



**HJRS Link:** [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH \(HEC-Recognized for 2023-2024\)](#)

**Edition Link:** [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH, 3\(4\) October-December 2023](#)

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**Link of the Paper:** <https://jar.bwo.org.pk/index.php/jarh/article/view/358>

## SUBJUGATION AND DISCRIMINATION IN DRAMA SERIAL DOBARAH: A MUTED GROUP THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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### Paper Information

#### **Citation of the paper:**

(Jarh) Rauf, Huma., & Mehmood, Saqib. (2023). Subjugation and Discrimination in Drama Serial Dobarah: A Muted Group Theory Perspective. *In Journal of Academic Research for Humanities*, 3(4), 181–187.

#### **Subject Areas for JARH:**

- 1 Humanities
- 2 Media Studies

#### **Timeline of the Paper at JARH:**

Received on: 08-11-2023.  
Reviews Completed on: 21-12-2023.  
Accepted on: 24-12-2023.  
Online on 25-12-2023.

#### **License:**



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#### **Recognized for BWO-R:**



#### **Published by BWO Researches INTL.:**



### Abstract

Socially conditioned intricacies and the system of stringent patriarchy through ideological indoctrination regarding gender values are quite particular in Pakistani culture. Media has a prominent place in any society, it greatly influences people's life and helps in shaping ideologies and beliefs. Gender discrimination and the intricate social systems along with rigid ideologies and gender beliefs are commonly reflected in Pakistani culture with the help of media. Hence, the current research looks at the role of women in Pakistani society and how women are traditionally muted, and less access is given to them than the members who are dominant groups in the public discourses. Women are socially conditioned and since their birth it is inculcated in their minds that the more, they suffer the more they will be rewarded. If a woman tries to speak or decide on her own, she is considered rebellious and feels herself a misfit in a traditional society. Her voice is never heard. The sample of the study is the Pakistani Drama 'Dobara'. This drama serial truly depicts the mentality of those who consider women a weak and fragile creature of God. The research is significant in highlighting an important issue regarding the subjugation of women in society. The research was qualitative. Data for the study was analyzed by utilizing Conversational Analysis of the characters of the drama. The subjugation of the protagonist was seen by using "Muted Group Theory" as a framework. The analysis of the data concluded women are silenced in society by ignoring their perspectives and beliefs.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, women, patriarchy, dominancy, subjugation

## Introduction

The issue of Gender discrimination and unequal treatment of women in developing countries has been well-documented in different spheres of life [Duflo \(2011\)](#). Nonetheless, in different societies, different individuals have multiple identities. Then to what extent does the women's social identity matter and how does society treat them? It can be noticed by looking at the history that different groups and cultures have strived for power consequently, the voices of the powerful are accepted and widely ruled whereas, the voice of the unmarginalized is diminished and silenced forever. Women have been traditionally silenced [Ardener \(1978\)](#). Women are not only silenced but their voices were never heard, or they were ignored altogether. History indicates that women are subjugated in many cultures and men's superiority and supremacy have been imposed on them [Vuuren \(1973\)](#). It was in 1972 that in the linguistics department of "The University of California" Berkeley Robin Lakoff, a linguist started to study language and gender. He also wrote an essay on "Language and Woman's Place. It was later published in 1973 in the journal Language and Society. Lakoff was not a pioneer in highlighting this issue but several scholars were working on the same question at that time. This issue was showcased in the collection of Language and Sex: Differences and Dominance, which was later edited by Barrie a sociologist, and Nancy Henley a psychologist in 1975 [\(Cameron, 2020\)](#). Cameron mentioned that he seriously started to think about this issue in 2015 with the resurgence of grassroots feminist activism, which was particularly concerned with young women who motivated me to start a blog, addressing feminism it was called, Language: A feminist Guide [Cameron, \(2018\)](#). Cameron was amazed to see that when he put his plan into action the topics that were under discussion even in the 1970s were still

considered the major concerns for women even in the present. Women are still marginalized, talked over, and patronized in discourses. During his research, he realized that there was a lack of research in the respective field, and he called it an overstatement to commit that issues like imbalance and inequality have disappeared from the field of language and gender studies. The current research focused on Pakistani society; the issue of gender discrimination was noticeable, particularly in South Asia. In Pakistani society, this imbalance was particularly pronounced and appeared to be paradoxical (2001). Although global agencies like CEDAW are making efforts in this regard the issue of women marginalization is abounding in all sectors and women are less represented. It is also true that women at the socio-political level around the world are not given the right to decision-making and also feel that they are under-presented in parliaments [\(George, 2019\)](#). Women are playing significant roles in society even the fields that were strictly considered to be men-specific are now occupied with women and they are performing their duties in the best manner [\(Zessis, 2007\)](#). The researcher selected the Pakistani drama: Dobarah, the discourse of the character of Mehunisa was analyzed which indicated how she faced injustice and violence not only from her husband but from her father as well. Her father died when she was 16 but before his death, he married her daughter to a man Hidayatullah whose age was 36 at that time. As the story of the drama unfolds it shows how Mehunisa sacrifices all her happiness and priorities for the sake of her husband. She became a changed person as compared to the girl shown at the age of 16.

## Problem Statement

Language is not only a source of communication but also contains hidden ideologies and beliefs. Such beliefs become part of our culture and start influencing the

thoughts of the people living in that society. The current research is an endeavor to shed light on the gender discrimination spreading through language. The ideas and beliefs of women are still ignored, and language plays a significant role in paving the way toward these beliefs. The data in the study is collected from a drama serial 'Dobara'. The serial is a true depiction of our society and also sheds light on the stereotypical thoughts of society.

### Research Questions

1. How are women marginalized and subjugated in Pakistani society?
2. What is the role of Muted Group Theory in highlighting these aspects?

### Research Objectives

- To shed light on the marginalization and subjugation of women in Pakistani society
- To show the role of language in the muting processing of women

### Significance of the study

The research is significant in highlighting an important issue regarding the subjugation of women in society. The voice of media is influential as it becomes easy to spread the message in society and people sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally follow what they watch on media. Hence, it becomes part and parcel of society.

### Delimitation

The sample of the study is one drama serial, the findings of the research could reach different conclusions if more drama serials had been added in the data collection process. Therefore, it can be considered as the delimitation of the study. This study would be qualitative.

### Literature Review

To deal with the issue of gender inequality Muted Group Theory (MGT) (Ardener, 2008) was utilized as a handy kit to analyze and explore the marginalization and subordination of a certain class in society. The dominant class in society liberally represents their ideas and commands the thoughts and

behavior of the marginalized class. Muted Group Theory is concerned with gender communication and the phenomenon of gender lingual disparity. Different aspects of gender inequality which vary in males and females are discussed in this theory. The binary division of dominant and subordinate classes in society is recognized as gender. Karamarae stated that people who are at the top of hierarchal social structures are the privileged ones who are always there to define what it means to be female or anything else in a given culture (Karamarae, 1999). People who enjoy a higher status in society and are privileged in society impose their decisions on others and force them to spend their lives according to their demands. We can say that MGT sheds ample light on the aspects and patterns of patriarchy that support male hegemonic ideologies and women's perceived muteness. In the 1990s MGT focused on the raising voice of women's muteness and subjugation in society. In a male-dominated society where females are suppressed and bound to live as dependent creatures and have no rights, no desires are ultimately silenced. To strengthen women's perspectives and experiences in society two communication scholars Karamarae (1981) & Orbe (1994) implemented Muted Group Theory. Karamarae (2005) stressed the point that researchers have always been interested in asking questions concerned with problems of women's subjugation in male-dominated society and also show how women struggled in their daily lives to rise to equal positions. MGT theorizes that "Women's voices are less heard than men's in part because they are trying to express women's experiences (Henley & Karamarae, 2001). Karamarae emphasized that women are more constrained in expressing their opinions of what to say when to say and how to say by keeping certain apprehensions in their minds than men in several situations. This indicates the truth that women are muted. Karamarae

(1981) mentioned that language has been created by men therefore, interaction between both genders is never equal. It is with the help of language that absolute power is defined in societies and language is also required to uphold the power. It was in 1949 that Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* introduced the concept of *the Others*. The term was used to interpret and comprehend the relationship between the master and slave, the concept defined that there exists a process where entities do not stand equal in relationships. One entity is considered more powerful and enjoys the upper state whereas, the other one is always at a lower status. The relationship of subordination and domination has been established in a male-dominated society which leads to the fact that women are Other in the society. Asian women are mostly deprived of their rights hence, they fall into the category of Othering. Several female authors have shed light on this point. Kissack underpinned that the rules of language are organized by men they do not give any chance to women to express their views in their language. Not only societies but organizations are also patriarchal Kissack (2011) explored this truth in his research that organizations also show discrimination towards women by shedding light on the upper status of masculine language in society with the help of these organizations. The findings of the research indicated that women are deprived even of the right to express their views in writing. The critical aspects explored in the findings of Kissack's research are the basic assumptions of MGT.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

The study is qualitative and the conversation of the protagonist and other characters was analyzed. The researcher selected the drama serial 'Dobara' as a sample of the study. The conversation analysis method was utilized to reach the specific meaning by keeping the subjective theory. Karamarae (2005) stated that

language is man-made therefore it becomes convenient to control and persuade women accordingly. Men use this tool conveniently to construct and reconstruct the social phenomenon. The leading scholar of communication Karamarae hopes to make a change in the status of women. The change in language in society can change the status of women as the language and ideas of women are ignored by men.

### **Conversational Analysis**

"Dobara" is a Pakistani drama serial aired on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2022, on Hum TV. The serial is based on the life of a woman who remarries a boy after the death of her husband. The researcher analyzed the first 3 episodes of the drama because the major notions of MGT could be seen clearly in the conversation of these episodes. The first scene of the drama was based on the death scene of the husband of the protagonist, Mehrunisa. In the opening scene of the drama the protagonist of the drama, Mehrunisa, is seen recalling the bitter memories of her past when she was married to a 36-year-old person upon the wish of her dying father. The people around her noticed her strange behavior and started passing negative comments. Mehrunisa has been subjugated throughout her life, she was not allowed to express her opinions throughout her life which she spent with her ex-husband Hidayatullah. She could not even wear clothes of her own choice.

In the opening scene of the drama Mehrunisa is seen behaving strangely at the funeral of her husband, her daughter enters her room and is amazed to see her behaving strangely and says,

Daughter: "Mother they are taking Father away"

Mehrunisa: "Where they are taking Hidayatullah"

Daughter: "What happened Mother why you are not crying, why did you stop your tears, do not oppress yourself"

Mehrunisa: "Oppression what kind of oppression"

This conversation between mother and daughter indicated that there were a lot of things going on in her mind of Mehrunisa, but she was unable to convey anything when her daughter said "Do not oppress yourself". Her expressions were clear enough for the audience. People around her say that she is in shock, and therefore unable to speak but only she knew what was going on in her mind. Later in a scene, she recalls the memory of when she got married to Hidayatullah, and on their very first meeting, he dictated that he would call her Mehrunisa although she tells him that "I liked to be called Mehru everyone calls me Mehru" to which he answers "everyone will call you Mehrunisa from today". She tried to speak and said "I", but then she looked at the annoying expressions of her husband and did not say anything and nodded her head. Hence, the first meeting between the two showed how Mehrunisa was made quiet she was not even allowed to be called by the name she liked and heard throughout her life. She cries bitterly while holding the picture of her husband and utters "You killed Mehru".

In another scene of episode 1, she is seen talking to a little girl in the presence of some guests, but they don't like her talking to a kid in a relaxed manner and one of the ladies says to her "Daughter "take your mother inside". Throughout the episode, no one tries to understand the feelings of Mehrunisa, the reason behind her strange behavior but they are more concerned with worldly affairs than how she should behave in society. In another scene Mehrunisa is seen brushing her hair, her sister-in-law enters her room and says: Sister-in-law:"q apna or mary mushroom bhai kaa mazaak bnwaa rahi hoo, abhi shohur koo gye do din nai guzry or tum ny buchoon k saath uthkhalian shuru kr dee ary soim py aai hui aurtain batain bnaa rahi thee" why you are making fun of my belated brother, your

husband died just two days ago and you started to play with a kid, the ladies talking behind your back about your weird behavior.

Mehrunisa: "my husband has died I am not dead my husband wanted to see me happy"

Sister-in-law: "if a husband wants to see his wife happy in his life even then a woman cannot live happy after his death, I understand my brother Hidayat wanted to see you happy but feel the grieve after his death"

Mehrunisa: "first I was imprisoned in Hidayatullah's love and now I should be imprisoned of his memories, what do you want from me". Her sister-in-law does not reply, snatches the hairbrush from her hand, and leaves the room. The discrimination is quite evident when her sister-in-law says that her happiness belonged to her husband only and now, she has no right to live happily after the death of her husband. A woman should feel happy when her husband is around.

In episode 2 the lawyer comes and informs the family that Hidayatullah had transferred all her property to his wife, the family was not happy with the decision and their expressions were enunciating the truth. Later in that episode, her daughter says to her mother, Daughter: "our father was really sweet he gave everything to mama" Mehrunisa: "my most important thing my childhood was snatched from me" Her conversation with her daughter indicates that she was not concerned with any material but was sad at the loss of her childhood, but no one was there to listen to her or understand her feelings. As in a male-dominated society, more importance is given to the thoughts and beliefs of the mainstream (Karamarae, 2005). Mehrunisa again recalls her memories with her husband after the departure of her daughter when she appears in a saree in front of her husband, he looks at her with admirable eyes and says,

"Now you look like lady Hidayatullah" Mehrunisa looks really upset and says,



Mehrunisa: "I don't like my hair my dress". Hidayatullah: "but I like it" Mehrunisa: "please tell maid to let me go out, she has hidden my racket somewhere and she doesn't let my friends come in". He does not respond to her gets up and set a flower on her head she keeps talking "I want to study, I want to go to college". Hidayatullah: "it is difficult I shall arrange a tutor for you at home" Mehrunisa: "you are imprisoning me". Hidayatullah: "I am protecting you". She looked at him helplessly and could not utter a single word.

According to [Karamarae \(2005\)](#), women have no power to express what they think, their points of view are disrespected and disregarded by the dominant groups which could be noticed in conversations of both genders.

In another scene, Mehrunisa is seen dancing with her friends as soon as they see her husband entering the house they leave. He annoyingly looks at Mehrunisa, she tries to explain, Mehrunisa, "the girls were saying to sing and dance". He comes towards her ties her hair which also causes pain to her and says, Hidayatullah: "You are the lady of Hidayatullah such actions do not suit you". Mehrunisa: "but..., I". He does not let her speak and says, Hidayatullah: "You should do what suits you, you like music" She nods her head in yes, and then he says "I shall play the real music for you". Mehrunisa: "What"

Later in a scene, she is seen lying on the bed after the birth of her child, her husband comes and gives her a set of necklaces as a gift for the birth of her child and instructs her to keep it safe in the cabinet. She demands that she wants to learn driving and he replies, "I cannot give you permission to do that I shall arrange a driver so you can go wherever you want to go with him" She looks at him quietly again, does not utter a single word, and looks at her child meaningfully. [Abbas \(2018\)](#). Discrimination and inequality have become the shallow base of our society. To maintain

this system female voice has been guarded and kept in boxes. All these scenes and dialogues clearly show how the protagonist in the serial was muted, no one paid attention to her thoughts, what she thought, what were her priorities, and her beliefs could never get the attention of anyone in the serial. Even her father did not think of her, and she was bound to marry her to an elderly person without asking for her choice. All the major claims of MGT can be seen at all levels through the conversations of the protagonist and other characters.

### Conclusions

To elevate male status and sovereignty in society patriarchal notions are inculcated in societies. Women in such cultures are portrayed as a symbol of beauty serving their subordinates. They are dealt with like showpieces displayed at homes and kept anywhere with the choice of the owner. They are marginalized, and subjugated and their life is considered worthless without a husband. We can see characters like Mehrunisa in our real life as well where their own choices and priorities are not only ignored but considered inappropriate in society. Characters like Mehrunisa can help open the eyes of society and also raise awareness about education in societies. Research conducted in 2008 "Portrayal of Women's Issue in PTV Drama Serials: An Overview" analyzed how different women face difficulties in different spheres of their lives. The study revealed that how orthodox mentality has been deeply rooted in Pakistani society makes the lives of women complicated.

### Innovation / Research Gap:

The research is significant as it highlights the gender discrimination that has prevailed in our society and how it has become normal to marginalize and subjugate women in Pakistani society. The research is an endeavor to empower humanity with knowledge and the conversational analysis of the characters

of the drama will enable the audience to raise awareness in our society of how language is used for gender discrimination and women's subjugation

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