexistence between men and women. When she talks about her father, there are a lot of arguments and fights. There is pressure between Meeran and her dad given the divergence between her dad's customary standpoint and her dynamic thoughts.

When viewed through the lens of cultural feminism, Meeran's independence and willingness to follow her own desires despite social pressures and expectations are in line with this movement for women's liberation and autonomy. This is yet another illustration of cultural feminism. But her trip also shows how important it is to value and respect women's ideas and perspectives. Her desire to follow her passions and rejection of conventional wisdom are examples of cultural feminism's call for autonomy.

The main character of the story is Zebo, a nine-year-old. The agony of child abuse and the search for equity and value are both embodied in her persona. Despite the challenges she has encountered in the past, she is shown to be a strong and determined character. She changes from being a wordless child to a girl with voice. a young, naive girl whose life drastically changes as a result of her stepfather raping her.

The heart-wrenching and realistic delineation of her trauma mirrors the harrowing results of child molestation and abuse. From a victim to a survivor is marked by continuous struggle and strength within Zebo. As she says, "Main victim nahi hoon. Main survivor hoon. Main Bechari nahi banungi, Main apne mujrim ko saza dilwaungi. Sharam mujhe nahi, usse karni chahiye."

**Translation:** "I am not a victim. I am a survivor. I will not become helpless; I will make sure my culprit is punished. I am not the one who should be ashamed, he should be."

Zebo symbolizes justice and optimism with her progressive strengthening. As she resists Imtiaz's brutal attacks, she is a representation of bravery, strength, and perseverance. Zebo's character aims to empower

the victims of child abuse by highlighting the widespread problem of child abuse in Pakistan.

Double-crossing and complexity characterize Zebo's relationship with men. Zebo's stepfather reflects her traumatic past. The abuse leaves her powerless and devastated. Her relationship with Arsh, on the other hand, is a symbol of support and empathy. Arsh gives her strength and aids in obtaining justice. The dual natures of Imtiaz and Arsh, according to Zebo, are a sign that both good and evil people are present in the world. Her trauma finally gives her a brief moment of relief when she meets Arsh.

Zebo is an excellent illustration of cultural feminism because she simultaneously advocates for Imtiaz's retribution and justice. As the story centers on Zebo's transformation from casualty to survivor, it investigates the possibility of social woman's rights supporting women.

### **Themes of Udaari**

Udaari, a groundbreaking work in the history of Pakistani dramas can be analyzed through the lens of cultural feminism. Self-discovery and identification seem to be a very important theme within this narrative where women exercise it. Women, in this drama, are presented as tough and resilient women striving to empower themselves within the shackles of cultural expectations, trying to maintain a good healthy balance between the norms and their longings and aspirations. The drama also unapologetically presents how women exercise their autonomy and agency in a society where patriarchy is deeply embedded in its roots. Meeran is an example of independence and autonomy. Her rediscovery as she enters the realm of music is a reflection of her agency and independence. Zebo also embodies the aspects of agency, autonomy, and freedom as she progresses from a helpless child to a strong and independent girl who relabels herself as a survivor and seeks justice. Her rediscovery is marked by self-reliance, autonomy, and agency. Gender norms are another theme in the story, and gender roles are common in the rural Punjab where the story is set. In Pakistan, individuals' lives are represented by customary orientation jobs. In a male-centric culture, for example, the one found in Udaari, women are supposed to assume the roles of compliant spouses, well-trained daughters, and unselfish individuals. Men, on the other hand, are depicted as imposing, in charge, and making decisions. One illustration of how gender stereotypes are enforced is Sajida, a mother who is initially depicted as a selfless, devoted lady attempting to protect her orphan daughter. Imtiaz and Sajida are seen as submissive partners in an unhealthy relationship. One of the main themes is that Sajida's transformation from a submissive to an independent woman challenges rigid gender roles in patriarchal societies.

Meeran, a young girl with a lot of dreams, is another strong woman. Meeran is expected to focus solely on performing her gender-specific

responsibilities, suppressing her ambitions. Be that as it may, for Meeran to accomplish freedom and self-assurance, she battles against these set standards, because of her newly discovered individuality and personality, she can finally realize her dream of making music her career.

Sheedan is portrayed as a determined, strong woman. She exemplifies the ideal of a woman who was born to challenge any and all incorrect gender norms and prejudices based on her gender. Sheedan is a resilient lady who involves her abilities as an artist and vocalist to earn enough to get by without having a blameworthy outlook on it.

Autonomy and power are two additional significant concepts that are woven into the narrative. The objective of the whole play is to engage women and allow them to coordinate, oversee, and shape their own lives. Marriage and the family are two institutions that are thought to be trying to limit women's freedom and quality of life. Sheedan is a great example of power and control. Sheedan is a person worth discussing and featuring due to her solidarity in declining to follow normal practices and submit to them regardless of the relative multitude of obstacles. Zebo and Sajida are the two women who use their autonomy and power to speak out against sexual abuse despite the numerous power disparities between men and women. The significance of a woman's power is emphasized in the drama's conclusion, which sees Zebo receive justice.

The path to independence, self-governance, action, and dependability is music. Music as a fine art accentuates the meaning of human expressions in offering women's independence and opportunity. Meeran's insatiable thirst for music is a sign of her freedom from social pressures and self-expression.

Women's support and admiration are a profound theme in the narrative. The three powerful ladies including Meeran, Sajida, and Sheedan work collaboratively to resist the patriarchal framework. This solidarity and unity for the shared purpose and goal finally assists them in achieving their goals.

### **Social and Historical Context**

The setting of *Udaari* is affected by Pakistan's sociopolitical climate in 2016. Pakistan has struggled since its founding against a dominant society dominated by men, Gender roles, and women's exploitation. As a matter of fact, women can't get to political opportunities, clinical workplaces, preparing, or different assets in distant spots. In Pakistan, where patriarchy is deeply ingrained, women's autonomy and independence continue to be criticized despite numerous legal advancements. With its conveyance, *Udaari* disproved these considerations of male-controlled society, which was a truly necessary improvement for Pakistani women. *Udaari* discussed taboo subjects like child sexual abuse, gender-based discrimination, and domestic violence. The topic of rape and the rights of women came up

more frequently during this discussion. The portrayal of Udaari by society was criticized in Udaari.

Udaari contributes to the development of gender and feminism-related debates. By advocating for women's agency, liberty, and autonomy, Udaari appears to add to the rapidly expanding modern feminism. Udaari focuses primarily on women's identity and self-discovery. Udaari advocates for women's autonomy and independence. Udaari also discusses gender, class, and privilege in greater detail. By providing an intersectional perspective on the narrative, this contributes to the critique of social injustices.

### **Conclusion**

Sexual abuse against women and children is a reality in our society. Despite having laws and institutions to combat this menace, this heinous crime goes on in the society. Ironically, such incidents have increased over the past few years. There are several reasons behind this which include social taboos, corrupt judicial and police systems, family pressures and threats to the victims/survivors. Drama Udaari has given a ray of hope to the oppressed segment of society to raise their voices against such acts. It has also suggested to women that once they stand firm for their rights, the system will also help them.

However, there is a need to telecast such dramas as a regular feature by all the entertainment channels of Pakistan. State and NGOs must also encourage and support them in this regard. There is a dire need to revise the curriculum where respect for women must be taught to students at the school level. Furthermore, news channels must also make it a regular feature of their transmission in the shape of talk shows and documentaries. Religious community, particularly the clergy has to step forward and convince their followers to give due respect to the women as instructed by the Quran and Sunnah. We hope, with such initiatives, our society will be able to reduce sexual violence as well as other kinds of violence against women and children.

### Bibliography

- Alcoff, linda. "cultural feminism vs post structuralism: the identity crisis in feminist theory." *the university of chicago press*. (1988): 32.
- Azhar, fatima. "udaari: child abuse is disturbing but it exists in pakistan, pemra!" may16 2016. *Tribune.com.pk*. Article.
- Bhugra, gurvinder kalra and dinesh. "sexual violence against women: understanding cross-cultural intersections." *indian journal of psychiatry* (2013): 244-249. Document.
- Flitcraft., evan stark and anne h. "women and children at risk: a feminist perspective on child abuse." *national library of medicine* (n.d.): 22.
- Gordon., deborah a. *Feminism and cultural studies*. 2014.
- Haider, sadaf. "udaari is proof: a tv drama doesn't need helpless women to be a hit." 22 june 2016. *Dawn news*. Article/blog.
- Khadija ikram, dr. Sehrish mushtaq. "impact of pakistani dramas on women empowerment: a challenge to patriarchal norms." (2023): 12. Document.
- Khan., sheeba. "breaking new ground: there is more to udaari than just child sexual abuse." 20 may 2016. *Dawn news*. Article.
- Kothari, shuchi. "from genre to zanaana: urdu television drama serials and women's culture in pakistan." *taylor and francis online* (2006): 18.
- Malik, aisha. "transnational feminist edutainment television in pakistan: udaari as case study." *sage journals* (2020): 16.
- Mohajan, haradhan kumar. "an overview on the feminism and and its categories." *paradigm academic press* (2022).
- P, nisha k. "understanding psychological theories and etiology of child sexual abuse." *indian journal of research* (2014).
- Salman, saima. "spotlight: udaari has let the proverbial genie out of the bottle." october 2016. *Dawn news*. Blog/article.
- Sustainable development goals*. N.d. Document.
- Wajiha raza rizvi, maheen imran. " voicing the taboo: sexual harassment in hum and ary digital tv dramas in pakistan." *revista de educacion* (2022): 27.
- William j. Turnier, pamela johnston conover, david lowery. "redistributive justice and cultural feminism." (n.d.).
- Zaheer, ayat. "women, labor and television: a critical analysis of women portrayed in pakistani drama serials." (october, 2020): 82.