

## GENDER DISCRIMINATIONS IN MEDIA DISCOURSE: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

*Fouzia Rehman Khan*<sup>\*</sup>

*Samreen Zaheer*<sup>†</sup>

*Muhammad Abdullah*<sup>‡</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*Human competence in its multiple dimensions always remains under debate in healthy and civilized societies. Morally and religiously, private life of the individuals is duly esteemed in terms of its sanctity until and unless it poses a grave threat to public interest. In certain societies and regions like the sub-continent, private life of the public figures remains under discussion in the media discourse to capture, manipulate and adjust the public opinion or achieve multifaceted invested agendas. In the field of language and gender a narrative has been set that the private life of a public woman is more vulnerable to public discourse than that of a man of the same status. She is not just taken as a public figure but her life is open to any kind of public discourse especially in the media. Present study explores the similar reflection in the media discourse of Indian English newspaper about Hina Rabbani Kher's visit to India. The editorial is analyzed within the qualitative research paradigm through the theoretical framework of sexual objectification furnished by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997).*

**Keywords:** Gender Discrimination, Sexual objectification, Media Discourse

### INTRODUCTION

The human history has reflected women as a powerless creature, even just an object of use by the other gender. This renders her position to be subservient. Such positioning of women is found in many discourses including even the religious ones. Today's world has apparently given many rights to the women and there is an obvious presence of feminists and other movements trying to get equal status and rights for her as they are for the men, but this also stays a fact that sexist patriarchy is still present explicitly or implicitly in different societies. The permeation of such kind of male dominance leads to the sexual objectification of women. The following analysis of a media discourse is an example of the same hierarchical structured society, with sexist patriarchy and sexual

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<sup>\*</sup> PhD Scholar NUML Islamabad

<sup>†</sup> Lecturer, Department of English, NUML Quetta Campus.

<sup>‡</sup> PhD Scholar NUML, Islamabad

objectification.

The selected text is a media discourse about Hina Rabbani Khar's visit to India as Pakistan's foreign minister in 2011. The discourse is an editorial that appeared in an Indian newspaper. It is gendered both at the micro analytical level of its words, use of idioms, syntactic structures as well as the holistic macro level of analysis of discourse beyond the level of sentence and prevalent context.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The classification of human world into 'us' and 'them' by Simone de Beauvoir can be related to the concept of objectification, where women are viewed as "others" universally, across all cultures. Hence Othering gives the concept of a woman as wholly inferior: the concept of Otherness cannot coexist with equality. Sexual objectification is the depersonalization of an object with desires of an individual. According to Bartky (1990):

Sexual objectification occurs when a woman's sexual parts or functions are separated out from her person, reduced to a statue of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her. To be dealt with in this way is to have one's entire being identified with the body... (p. 35).

The theory of sexual objectification, given by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) states that women exist in a culture in which their bodies are looked at and always potentially objectified. Interpersonal interaction and social interaction could be the ground for sexual Objectification: family, friends, associates and media. The function of objectification, therefore, is to socialize girls and women in a way that they think themselves as an object that is presented to be looked at and evaluated. Hence societal approval of objectifying gaze is playing a vital role to get Interpersonal sexual objectification to its extreme form. The sexual objectification is so much internalized by the women that some studies have found the objectifying advertisements as culturally acceptable and a part of the society (Zimmerman, 2008). Such acceptance is reflected in the sale of products whose ads demean women to mere objects. This acceptance results in the appreciation of oppressing messages and in turn continuation of oppression towards women that gets reflected in the overall behavior of the people of that society (Fredricson & Roberts, 1997 cited in Malinawskaite, nd)

As Bartky (1990) asserted the act of sexual objectification is a misconception of considering women's body or parts of her body as whole women. Consequently, vicious effects of objectifying women are noticed. For example (Fredrickson et al., 1998; Fredrickson & Harrison; 2005, Hebl et al., 2004), findings of this set of researches proposed the link between objectification and performance, where task performances of women on math and softball throwing were negatively hindered by self-objectification. Self-objectification is negative turn out of sexual objectification. Here they perceived and objectifies themselves from third person prospect and place more value on how they look than how do they feel.

The perceived failure of not being ideal often leads women to ashamed on being fat or out of shape. In our society, certain terms such as organized and self-control are related with balanced weight individuals and those who are overweight often perceived as wanting such qualities (Crandall, 1994). These internalized ideals of being perfect in body shape direct individuals to body shame that often motivates towards weight control. Dieting assures weight control, this practice leads individuals' attention to weight and shape, in the case of failure to maintain weight one may experience increase body shame (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). Self-objectification activates other mental and physical difficulties such as more inclination to cosmetic surgery, weakens cognitive ability, lower self-esteem, resentment towards other women, feelings of humiliation and disgust, the higher tendency of smoking.

Moreover the objectified women pretend to be like an object, she tries to be more like feminine as expected by the society. Objectification's impact on women's social interaction was identified by Saguyet al., (2010). It was demonstrated that women participation got reduced in social interaction when they thought that their bodies were being more focused by men, they narrowed down their presence by talking less. In addition, when women felt-freed from visual inspection of man their talking time was not less than men.

A link between Objectification and depersonalization was studied by Loughnanet. al., (2010), where they observed the dire consequences of objectification on objectified that led to denial of mental states and moral status. Loughnanet at., (2010) employed the term objectification in a philosophical sense, while previous researches focused on the psychological approach to objectification.

The work of Heflick and Goldenberg (2009), is one of the exceptions in which objectifying of a woman from third person's prospective was discussed. This was the first study to examine the projection of two well-known female personalities for example (Agelina Jolie and Sarah Palin). It was established that objectifying women might reduce perceived humanity. As bulk of researches employed psychological aspect of objectification (i.e what is focused, the body) however, only a few studies focused philosophical aspect of objectification (i.e what is denied, personhood) Loughnan et al., (2010). Current research aimed to present the philosophical aspect of objectification that is depersonalization of a person through media discourse analysis of an editorial about the visit of Hina Rabbani Khar to India and its presentation in the Indian media.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Present study utilized qualitative research method. This study is the discourse analysis of an editorial published in an Indian newspaper and analyzed within the theoretical frame of objectification presented by (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The text is gendered both at the micro analytical level of its words, use of idioms, syntactic structures as well as the holistic macro level of analysis of discourse beyond the level of sentence and in context.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The selected text is analyzed through the theory of sexual objectification. Sexual objectification is treating a human as an object for use and to look at, for pleasure. In a patriarchal cultural setting, this object is the woman and therefore this sexual objectification is often times paralleled to 'male gaze', where women become an object for men's gaze. This object and the gaze, structures, create and perpetuate the hierarchical structure of the society. Malvey (1975) in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' blames the cinema and the media as the product of the male gaze, where women are like spectacle in a film and men are spectators. Feminists have tried to argue to prevent women to be an object and a spectacle of men's fantasy.

Roberts and Fredrickson (1997) believe that sexual objectification is an act, which is achieved through sexual gaze by which women's body is not only centered but also detached from her personality as a human. They differentiated such objectification at three places, one is the public place

where the women receive sexual comments during face to face encounters, second is the media that tries to bring it closer to the face to face encounters for the satisfaction of the male gaze but here women do not feel or notice it directly. The third is the most threatening sexual objectification and this is through the visual media; this includes television and advertisements where through media tactics men's face is centered while women's body parts are focused and sexual objectification is attained through media. The sexual objectification has serious effects on the women as human beings and overwhelming effects on the viewers. It not only aids in the perpetuation of the male gaze but also develops a kind of acceptance among the women who start seeing themselves as object and thereby try to follow the standards of attractiveness as set by their culture and society. This aspect of attractiveness is sometimes taken as women's power at the work place because it increases their social acceptability, it sounds as if women are conditioned to such an objectification (Unger, 1979).

The sexual objectification has serious repercussion on the psychology of women. Many suffer anxiety and sometimes develop a feeling of shame, a negative emotion, for not appearing the way an ideal woman is shown in the advertisement. Therefore sexual objectification works two ways through the media; one is to objectify the women on the screen secondly to objectify women as viewers, as they start looking at themselves as object that gives pleasure when beautified in its appearance.

Sexual objectification can act as a barrier in attaining confidence and it also disrupts chances of success and achievement. This may also lead to psychological illnesses like anxiety, depression and eating disorders. Sexual objectification and the resulting self-objectification are the providers for the sustenance of patriarchal sexism (Millers, nd).

The women who think more about their looks and appearance have negative effects on their self-conceived competence. Women's importance in society is minimized as their internal attributes are shunned by themselves over their outer appearance. According to Casco (2011) using make up is one of the ways that woman self-objectify, seemingly making up for their competence but in fact dehumanizing themselves.

Sexual objectification co-relates the physical beauty of women and their worth and such a relation between these two variables is encouraged in most of the societies. Casco (2011) divides sexual objectification into two kinds, one is interpersonal and the other is intra personal. The interpersonal

sexual objectification involves two persons, a man who objectifies and the woman who gets objectified, whereas intrapersonal sexual objectification involves only the woman herself and the phenomenon is called as self-objectification. Interestingly it is not only the men who objectify women but women also can and do objectify other women. Objectifying women amounts to dehumanizing them and treating them neither as human nor equivalent to the other gender. They are reduced to some body parts and not taken as a whole but converted into some kind of an object and an instrument of use, especially to satisfy the male gaze and his sex goals.

Some older researches like (Vaes et al., 2010) suggests that in general women dislike and distance themselves from women who objectify themselves because they promote a culture where the looks of the women become the most important part of her, which vanishes her qualities as a higher order being, an individual who is competent and more than just the looks and the appearance.

According to Szymensk, Moffitti and Carr (2011), the environment plays a role in sexual objectification, which they term as SOE (sexually objectifying environment). The core criteria for this environment is the presence of gender role which is traditional, making the environment male dominant, where women have either lesser power or no power. Attention is given to the physical beauty of women, the purpose of which is to satisfy the male gaze. Such are the factors that contribute in the making of SOE. These roles spill over as Gutek (1985) uses the term that means they are carried over inappropriately to the workplace that seems irrelevant. The effect of this spill over is observable in jobs where the job or the part of it is reminiscent of a sex object like the women in showbiz or the cocktail waitress. An example of hooter restaurants is given, where all waitresses are females and wear sexually objectifying uniforms that emphasize their body and not their individuality as humans. The following analysis is a relevant manifestation of the same.

### **Analysis**

The title 'Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bags Attention on Indian Trip' well informs the reader of the theme of the editorial, the lady foreign minister 'bags' i.e catches or wins considerable attention. Since it is known that the foreign minister at that time was a lady, therefore the common interpretation is winning attention through her looks not by her performance as a foreign minister and a politician. The title in the very

beginning reflects the objectification of Pakistan's foreign minister who becomes the center of attraction not because of her competence but because of her beauty, looks, and elegant accessories.

The article starts with the mentioning of her 'Accessories and style' which further situates the readers to the kind of expected progress in this print media discourse. In the very next line, the purpose is mentioned as served by 'accessories and style' and that was 'media swooning'. Swooning literary means to be taken completely away with something extra ordinary and this phrase is followed by a glamorous picture of Ms. Khar. She is in fact objectified where she is looked at and evaluated; this object of pleasure, in other words, threw the media in a swoon.

The first part of the sentence mentioned above is the main clause connected to a sub clause with a complementizer 'but' and continues "is Hina Rabbani Khar really in charge of policy on Kashmir?" There are a number of aspects that need to be looked at in this introductory sentence, firstly, the arrangement of clauses within sentence. The sentence consists of two clauses. The main clause which is the first clause focuses on the frivolous, the accessories of the lady which threw the media into a swoon, and the second which is the subordinate clause i.e not an essential part of the sentence grammatically ask a political question which in itself is not a simple question but a query full of doubts, questioning the actual and the real power of Ms Khar to solve as serious a problem as the long existing issue of Kashmir. Her visit is first related to her stylish accessories and then to business, rendering the second as less important or depicting not too much hope for the achievement of the goals of the visit. Frivolous attached to the serious but the frivolous and the trivial precedes the serious. It is not without doubts that media discourse would not have been the same, had there been a male foreign minister.

The next paragraph again instead of starting with the proper names of the participant or concentrating on the agenda of the meeting between the two ministers, it starts with the name of 'Birkins' a brand whose bag was carried by Hina Rabbani Khar. Then the age of Ms. Khar is mentioned to inform the readers that the lady is young so mentioning her beauty, style and glamour are not out of place but very much relevant to her description. The description of her youth is followed by the phrase 'media frenzy erupted around her style' meaning thereby she drove the media crazy by her stylish looks. Her body parts are separated from her personality and she is not being treated as a whole human. Her accessories from head to toe are

noted and described “the pearl necklaces, elegant costume, Cavalli sunglasses and a stylish Hermes-made Birkin bag worth at least \$9000”. Such media discourse is rarely used for a male celebrity though there are no fewer brands available and carried by men too.

The age of both the foreign ministers is mentioned but with two different purposes. The age of Ms. Khar is told to signify her youth to associate it with beauty, glamour, and style whereas the age of Indian foreign minister Mr. Krishna, 79 shows his experience. In other words, women's mention is for the trivial, the frivolous while men's is for business, for the actual purpose and also to show his superiority for the task they are meeting for.

The second paragraph is also filled with the same kind of vocabulary and a similar beginning ‘Khar’s glamorous turn triggered a media swoon and became the buzz of the sub-continental chattering class’ so the foreign minister became the talk of the town just for something she had not gone to India for. All the term like “triggered, media swoon, frenzy eruption” are not apparently sexist but in this editorial in context they are as they shift the focus from the serious enterprise to triviality of looks, implicitly making Ms. Khar powerless (as an object) for the assigned task. The paragraph continues with the citation of headlines from the other papers. The Times of India described Ms. Khar’s arrival as “Pakistan puts on its best face” implying that Pakistan has tried to win over the talks through the beautiful face of her foreign minister, this is what at best Pakistan is capable of. This is putting Pakistan down through the media discourse. More sarcasm of the sexist kind is followed in the same passage by quoting a headline from another paper, Mumbai Mirror, which said “Pakistan bomb lands in India”. The derogation continues among headlines from several print media sources. The lady is equated to a bomb, a destructive object, which only serves to kill, and that too not a single person but a multitude of people at one time. The destruction is done by her beauty, and her looks to kill as if she has dressed up for this particular purpose. She is not called the best for the higher position she has acquired or for her other capabilities as a foreign minister, but ‘best’ in the headlines refers to her face which became a part of popular media discourse even before the formal talks between the two countries even began. She is stripped off her competence. The phrase ‘...its best face’ is well connected and in line with the lexical choice in the previous paragraph where Ms. Khar’s appearance sent the “media in swoon” and resulted in a “frenzy eruption”.



The third paragraph continues with the same theme, which mentions that not only the print media but Hina Rabanee Khar has gathered attention in the social media like twitter as well, where her name is clipped to HRK and equated to the Bollywood superstar SRK, Sharukh Khan who in this text is referred to as a 'leading heartthrob'. The dictionary defines heartthrob as a famous person with a sex appeal. Here again, she is being popularized for her sex appeal by being compared to an actor and an entertainer, thereby sexually objectified. She could have been compared to any political figure of the present time or from the history, seeing the nature of her job and mission. This kind of media discourse aims to jest about the peace negotiations between the two countries just for the reason that the foreign minister is a young female. The media coverage would have focused and discussed the agenda of the talks, had it been a man-to-man talk. A similar kind of sexist discourse went on in Pakistan, implying that the lens of media stays the same, no matter what country it is. Her looks, lineage and the right to carry such an expensive bag became the part of hot discussions back home.

Ms. Khar herself criticized the media for an undue attention to the frivolous, leaving the significant and the consequential. On a flight back home she aptly remarked "you don't want the attention to focus on the frivolous" and continued "a guy in my place would never get such attention; nobody would be talking about his suit", and with determination she said that she would not change herself, just because the media was sexist, she would stay the way she was, a well-dressed lady. The editorial picks up the term 'frivolous' as used by Ms. Khar and the next paragraph which thematically appears to talk about the meeting starts as "for all the frivolity" and then a small discussion of few lines on the consequential side of Ms. Khar's trip.

The initial four and a half paragraph of the editorial under analysis are invested in the discussion of Ms. Khar's looks, style, and glamour. Yet again just after two paragraphs on the aim of her trip, the discourse moves back to the description of her lineage and looks. With little relevance of the theme of the article, Ms. Khar is associated with the popularly unpopular book 'My Feudal lord' written by his uncle's ex-wife, Tehmina Durrani, who wrote about the women abuses in the family of Khars. With what collocation or connotation she is being associated with this writing is rather hard to understand.

Tracing her lineage, the text presents her to belong to a very conservative family. During the election campaigns when her father was found to be addressing large rallies, Ms. Khar would stay at home with not even a picture appearing in the media in accordance with “the deference of local sensibilities about the place of women”. But during her this official trip to India as Pakistan’s first female foreign minister, she was more pictured for her appearance rather than written about for her profession as a political representative of Pakistan in India. The editorial questions the power of Ms. Khar “whether she is really in charge” and her negotiations and decisions would be taken seriously or she was just sent as the “best face” representative of Pakistan.

To many critics, Ms. Khar is looked at as a symbol of the over-privileged aristocracy. Many common people must have come across the brand name ‘Birkin’ after Ms. Khar’s trip to India, the word has even become a part the of political register. Her arrival is called to have “injected freshness into a tired cabinet....”. In the parliament too she seems to have gained popularity for her young and fresh looks, which serves the purpose of taking away the tiredness of the rest of the cabinet. Be it India or Pakistan, the media discourse remains sexist towards women where even the powerful women are praised and appreciated for their looks and style, they are glamorized, giving undue attention to the frivolous and the trivial, leaving far behind the substantial, the significant and the consequential, suggesting to render them powerless and objectify them, and so are not be taken seriously and equally on professional grounds.

## CONCLUSION

The private life of a public woman is more vulnerable to public discourse than that of a man of the same status. She is not just taken as a public figure but her life is open to any kind of public discourse especially in the media. If she is pretty by the standards set by the society then she is prone to get extraordinary amount of undue media attention for no good reason but on issues as trivial as her appearance and more so when dressing, clothes, makeup and accessories should be regarded as a person’s personal choice. As shown in the above analysis a good amount of coverage is given to the minor details of Ms. Khar’s accessories. Her good looks are expected to be the reason for success in the talks. The major part of the article is her description; business comes later and as something unimportant. She is termed as model-like minister for her charms and occupied the front pages of the papers as models do in the fashion magazines to attract the readers.

She is admired for her looks and not for her competence as a foreign minister.

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