

## Language And Gender: A Critical Discourse Analysis Of Tweets And Hashtags On Aurat March 2021

Noureen Waqar<sup>1</sup>, Ayesha Ahmed<sup>2</sup>,  
Zarish Fatima<sup>3</sup>, Ijaz ul Haq<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer, Department of English, City University of Science and  
Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of English, University of Lahore, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer at Times Institute, Multan, Pakistan

<sup>4</sup>M.phil Applied Linguistics, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan

Email: [1noureenwaqarkpk@gmail.com](mailto:1noureenwaqarkpk@gmail.com), [2ayesha.ahmed@ell.uol.edu.pk](mailto:2ayesha.ahmed@ell.uol.edu.pk),  
[3zarishfatima12@gmail.com](mailto:3zarishfatima12@gmail.com), [4ijazulhaqfap875@gmail.com](mailto:4ijazulhaqfap875@gmail.com)

### *Abstract*

Language assists in shaping the ideas and creates diverse views on domestic, social and political issues. It is evident that inequality and power imbalance in online discourses lead towards the social understanding of problems faced by the mass. Aurat March has stirred patriarchal norms and the so called dignity of not only some of the Pakistani men but women as well. The present study aimed to highlight gender biasness presented through language on the Aurat March 2021 through selected tweets and hashtags. It also analyzed the relatedness in the diverse views of both the genders (male and female) in order to highlight the social mentality of Pakistanis regarding gender based roles in Pakistani culture. Data was collected from the hashtags, namely: #AuratMarchKHI, #LetHerDecide, and #BelieveHer that were repeatedly circulated on twitter. The corpus consisted of 200+ tweets which were collected from using the above stated hashtags. Critical discourse analysis was done on the selected data by using Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1995). Results of the study revealed that most of the male twitterati shared the biased attitude towards Aurat march 2021. The selected tweets and tweet replies supported the idea of patriarchal society of Pakistan. The current study concluded that Aurat march is minimizing the gap between domestic and social problems. It gives voice to all the unheard stories of women which

were neglected in the past. The present study adds to the existing knowledge in the field of language and gender by examining the language used by both male and female genders to address gender roles and social issues. Further studies can be conducted by analyzing the language used in the placards and media coverage on Aurat march to examine the diverse views.

Keywords: Aurat, Believe, Decision, Hashtag, March, Twitter.

### **Introduction**

Twitter is attributed to provide a diverse platform where one can be updated with the happenings and current affairs in the surrounding. It also informs others about the serious social, political, geographical and religious agendas. Indeed, it gives birth to diversities and complexities, yet it enables twitterati to unearth what actually lies beneath (Fink & Brito, 2017). On social media networks, discussion is dominated or controlled by a few who put forward their views without any hesitation. Twitterati are actively exchanging opinions on different social and political issues on daily basis (Aljarallah, 2021). It is evident that inequality and power imbalance in online discourses lead towards the social understanding of problems faced by the mass. Online versions of thoughts define the confined and biased social divisions of the public. Communal views on hot debating issues reveal the hidden mentality of people on the popular platforms of social media (Shaw, 2012). For instance, realities are usually presented through digital discourse practice. People find it easy to put forward their vision through social media accounts which seem as an escape from sharing it in person (Mahfouz et al., 2017).

The verbal content available on twitter contains written texts, hashtags, graphics, images, and videos. It provides a multimodal platform to its users to share their ideas and thoughts, explicitly (Brantner & Pfeffer, 2018). Digital world engages its users in a continuous production of narratives and enables them to critically analyze the situations round the world. It allows the audience to prioritize the concern circumstances and assess them accordingly (Cornwall, 2016). Many Muslim women are challenging the status quo in Pakistan over the years which is represented in Aurat March by raising the feminine issues faced by them in their daily lives. The word 'Aurat' is taken from Urdu language which means woman. Aurat March has stirred patriarchal norms and the so called dignity of not

only some of the Pakistani men but women too. It brings forth the traditional mindset of Pakistani society in which women have been shackled for years in cultural lexicons (Siddiqui, 2020).

The user-driven social media backlash towards Aurat March has started controversies over the past few years. In the light of Aurat March 2021, there is a visible shift from #AuratAzadiMarch2021, #StopEndangeringWomen, #WhereIsTheState to #SlutShaming. These hashtags were used repeatedly on twitter to foreground the contemporary public sphere. This type of public involvement in social affairs at times manipulates the stated facts to create an upheaval in the society in order to distort the reality (Bardici, 2012). The year 2021's Aurat March appears more vibrant in its approach of considering the issues of body shaming, LGBTQ, and minority class. It has been noticed that this march is not just confined to Pakistani women rather it becomes gender-neutral movement. In 2021, many men along with women marked their presence in the march. Members of LGBTQ community also hit the roads to join hands with the supporters of Aurat March and propose their agenda of freedom of living.

Just like previous years, Aurat March 2021 has gained backlash and mixed views on twitter. There are people who supported the latest agendas and demands of the protestors whereas, a number of Pakistani twitterati criticize it by circulating hashtags and tweets repeatedly right after the march. The present study critically analyzes the discourse used in the selected hashtags and tweets on Aurat March 2021 to find the relatedness in the diverse views of both genders (male and female) in order to highlight the social mentality of Pakistanis regarding gender based roles in Pakistani culture.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The present study aims to:

- Highlight the diverse views of Pakistani twitterati on Aurat March 2021
- Examine the social mindset of Pakistanis regarding Aurat March
- Analyze reasons behind the multiple views on Aurat March

### **Literature Review**

Expanding the ideology behind the creation of Pakistan, the sole purpose was to provide equal rights to all citizens in the home town. Women were never considered less important than men. They were given good opportunities to mechanize their living standards but with certain boundaries (Iqbal, 2020). Feminism has emerged over the years in different forms and has taken different shapes. Out of multiple forms of feminism, liberal feminism is the most participated and accepted form. It argues about the equal rights of women within a state and urges women to fight for their rights if not given by the authorities (Sarwar & Huma, 2021). Women are forced to go against their will to perform tasks. They are bound to their roots in the name of family, culture, honor, and society. The inhumanized attitude towards women made them suffer from the time unknown. The patriarchal structure of the society has practiced injustice and inequality in order to maintain their superiority over the mass which results in the creation of imbalance among the people and stirred social peace (Batool, 2021).

In 1975, 8<sup>th</sup> March has been formalized as International Women's Day by United Nations. This day is celebrated each year to educate nations to eliminate gender discrimination, women oppression and gender inequality. Similarly, Aurat March which is held on International Women's Day also tries to bring forth the oppression faced by Pakistani women in the society. Women in Pakistan are culturally bound to their families. The biased and unfair distribution of opportunities among people and gender specific roles made women question their status in the community (Iqbal, 2020). Aurat March is considered as a tool in the hands of elite women in Pakistan to manipulate the mentality of common people in terms of women oppression and disgrace. Females in Pakistan raised their voice against the violence and gender inequality, and their protest dig out the insecurities of the society. The protest seems irrelevant to many people because they do not consider anything wrong with the way women have been treated in Pakistani culture (Sarwar & Huma, 2021).

In 2018, Pakistani women marched for their rights to reclaim their space in both private and public spheres which was termed as Aurat March. It was strongly backlashed by many religious scholars and political leaders on social and print media (Azeem, 2019). This kind of attitude made controversies over the world and showed the treatment of women in the developing country. Undoubtedly, Aurat

March 2018 questioned the status of women in the work place and demanded the right for equal work space to both the genders.

With the rising interest in Aurat March, one thing is clear that females do not stand their negligence in the society anymore. This conscious effort made Pakistani women strong enough to resist the patriarchal forces in the state. Despite the fact that many women in Pakistan took mere survival as their only right; yet some of them awakened the thoughts of freedom of living and expression on the roads of Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad (Asher, 2020). Likely, Aurat March 2018 raised the issues of sexual harassment and violence against women in which the government act neutral whereas, Aurat March 2019 made it to the headlines with huge crowd when women from both upper and middle classes voiced the issues of oppression and torture under official permission from the government. In 2019, Aurat March was criticized on political and social levels which results in strengthening justice for women. All this criticism encouraged women to come prepared in Aurat March 2020 with the issues of bodily dressing and liberty in decision making (Iqbal, 2020).

Nevertheless, there is a visible shift in the issues raised by Aurat March from women oppression to the normalization of all genders in the state. This movement caught attention not only from print and digital media but also from biggest social media platforms namely: facebook, twitter and instagram. An interesting discourse regulates on twitter between the so called progressors of liberal school of thought and the followers of Islam. Ghassemi and Hemmatgosha (2019) examines the language of both print and digital media and explores the hidden ideologies in it. He analyzes the perceptions and views of real audience on the distortion of facts by the media sources. Responses of the audience revealed that media asserts pre-defined informational content to promote the relation between oppression and exploitation. Esteron (2021) conducted a study on the language used in social media for the expression and representation of thoughts. Short forms and hashtags are popularly used by the millennials to express their vision explicitly. These shortenings are time-saving and help in the promotion of related ideas.

Fink and Brito (2017) reviewed twitter as a place to enable users to create a public sphere in order to remake identity and culture. It is a popular platform which allows its users to construct meaning, power, culture and ideology. The generation gap is minimized with a single

tweet on any social, political or religious issue. Discussion is build up on trendy topics with the circulation of tweets and hashtags. Hashtag is undoubtedly most powerful way of communication on Twitter (Aljarallah, 2021).

### **Methodology**

The data for the current study is gathered from Twitter posts (tweets and hashtags) about Aurat March 2021. Data was selected mainly from the hashtags, namely: #AuratMarchKHI, #LetHerDecide, and #BelieveHer that were repeatedly used throughout the campaign. The tweets were collected manually from the server along with the tweet replies in order to analyze the backlash and support by the public. The corpus consisted of 200+ tweets which were collected from using the above stated hashtags. Furthermore, most of the tweets and hashtags are in English however, translation is given in the analysis, where needed. Keeping in view the nature of the present study, Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1995) is used to reveal the power relations and socio-cultural practices in the selected discourse.

### **Analysis**

Tweets, tweet replies and hashtags are analyzed step by step in terms of text (micro-level), discourse practice (meso-level) and sociocultural practice (macro-level) in the light of Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The tweets and tweet replies are written either in the support of Aurat March 2021 to advocate the rights of women in Pakistan or against the celebration of Aurat March which is mostly considered as a useless campaign by the general public of Pakistan.

### **Textual Analysis of #Hashtag**

Celebrations of Aurat March start every year in the opening days of March on twitter all over the world. Hashtag are selected and regulated throughout the month to define the agenda on which the campaign is going to be operated. In Aurat March 2021, some hashtag were designed which supports the message given by the followers and supporters of the march. During the identification of the hashtag used in Aurat March 2021, one thing becomes prominent that the language used in them has a strong impact on people. It reveals the inner mentality of the people about gender biasness.

### **#BelieveHer**

The hashtag used primarily to define the agenda of Aurat March 2021 on Twitter is #BelieveHer. 2021's campaign was started with the

promotion of the ideology of faith in womanhood. The reason behind the selection of this certain hashtag is to draw the attention of public towards the inequality between the genders. It is a common practice that females in Pakistan are asked to remain silent when it comes to male's honor and dignity. Even in terms of serious issues of sexual harassment, molestation and rape, nobody wants to believe a woman. She is hushed by her own family for the sake of keeping the public face, upright. Evidently, this hashtag on twitter focuses on the overall issues faced by women in the society. It urges the people to listen to the unheard stories of female sufferers.



### #SafePublicSpaces

This hashtag was first used on 19 March 2021 on twitter. It illustrates the gender neutral issue of safety in public. As stated earlier, Aurat March 2021 had raised the matter of freedom of living. In the past few years, safety becomes central issue in Pakistan due to terrorism. Despite of being a developing country, Pakistanis find it difficult to move freely in open spaces specially women. The cases of sexual harassment and molestation are mostly happened in public spaces which are loaded with people. Therefore, there is an urgent need to make public spaces safe for the daily commuters.



### #LetHerDecide

This hashtag was trended on April 5, 2021 on twitter. It supports the agenda of decision making by women themselves. It is one of the basic rights of being human that one has to take the decision of his life, without interference. Females in Pakistan are usually deprived of this right. The right to educate, right to marriage and right to live is usually centered by an external stimulus. From the childhood to the adultery, a girl is brain washed by her family that the sole purpose of her existence is to maintain the so called dignity of men in her life. This kind of malpractice is raised as an issue in the Aurat March 2021. The reason is to let the girls understand the meaning of life by themselves in order to be able to live independently.



### Matrimonial Issues in Womanhood

Marriage is a serious business in Pakistan. Girls are prepared mentally from the beginning for the marriage. They are raised in such an environment where getting a good husband becomes their



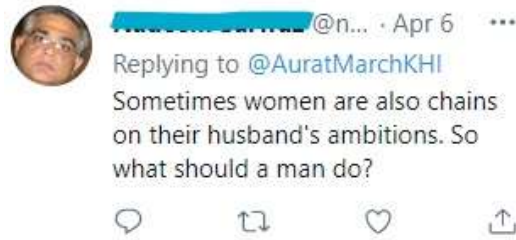
priority. The whole purpose of a girl's life is to prioritize the demand of her in laws. In such condition, at times she is forced to let go of her dreams and ambitions. This unpromising act made the nation deprived of many skillful women in the industry. This thought provoking matter is highlighted in the below tweet.



It is evident from the above tweet that marital affairs are challenging for a lady. In terms of commitment, she is bound by the society. There comes a point in her life where she has to select either her career or her family whereas, there is no such frontier for men. They are at ease to carry the marital affairs along with their ambitions. However, the reactions on the above tweet seem more outrageous.



When it comes to patriarchal stance, men find it hard to digest social factors of the society. Instead of coming up with a proper response, it is easy to use abusive language to show anger and backlash. This kind of harsh attitude drives women to join the Aurat March campaign.



In this tweet reply, the twitterati is not coming up with a solution instead he is putting the same question back in the context of manhood. Such responses show mentality of the common people. It also highlights seriousness of the mass. Men are not trying to solve the feministic issues of the society rather prefer to do comparisons. In the light of gender equality, gender issues cannot be solved without the support of both of the genders. With the closer inspection, one thing is obvious that questioning social norms in a conservative society is not an easy task.



In this response, it is evident that male gender finds it harsh when it comes to question gender roles in a male dominant society. The above mentioned tweet shows the pre-defined mindset of Pakistani males that they have already made up their minds about the march. The word “behayai” means vulgarity which is used to target the purpose of Aurat march. One thing is evident from the given tweet that Pakistani men have lop-sided the agenda of Aurat march towards male hatred.

### Discussion

Comparatively, 2021’s Aurat March received more backlash based on its slogans and placards. Active participation of men was found during the analysis. It was noticed that most of the male twitterati shared the biased attitude towards the women march. The selected tweets and tweet replies supported the idea of patriarchal society of Pakistan. According to Iqbal (2020), Pakistani

women have been given the liberty to mechanize their living standards but with certain boundaries. It is evident from the given analysis of the selected hashtag “#Letherdecide” that women are deprived of their basic right of decision making. This seems not even a problem in the society as people in Pakistan are not taking gender equality as seriously as it should be. However, Aurat March keeping it real through highlighting the modern problems by questioning the pre-decided mind set of Pakistani society.

Despite of the fact that Pakistan is now an established society, there are certain factors which were underlined and marked red by 2021’s march. One of the social factors was to secure the public places for all. Baig et al. (2020) discussed that patriarchal structure of the society practiced injustice and inequality which results in the imbalance of the society and stirs the social peace. The current study also supports this idea that gender inequality provoked the hatred among the people and gave birth to social instability. The reaction of the mass towards the march on the social media platform gave the liberty to the people to go through the mind set of Pakistani twitterati. It was observed that most of the people doubt the authenticity of the march because it was supported by a large group of women.

The word “ambition” is used quite often in certain tweets. It was not only questioned but also mocked. Ambitions are taken for granted when it comes to female gender. It is considered less valuable in terms of feministic approach. Females are thought of ambition less and questioned when they openly express them in public. Aurat March has given a well settled platform to Pakistani women to give mouth to their ambitions and talk about what it feels like being an Eastern woman. Of course, every human has his own ambition and seeks for a number ways to fulfill them but when it comes to a lady, things get serious.

According to Yunis (2019), short forms and hashtags are popularly used by the millennials to express their vision explicitly. The present study also believes that social media has given a chance to many to express their ideas publicly and provides a bigger picture of the society by demonstrating such views altogether. The hastags discussed in the current study revealed that women are empowering their statements in this millennial era where people

are easy to approach via social media and popularly through twitter.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up the discussion, it is concluded that Aurat march is minimizing the gap between domestic and social problems. It gives voice to all the unheard stories of women which were neglected from the past few years. It is evident that twitter engages its users in a continuous production of narratives and enables them to critically analyze the situations round the world. Pakistani twitterati shared their views on Aurat March 2021 through tweets and tweet replies. Popular hashtags and tweets were selected and analyzed by the present study to understand the awareness of the march and reaction of the mass towards it. The present study examined the relationship of social media and its users in the modern world. It analyzed the impact of public view over gender and social issues in a society. Nevertheless, some of the Pakistani twitterati strongly condemned 2021's Aurat March but most of them actually supported it. Despite of the gender differences, one thing is evident that twitter is providing a platform where diverse views can be found and analyze.

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