
ANALYSIS OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE PAKISTANI DRAMA *HUM TUM*: A QUALITATIVE STUDY BASED ON SANDRA BEM'S GENDER SCHEMA THEORY**Eisha Rafi**Email: eisharafi4@gmail.com

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Abstract

Media content has been used for long to portray and propagate the idea of gender discrimination based on prevailing social and cultural norms. Television dramas in Pakistan have a great impact on the views of the people about gender roles, family relations and social expectations. Traditional dramas in Pakistan have often cast the women as weak, helpless, housebound, and under the control of men, but recent dramas have started to defy these stereotypes. Hum Tum is one such change in the narrative of the play, which has been written by Saima Akram Chaudhary, which shows the reversal of roles in the management of household affairs, education and dreams, etc. In the present study the issue of gender role stereotype is explored in the theoretical context of Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory, with a focus on the role Hum Tum plays in breaking them. This study uses a qualitative research design and thematic analysis of selected episodes and dialogues to explore the meanings of the representation of masculinity, femininity, household labour, women empowerment and family dynamics. The results show that the drama reinforces the traditional gender roles, in which women are viewed as ambitious, educated, career oriented and men are viewed as emotional, supportive and actively involved in household chores. These images challenge the male centric notions that are entrenched in the Pakistani society and foster more gender balanced conceptions of genders. Meanwhile, the analysis shows that some aspects of the culture are still present in the narrative, indicating that some traditional gender norms are still challenged and negotiated in the media texts, and that the media were not meant to abandon them entirely. The study also adds to the scholarship on media and gender by emphasising the important role of Pakistani TV serials in promoting public discourse on gender equality and social transformation. It is also a modern extension of Gender Schema Theory to South Asian TV narratives and has implications for media practitioners, teachers, and policy-makers who are interested in creating gender-representative media stories.

Keywords: Gender discrimination; Gender stereotypes; Pakistani drama; *Hum Tum*; Gender Schema Theory; Sandra Bem; Media representation; Qualitative analysis

1. Introduction

Gender discrimination is one of the most entrenched and common types of social inequalities globally. Although there has been significant advancement in education, work and legal status, gender stereotyping persists and affects access to opportunities, social norms and resources for people. These stereotypes are entrenched in various social institutions, including the family, the educational system, religion and, significantly, the media, which helps to create and spread the norms of gender (UNESCO, 2024).

Television dramas are one of the most powerful areas of mass media as they entertain the viewers, but also influence their understanding of masculinity, femininity, family relations and appropriate behavior in society. The audience internalises gender stereotypes in the media, which can be entrenched in gender norms or lead to a more gender-equal and balanced worldview, through repeated exposure to media messages (UNESCO, 2024).

In Pakistan, television dramas have always been used as significant cultural text which mirrors the social values and ideology of the audience. In previous years, the traditional image of women was that of a dutiful daughter, a selfless wife and a loyal mother, while the traditional image of men was that of a decision maker, provider and head of household. These depictions help validate the root of the patriarchy in society and unequal gender relations (Shahzadi et al., 2023; Ashraf et al., 2024).

In recent years, research indicates that Pakistani TV serials are slowly breaking away from these stereotypes, showing women as educated, independent, and working professional women, and men as emotional, and proactively engaged in domestic affairs (Abid et al., 2024; Shoukat et al., 2025). However, stereotypical portrayals are prevalent in many TV stories and can be seen as a reproduction and negotiation of shifting gender ideologies (Azam et al., 2024).

In Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory, cognitive schemas about masculinity and femininity are formed by a continuous interaction between a person and his/her social and cultural surroundings. These schemas affect the way that people understand behaviors, the way that they define gender roles, and their self and other-appraisals. Thus, television dramas are a potent source for the creation, confirmation, and at times alteration of gender schemas (Bem, 1981, 1993).

Hum Tum is one of the few contemporary Pakistani TV productions that breaks away from the traditional gender narrative written by Saima Akram Chaudhary. Where most family comedies had the stereotypical notion of men as the breadwinners and women in domestic roles, Hum Tum intentionally flips the roles and makes the stereotypical women characters like a man, driven, brilliant, technologically skilled and active at physical activities, while the male characters take over the cooking, cleaning, domestic work and look after the children with great ease. These images question the notion of patriarchy that domestic work is the domain of women and leadership, authority and financial control are male.

The rise of these progressive narratives can be attributed to the societal shifts happening in Pakistan, including the rise in female participation in education, labor market, urbanization, digital communication, and public discussion on gender equality (UN Women, 2024). These changes in society have prompted media producers to make increasingly varied and realistic depictions of gender identities, sometimes controversially, but this has so far been a matter of debate among scholars.

Hum Tum was hugely popular, but there has been little academic work that focuses on the drama's reconstruction of gender identities and undermining of patriarchy. Most of the existing research concerning Pakistani television has been concentrated on the oppression of women, domestic violence, honor culture, and stereotypical portrayals of women, whereas, less research has been conducted on the dramas which explicitly advocate for other models of masculinity and femininity (Abid et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2025).

Based on the theoretical framework of Sandra Bem Gender Schema Theory, therefore this study was conducted to explore the issue of gender discrimination and reconstruction of gender roles in Hum Tum. The research approach adopted was qualitative thematic analysis of how the drama has attempted to go against the traditional gender roles of the characters, responsibilities of the household, educational attainment, interpersonal relationships, and family dynamics. This study helps fill the existing void in the literature on gender representation, media discourse, and cultural change in Pakistan.

Moreover, this study is an extension of Gender Schema Theory in current research on Pakistani television and offers some implications for media practitioners, educators, and policy makers to encourage gender-free representation. As television dramas are a major source of social awareness in Pakistan, it is important to comprehend the narratives of the dramas and

how they can either reinforce or challenge traditional gender stereotypes for promoting gender equality and sustainable cultural change in the country (UNESCO, 2024; UN Women, 2026).

This study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How does *Hum Tum* represent gender discrimination and gender stereotypes within Pakistani society?

RQ2: In what ways does the drama challenge traditional masculine and feminine gender roles?

RQ3: How can Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory explain the reconstruction of gender identities portrayed in *Hum Tum*?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender as a Social Construction

Today gender is viewed more as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon than a biological one. Social constructionist perspectives stress that gender identities are continually negotiated and constructed in the process of socialization, cultural norms, institutional practices, and media depictions. Since childhood, people are taught acceptable behaviours of masculinity and femininity by their families, schools, peers and the media.

According to Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory, people form a schema, or framework, in their minds which include information about gender appropriate behaviors and affect perception, attitudes, and decision making (1981, 1993). Gender schemas are especially strong because they shape how people perceive and understand their everyday experiences and how they judge the behavior of others. It is because, therefore, those socially desirable models of masculinity and femininity are acted out in the repeated media representations, which reinforce or question these cognitively constructed models. Wherever women's roles are becoming more flexible, as is increasingly suggested by contemporary scholarship, stereotypical depictions can be found in various media.

2.2 Media Representation and Gender Stereotypes

Media is one of the most powerful institutions in the shaping of public understandings of gender. TV dramas, movies and digital media are not only a reflection of the prevailing cultural values but also play a role in molding public attitudes towards gender roles. Traditional media depictions of women have consistently attributed them with emotive, nurturing and domestic responsibility, while those of men have consistently been attributed with authoritative, rational, financial independence and social dominance (Bem, 1993).

Recent research suggests that the representation in the media has become more complex. Modern dramas often depict women as educated, working women, and men as emotional, expressive beings, but these forward-thinking roles can be paired with patriarchal expectations. Thus, the media does not eliminate but rather undermines and re-affirms dominant gender norms. Analyses of narrative structures through computerization also show that gender stereotypes are still present in popular stories, despite the fact that there are signs of social change.

2.3 Gender Representation in Pakistani Television Dramas

Pakistani TV serials hold a special place in the pop-culture of South Asia because of their impact on the public's perception of family life, marriage, gender relations and morals. In traditional dramas, women's characters are mostly defined as an obedient daughter, a loyal wife and a selfless mother, while male characters are seen mostly as providers of money and decision makers. These depictions help normalize patriarchy, and perpetuate inequitable gender relations in society. More recent research suggests some change in these images over time.

According to Ashraf et al. (2024) the television dramas in Pakistan today depict traditional and updated gender roles more often, indicating that television has emerged as an important tool for the promotion of gender equality discussions. Similarly, Abid et al. (2024) show that

the patterns of discourse in Pakistani drama serials are still perpetuating gender stereotypes as well as adding more inclusive depictions of women and men. Likewise, by using critical discourse analysis, Azam et al. (2024) claim that even dramas that focus on women empowerment still subscribe to the patriarchal ideology by showing women in socially acceptable ways. Television narratives also contain narratives about the female characters who are challenging the traditional gender roles, which shows how empowerment is interwoven with traditional culture. Similarly, Azam et al. (2024), through critical discourse analysis, argue that even dramas promoting women's empowerment often continue to reinforce patriarchal ideology by presenting women within socially acceptable boundaries. Female characters who challenge conventional gender expectations frequently encounter social resistance within television narratives, illustrating the complex relationship between empowerment and traditional cultural values.

2.4 Emerging Representations of Reverse Gender Roles

In recent years TV serials in Pakistan have begun to break the gender stereotypes by having men as emotional family members and women as independent professionals. These stories question and subvert the traditional notions about homework, home leadership and feeling. Chaudhary et al. (2024) have shown that the dramas aired in Pakistan are on the rise that portray women as bold, informed and professionally successful individuals, whereas male family members are portrayed as partners instead of an authority figure.

They revealed that reverse gender role representation helps to build positive understanding of women empowerment in the society of Pakistan. Likewise, Noor et al. (2024) state that the portrayal of women in dramas written by women writers gradually shifts from being weak and housewives to having strong character traits, working towards the goals of self-reliance and resisting male stereotypes.

Similarly, Noor et al. (2024) state that women are portrayed in a comparatively stronger manner in dramas written by women writers, while male writers are likely to present women in male gender discourses. The results of these findings indicate that the role of the author and the perspective of the narration of the story have a significant impact on the representation of gender in Pakistani Television.

2.5 Pakistani Television as an Agent of Social Change

Television dramas serve as entertainment but also serve as a vital cultural institution that can shape public attitudes and social behavior. It has been suggested that the persistence of media narratives on the topic of progress can shape the perceptions of society over time about gender equality, familial relationships and household duties. Iqbal et al. (2024) confirmed that TV dramas positively impact on the perceptions of women empowerment in the university context and promote more inclusive gender equality concepts among the university students. Similarly, Shoukat et al (2024) suggest that while more and more dramas today feature empowered women and sensitive men as protagonists, there is a strong presence of patriarchy in most television dramas. Thus, the present-day Pakistani television reveals the process of negotiation between the traditionalistic cultural norms and new changing norms of equality.

2.6 Research Gap

Although considerable research has examined women's representation and patriarchal ideology within Pakistani television dramas, comparatively fewer studies have focused on dramas that intentionally reverse traditional gender roles by simultaneously reconstructing both masculinity and femininity. Existing scholarship predominantly employs feminist critical discourse analysis and representation theory while paying comparatively little attention to cognitive theories explaining how audiences internalize changing gender representations.

Furthermore, no substantial scholarly work has specifically examined *Hum Tum* through the theoretical framework of Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory. Most existing studies investigate dramas such as *Sar-e-Rah*, *Sinf-e-Ahan*, and *Mere Pas Tum Ho*, leaving *Hum Tum* comparatively underexplored. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by examining how *Hum Tum* reconstructs traditional gender schemas through the portrayal of educated women, emotionally expressive men, and shared domestic responsibilities. By integrating Gender Schema Theory with qualitative thematic analysis, this study contributes to the growing literature on media representation, gender identity, and cultural transformation in Pakistan.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in **Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory (GST)**, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals acquire, internalize, and reproduce gender-related beliefs and behaviors. Introduced by Bem (1981), the theory argues that gender is not solely determined by biological sex but is largely shaped through cognitive schemas developed via socialization. These schemas enable individuals to categorize behaviors, occupations, emotions, and social roles as either masculine or feminine according to prevailing cultural norms (Bem, 1981, 1993).

Gender schemas are formed through continuous interaction with social institutions such as the family, educational settings, religion, peer groups, and mass media. Among these, media plays a particularly influential role because repeated exposure to television narratives reinforces socially accepted expectations regarding masculinity and femininity. Consequently, television dramas become important cultural texts through which audiences learn, negotiate, and sometimes challenge gender stereotypes.

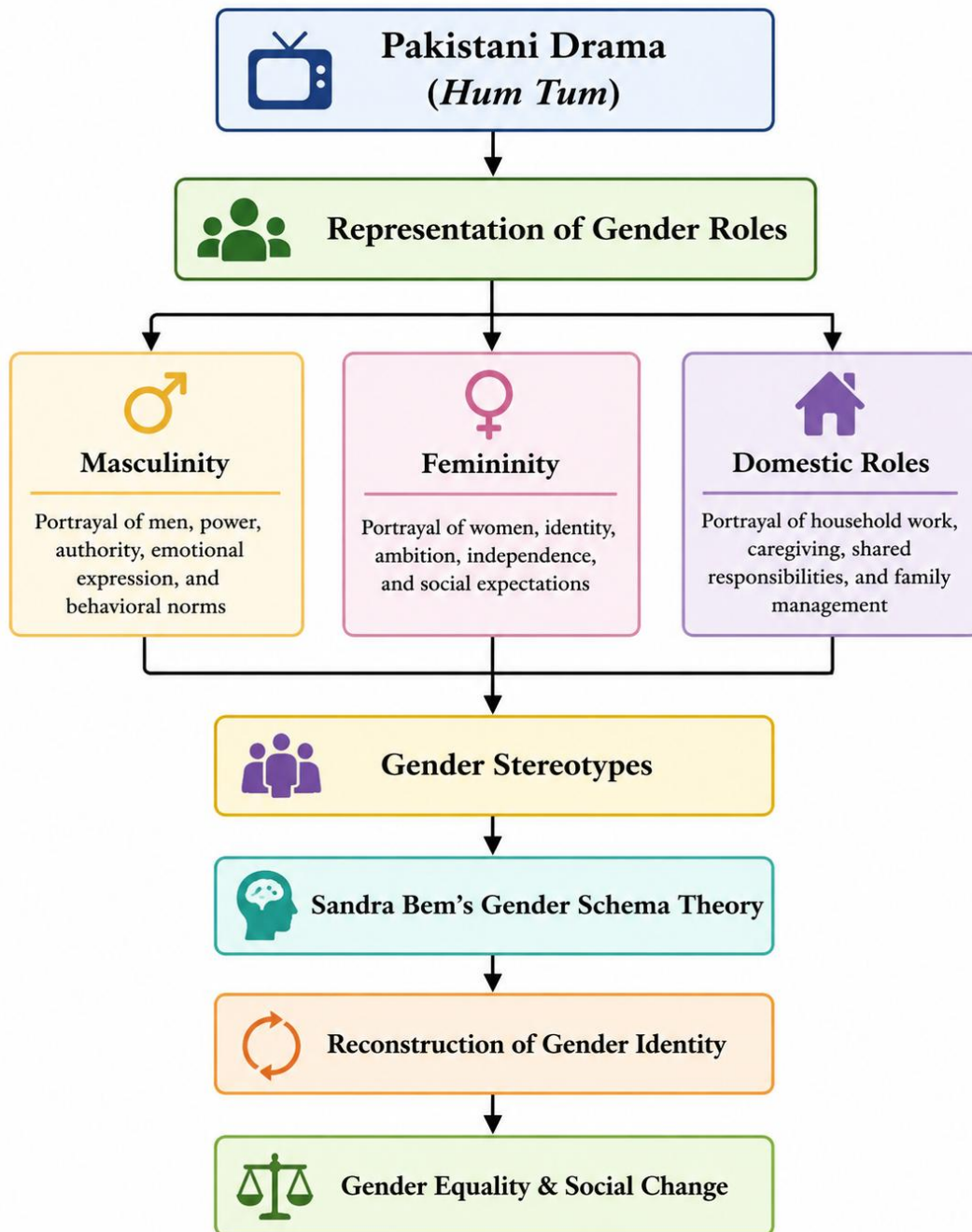
Within Pakistani society, television dramas have historically portrayed women as obedient daughters, devoted wives, and primary caregivers, whereas men have been represented as authoritative decision-makers and financial providers. Such portrayals reinforce patriarchal gender schemas by normalizing unequal divisions of power and domestic responsibilities (Bem, 1993). However, contemporary Pakistani dramas have increasingly begun to challenge these traditional representations by depicting women as educated, career-oriented, and independent while presenting men as emotionally expressive and actively engaged in domestic work.

The drama *Hum Tum* represents a significant example of this transformation. Unlike conventional television narratives, the drama deliberately reverses traditional gender expectations by portraying female characters as ambitious, technologically competent, and professionally motivated, while male characters willingly participate in cooking, household management, caregiving, and emotional support. These role reversals provide an appropriate context for examining how media narratives reconstruct conventional gender schemas and promote alternative understandings of masculinity and femininity.

Drawing upon Gender Schema Theory, this study investigates how *Hum Tum* challenges socially constructed gender stereotypes through its characters, dialogues, and family interactions. The theory serves as the primary analytical lens for interpreting how the drama reconstructs gender identities and encourages more egalitarian perceptions of gender relations within contemporary Pakistani society.

Conceptual Framework

The analytical framework guiding this study is presented below:



4.1 Reversal of Traditional Gender Roles: Challenging Patriarchal Gender Schemas

A major theme that has come out of the analysis of Hum Tum is the intentional changing of gender roles. As opposed to Pakistani dramas in which women are always domestic and men are authoritative job holders/earners, Hum Tum challenges these conventional gender expectations by having the women characters be ambitious, educated, independent and the men characters be emotionally expressive and actively involved in the household tasks. The narrative approach directly challenges the gender norms that emphasize that gender roles are socially constructed, rather than biologically determined, and that gender is a flexible category (as is assumed by Gender Schema Theory, 1981, 1993).

This turnaround is shown right away in the first episodes. Female characters are shown doing things which the Pakistani media has traditionally believed are activities of a male. Neha is seen to be confident riding a motorcycle, although her father is skeptical, while Sasha is shown to be ahead of the curve in her understanding of technology, knowing how to hack a computer, and the three sisters always excel in their academic work. At the same time, the male characters Adam and Sarmad are depicted as being good at household affairs, cooking, washing up, and looking after family members. The roles are reversed, suggesting that domestic work is a feminine role and leadership, education and competence is a masculine one.

In the frame of reference of Gender Schema Theory, these representations break the culturally established cognitive schemas of appropriate masculinity and femininity. Bem (1981) states that one's gender schemas are formed as a result of repeated exposure to culture which assigns specific behaviors to either males or females. These cognitive divisions, however, are deliberately erased from *Hum Tum*. The male characters carry the burden of home duties and home-life without their manhood being doubted, and the female characters are confident, intellectually able and physically independent without being labeled as social deviants. Thus, viewers are challenged to reflect on their preconceptions of gender-appropriate roles through the drama.

One such standout example is Adam's characterization. Adam is not depicted as a domineering man but is seen doing chores for the house, ironing clothes, helping his younger sister with her homework and helping female family members with daily tasks. Domestic duties are his duty and care and not his weakness. Likewise, Sarmad's love for cooking and the desire to become a professional chef, both challenge the stereotype of cooking within the household as a feminine domain. These images challenge notions of masculinity and promote the values of empathy, cooperation, and shared responsibility rather than authority and control.

The female protagonists also defy gender stereotypes. Neha's independence, confidence and willingness to challenge the social restrictions on women's movements represents resistance to the patriarchy's control of women's mobility. Sasha's technical skills are also challenging misconceptions of technical professions as being exclusively masculine. The drama does not offer a depiction of a helpless female, but of a capable woman who is actively carving out her educational and career path. The role depictions in these depictions are in keeping with the overall social transformation taking place within Pakistani society where the growing educational provision and employment of women have made them more visible in the public sphere.

Another key narrative technique is the equal burden of household duties. It does not make light of or make seem special for men to participate in domestic tasks, but makes it seem ordinary and part of family life. In the domestic sphere, Adam and Sarmad take care of their family responsibilities, and as a result, domestic work and caring for household affairs are not seen as gender work. This is a direct confrontation with patriarchy, where household work is seen as a feminine domain — and its economic responsibility a male one.

It also exposes the pervasive cultural bias towards sons that is entrenched in the community. The professor is continually dismayed to have so many intelligent, disciplined daughters who are all studying well. His attitude is based on the ideology of the patriarchy that assigns higher social and economic status to male children than female children. In this characterisation *Hum Tum* highlights the enduring nature of son preference in Pakistani society and challenges its validity. The daughters' education and good conduct defy the notion that sons are the ones to bring the family honor and place.

This is in line with the recent research showing that Pakistani TV dramas are increasingly becoming more gender-sensitive in their portrayal and yet are still engaging with the traditional

gender norms and values (Ashraf et al., 2024; Azam et al., 2024). Hum Tum is neither like the other modern dramas that show empowered women in traditional family setup, but it reconstructs both femininity and masculinity as well. This dual transformation is especially important because gender equality would not be possible if we could only empower women, we also need to redefine what it means to be a man in terms of care giving, expressing emotions, and participating in the home.

Overall, the analysis shows that Hum Tum is a heterodox TV production that challenges the hegemonic notion of gender roles as a natural truth by depicting them as a social construct. By inverted gender expectations the drama confronts the audience with their gender schemas and facilitates a more gender-balanced view of family relations. As per Gender Schema Theory, these alternative representations can help to modify viewers' conceptualization of masculinity and femininity, by offering repeated exposure to other gender identities that are more inclusive and equitable.

4.2 Female Agency and Educational Empowerment: Reconstructing Women's Social Identity

There are also strong depictions of female agency and educational empowerment, which are key themes highlighted in Hum Tum. Hum Tum is different than the Pakistani dramas that are traditionally made, where women are generally characterized as emotional, marriage-oriented and only stay at home. The drama's female characters recreate the traditional interpretations of femininity, with an emphasis on the ability, self-confidence and autonomy of the individual rather than on obedience and domesticity. This thematic change is similar to Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory which posits that gender identities are socially acquired through repeated exposure to gender representations in the cultural environment and can therefore be changed to an alternative model by presenting individuals with alternative schemas (Bem, 1981, 1993).

According to the analysis, all the three central female characters are portrayed as successful academically and as career-oriented. They do not strive to compete for marriage or social acceptance instead they focus on education, further development and achievement. Their identities are formed based on intelligence and skill rather than looks or the role of a homemaker. This representation breaks from the dominant media image of women's success being that of an ideal wife and mother. Rather, Hum Tum proves that it is perfectly fine for women to aspire to both educational achievement and career trajectory.

Neha is one of the most promising instances of female agency in the drama. She has the skills to ride a Vespa scooter with great confidence, openly challenges male characters and shows independence in her everyday choices at all times. Her mobility is not merely a sign of freedom but of resistance against the traditional constraints that hinder women's access to public spaces. Women's mobility in many South Asian societies has been related to family honour and social control. The drama showcases Neha as a confident and independent woman, breaking out of these cultural stereotypes and making independence an everyday trait of contemporary womanhood, instead of rebellion.

Likewise, Sasha's background in Computer Technology and Ethical Hacking dispels the myth of women's involvement in Science and Technology. In Pakistan, the media has been rather traditional in its portrayal of technology related jobs as male domains and the assumption that technical skills are predominantly male skills. The assumptions are challenged, however, with Sasha's character who shows intellectual skill in a field that is often considered a male domain. This portrayal helps to spread knowledge about what women actually can do and to normalize the involvement of women in high-tech jobs.

The character of Maha further extends this story of empowerment, where she is a symbol of resilience despite divorce. Divorced women have been shown in the Pakistani TV as socially marginalized or emotionally broken many a times. A contrast to this is Maha, who is physically active, emotionally mature and professionally ambitious. The drama does not centre her previous marriage but depicts divorce as a life experience, not a social stigma. Her relationship with Sarmad is a pivotal aspect of her character development, showing that love is possible beyond patriarchal assumptions and restrictions on marriage history, when it is valued for its mutual respect and emotional fit. The representation helps to diminish the culture-bound negative attitudes associated with divorced women and promotes more positive attitudes towards women's life experiences.

Moreover, the study shows that Hum Tum has questioned the preference for sons in the context of the depiction of Professor Qutub's family. His daughters are always intelligent and well-disciplined and have done well at school, but he continues to talk down to them for being a girl and for not being a son. This story reveals the disparity between what people expect culturally and what someone is good at doing. The daughters are repeatedly shown to be more responsible and more accomplished than other male characters in the stereotypical sense, thus challenging the notion that the son brings more to the family. This contrast allows the drama to condemn discriminatory practices between men and women based on the traditional family model and suggests to the audience to assess children based on their skills and capacities instead of their biological sex.

According to the Gender Schema Theory, these images suggest viewers to construct their pre-existing schemas of femininity. Bem (1981) states that people learn gender roles over time by absorbing the norms of culturally accepted behaviors. Hum Tum has repeatedly presented women in the role of a leader, innovator, decision maker and academically successful person in order to provide alternative gender schemas that can help to reshape the audience's perception over time. The Drama learning experience does not encourage only limited female stereotypes, but multitasks and encourages female stances as confident, competent, independent, and resilient.

These results are similar to recent research in the field of gender and media that indicates that South Asian television dramas are emerging as a space for negotiating shifting gender identities in the societies they are consumed in. Recent research suggests that media coverage that encourages women's education, economic involvement, and leadership helps to defy patriarchal norms and increase social acceptance of gender equality (Ashraf et al., 2024; Azam et al., 2024). Hum Tum is not just about successful women, however, it is about incorporating the concept of female empowerment into an everyday family life, making gender equality a norm and not an anomaly or hot topic.

A further dimension of the drama is that it is a rejection of the conventional binary opposition of femininity and strength. In Pakistan, the image of feminine has always been linked to sacrifice, silence and dependence in TV stories. On the other hand, the female leads in Hum Tum are also kind, caring, family-oriented, and yet have the qualities of being determined, intelligent, and independent. This evenhanded picture shows, however, that empowerment does not require that women give up on their own culture; it's about increasing women's opportunities and acknowledging their various talents.

In general, the thematic analysis reveals the agency of the woman shown in Hum Tum through four aspects: education, female professions, technological abilities, self-determination regarding choices, and resistance to the norms and requirements of patriarchy. These depictions deconstruct gender schemas and advance more inclusive understandings of women's social roles. Such counter-stereotypical images can, in line with Gender Schema Theory, help to

change the audience's attitude to women's ability and participate in the progressive culture change toward gender equality.

4.3 Reconstruction of Masculinity: Redefining Male Identity Beyond Patriarchal Expectations

Among the most unique discoveries from the thematic analysis of Hum Tum is the reconstruction of masculinity which is brought about by the portrayal of male characters who reject the traditional notions of the patriarchy. Hum Tum offers a different perspective on manhood than the Pakistani television dramas that typically float in the air around television in Pakistan, where being a man usually means being tough, in control, authoritative, caring little about emotions and more about money. The brand new definition of masculinity is important as it shows that the empowerment of women is not enough to create gender equality, but also the paradigm shift of male identities. Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory points out that the drama is creating a disruption of deeper schemas that are ingrained in the culture by demonstrating the "caring and domestic" schemas as being compatible with the male gender identity rather than being in opposition.

This analysis shows that Adam and Sarmad frequently defy conventional stereotypes of manhood. The characters show each other more than a single vision of home affairs and family care; they are both active in the domestic sphere. Adam is depicted as keeping the house clean, putting clothes in the iron, helping his younger sister with her homework and guarding the family when needed. Likewise, Sarmad, who is trained as a chef, happily cooks for his family, and enjoys cooking for others. Most importantly, these activities are not viewed as funny diversions or 'sacrifices' but are part of every character's personality. Thus, the drama de-normalizes domestic work as being a matter of the family and not the gender.

According to Gender Schema Theory, these depictions are in opposition to the cognitive attitudes that are learned in the culture of masculinity. According to Bem (1981), differences in expectations are socialized into boys and girls via repeated exposure to stereotypical gender norms. It is well established that Pakistani media perpetuates the stereotype that men need to be superior, have monetary power and be emotionally tough and have to steer clear of domestic work and care-taking. Hum Tum, by contrast, is a purposeful recreation of these gender schemes of behavior, in this case with a strong sense of how the male character ought to be strong; not through control or aggression, but through compassion, cooperation and emotional maturity. An alternative presentation that invites viewers to reflect on socially-acceptable manhood.

One such instance is when Adam gets in a relationship with his younger sister. He does not take the place of an authoritarian elder brother, but helps her with her studies, coos her hair, encourages her in martial arts, and supports her emotionally all along the way. The interactions redefine brotherhood, emphasizing not only the aspects of dominance and protection, but also of encouragement and care. These symbols expand the definition of the masculine and include nurturing qualities that have long been identified with the feminine. The drama thus moves away from polarized gender concepts, and contributes to a more balanced view of the interdependence between the members of the family.

Sarmad's character also raises an important question to patriarchy masculinity, as chef. In many patriarchal societies, cooking tasks have traditionally been classified as women's tasks, while professional tasks were more suitable for men. Hum Tum deliberately fuses these two together as it were, when Sarmad's cooking skills are the profession he is proud of and the way he shows love for his family. He's not afraid to cook, which shows that a man can be good at cooking without losing his manhood. The drama therefore exposes cultural values that are related to the threats of the role of women in the household to the authority and status of men.

Another important part of the reconstructed manhood is men's attitudes towards women's achievements and personal decisions. While they constantly battle, Adam never takes the place of Neha in the drama, and he never overlooks her independence. He stands up for her when she's being harassed in public and recognizes her skills, but doesn't mistake her self-assurance in her talents as a challenge to his manhood. Similarly, Sarmad treats Maha as a divorced woman and doesn't let the patriarchal prejudice get in the way of his feelings for her. Rather than judging women by the accepted social standards, both male characters value mutual respect, emotional compatibility and character. These depictions expose the shift from hegemonic to relational masculinity based on equality and partnership/relationship.

The analysis also uncovers the implicit critique of socialization mechanisms that produce and reproduce patriarchal masculinity in Hum Tum. The paper points out that girls were encouraged to get ready for domestic duties from young while boys were discouraged from doing household work, which is considered women's work, in Pakistani society. The drama portrays men who are strong and reject these roles, thus revealing the socially constructed roles and not the naturalistic reality of men. This lends support to Bem's argument that gender schemas are learned from one's cultural experience, and so can be revised as a result of other cultural representations.

This is reinforced by the portrayal of Islamic teaching within the story, too. The traditions mentioned refer to the ways in which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) helped his family in housekeeping, to his repairing own belongings and to his kindness towards his wife. These references show that having to share domestic chores is not forbidden in Islam, in fact it shows important ethical values which are a part of Islam. The use of these examples are challenging the general belief that patriarchy is a religious duty. Rather, it separates out cultural practices from true religious instruction, and makes cooperation in the home a sign of moral duty rather than gender aberration.

Such results align with current research that has suggested that the media more and more reflects an expansion of the range of male identities that are inclusive rather than exclusive and includes emotions, caring and partnership in the family. Representations of men in television dramas have been observed to help to lower rigid gender stereotypes, foster healthier interpersonal relationships, and promote more balanced family relationships. Hum Tum is different from previous Pak dramas, in which the primary value attached to masculinity was the idea of patriarchal rule. In contrast to previous Pak dramas, which overwhelmingly reinforced hegemonic masculinity, the male characters of Hum Tum are those who have social value based on empathy and respect and sharing responsibility rather than patriarchal authority.

In conclusion, the analysis is able to prove that Hum Tum creates the masculinity by substituting the power with cooperation, the emotional limitation with empathy, and the privilege of the males with responsibility. The drama brings to the fore the fact that taking care, being involved in the household, and valuing women's independence is not a weakness of the man, but a sign of his maturity and social responsibility, through Adam and Sarmad. Frequent exposure to such counter-stereotypical depictions can eventually change how the viewer thinks about masculine identity, and help foster a more accepting attitude toward gender-equal relationships in the broader culture, consistent with Gender Schema Theory.

4.5 Discussion: Reframing Gender Equality through Gender Schema Theory

The results of this research reveal Hum Tum is a remarkable break from the typical representation of gender in Pakistani TV dramas. The drama challenges stereotypical roles assigned to men and women, with men and women appearing in non-traditional social roles in place of reproducing stereotypes of the traditional breadwinners or homemakers. These depictions provide an interpretation of gendered behaviours, based on Sandra Bem's Gender

Schema Theory, that they are socially learned, culturally reinforced, and therefore open to change. The thematic analysis shows that Hum Tum not only challenges the existing gender norms but also invites the viewer to reflect on the deeply engrained norms about family duties and manhood and womanhood.

The drama is one of the main contributions through the reconstruction of femininity and masculinity at the same time. Durrani noted that many Pakistani TV dramas have tried to portray the female characters as empowered, but failed to challenge patriarchy and its constructions of masculinity. Unlike that, the film Hum Tum takes a more holistic approach, portraying women as educated, ambitious, technologically adept and men as emotional, nurturing and active participants of domestic work. This balanced representation is in keeping with Bem's (1981, 1993) claim that gender schemas affect perceptions of men as well as women and that true gender equality needs to be brought about by changing the societal expectations for both men and women.

The analysis also shows that the drama systematically challenges some of the dominant beliefs of patriarchy which are ingrained in the Pakistani society. These are in the form of beliefs that household duties are solely the domain of women, that leadership and competency in work is a male attribute, and that sons have more worth in society than daughters. Adam and Sarmad represent a normalcy of male involvement in taking care of others and in domestic work, whereas Neha, Sasha and Maha represent educational excellence, technological competency, resilience and independent decision making. These representations collectively recapture the idea of competence as an attribute of human, rather than gender. The drama acts as a cognitive model that can reorient existing gender schemas over time by doing so.

The results are consistent with recent studies that indicate that today's media is being used as a venue for negotiating evolving gender identities in the South Asian societies. It is suggested that such narratives present women in leadership positions and as collaborators with men—a role previously stereotyped as a woman's place—instead of as authority figures, can break the cycle of harmful stereotypes and narrow gender roles (Ashraf et al., 2024; Azam et al., 2024). The current result would add to this literature because it would show that not only is Hum Tum introducing a new set of examples of empowered women, but it is also reconstructing the everyday interactions of the families by creating a space of respect, equal division of labour and emotional parity. This drama thus fits into a larger conversation about gender justice that makes equality a common social practice and an ordinary position rather than an exceptional one.

Another significant one is related to the connection between cultural traditions and religious values. The analysis shows that the drama conveys the message of collaboration, mutual respect and shared duties of the household in marriage, whereas the Islamic teachings, as derived from the Quran and Sunnah, call for monogamous relationship between husband and wife in which both are bound by mutual trust and responsibility. Domestic involvement by men is not being bad for society, but is 'ethical and religious' as presented in the narrative. This difference is of great importance because it is often that a lot of patriarchal practices in Pakistani society are explained on the basis of cultural understanding of religion. Hum Tum seeks to question these notions and reimagines the possibility of gender equality being a result of religious practice or the culturally ingrained norms.

The results also confirm the explanatory power of Gender Schema Theory for the understanding of media representations of gender. Prolonged exposure to stereotypical behaviors leads to the formation of cognitive schemas that help people develop their perceptions of proper masculine and feminine behavior, according to Bem (1981). However, the opposite exposure to counter-stereotypical depictions could over time alter these schemas

by broadening the socially acceptable behaviors for both males and females. This uniformity of presentation, as men are portrayed as caregivers and women as independent decision makers in *Hum Tum*, has the potential to reinforce audience attitudes to gender equality over time.

While these positive contributions are noteworthy, it is important to look at this context in the light of the broader socio-cultural context of Pakistan. *Hum Tum* gives progressive representation of gender but on a television dramas level it can't be a solution to the deeply rooted gender inequality which comes from the family traditions, education, workplace discrimination, and social structures. Media portrayal can help to facilitate attitudinal change, but attitudinal change is not enough to achieve sustainable gender equality; there is a need for institutional reforms, educational programmes and ongoing public debate. Thus, it is important to see dramas like *Hum Tum* as a significant cultural intervention to supplement and not supplant social and policy interventions for gender justice.

The overall picture of this study reveals that *Hum Tum* is a continuous media text that brings about the reconstruction of traditional conceptions of gender through the traditional idea of family relations, education, work goals, and domestic duties in a different way. The drama promotes a more gender-equal society while at the same time challenging and dismantling patriarchal norms and redefining masculinity. The results are therefore in line with Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory, which exemplifies the power of media narratives as cognitive and social agents of change. Exposure to counter-stereotypical depictions of females and males can help undermine traditional gender schemas over time. This article emphasizes the transformative capacity of modern Pakistani TV serials in fostering gender sensitive social attitudes and in developing discussions on gender equality in both scholarly studies and public debates.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the representation of gender discrimination and gender role reconstruction in the Pakistani television drama *Hum Tum* using Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory as its theoretical framework. The findings reveal that the drama challenges traditional patriarchal norms by portraying women as educated, ambitious, and independent while presenting men as emotionally expressive and actively involved in domestic responsibilities. These counter-stereotypical portrayals demonstrate that gender roles are socially constructed rather than biologically determined, supporting Bem's argument that gender schemas can be reshaped through repeated cultural representations.

The thematic analysis further shows that *Hum Tum* promotes gender equality by normalizing shared household responsibilities, encouraging female educational and professional empowerment, and redefining masculinity through empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect. Rather than reinforcing conventional stereotypes, the drama presents balanced gender relationships that reflect changing social realities in contemporary Pakistan.

Overall, this study highlights the important role of television dramas as agents of social change capable of influencing public perceptions of gender. By challenging traditional gender schemas and promoting more inclusive representations of men and women, *Hum Tum* contributes to ongoing discussions of gender equality in Pakistani society. Future research may extend this work by examining multiple television dramas or exploring audience perceptions to better understand the broader social impact of progressive gender representations in contemporary media.

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