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CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF REPORTED DEROGATORY REMARKS ON FEMALE PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

Women constitute 48.51% of Pakistan's population, and hold only 16.2% of seats in the national parliament, but they often face derogatory and gendered remarks from their male counterparts. This study explores derogatory remarks made on the floor of parliament and reported in online newspapers. Those uncivilized remarks threaten the democratic norms and create hostile environment for female politicians particularly who are the members of the parliament. Through critical discourse analysis, the researcher examined the language used at the floor of the parliament and the frames used to report in the online media. This study employs purposive sampling, selecting two high-profile incidents of derogatory remarks made against female parliamentarians. The first incident involves the labeling of Dr. Shireen Mazari as a "tractor trolley" in June 2016, and the second on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) female lawmakers as "garbage left behind" in July 2023. These cases are chosen due to their significant media coverage, public reaction, and the status of the individuals politicians involved. The research findings suggest that Female parliamentarians are subject to humiliation that includes bigot and disparaging remarks. These radical remarks are often used to demoralize the females, question their competency, or to belittling their political contributions. Moreover, the study uncovers the ways different media outlets and political ideologies handle such remarks. The critical discourse analysis suggests the need to take drastic measures to challenge and counter such negative remarks, promoting gender equality and respect of female politicians on the floor of the house as well as in society.

Keywords

Female Parliamentarians, Derogatory Remarks, Mainstream Media, Political Discourse



1. Introduction

The role of women in politics is paramount in modern world. As societies strive for progress, equality, and social justice, the active participation of women in the political arena has emerged as a fundamental driver of overall positive change (Collier, C. N., & Raney, T. , 2018). Historically, women have faced significant backlash to their political involvement, often pushed to the wall in decision-making processes (Krook & Restrepo ,2016). However, the recognition of women's importance in politics is not merely a matter of justice; it is also a pragmatic recognition of the vast reservoir of talent, diverse perspectives, and innovative solutions that women bring to the table. This study explores the compelling reasons why the presence and influence of women in politics are necessary for the advancement of our society, economy, and democratic values. From championing gender equality and addressing pressing global issues to enhancing the quality of governance and representation, women's active participation in politics has far-reaching and transformative implications that reverberate across all sectors of society. Women constitute approximately 48.52% of the Pakistan population, and their inclusion in political processes is not only a matter of equality but also a foundation of stable democracy. By actively engaging in politics, women contribute unique perspectives, priorities, and experiences that such as policy analysis and decision-making processes, leading to more inclusive and equitable outcomes. But, derogatory remarks against female parliamentarians have a profound and complex impact on the overall

political discourse and debates within the Pakistani parliament. This impact extends beyond individual instances of offensive language, reaching into the very fabric of the political environment, influencing power dynamics, policy discussions, and the broader perception of women in politics. Firstly, derogatory remarks in social media contribute to normalize sexist and gender-based discrimination within the parliamentary sessions. When such language is allowed to persist without challenge, it sets a precedented act, fostering an environment where disrespect and gender bias are tolerated. This normalization not only undermines the dignity of female parliamentarians but also erodes the quality of political discourse itself. Moreover, derogatory remarks can have a silencing effect on female parliamentarians, hindering their ability to participate fully in debates and discussions. The fear of facing further disparagement may lead some women to self-censor or avoid contentious issues, thus limiting the diversity of perspectives and policy solutions brought to the legislation process. As a consequence, critical voices and innovative ideas may be stifled, ultimately undermining the effectiveness of the parliamentary process. Secondly, women often advocate for issues that directly impact them, such as gender equality, reproductive rights, education, healthcare, and family welfare (G Sen, A Mukherjee,2017). Consequently, a more balanced representation in politics ensures that a broader spectrum of societal needs and aspirations is addressed, fostering a better understanding of complex issues and driving the formulation of more informed and comprehensive policies. The female

parliamentarians in Pakistan continue to face gender-based discrimination, including derogatory and demeaning remarks from their male counterparts. These remarks, when reported and mediated through online newspapers, not only reflect underlying patriarchal attitudes within political discourse but also shape public perception of women in leadership roles. However, limited scholarly attention has been paid to how such gendered language is constructed, framed, and disseminated in digital media. This gap limits our understanding of how media contribute to promoting gender inequality and reinforcing male dominance over women through the media. Therefore, there is a dire need to analyze the news surrounding these incidents to uncover the ideological functions of such language and its implications for gender equality in political representation. These research questions will guide the study by addressing the use of derogatory language by male politicians in parliamentary sessions and examining gender bias in media portrayals of female politicians, thereby providing a structured framework for analysis. Q1: What are the derogatory remarks and language used against female parliamentarians on the parliament floor?

Q2: How media has framed derogatory remarks in online newspapers?

2. Objectives of the study

The research objectives of the study titled "Discourse Analysis of Reported Derogatory Remarks on Female Parliamentarians in online newspapers " are clear, specific, and interpretable, and they will guide the research process. The research objectives for this study are as follows:

1. To identify and categorize derogatory remarks made against female parliamentarians published in online newspapers
2. To examine the context in which derogatory remarks are reported,
3. To assess the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed in derogatory remarks against female parliamentarians
4. To explore the role of gender stereotypes and biases in shaping the discourse surrounding female parliamentarians.
5. To suggestion recommendations for more responsible and gender-sensitive media coverage and discourse surrounding female parliamentarians.

3. Literature Review

Despite comprising 48.54% of Pakistan's population, women remain significantly underrepresented in politics, holding only 20.2% of parliamentary seats (World Economic Forum, 2020). Scholars argue that women in Pakistan face systemic barriers to political participation, including limited opportunities, socio-cultural constraints, and discriminatory practices (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2018). Although women's participation in politics has increased over the past few decades, they continue to encounter sexist attitudes and derogatory remarks from male counterparts, often aimed at undermining their credibility and legitimacy (Bandall *et al.*, 2019; Bjarnegard *et al.*, 2020). Several factors influence women's political participation, including socio-economic conditions, political systems, family background, and educational attainment (Chopra,

1993). In Pakistan, hereditary politics often determines women's entry into the political career. According to the Asian Development Bank (2010), many women inherit political roles through family connections before establishing independent political identities. Even those who enter politics on merit frequently face patriarchal resistance, rooted in societal norms that portray women as secondary actors in public life (Dar & Shairgojri, 2002).

Feminist Media Theory provides the deep understanding how such gendered representations are constructed and sustained through media outlets. Originating in the 1970s with foundational works like Laura Mulvey's (1975) "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the theory critiques how media reproduces patriarchal ideologies, marginalizes women, and reinforces gender hierarchies. It emphasizes that language, imagery, and media narratives often reflect the dominant male perspective, contributing to the public devaluation of women in politics. This is particularly relevant in the context of Pakistan, where female politicians are often objectified, mocked, or dismissed in public. Although constitutional provisions such as the 1978 presidential proclamation reserving 30 parliamentary seats for women have increased female representation relative to other South Asian nations (Bano, 2009), but cultural and structural barriers still persist. These include male resistance, gender discrimination, and negative portrayals in mainstream media (Al-Rawi, Chun, & Amer, 2022). Derogatory remarks directed at female politicians serve as tools of symbolic violence, used to challenge their legitimacy and reinforce male

dominance (Tan, 2023; Höhmann, 2020). These remarks ranging from slurs and body shaming to public ridicule are often delivered in parliamentary settings, where they reflect deeper societal discomfort with women in positions of power. Such language not only discourages women's political engagement but also contributes to emotional distress and public distrust (van Bavel, 2022; Turska-Kawa & Olszanecka-Marmola, 2018). The media, as a powerful cultural institution, plays a crucial role in either reinforcing or challenging these gendered norms. Feminist Media Theory underscores how media narratives shape societal attitudes, often emphasizing women's appearance, marital status, or personal lives over their political accomplishments (Al-Rawi, Ackah, & Chun, 2023). These portrayals reinforce stereotypes and frame women as less competent or legitimate actors in the political sphere. Solomon and Dar (2022) argue that a gender-sensitive media is vital for equitable representation and responsible reporting, especially when female politicians are targets of misogynistic rhetoric. The transformative potential of social media is also significant. While it can amplify women's political voices, it also facilitates the rapid spread of derogatory content, intensifying reputational damage (Brannon, 2017). Derogatory language not only shifts public discourse away from substantive policy issues but also erodes the confidence and mental well-being of female politicians (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2018; Krooke & Restrepo, 2016). From a feminist discourse analysis perspective, language is central to the construction of gendered power relations. Feminist Media Theory, particularly in its engagement with critical

discourse analysis, highlights how repeated media patterns reinforce patriarchal structures by shaping who is heard, how they are portrayed, and what kinds of speech are legitimized. As Collier *et al.* (2018) explain, derogatory language functions as a symbolic mechanism for exclusion, perpetuating inequality and silencing dissenting voices. In conclusion, the literature reveals how media and political discourse in Pakistan often marginalize female politicians through derogatory language, contributing to broader patterns of gender inequality. The integration of Feminist Media Theory provides a critical framework to examine how language and representation function as mechanisms of power and exclusion. Ongoing research and media reform are necessary to promote gender-equitable discourse and ensure inclusive political participation.

4. Methodology

This research is qualitative and has employed analytical analysis method used by CDA' researchers. Online discourse has consistently been scrutinized using Critical Discourse Analysis to dissect the content and underlying meaning. Yet, the most pivotal domain, particularly within the social realm, is politics and media. In this realm, political language primarily engages with the utilization of power and control to influence people's thoughts and perceptions. According Matsilele, T., & Nkoala, S. (2023), political language typically disseminates through electronic channels and gains virality on social media platforms. Furthermore, CDA serves as a valuable tool that not only facilitates in-depth text analysis but also recognizes discourse as both socially

constructed and constitutive (Campolina Rebello Guerrero, D. ,2023). Moreover, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) delves into the semiotic aspects of discourse, encompassing concepts related to abuse, power dynamics, injustices, as well as economic, political, and cultural (Esposito, E. ,2023). Additionally, in the realm of sampling, researchers such as Khan *et al.* (2019) have suggested that when conducting discourse studies, the selection of a sample for analysis should be based on keywords extracted from the text being analyzed. They argue that focusing on the quality of the text should be a priority in data collection for discourse studies, rather than simply aiming for quantity. This perspective led the researchers to purposefully limit the number of samples for analysis and taken two cases when male parliamentarian used derogatory, misogynist remarks for female parliamentarians. This study employs purposive sampling, selecting two most reported incidents in media. The first incident involves the labeling of Dr. Shireen Mazari as a "tractor trolley" in June 2016, and the second of female Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmakers as "garbage left behind" in July 2023. These cases were chosen due to their significant media coverage, public reaction, and the status of the individuals involved, thereby providing rich data for critical discourse analysis.

4.1 Analysis

Khawaja Asif calls Shireen Mazari a 'Tractor Trolley' June 08, 2016. ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly witnessed a ruckus on Wednesday when outspoken federal minister Khawaja Asif called names on the central leader of PTI Shireen Mazari. Khawaja Asif called Mazari a

‘tractor trolley’ while speaking in the house over the issue of load-shedding. “Mr. Speaker! Tell the tractor trolley to be quit,” the minister said. As reported by The News International, Daily Times, and The Nations. Referring to a female parliamentarian as a "tractor trolley" is an extreme example of derogatory and disrespectful language with latent consequences. Analyzing such language involves considering the context, power dynamics, stereotypes, and the impact it has on individuals and society as a whole. It's important to promote respectful and inclusive discourse to ensure fair and equal treatment of all individuals, regardless of their gender or political affiliation. The term "tractor trolley" used in the context of her not listening to a speech and continually interrupting during a speech of Khawaja Asif can be analysed within the cultural context provided, where "tractor trolley" is associated with loudness and a lack of responsiveness. Pakistan, being agriculture economy, the metaphor "tractor trolley" during harvest season being loud and not responsive to other sounds in their surroundings is a familiar and intense portrayal. This statement provides insights into the speaker's choice of words that is very humiliating, uncivilized and lack of respect for the woman parliamentarian. Referring to a woman in this manner may perpetuate gender stereotypes, implying that women should be more passive or submissive in political debates. It can contribute to an environment where women in politics are discouraged from asserting themselves. It could also polarize the discussion, hinder constructive dialogue, and potentially discourage the woman parliamentarian from actively participating. The

audience reaction to this metaphor is significant. 73% of the X(Twitter) condemned this statement that provide insights into the prevailing attitudes and norms within the political context in online space. Khawaja Asif draws flak from PTI after calling party's women parliamentarians ‘garbage’.Published July 25, 2023. Asif then went on to call the women parliamentarians the “remains” and “ruins” of Imran.... “This is the garbage left behind” by the PTI chief, “which has to be cleaned”, he added. As reported by Dawn, Pakistan Today, and The express tribune. The remarks again made by Khwaja Asif, as described in his statement, are derogatory and misogynistic. Referring to women parliamentarians as "remains" and "ruins" of Imran Khan (ex-prime minister of Pakistan) implies a demeaning and objectifying view of these individuals. Such language reduces women to mere objects or possessions of a male figure, disregarding their autonomy and contributions as parliamentarians. Furthermore, the statement suggesting that these women parliamentarians are "garbage" left behind by Imran Khan and need to be "cleaned" is highly disrespectful and offensive. It devalues their roles and contributions in politics, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and discrimination against women in leadership positions. In a respectful and inclusive society, it is crucial to treat all individuals, regardless of their gender, with dignity and respect. Derogatory and misogynistic remarks like these not only harm the targeted females but also perpetuate a culture of discrimination through media is disrespectful towards women in general. Such comments have no place in civilized nations and

should be condemned. It is essential to promote respectful and inclusive language in public discourse to ensure a fair and just representation of all individuals, regardless of their gender or political affiliation in media.

5. Discussion

Derogatory remarks against female parliamentarians in the Pakistani Parliament significantly influence the overall political discourse and debates, painting a distressing picture of gender dynamics within the political sphere. The conclusion encapsulates the discernible impacts of such derogatory comments and offers insights into the broader ramifications on political discourse and democratic principles. Firstly, derogatory remarks undermine the credibility and professionalism of female parliamentarians. By focusing on gender-based insults or derogatory language, the discourse is diverted from substantive policy discussions to personal attacks. Such derogatory language perpetuates a culture of sexism and misogyny, diminishing the image of female politicians and dissuading potential female leaders from entering politics. Secondly, these remarks create a hostile and intimidating environment for female parliamentarians. The use of derogatory language undermines the very principles of democracy, including freedom of speech and expression. Female parliamentarians may experience psychological distress, anxiety, and fear for their personal safety, ultimately inhibiting their ability to contribute effectively to debates and discussions. Furthermore, derogatory remarks reinforce gender stereotypes and traditional patriarchal norms within society. By perpetuating harmful narratives and

reducing female politicians to mere gender-based stereotypes, this discourse limits the recognition of their capabilities and contributions in policymaking. It obstructs the progress towards achieving gender equality and equitable representation within the political arena. The impact is not limited to the immediate targets of derogatory remarks. Such language sets a precedent for the acceptability of gender-based discrimination and disrespect within the political realm. This normalized culture of derogatory language diminishes the overall decorum and professionalism expected in parliamentary debates, potentially deterring public interest and eroding trust in the democratic process. In conclusion, derogatory remarks against female parliamentarians in the Pakistani Parliament are not isolated incidents but rather symptomatic of deeply entrenched societal attitudes towards gender and power. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, involving cultural shifts, increased awareness, stronger enforcement of ethical standards, and fostering a more inclusive and respectful political environment. The collective effort of society, policymakers, media, and civil society is essential to challenge and change this harmful discourse, ensuring that political debates are driven by substance, respect, and a commitment to gender equality.

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