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Piety and Patriarchy: Intersections of Religious Dominance, State Power, and Misogynistic Attitudes in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aims to critically examine the forked interaction between religious dominance, state power, and misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan, finding how these forces construct and regulate the roles of women in society. The present research deeply analyzes religious sermons, state policies, and media narratives through Foucault's CDA model to unveil the gender-based subjectivity that is constructed and maintained by religious discourse. The investigation further highlights the strategic use of religious discourse, sometimes state-endorsed, that presents women chiefly as bearers of piousness and morality, strengthening the patriarchal norms and limiting feminine authority with an intentional erasure of socially established female figures from the early Islamic period. Focusing on Pakistan, this investigation critiques the prolific power of religious discourse as it is articulated through socio-political structures, including jurisprudence and public controversies, to constrain female agency and codify patriarchal norms. The paper ends with a recommendation for an interpretation of religious texts to avoid patriarchy and prevalent misogynistic behaviour.

Keywords: Religious Discourse; State Policies; Misogynistic Attitude; Patriarchy; Re-interpretation.

Introduction

The points where religious authority, state power, and gender relations in Pakistan intersect present a complex trajectory for the roles of women and gender-based subjectivity, which are defined by socio-political and cultural power. Being an Islamic republic, Pakistan's socio-religious environment is profoundly influenced by the interpretations of Islamic teachings, which are often mediated through institutional religious authorities and state mechanisms. These interpretations meaningfully influence public perceptions about women, however, strengthening patriarchal norms and confining women's authority in both the private and public domains (Nasr, 2001; Zaman, 2010).

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Religion in Pakistan has historically operated as a corrective institution, regulating not only spiritual conduct but also social norms, gender roles, and political frontiers. The state's disposition of religious ideology, predominantly during General Zia-ul-Haq's rule, played a critical role in arraying patriarchal interpretations of Islam into legal frameworks. One reason is that in Pakistan, religious discourse is not only responsible for spiritual guidance but also is used as a strong instrument of governance that sometimes causes a gender-based subjectivity (Nugroho & Andaryuni, 2023). Therefore, the state's inclusion of religious content into legal and educational structures, as evident from Zia ul Haq's era, e.g., the Hudood Ordinance, has brought up certain misogynistic attitudes, causing a disproportion in rights and freedom of women (Wasti, 2003; Weiss, 2014). These laws have long been a subject of a critical debate for their confusing religious morality with legal justice by creating patriarchy under the guise of Islamic authenticity (Shaheed, 2010).

The media has further promoted this trend by mingling gendered narratives that support conservative religious interpretations. Media narratives often assign women the symbolic function of societal moral compasses, positioning them as the embodiments of virtues such as religious devotion, submissiveness, and the preservation of family reputation. Such depictions obscure the multidimensional roles women have played in the history of Islamic societies. Mainstream religious pedagogy frequently marginalizes the foundational contributions of pivotal early Muslim women. The legacy of Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, a renowned merchant and patron, and Aisha bint Abi Bakr, a formidable jurist and political leader, is often minimized or omitted entirely from conventional narratives. In modern narration, this kind of contribution is either marginalized or omitted on purpose, repressing gender norms (Barlas, 2003; Esack, 2001). Hence, this discriminating historical forgetfulness serves to validate contemporary gender hierarchies by presenting them as consistent with Islamic tradition (Barlas, 2003; Esack, 2001).

This elimination of empowered female identities is not incidental but part of a larger strategy to construct a gendered subjectivity that fits into patriarchal expectations. Women are mainly perceived through the lens of moral commitment, family honour, and domestic responsibility. Their public manifestation is frequently treated with distrust, surveilled for possible moral transgressions, and disciplined through social discrediting or legal pressures. This regulatory framework efficiently constructs the female body as an object to control. An idea that aligns closely with Michel Foucault's concept of the "docile body," well-ordered and regulated through discourse, surveillance, and institutional power (Foucault, 1978). This discriminatory historical erasure is used to accommodate patriarchy, making people believe this is divinely decreed, and to confine the alternative models of gender justice in an Islamic framework. Due to such manipulated religious discourse, women are considered merely the bearers of family honour and religious morality. So, their public participation and self-reliance are always subjected to surveillance and control (Zaman, 2012; Ahmad, 2021).

Moreover, state-backed religious discourse functions as a prevailing technology of governance. It delegitimizes disagreement by framing alternative gender narratives or feminist reinterpretations of Islam as culturally deviant or religiously heterodox. This strategy not only silences women's voices but also strengthens a regime of "truth" in which patriarchy is standardized and resistance is stigmatized. Religious leaders, repeatedly acting as custodians of morality, vigorously shape public perceptions by framing gender equality as a Western imposition unsuited with Islamic values, despite studious efforts to prove otherwise (Rahman et al., 2025; Wadud, 2006). Public opinion, shaped by years of acquaintance with such ideological conditioning, echoes a coopted misogyny that resists legal and social reforms. According to Gallup Pakistan (2019), a noteworthy percentage of the population articulated uncertainty toward the Women's Protection Bill, fearing it would promote immorality. Similarly, UNDP's (2020) Gender Social Norms Index positions Pakistan among the top countries concealing anti-women bias, with nearly 99.8% of respondents agreeing with at least one discriminatory statement about women. These findings highlight the extent to which misogynistic attitudes are rooted in the public psyche, certified through both religious and state narratives. This study, therefore, aims to probe the entangled mechanisms through which religious discourse, state policy, and public perception together construct and withstand misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan (CGTN, 2020).

This study, through Foucault's Critical Discourse Analysis model, examines the patterns in which religious discourse, state power, and public perception intersect to construct and sustain misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan. Through the analysis of sermons, state policies, and media narratives, this research intends to reveal the strategies through which gender-based subjectivity is produced, internalized, and institutionalized. It also highlights growing counter-narratives, particularly from feminist Islamic learning and digital involvement that challenge the dominant orthodoxy and open new prospects for reinterpreting the roles and rights of women in an Islamic framework. Finally, the paper reasons that honest gender justice in Pakistan requires more than legal reform; it requires a critical re-engagement with religious texts and a reformation of public discourse that now legitimizes misogyny. By positioning the problem within a discursive and institutional matrix, this study emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary and transformative approaches that challenge the religious-political status quo.

Theoretical Framework

To see the interference of religious authority, state power, and misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan, Foucault's CDA model has been employed as a primary lens to see through. Michel Foucault's concept of discourse as a form of power/knowledge foregrounds the methods in which language, practices, and institutional structures work together to produce social realities and subjectivity (Foucault, 1978). Discourse does not merely reflect reality but actively shapes what can be said, thought, and done, thereby regulating bodies and behaviours in society.

Foucault's idea of ***power as prolific rather than entirely inhibitory*** is primary for knowing the mechanism through which religious discourse functions in Pakistan. Religious narratives and state policies together not only prohibit the authority of women but also produce particular gender-based identities, for instance, positioning them mainly as bearers of piousness, morality, and domesticity. This restrictive power goes further into law, education, and media, creating a sense of normalization and internalized subjectivity that limits the roles of women and their voices (Fairclough, 1995; Foucault, 1980).

This study also integrates insights from ***Islamic feminist theory*** **as a workforce for Foucault's model**. This feminist theory critiques patriarchal explanations of Islamic texts and advocates for a reinterpretation of the holy scripture and history to reveal democratic principles (Barlas, 2003; Esack, 2001). Islamic feminism questions the various dominant narratives that erase the political, intellectual, and efficient contributions of women in early Islamic society, offering unconventional frameworks for gender justice also grounded in faith. Hence, this theoretical formulation allows for a critical examination of the nexus of state and religion for constructing gender-based subjectivity that works on the minds of people and creates a misogynistic attitude in society, further creating a sense of its legitimacy. It also highlights the potential for opposition through reversion and reform in the existing socio-religious fabric of Pakistan.

Research Objectives

This study aims to critically investigate the interventions of religious discourse, state power, and misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan, focusing on how these dynamics form the roles of women and their identities. The particular objectives are:

a) To explore how religious discourse in Pakistan, endorsed by state policies and public narratives, forms gender-based subjectivity that strengthens patriarchal norms.

b) To interrogate the intentional erasure and marginalization of various and empowered roles of women from contemporary religious narratives, and their impact on public perceptions about women in Pakistan.

c) To spotlight particular cases from contemporary Pakistan that exemplify the lived realities of misogynistic attitudes.

Review of the Literature

The relationship between religious discourse and gender-based regularities in Pakistan has been much studied by scholars who highlight the issue that Islamic teachings are often interpreted in ways that reinforce patriarchal power structures. For example, Nasr (2001) stresses the point that Pakistan's religio-political stance is formed by a conservative interpretation of Islam, which has been profoundly integrated in the state

establishment since the policies of Islamization were introduced in the 1980s. General Zia-ul-Haq's government is credited with these Islamization policies, initiating legal frameworks such as the Hudood Ordinances that caused the victimization of women unnecessarily, by tricking religious morality with state law and then legalizing gender inequality (Wasti, 2003; Weiss, 2014). Similarly, in contemporary legal structures, the implementation of policies, such as the Bill of Protection for women, has been met with public opposition. A survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan revealed that 39% of respondents think that this bill would cause more obscenity in society than doing good. While only 39% believe that it would protect women's rights. Such a thought pattern of society reflects a huge societal reluctance to favour legal reforms designed to empower women (Gallup, 2019).

Zaman (2010) looks into the institutionalization of religious control in Pakistan, screening the joint work of state and religious figures, not only the modulation of Holy matters but also for the social standardization, especially concerning women's conduct and status. This group action produces gender-based subjectivity that fits with the orthodox belief of family honour and female decency, a procedure more detailed by Rahman et al. (2025), who advocates that such discourse is used as an application of power that disciplines female conduct and enforces adherence through moral surveillance.

The misunderstanding of religious teachings is cited as an important obstruction to the participation of women in politics. Religious beliefs significantly influence women's political participation in District Charsadda. Their study revealed that 76.2% of respondents agree that misinterpretation of religious texts keeps women out of politics. While 61.5% consider that female leadership in Pashtun society is thought to be disgraceful and wicked due to religious misinterpretation (Khan, Jan & Khan, 2020). Barlas (2003) calls for a rereading of Islamic texts from a feminist view that recovers concern for women and their historical significance, a view echoed by Esack (2001), who records the different roles of women during the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) time. The roles that are consistently erased in modern narratives are those that sustain patriarchal authority. Her point of view goes opposite to the present dominant patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an, meaning that many restrictive interpretations are culturally conditioned rather than sacred text-mandated.

Moving ahead with a misogynistic attitude in Pakistan, it has been viewed that even popular female figures, such as politicians and social media personalities, have to face severe misogynistic backlash, reflecting a broader societal opposition of women for their public presence and self-reliance (Khalid, Khalid & Islam, 2023; Hussain, 2019). Female judges, doctors, and even a common woman dressed oddly have to encounter discrimination and mistreatment, which evaluates institutionalized gender biases that limit professional and social empowerment of women (Hussain, 2019; Ali et al., 2022). These examples are the entrenchment of misogynistic attitudes in both the public

sphere and the state structure, highlighting an urgent need for quibbling action to cope with this state of affairs.

Ahmad (2021) analyses media and public discourse in Pakistan, finding that women are often depicted as merely the symbols of chastity and religious allegiance, rather than as independent individuals. This symbolic representation enforces social expectations of modesty and obedience, limiting the participation of women in public and political life. Likewise, Zaman (2012) discusses that such discourses create a gender-based public sphere where the presence of women is dependent and, to a great extent, is watched. Shaheed (2010) renders a captious feminist analysis of legal and social structures in Pakistan, highlighting the intersection point of religion and state in upholding the subjugation. Her work insists on the need for legal reforms and reinterpretations of the Islamic teachings that go well with gender-based justice and human rights in an Islamic system.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) surveyed in 2020 and ranked Pakistan at the top of a list of 75 countries for misogynistic bias, where 99.81% of respondents expressed at least one prejudiced view. Common biases included thoughts like men can become better political and business leaders than women, and for men it's more important to acquire a university education; moreover, it was found out that there is nothing much objectionable in beating wives for the sake of good, Pakistan's sexism problem is no secret (Yusuf, 2020). Ali et al. (2022) call attention to the continuity of gender discrimination across several regions of Pakistan through both literature and field data. Their studies have revealed enough that women are mostly viewed as objects for physical intimacy and helpless creatures, having no self-identity unless married. They are primarily confined to domesticity and child-rearing responsibilities, with limited self-reliance or recognition for their efforts. In addition, religious figures in rural areas with low literacy rates sometimes misapply religious instructions based on patriarchy to disapprove education for girls; their view is that education makes women self-directed, making them unfit for domesticity (Ali et al., 2022).

These cases represent an established misogynistic attitude in both the public sphere and he state structures, throwing light on the objections faced by even those women who are in powerful positions. Hence, this collection of learning proves the value of critically analyzing the religious discourse in its socio-political context to recognize the structures that assist in causing misogynistic attitudes. Foucault’s discourse analysis suggests an appropriate lens for revealing these power patterns by telling how knowledge and power come across in the building of gender-based subjectivity.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method research design using ***Foucauldian Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*** to investigate the intersection of religious discourse,

state power, and misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan, and a survey based on a questionnaire to gauge the impact of this state and religion's nexus. CDA is well-suited for the qualitative part of this research as it critically analyzes how language, power, and knowledge act together to construct social realities and subjectivity (Fairclough, 1995; Foucault, 1978).

Data Sources for Qualitative Analysis

The firsthand data consists of:

- Religious sermons and speeches by influential Pakistani religious figures and scholars.
- State policies and legal documents, with a focus on the Hudood Ordinances and other laws related to gender.
- Media narratives, including news articles, television debates, and social media discourse about prominent female political and social media figures, as well as about cases from society.

Data Collection

All data was collected from publicly reachable origins, including government archives, religious institutions' publications, and digital media platforms. Texts that explicitly engage with the roles of women, gender norms, and related socio-political disputes were selected on a priority basis.

Ethical Considerations

As this study utilized exclusively publicly available textual data, it did not involve direct interaction with human subjects. Nonetheless, the research was conducted with a conscientious regard for the ethical representation of the individuals and topics discussed within these texts. The entire data has been handled with sensitivity and scholarly honesty so that this methodology can enable a sound discernment of the power relations integrated in discourse and their practical effects on the social placement of women in Pakistan.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The main focus of the analysis is to distinguish discursive strategies that produce and regulate **gender-based** subjectivity through the CDA framework of Foucault. The key themes that were discovered include the representation of women as symbols of piousness, the beauty of Islamic history to justify patriarchal norms, and the institutionalization of misogyny done with law and media. The analysis also considers how opposition and counter-narratives appear in the public sphere.

Coding Framework and Tagging Schema

For a systematic qualitative analysis of the data collected from religious discourse, state documents, and media narratives, this study has engaged a structured **thematic coding and tagging representation** founded on Foucauldian discourse analysis. The coding process involves **open, axial, and selective coding** to show the patterns of power, dominance, gender construction, and ideological reinforcement.

1. Code-book: Primary and Axial Codes

Primary Code	Definition	Axial Sub-Codes
Religious Justification	Illustrations where gender roles are legitimized using religious texts or theology	- Qur'anic citations - Hadith quotation - Fatwa speech
Gender-based Subjectivity	How women are placed in discourse (e.g., inactive, righteous, domestic)	- Female decency - Domestic ideal - Public risk
Misogynistic Discourse	Language that disregards or devalues women	- Honour-based logic - Victim-blaming - Derogatory remarks
Moral Regulation	Surveillance of female behaviour in terms of religio-cultural norms	- Veiling/Hijab social control - Movement regulation
State Power & Conformity	How laws or state practices impose religious or patriarchal values	- Hudood Ordinances - Qanun-e-Shahadat - Policing of behaviour
Resistance/Counter-Narratives	Instances where gender norms are challenged or critiqued	- Feminist language - Activist speech - Modernized religious voices

Interpretation of Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis, integrated with Foucault's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), brings out the mechanism by which power, knowledge, and discourse interweave to build and govern gender-based subjectivity in Pakistan. Drawing from religious sermons, legal documents, and media narratives, the findings highlight recurring themes of ***religious justification, moral regulation***, and ***misogynistic discourse,*** alongside a few places of resistance.

1. Religious Justification and the Production of Gender Norms

Religious sermons and public speeches by influential religious figures systematically evoke Qur'anic and Hadith-based justifications to define the

"perfect" woman as pious, humble, and home-oriented. Expressions, for instance, **"a woman's dignity lies in her home"** and references to **"God-ordained roles,"** were frequently engaged to verify male guardianship and female compliance. These constructions illustrate Foucault's notion of ***power/knowledge,*** wherein religious discourse becomes a device of governance that contours individual conduct and social demand (Foucault, 1978).

Likewise, the ***strategic use of divine texts*** not only establishes patriarchal authority but also makes alternative interpretations as perverted or blasphemous, forbidding feminist reinterpretations of religious belief. The same was the argument by Barlas (2003) in her critique of patriarchal interpretation of Islamic theology, and she demonstrates how gender roles are discursively supported through religious authority.

2. Legal Discourses and Institutionalization of Patriarchy

Hudood Ordinances and **Qanun-e-Shahadat** were some peculiar examples of legal texts used to institutionalize gender hierarchies, done with the **codification of inequality**. To consider the testimony of women as legally inferior and the encumbrance of proof on the part of women in cases of adultery (zina) illustrates what Foucault terms the ***juridical-discursive nexus*****,** the way in which laws produce and reinforce dominating discourses. Consequently, these legal instruments do not merely reflect social values but also actively ***produce gender-based legal subjects***, allocating women a legally inferior and morally questionable status.

Further investigation of legal language disclosed more about the labyrinth of ***state power with religious dominance,*** where legal standards are infused with religious authenticity, making them resistant to reform. Foucault's concept of government is relevant here as he claims that state control over female agency is justified through a moral and religious frame of reference.

3. Media Narratives and the Circulation of Misogyny

Media discourses are often replete with ***moral regulation and misogynistic commentary,*** especially when some burning event involving women takes place across Pakistan; the media actively participates in portrayals of women, ignoring their status, whether they are politicians, activists, digital celebrities, or a mere woman. Women who stand against the conventional roles, like outspoken women rightists, journalists, or political leaders, have been subjected to public shaming, character assassination, and accusations of moral deviance. Terms like **"vulgar** فحش**," "disrespectful** بےادب**,"** and **"anti-Islamic"** مخالفِ اسلام are routinely attached to their personas.

These narratives reflect Foucault's view of ***disciplinary discourse***, where deviant subjects are rectified through public enquiry and moralizing language. Thus, the media works as a disciplinary institution that ***reproduces hegemonic masculinity*** and curbs unconventional gender actions.

4. Construction of Female Subjectivity

Across all three recurrent domains, religion, law, and media, women are overwhelmingly constructed as ***dependent, emotional, and morally vulnerable.*** Their authority is framed as either dangerous or requiring male oversight. The discursive formation of women as **"bearers of honour"** and **"guardians of morality"** serves as a justification for regulating their behaviour, attire, speech, and mobility.

This discursive construction confines the subjectivity of women to constrictive moral categories, efficaciously ***subjectifying them as objects of regulation*** rather than independent individuals. According to Foucault, this is called the creation of ***a docile female body*****,** an individual corrected by speech to accommodate patriarchal and religious norms.

5. Sites of Resistance and Emerging Counter-Narratives

Though it's uncommon and infrequent, the analysis has identified ***rising counter-discourses***, particularly on digital media and in activist voice. Feminist narratives that demand a reclaim in Islamic principles of justice and equality are found intriguing to the exclusivity of patriarchal religious interpretations. These discourses represent what Foucault calls **reverse discourse**—the use of the dominant discourse's terms to overthrow and defy its control.

Analysis shows that women-led social media campaigns and televised counter-debates have been coded under ***Resistance/Counter-Narratives*** **that** declare a stepwise but remarkable ***disruption of hegemonic narratives***, particularly among younger and urban populations. Yet, these counter-narratives remain marginal compared to the overriding misogynistic discourse, and such resistance-based campaigns are often suppressed through backlash and warnings, which can be taken as a manifestation of the fragility of feminist subjectivity in Pakistan's public domain.

The findings also support the view that ***religious and state discourses in Pakistan are profoundly involved in the production of patriarchal norms*** that regulate and restrict subjectivity about women. Such discourses are further reinforced through law, religious speech, and media representation, creating a discursive state of affairs where ***misogyny is standardized and resistance is invalidated***. Still, ***the presence of counter-discourses*** signifies the possible discursive transformation, especially through feminist illustrations and digital engagement. The analysis also emphasizes an imperative need to critically

pursue the ***discursive mechanisms of power*** that uphold gender-based difference in religiously-informed settlement.

Quantitative Analysis Based on Survey Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire has been formed as a complement to gauge public perceptions about the roles of women, religious discourse, and gender norms in Pakistan. The questionnaire has been constructed to capture the attitudes, beliefs, and awareness levels of Pakistani citizens regarding the crisscross of religion, state policies, and misogynistic attitudes.

Sample and Distribution

The questionnaire has been distributed to a purposive sample of 150 individuals across urban and semi-urban areas in Pakistan, considering diverse demographic features, i.e., age, gender, education, and socioeconomic status.

Data Analysis

Responses collected from the sample have been examined quantitatively to identify predominant attitudes and then correlated with qualitative discourse findings for a better and subtle understanding of the mechanism that is actually involved in religious and political discourse for shaping public conceptualization.

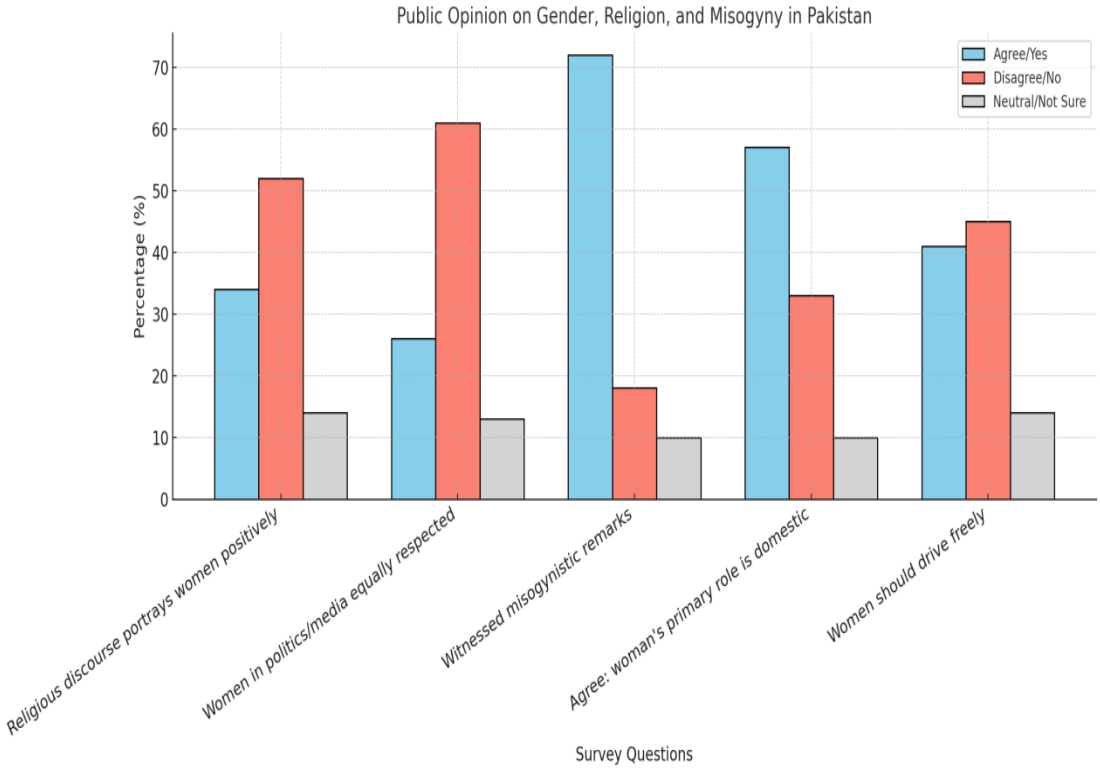
Key Findings Based on Survey Questionnaire (Selected Questions for reference):

Survey results bring out the interwoven strength of religious discourse, state governance, and public views in upholding the misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan. The findings prove how these powers work together to construct and maintain gender-based subjectivity that confines the self-reliance of women and their engagement in communal life.

Public Opinion on Gender, Religion, and Misogyny in Pakistan

Survey Question	Agree/Yes (%)	Disagree/No (%)	Neutral/Not Sure (%)
Religious discourse portrays women positively	35%	52%	13%
Women in politics/media equally respected	27%	61%	12%
Witnessed misogynistic remarks	72%	18%	10%
Woman's primary role is domestic	58%	33%	9%
Women should drive freely	41%	46%	13%

Here are the visual representations based on the data analysis:



A visual representation has been tried to display by a bar chart about public opinion in Pakistan regarding the crisscrossing of gender, religion, and misogyny. The findings unveil an important vision about social attitudes, especially in terms of religious discourse, media representation, and conventional gender norms and their impact on public perception in relation to the roles and rights of women.

The first survey item, **“Religious discourse portrays women positively,”** speaks as if a majority of respondents (about 52%) disagreed with the argument, showing only approximately 35% agree. This suggests that a significant part of the population comprehends religious discourse as either insufficiently supportive for women or possibly strengthening gender-based hierarchies. This critical view may cause deep societal debates on the role of religion in upholding patriarchal structures, as Barlas (2003) and Hallaq (2009) have explored in their works, whereby they question the gender-based interpretations of Islamic texts.

Then the second item, i.e.**, "Women in politics/media are equally respected,"** got an even higher proportion of disagreement (about 61%), with only 27% who agreed. This

disproportion calls attention to perceived disparities in the regimen of women in the public sphere, especially in the fields that historically were influenced by men. These findings help existing research that associates political and media spaces as challenged arenas for female depiction and authority (Zia & Bari, 1999).

In response to the statement of third item of the questionnaire, i.e.**, "Witnessed misogynistic remarks,"** an irresistible answer of 72% respondents affirmed the truth of the statement that they have been observing such misogynistic behaviour. This affirmation is an indication of the fact that misogynistic discourse is not only frequent but also regularized in everyday interactivity. Hence, this argument aligns well with Foucault's (1978) concept of discourse as a medium for power, where everyday language practice manifests and procreates societal power oscillations, along with gender subjugation.

The next item stating" **a woman's primary role is domestic,"** was supported by around 58% of respondents with the agree response, and only 34% disagreed. This response design elaborates a hefty attachment to conventional gender roles, where domesticity is regarded as a standard attribution for women. These findings align with critical appraisal of patriarchal theory in South Asian subcontinental contexts, where domesticity is frequently proclaimed as culturally idealistic and religiously commanded (Shaheed, 2010).

Finally, responses toward the questionnaire item stating **"Women should drive freely"** have been observed as more divisive. 41% of the respondents agreed, but the proportion who disagreed 46% took the advantage by reinforcing the notion once again, and 13% remained neutral, indicating a confused state of mind. This doubt or hesitance toward female mobility shows that the public sphere is still highly gender-based and is reluctant to show open expression for wider gender justice movements.

By triangulation of data, the **codes** ***"Gender-based Subjectivity"*** and ***"Moral Regulation"*** have been mapped against particular survey responses (e.g., public agreement that "a woman's primary role is domestic" or resistance against free mobility of women). A comparative coding matrix has been formulated to fit well the discursive course with public perceptions, showing a ***coherence between institutional discourse and public internalization*** of gender norms.

A well-structured ***summary table*** linking ***survey questions*** to the related ***qualitative code*****s,** derived from the Foucault Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, is presented. This table exhibits the intersection of quantitative public perception data with qualitative discursive constructions extracted from sermons, laws, and media.

Summary Table: Survey Questions and Corresponding Qualitative Codes

Survey Question	Public Response Trend	Corresponding CDA Codes	Interpretive Insight
Religious discourse portrays women positively	Majority Disagree (~52%)	- Religious Justification - Gender-based Subjectivity	Sermons and fatwas frame women as modest, domestic, or subordinate, which contradicts public ideals of equality.
Women in politics/media equally respected	Majority Disagree (~61%)	- Misogynistic Discourse - Moral Regulation	Media debates often disqualify women's roles in public, reinforcing the notion that women are unfit for political leadership or public visibility.
Witnessed misogynistic remarks	Majority Agree (~72%)	- Misogynistic Discourse - Gendered Subjectivity	Public perception aligns with media and legal discourse that normalize derogatory language toward women, especially vocal or visible women in society.
Agree: woman's primary role is domestic	Majority Agree (~58%)	- Gender-based Subjectivity - Religious Justification	Sermons and religious narratives stress domestic roles for women using scriptural authority, supporting internalized patriarchal values among respondents.
Women should drive freely	Divided Response (~46% Disagree, ~41% Agree)	- Moral Regulation - Resistance/Counter-Narratives	State and religious figures often frame the free mobility of women as a moral risk, though emerging progressive voices and female activists are beginning to challenge this.

Key Analytical Notes

Discursive-Receptive Symbiosis: The above table elaborates a high degree of alliance between the elite group's discourses (religious, legal, and media) and public view, especially on matters of domesticity and moral regulation.

Contradictions and Resistance: The subject of driving by women shows *the **most divided thought,*** manifesting a ***discursive strain*** between conventional norms and the emerging concept of gender equality.

Normalization of Misogyny: The higher agreement rate for perceived misogynistic remarks, along with media and legal data, exhibits a deeply embedded misogynistic language in both public and institutional spheres.

Discussion

In light of the above data analysis, the findings demonstrate a profoundly established nexus of religious discourse, state power, and public perception that together are responsible for upholding misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan's socio-cultural and political context. Foucault's CDA lens further helps in making it more evident that these elements are not detached but function as mutualist structures of power that build and regulate the roles of women.

Religious discourse in Pakistan, as illustrated earlier, works not only as a spiritual guide but also as a regulatory setup constructing gender-based norms. The formation of women chiefly as symbols of piousness and guardians of morals matches with Foucault's idea of disciplinary power, where discourse produces "truths" that rule social conduct. This institutionalized religious discourse blurs the historical roles of women from the early Islamic period, when women like Aisha bint Abu Bakar (RA) held a momentous political and rational authority and Khadija bint Khuwaieda had been a successful businesswoman, successfully rubbing out revolutionary prototypes of womanhood that challenge patriarchal control (Barlas, 2003; Esack, 2001). This deliberate erasure not only upholds a constrictive and conservative representation of Islam but also maintains the limited participation of women in the public sphere. Alongside religious narratives, state policies, such as the Hudood Ordinances, exacerbate these patriarchal norms by mixing religious morality into the legal structure, which justifies the dominance and surveillance of women's structure and their work. This codification of gender-based subjugation calls to attention the power circulation through legal institutions, beefing up gender hierarchies under the pretext of religious legitimacy (Wasti, 2003). The doubtful public response about legal protections of women, as demonstrated through survey data, evaluates the successful regularization of these misogynistic talks in a wide-ranging society.

This normalization of misogyny insinuates into public consciousness, resulting in a form of backlash against unorthodox women figures regardless of their status in society. Women affiliated with public, political, or digital settlements in Pakistan are repeatedly victimized through deep, invulnerable misogynistic discourse that points toward patriarchal control, indicating a mutual blending of religious and public sentiment. Female politicians like Maryam Nawaz and others have been frequently rushed with raging and male chauvinist rhetoric; for example, Ali Amin Gandapur accused her of using public money for her cosmetic surgery and threatened to "slap her so hard that her real face would be revealed" (Dawn, 2024). Likewise, Talal Chaudhry, from PML-N, once ridiculed a PTI MNA, Kanwal Shozab, for her

femininity, telling her, “First learn to act like a woman." These examples indicate the gender-based language that is used to sabotage the authority of women (The Express Tribune, 2019). This misogynistic attitude further extends to the digital domain, where artists and trendsetters are continuously targeted by humiliation and moral constabulary. During the recent Pak-India conflict, a TikToker, Minahil Malik, quoted Kareena Kapoor and had to face a certain patriotic backlash. Similarly, showbiz artists like Mahira Khan and Yumna Zaidi are often labeled with stereotypes on social media (India Times, 2025; Reddit Pakistan, 2024).

A very significant case revealing a true picture of misogynistic attitude is a woman in Lahore who was forced to apologize publicly for wearing a dress printed with Arabic calligraphy that was erroneously condemned as Quranic. It shows that confining women's expression of religiosity is implemented by selection (The News International, 2023). Another case of institutional misogynistic behaviour is the 2020 Sialkot–Lahore motorway gang rape case, when the chief of Lahore police blamed the victim for travelling at night on a remote road without a male guardian, igniting outrage across the country (BBC News, 2020). These live experiences of Pakistani women together exhibit that visibility of Pakistani women is monitored through discourses of ethics, religion, and patriotism, strengthening gender-based subjugation in both state and societal structures. These experiential cases underscore that disciplinary power functions not only through laws and discourse but also through social endorsement, including character defamation and hostility. These cases uncover the limits put on the authority of women and a continual watching of female subjectivity. Contrary to this misogyny prevalent in Pakistan, the findings also point toward the areas of opposition. There are now rising voices of female politicians and activists who are challenging these overriding narratives and are opening possibilities for reinterpretation of religious texts and reformation of state policies. Alternative discourses embedding Islamic egalitarian principles for both male and female are presented by feminist critiques for interrupting patriarchal power structures.

Finally, this study calls attention to the need for quibbling action of religious discourse and state policies to destroy misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan. It demands a truthful presentation of historical narratives, legal reforms, and public education to promote gender justice in an Islamic model that ensures authority and rights of women.

Conclusion

The present study has critically analyzed the crisscrossing of religious discourse, state power, and misogynistic attitudes in Pakistan, unveiling the fact that the roles of women in Pakistan are shaped and constrained by these powers collectively. Analyzing through Foucault's Critical Discourse model, it has become more evident that religious narratives principally present women as symbols of piousness and moral obligation, at the same time minimizing their past and current authority.

Government policies, particularly those sticking with traditional interpretations of Islam, institutionalize these gender-based norms, setting misogyny in legal structure and national institutions. A persistent social backlash faced by women who challenge patriarchal boundaries is evident from real-life cases of misogynistic behaviour toward popular female figures in Pakistan. Moreover, the deliberate erasure of strong societal roles of women from the early Islamic era sustains the gender-based beliefs of repression.

Nevertheless, this research sheds light on a pervasive regime of truth in Pakistan that normalizes gender inequality through intertwined religious, legal, and social mechanisms. However, emerging voices of resistance, including Islamic feminist views and women's policy, give an optimistic vent for challenging and transforming these established attitudes. A significant advancement toward gender justice requires a critical re-evaluation of religious discourse, reformation of prejudiced laws, and a societal earnestness for the rights of women and their empowerment.

Recommendations

Following a multifaceted plan of action is recommended to address the continual crisscrossing of patriarchal-based religious discourse and state structures that bring marginalization of women in Pakistan.

1. Reinterpretation of Religious Texts

It is a need of the hour to encourage a scholarly and community-based action that supports an Islamic feminist exegesis showing the egalitarian ethos of early Islam. Intellectuals like Barlas (2019) and Wadud (2006) have argued that patriarchal explanations of the Qur'an are not inbuilt but are a result of androcentric interpretation. By renewing the narratives of women, who were placed in high social positions in the early Islamic era, these reinterpretations can question established norms that bound authority (Rahman et al., 2025).

2. Legal Reform

After the reinterpretation of religious texts, the reformation of discriminatory laws is also required. Laws such as the Hudood Ordinances have been a critical step towards gender justice. Several studies have certified that such governance institutionalizes misogyny and imposes unnecessary punishment for women (Gondal & Hatta, 2024; Zia, 2019). Therefore, it is recommended that legal frameworks must be amended to fit well not only with Pakistan's constitutional commitment to equality but also with international human rights standards, for instance, those defined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 2021).

3. Public Awareness and Educational Initiatives

Mass education is recommended as a strong instrument that can be used to pull down gender-based discrimination. Introducing a gender-sensitive syllabus into academic curricula and running awareness campaigns at the community level can be helpful in public perception transformation (Rafiq, Kamran, Zia, Munir & Afzal, 2024). These undertakings can assist in handling misconceptions about religion and culture that are used to support patriarchal norms and can bring to light the historical and contemporary contributions of women to society (UNDP, 2020).

4. Support for Women in Leadership

To promote participation of women in the public sphere, like leadership in politics, health care, and the judiciary, there is a need for support at the Institutional level that ensures legal protections against harassment and action policies (Rana, Lee, Saher, & Shabbir, 2024). Despite being established at high social ranks, there are some infrastructural obstructions that hinder women's involvement in the public sphere, calling attention to the need for integrating special policies that ensure an egalitarian representation (Bari, 2000).

5. Media Responsibility and Accountability

Media, whether it is electronic or digital, plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions about gender roles. Present content analyses have demonstrated that Pakistani media often support misogynistic narratives and show disappointment in challenging noxious stereotypes (Hassan, Qureshi & Javed, 2020). There is a need for a collaborative work of both media regulatory authorities and civil society, so that responsible journalism can be promoted that uplifts positive representations of achievements gained by women and puts an objection to discriminatory portrayals (Akbar & Safdar, 2024).

6. Empowering Grassroots Movements

Grassroots organizations of women can be primary players in supporting gender equity on local socio-cultural levels. This organization, often working with modest resources, plays a pivotal role in addressing gender-based hostility and advocating for legal and social reforms to protect women's rights (Zia, 2019; Haider, Charan, & Katohar, 2025). If they get support from government institutions in terms of funding, legal assistance, and capacity building, they can bring a giant societal transformation and can magnify their impact to a great extent. Taking these recommendations as a plan of action, Pakistan an Islamic republic can certainly progress toward a more inclusive and equitable society where truthful religious interpretations, democratic state policies, and unbiased civic structures support, rather than obstruct the rights and dignity of women.

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